

Coffee Buzz | Ministry for Dummies Cross Post | A Conversation with Stassi Cramm

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SPEAKERS

Humberto Tinsman, Jacob Ross, Stassi Cramm, Blake Smith

Blake Smith 00:28

Hey Project Zion Podcast listeners. This is Blake Smith, Project Manager for Project Zion Podcast. As we all know, the Community of Christ just completed an historic World Conference where our first female President-Prophet was sustained and ordained. For this episode of Coffee Buzz, we once again connected with Ministry for Dummies' hosts Jacob Ross and Humberto Tinsman to cross-post their conversation with then President-Prophet designate, Stassi Cramm. We're grateful for their willingness to share this episode with you our listeners, and we hope you enjoy. Now, in the words of President Cramm ... "Onward"...

Humberto Tinsman 01:17

Welcome to Ministry for Dummies, a Community of Christ podcast hosted by the Community of Christ Southern USA Mission Field. All are welcomed here, and the stories and opinions that are shared here are part of our story and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Community of Christ.

Jacob Ross 01:34

Well, it may, in this case, actually reflect the official position of the Community of Christ as Humberto and I have teased for I don't know, I guess it's been a month, we are so honored to have our our third guest, President-Prophet designate. Stassi Cramm, welcome to the podcast Stassi.

Stassi Cramm 01:59

Thanks guys. It's really good to be here with you and your listeners tonight.

Jacob Ross 02:02

You know the five of us that is our listeners are all very excited to hear this interview.

Humberto Tinsman 02:08

I mean, especially our moms,

Jacob Ross 02:11

especially our moms, our moms, our dads and

Stassi Cramm 02:15

My parents too,. So six.

Jacob Ross 02:18

We're up to six today. Oh, look at us. So we're up to six. But yeah, Burt, unless you want to, if anything specific, we'll just dive right into the question we received.

Humberto Tinsman 02:30

Yeah, let's just do it. So before we dive right in, we also just want to give a shout out to all of the listeners who submitted questions and comments for this interview. Again, Jake and I are lazy, and we don't like writing our own episodes, so thank you for doing it for us, but, but we are just so appreciative of this community coming together and for this time where we can just spend so yeah, let's just dive right in.

Jacob Ross 02:53

Yeah, I guess, yeah. Now that you mentioned that, I will say we did our best. We had several questions that were like merged questions that we got. So we tried to do our best to combine them and then make them fair, even questions. So, hopefully nobody gets too offended on how we junked questions together, but we'll start off with our first question, what is a favorite camp memory of yours?

Stassi Cramm 03:26

Wow, so that's hard, not because of how old I am, which might be an assumption, but because, as you can imagine, I have been to a lot of camps and reunions, and I just have so many interesting memories of fun times, of spirit filled, times, of community, just, you know, just fabulous stuff. So, how about if I focus on a particular situation that happened a long time ago, but that just kind of like dinosaur bones. You know, we were having a conversation and sort of excavated and discovered this connection. So, a long time ago, I was at a camp in central Illinois, and although this probably sounds weird in this day and age, back in those days, hunting was big in the area where this reunion campground was. And one year, one of the activities for the campers was actually target shooting. Again, I know that sounds a little bit strange in our current era, but one of our members was a representative for Smith and Wesson, and so he was an expert, and had, you know, brought some guns, and I remembered that there was this one particular gun that was really special, and that was used for safaris, and I remember him talking about how unique it was. So, we were talking about camp memories one time, and I was partnered with, at the time, President of Seventy, John Wight. And I was telling him about this memory, because I knew that he and his family had spent time at this same campground. And we were kind of laughing about how strange it was that you would do target shooting at a camping experience. And he looks like really perplexed. And I was like, you know, what's wrong? How come you look so strange. And he was like, because I was there. And I was like, What do you mean you were there? He goes, No. He goes, I remember the Smith and Wesson representative. I remember the special gun. And he said, and that only happened one time. And so, I was like, Are you sure? He's like, No, I'm absolutely positive. And so we spent a bunch of time, again, sort of excavating and looking for all the clues, and we figured out that it occurred when I was six, and I wasn't really a camper. I was at the camp with my parents, and he was 16, and he was attending the camp as a camper. And so, through that exploration, which is kind of a strange story, but it really reminded me, and actually both of us, of how interwoven our relationships are that get created at camp, and sometimes we don't even realize where we're making connections or where we have common experiences, until, like, years later, when things start to bubble up. So I just, I love the idea of how our camping program weaves our lives and our life stories together.

Jacob Ross 06:26

Yeah, one of my favorite sayings, right? Whenever people are talking it's like, oh, you know, such and such. It's such a small world. I'm like, Well, it's, it's really not, you're just in a really small church. So, you know, that's what makes it so small, because there are just random, obscure intersections. Exactly,

Stassi Cramm 06:26

yeah, yeah,

Humberto Tinsman 06:27

Yeah. I love that small but mighty. Definitely. It's small but very connected. Speaking of connections, there is often a debate that goes off of, what is the best way to start your morning, and I would ask this so Stassi for you, are you a coffee person or of a tea person in your day to day?

Stassi Cramm 07:08

Yeah, I'm absolutely a coffee person, although I will drink tea. So I never turn down, you know, tea, but if I am left to my own, I always drink hot coffee. I love both hot coffee in the morning. I like cold coffee on a summer afternoon, but in the last like 12 years or so, I really only drink decaf, because I drink so much coffee and I'm relatively wired anyway. So you put me on caffeine and it's just it's a little bit too much for the whole world.

Humberto Tinsman 07:37

I love it. No, no, I love it. A previous story that we shared on this podcast was the time that our coffee broke. Our coffee maker broke in the middle of a reunion, and I've said that is the fastest I've ever seen a donation be collected and a goal achieved in a reunion experience. So yes,

Stassi Cramm 07:55

We do that. Well, exactly. It's not always present. So I run around with little Starbucks decaf vials, just in case, because you can always find hot water.

Humberto Tinsman 08:05

I love it. I love it.

Jacob Ross 08:07

I'm more of a tea person. I'm not really, actually even a caffeine person. I wake up every morning at six and just go for a walk, and then I save my caffeine for what I'm really dragging, but I am.

Humberto Tinsman 08:22

See, I also used to be that way, and then a lovely person named Zac Harmon-McLaughlin in the seminary program happened. And now we are here where we are, but we love you, Zach, no, no, no. Coffee is ...I, see, I love the ritual of, so I grind my own beans and I make it for Emily and I, we get it, and I'm just saying I love it. It's it's part of my routine. So Okay, moving on, moving on. We can't talk about coffee all the time.

Stassi Cramm 08:48

But I do like the walking part. So I just wanted to do a shout out for Jacob for walking. I'm committed to 12,000 steps and six miles a day, so I'm a huge walker, too.

Jacob Ross 08:57

It's nice. It's awesome. It's a good routine, although it's harder in the summer in Houston because it's so gosh darn hot.

Stassi Cramm 09:03

Yeah, amen.

Jacob Ross 09:05

Our next question is a little bit little bit deeper and definitely broad, what is a significant thing you've changed your mind on your mind on whether from personal conversations or experiences, scholarly discussions or debates, or your own studies.

Stassi Cramm 09:23

Ooh, changed my mind on Well, oh, I can't really think of a situation where I've done like, a total 180 you know, in a like, in a moment kind of thing. But I definitely can think of situations where, over time, as I've grown into a deeper understanding and appreciation on certain topics, that if you were to picture me on a spectrum, that where I stood on a spectrum has definitely changed and deepened. And I would say, you know, changed and deepened in a, into a space of of understanding and appreciation. So, like, if I were to really be pressed, I can think of, like, maybe four social topics that through, like, the last 20 to 30 years, I've gone from probably a relatively simplistic viewpoint, I guess, is what I would say, to a more complex understanding. And those four topics would be human sexuality, privilege and prejudice, resolving differences, in other words, you know violence, non violence, conflict. You know everything from difficult conversations to difficult national debates and earth stewardship and our connectedness and, and need to care for the world and all of creation. And actually, I wouldn't limit it to the world, because obviously, we're part of a massive universe of universes, and it's really all of that, because I really see the connectedness in all of that.

Humberto Tinsman 11:14

Awesome that's, that's just great to hear. You know, on, on, so a similar question, as you are discerning, and as you are, you know, looking at these different topics, both in your role, but also just, you know, as a disciple and, and a human being. You know, what are those influences that of your worldview, and how does that change? And you know what? What are those kind of pillars in your life that you use?

Stassi Cramm 11:41

Yeah, so some of your listeners may know, but not everybody. I was trained as an engineer, so my undergraduate degree was in engineering, and before I went to work full time for the church, that's what I did. So, it pretty much goes without saying that for an engineer, data is really important, and the whole idea of trust but verify related to data is really important. Yet at the same time, even in my engineering career, one of the things that I would bring into the teams is that, unlike some of my peers and colleagues, I'm also very intuitive, so I have just kind of this sense about listening and observing and, and not just the quantitative data, but also kind of that qualitative that that leads to perspectives, and I think that really influences my worldview. I've also come to understand that the privilege of my birth, that I'm able to have certain perspectives simply out of the privilege of my birth or the educational opportunities that I've had, or where I've had the opportunity to live. I feel like my family and my friend relationships that all influences me, I've had a host of experiences through my life, and I've been able to travel around the world, and all of that has shaped me, both my own economic status, but witnessing the economic status of others, and golly, the list just kind of really goes on and on. I think that what I've come to understand, and again, back to education, my PhD is in leadership, and so one of the things that I've really come to understand is that as a leader, that the challenge that I have is to try to observe not only the world but the church and the role of leadership, not only from my own shoes, but to spend time trying to understand the world from other people's perspectives. And sometimes that's, that's easy. So, sometimes it's really easy to, like, lay down your own perspective and say, Oh yeah, I can see where this person is coming from. Other times it can be really, really hard. And so, one of the things that I've really come to appreciate, especially as it relates to moving past my own worldview in the

process of discernment, is the six lenses for discovering God's will that the Church teaches about. So, for those that haven't been to seminary like Humberto, or haven't read some of the church's resources those six lenses are knowledge and reason, experience, scripture, history or tradition, continuing revelation, and common consent. And I know of these six that there's some that I favor more than others, but knowing all six of them sort of holds me accountable to say, Okay, what am I really strongly using and what am I missing? So they remind me that I cannot always rely on just limited ways of viewing the world that I feel most comfortable with and that I have to always be willing to expand my horizon, to stretch, especially to listen to voices that are different than mine, to help open myself to new ways of understanding.

Humberto Tinsman 15:11

See, kids from Sionito. I'm not the only one who's talking about those six lenses. They're important. They're important, dang it.

Jacob Ross 15:16

They are. I mean, I've never been to seminary, so those are new to me. I guess I consider myself averagely read in church resources. So.

Stassi Cramm 15:32

[...] again, if you google it on the church's website, you will get some articles and stuff about it. So they're important and and I really do find that they're helpful. As you can imagine. I already said I favor data. So, knowledge is one of my, you know, biggies. But, you know, really seeking out that balance with experience and scripture and tradition and every continued revelation, and then that common consent is the community part. So they're all really important.

Jacob Ross 16:02

Yeah, they absolutely are. All right. Now this one, we received multiple questions on, of course we totally expected. So this is on the sale of the church historic site. So we did try and roll this one up. So, for everybody who submitted questions. Here's, here's what we got. What do you plan to do to rebuild trust with those whose relationship with the World Church has been harmed by the sale of the historic sites and how it was handled and shared?

Stassi Cramm 16:35

Yeah, I'm, I'm not surprised to hear that question. I'm also not surprised, you know to hear that there were multiple ways of asking this question. It's, you know, clearly how you've rolled it together, It's an insightful and very multi-faceted question. It also leads me to ask, you know, you and your listeners, another question, which is, how would you rebuild trust if someone told you they no longer trusted you because of a decision you made, even though you believe the decision you made was the right decision. So, the answer is more straightforward, I think, when broken trust is based on a mistake that was made. It gets more complex when broken trust is based on disagreement over a decision that was made, or a disagreement over how the decision was made. So, I'm going to break this into three different scenarios so that we can explore it in a little bit of depth and try to not overly simplify it. So, let's look at one scenario. If someone has lost trust in leadership because of the sale, because they think that selling historic assets was a bad decision, then that's, I think, one scenario we can talk about. And of course, in that case, as people would have read in all the material that was released, leadership acknowledges this perspective. We understand this perspective, but we do not necessarily share this perspective. So, in this regard, leadership can't apologize for the decision since we believe that we did the very best that we could do in faithfully listening, you know, to God and fulfilling our responsibility as leaders. However, we can work and will work, and are trying to work towards a mutual understanding that everyone, all of us, are committed to the Church's mission. So those that disagree with us, we're

not questioning that they're committed to the Church's mission, but we're also then asking that they understand that we are also committed to the Church's mission. And if we can find space there, then that gives us common ground to build on, and also the principles of faithful disagreement, which you can find on the church's website or on Our Ministry Tools, they guide us in pursuing our mission together, even though we have This significant disagreement. So, that's kind of one scenario. Another scenario might be for those who have lost trust from a belief that leadership should have consulted with the World Conference. Because we've definitely heard, you know, that perspective, and we've tried really hard to explain why the decision was made the way it was. We, myself included, are really dedicated to collaborative decision making on important matters whenever possible. But as we've tried to explain in a lot of the Q and A's and other material, it just was not feasible in this particular situation. I understand that, once again, some people disagree with this conclusion, because almost every decision is debatable, and that that has led to this sense of not trusting that leaders want to be collaborative. So, I am sorry, and I do feel bad that people feel that way. I'm hopeful that as we continue to journey together, that other ongoing collaborative efforts, like the work that we're doing on the statement of non-violence, will continue to demonstrate leadership's commitment to collaborative decision making whenever possible and appropriate. So, let's try one more scenario. So, a third scenario is if trust has been lost due to frustration about the situation or anger about the church's financial challenges, then, you know, then that creates some other feelings that we have definitely heard about. Leaders, as we have shared, prayerfully struggled with difficult and complex questions about how to support the Church's mission. Given our current realities, we've communicated, at least we feel like, from our perspective, the Church's significant financial challenges through various updates, including financial updates and the way forward, messages from the presidency. At the same time, we have also heard that people didn't understand that communication, or didn't see it and didn't feel like we, you know, adequately made the information known so, so that's, you know, that's a critique that we have received and, you know, taken as the lessons learned. Eventually, in our journey, it became clear that selling some historic sites was the only viable solution. We understood that this decision would sadden many in the Church because, I mean, we were heartbroken by it ourselves, however, we try to help the Church understand through ongoing communications that leaders are passionate about and committed to both the Church's mission, the church's history, and our theocratic democracy in all of its missions for decision making. So it is the Church's mission that matters most to us and hopefully to everyone, and that will you know continues to drive all our decisions. So, to come back to how do we rebuild trust -- as we move forward, I trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide and unite us as we focus on our common mission. During difficult times, it's really easy to become frustrated and damage the integrity of our community. My dad was a coach, so an analogy that I would lift up is a sports team that tends to make more mistakes and kind of turn on each other when they're not playing well, and that just further impacts their ability, you know, to play well and hopefully succeed. The other thing that I would say that at least in the USA context, my observations, and perhaps you have different observations, but I feel like we live in a culture right now that is prone towards cynicism and division.

Jacob Ross 23:30

Absolutely, I

Stassi Cramm 23:31

Okay, all right, so you share that?

Humberto Tinsman 23:33

Okay, yes, yeah.

Stassi Cramm 23:35

So, so in that, I mean, that's the outside culture, so I'm really committed, and I trust that your listeners and both of you and I know other world church leaders are committed to create a different kind of culture in the Church. We want to create a culture that seeks to trust that we are deeply grounded in our common love for each other, for the Church and for its mission. If we can ground ourselves in that common space, then when difficulties arise, I hope we can start with the assumption that we are all acting in the best interest of the Church and its mission. So, this shifts the focus from a one way question of accusation to a shared question of exploration, where together we can seek greater understanding. Now, I realize this does not eliminate disagreements, or it doesn't eliminate the need for difficult questions or accountability of decisions that are made, but it does give us a starting place for conversation that's different than what we really experience in the world around us. So, trusting in our common motives, which leads us to the opportunity to learn together in ways that strengthens our community is a way of being that I hope we can continue to embrace. So, my prayer is, I know that we're going to face more challenges in the days ahead, not because of anything that we are necessarily doing or not doing, but because we live in a complicated, messy world. But in the midst of those challenging days, I think there are going to be a whole host of opportunities for us to be the bearers of good news, for us to shed the light of, you know, Christ into the world and to share Christ's peace. So, I hope we can focus on our common mission and trust each other's motives. I think is a great way of getting started. And so I realized, you know, that we've got work to do, but I hope we can rally together, because, you know, we still have a lot of opportunities ahead of us that we need to face together.

Jacob Ross 25:57

Yeah. I mean, I think for me, with this topic in particular, I think an analogy I've come to is it felt like a car accident, where every time you drive on the road, you know, like it felt like it was a footnote in conversations in the past, like, you know, we're looking at, you know, It's not off the table to sell church property, and it was there. And like, you know, is in footnotes, kind of like the inherent risk when you drive a car, like, you know, some idiot can t-bone you at any moment, but then it just kind of happened. And like, when you lose someone in a car accident, you didn't know it was happening. You didn't know you know the last time you say goodbye, the last time you see them. And I think, I mean, for me personally, a lot of my frustration was in the fact that I felt like I didn't see it coming, and it felt like I didn't have that closure, you know, you know, like, when somebody, you know somebody's gonna pass. I mean, I have read relatives in hospice care, for example, you know someone's gonna pass. You have that opportunity for closure. And I felt like, in this instance, it didn't get to happen, if that makes sense...

Stassi Cramm 27:16

Yeah, or at least it didn't get to happen in the way you would might have wanted it to happen. So, I hope that, you know, we can find other ways maybe to get to some of that closure. And I know we've been working like with the Historic Sites Foundation, you know, they're looking at creating some opportunities. I know there was just recently a retreat, for instance, at Kirtland that was sponsored by Community of Christ. So, we're still hoping to be able to create some of those opportunities, fully acknowledging that for many that will not feel the same as if we had done it before the sale. But, as we've said in a lot of our publications, if we were going to have to do it, we needed to have the strongest negotiating position that we could have to optimize the outcome for the benefit of Community of Christ. And that was, those were the trade offs, and it was tough. It's, it's not a, it's not a journey that I would wish on any leaders ever.

Jacob Ross 28:14

And hopefully we don't have to. Of course, I say that, I don't. Well, no, I won't. I won't open that bag and worse. But yes, I hope, hopefully, hopefully not opening Pandora's box. But yes, yeah,

Humberto Tinsman 28:26

I know that we can probably spend all night on this topic, and I want to move us away from it, but I just wanted us to pause, and I just want to, I just want to offer my gratitude to you, because this is a difficult question. This is a hard question that many of us are still processing like Jacob talked about, like a death, like, like any loss, it takes time to process and to grieve. And I just appreciate your openness and letting us ask that question. And, you know, recognizing, yeah, it's something that a lot of us are still discerning and deciphering. But like you and as Jake and I, we've discussed we hope that as we continue to discern, the passion will turn to, from a place of either loss or grief into a passion of okay, this is where we are now. How do we continue to share our sacred story, and how can we then, as members, recognize that if we truly value those items or those historical assets, maybe we should start asking ourselves, How are we supporting them? Are we supporting them to our truest capabilities? And you know, what can we be doing in the future to, you know, make sure that that our sacred story is still something that we put on our front and center? So thank you again for openness.

Stassi Cramm 29:13

Well and again, not to be like the forecaster of gloom and doom, but the Presiding Bishopric has told us, you know, that the income that will be generated from these really stabilize us for the next, you know, five or so years. But we have to find how to increase contributions to the church if we want to continue to maintain the size of ministries and services that we're currently providing. So, you know, so the small print or the footnotes are in the financial updates. Again, the good news is we've got this period of time, and so we really all need to be working together to say, what really matters most with regards to mission, and how are we going to financially support it together?

Jacob Ross 30:30

So I have a follow up question to that. Maybe you can explain this to me like I'm an idiot, but I mean, the number is like 290 million, and right, it's something like that, 100

Stassi Cramm 30:43

Well, the sale was like 191 million, with 175 going into endowments.

Jacob Ross 30:50

So that went to, like, refill the Temple Endowment that was drained. Or in general, yeah, funds,

Stassi Cramm 31:00

Yeah, it's going to the Worldwide Mission Endowment and also to the Temple Endowment. The Temple Endowment has recovered from some of its earlier stages but was never that big. So, so this makes the Temple Endowment a larger amount than it's ever been. And the intent, then is that, using a conservative spending rate, it will allow the Temple Endowment to continue to grow, so that as inflation occurs and the cost of supporting not only the operations of the physical plant, but also the ministries of the Temple, which are funded by the endowment, that that there will always be enough in there to support that. And then that allows us to then focus on worldwide mission and how to grow that endowment, but also, then how to grow just annual contributions that are wanting to support worldwide mission?

Jacob Ross 32:07

Yeah, so I guess I was surprised that that amount, the returns on that would not be significant enough to fund, because, I mean, I'm, I'm not like, a you know, savant, but I mean, like a 7% return rate on an investment account like that, I felt was reasonable. And I was thinking like, well, our operating budget, I in my head, was, like, aligned with how much we would be making on a return on an account like that. So when I saw that, alarm bells went off. I mean, Berto and I discussed this at one point.

Stassi Cramm 32:43

Well, I know you don't want to do like, you know, Excel, 101, so, but just for the sake of, like, naming a few things, so 7% would be the average long term return. But inflation for the church is in some of the countries where we work, is anywhere from 30 to 50%. In other places, it's 10 to 20% so what you're trying to do in an endowment is typically maintain purchasing power, which says you have to take your average return, you have to figure out how much of it you have to reinvest so that it will grow to cover inflation, and what's left over is what you can spend. And so there's a whole set of spreadsheets that the Presiding Bishopric has where they've been looking at inflation rates around the world and how much needs to be put back in each year so that they can continue to fund the the level of ministries and services of that 175 million that it's supporting.

Jacob Ross 33:53

Yeah, that I trust, that they're looking at that kind of thing. It was just like, weird, off putting that's what I'm like. If it was off it was off, off putting, when I when that one came across a ticker. yeah, well, it's,

Stassi Cramm 34:07

Yeah, well, it's, it's complicated. It's just like, if you like, you know, if you lose money, like, if you have money invested in the market, you know, and you lose money, it takes a lot longer to gain it back than it, you know, does to lose it just because of the nature of interest and how that works, and then the nature of inflation and other impacts on the value of \$1.

Jacob Ross 34:28

Yeah, the house always wins.

Stassi Cramm 34:31

The house always wins. Are

Humberto Tinsman 34:34

Are you done talking about money now Jacob?

Stassi Cramm 34:39

We have like a bishop in the making. I'm feeling like the need to, you know, spreadsheet,

Jacob Ross 34:46

all right. I like ...

Stassi Cramm 34:48

You can have Ron Harmon come back and do a whole, you know, Endowment for Dummies kind of episode.

Jacob Ross 34:53

Now, that may not actually be a bad idea, but

Humberto Tinsman 34:56

that actually, if you can put in a good word, hey, we'll take all the guests.

Stassi Cramm 34:59

Uh. Absolutely he would be happy to do that.

Humberto Tinsman 35:02

I love it. I love it. Okay, let's breathe. Thank you again. Those were hard topics, but I think good ones that I think many are for who, like me, are not spreadsheet savants, but are passionate about learning as much as we can. Very appreciative of that conversation so closely liberated, but kind of changing gears a little bit. Jacob and I are in a demographic that often the church talks about as being a key for future success in the Community of Christ, so that 20 to 30 age range. What are some of your plans that you're working on right now, or discerning on to engage with young adults in the United States and then looking, you know, always further out in an international context as well.

Stassi Cramm 35:49

Yeah, for sure. So, you know, I love to answer a question with questions. Maybe that's the old teacher in me, but I want to just pose a couple of questions for your listeners, and then if they have any responses, they can email me. And so I'll just say my email is easy to remember. It's scram or SCRA, and then 2 m's at cofchrist.org so here's a couple of questions. Yeah, we do not really want your listeners to scram just to email SCRAMM. All right, so here's my questions. First of all, how do young adults in the USA and across the world want to be engaged by the President? Because I can have all these like great ideas, but if it does not align with how young adults are wanting to be engaged, then it won't, my strategies won't work very well. And related to that, then is what support do they feel like they need to live Christ's mission, and what activities or events or resources would they value and purchase or make time to participate in? So if anybody has ideas again, I would invite them to email me. Having said that, though, of course, as I prepare for my new role, I am continuing to focus primarily right now on leadership changes within the leading forums of the church, and so there's a lot of really intentional discernment process going on, and later this year, I will share with the church kind of where my discernment is taking me, so that the church can reflect and discern on those possible calls should my call be approved? And right now, I'm getting, you know, inputs from a lot of different people in different perspectives, and that input includes, you know, how do we engage different demographics and different backgrounds and, you know, and diversity. So, in all of that, one of the things that really has bubbled out is that we need a First Presidency that can inspire vision and encourage the church to use its collective prophetic imagination. And in this case, the church is all ages, all countries, you know, all members and friends. So, so we've got to be able to share and inspire in that realm. And similarly, the Council of 12 is going to need to be able to develop mission strategies that speak to that same worldwide church, and that can be implemented through the multi-nation and USA teams of, of apostles. And so, that really leads to another question, and that is, how do young adults want to be a part of the church's vision and mission, both developing it and living it out? And what will compel you and your listeners to participate, and what's the best way for us to achieve that? So, the only way, I know is to keep asking questions and inviting involvement, both directly, when we're together in person, indirectly, through podcasts like this, and through ongoing surveys and other means, and then we'll gonna have to probably experiment our way into the future, because based on all the surveys that we have done, there is no like, there's no pony in the pile, there's just a wide level of perspectives and ideas, and so we're just going to have to feel our way, kind of into the future. So, in this moment, I'm really at the front end, and I don't want to make any promises that I can't keep. So, my answer may seem kind of simplistic at this point, but I hope that there will be opportunities created after the 2025 World Conference, and maybe even during it. I know at the last World Conference, there was an evening where Shandra and I had the opportunity to sit with a group of young adults who were at conference. And so if there's some of you that want to organize one of those opportunities during the next World Conference, I will support that, and we will find time you know when I can be there. So, I hope that your listeners will take advantage of having my email and that they will share what is important to them and how they would like to see things happening. And I commit to listening and trying to integrate and try to find ways to experiment as we move together.

Jacob Ross 40:49

Yeah, when, when this came across, it was framed in the also talking about the young adult survey that happened, I guess, a couple years ago now. You know, there's a whole bunch of hype behind it, and then it kind of went nowhere. And maybe this was just my, I kind of laughed when I saw the results, because I saw there were people who answered who were over 50. And I think that's just so endemic of the, I mean, it's the church is like, even if you're no longer a young adult, you may still be a young adult relative to the congregation in which you worship every day, right? And my mom has this great story where she talks about a summer she was leading a young adult class of reunion, and one of the young ladies in the class, her mom came to the class, and she was like, she couldn't believe it, like, the lack of self awareness to, like, think you're a young adult, and then you pollute data. So I don't know if that's related at all to what happened there, but felt like there was so much and that just kind of kind of fizzled,

Stassi Cramm 41:59

at least. Yeah, and we did. We asked people's age so that we can sort, you know, so that you can partition your data. The problem that we had is, once we partitioned to really seeking, well, what was the strong feedback from young adults? Even that was not strong. They were. They were kind of all over the space. I think something that I should mention, we were talking about the Presiding Bishopric, but they just hired two new positions based on the generosity of a contributor who's very interested in how we engage. Now, in this case, it's under 65 but they've broken it into two groups and so, and I don't remember exactly how the bishopric is doing it, but it's like 65 down to like a point maybe like 45 or 40 and then it's like 40 to 18 or something like that. So, I'm hoping to see some really good engagement and exploration happening out of those two focused positions, at least with regards to what matters most in mission and what people feel really passionate about and how they are, you know, their ideas for how do we financially support things?

Humberto Tinsman 43:13

Awesome. Thank you.

Jacob Ross 43:17

This is another

Humberto Tinsman 43:19

I realized we talked too much about finances. We should have really vetted these questions better. I am so sorry, but hey, this is what we got.

Jacob Ross 43:27

Well, you know, they're all relevant in light of things. We're not jumping topics. So that's better. At least we had the foresight to sort them appropriately, as you're talking about. I mean, this really bleeds well with what you're saying. What do you see as the future of funding and how local congregations may use their building to generate income, instead of a quote, unquote, sell first mindset.

Stassi Cramm 43:51

Yeah, yeah, no, I think that's I think that's important. So, I do find it interesting that the question assumes there is a sell first mindset. So, I do want to say that in my experience, that is often the last strategy that's considered. And I can actually give you a multitude of examples where, in some cases, groups waited so long and deferred maintenance had been so deferred that they actually lost value in their sale because they waited too long. But there have been instances where a group had a clear vision for their mission and quickly concluded that their building was holding them back, you know. And

so in those cases, they did move pretty quickly. I think what's important in this question is, you know is, how do our buildings serve as a tool for mission and, and if we're not using our buildings to their full capacity, then what is our stewardship for looking for alternative ways to use those buildings? And those are great questions, and every group that's associated with a building should be, you know, really asking that, not just like once in a while, but all the time. But I do want to acknowledge that that is a complex challenge, especially in the US, but also in other countries. But it's easier for me to right now talk about the US because of tax statutes. In most, if not all of our states, church properties receive tax breaks because they support religious activities and they don't compete with for-profit businesses. So if you rent out your property for other purposes, depending on what you do with it, it can change your tax status, which is fine, as long as the additional income that you are generating covers any extra expenses that you're having. I think what's really important is that people commit to being really creative. Again, considering how their building is a tool for both disciple formation, for community formation, but also for, you know, mission out into the community, and that they evaluate all the possible options. They need to be really honest about the building's condition, because a lot of our buildings are really old, and they were built in an era for kind of different ways of being together, and they're not necessarily configured for modern use. Some of our buildings lack accessibility for people, you know, who maybe can't climb stairs, which even, you know, that that can be a problem, even for people that have, like, you know, temporary situations. Some of our buildings have asbestos or other environmental challenges. So, I think the clue is, again, how do our buildings serve as a tool for mission? How do we honestly assess what the options are for using the building if we're not going to fully use it, are there other alternatives that can be explored to generate additional income? You know, creating a solid plan for how all of that's going to be worked out, and making sure that you're considering all the local laws and statutes and, you know, the risk and all those other kinds of things. So, you know, discernment is definitely about listening to the leadings of the spirit, but discernment is also about doing the hard work of collecting the data and considering all of the the options, you know, based on the information

Humberto Tinsman 47:57

I'm waiting for, Jacob, our budding Bishop.

Jacob Ross 47:59

Oh, I didn't realize you were Yeah. I mean, I agree with all those points, right? I think in a lot of cases, I think, like the church I grew up in, like a two and a half story old building with an addition that's also old, and none of, you know, the basement is at street level. The sanctuary is not, you know, multiple steps, stuff like that, yeah. I mean, of course, our

Stassi Cramm 48:28

Yeah. The other thing and this, oh, you know, I talked about cynicism, so I don't want this to come across like cynically. But the other thing is, our congregational buildings are not our attics, or our basements, or our backyard sheds. So, if you're attending a congregation you know, enter it with like new eyes and see what you see. And if you see like old furniture that you won't sit on, then perhaps that old furniture shouldn't be in there. Or if you see boxes of stuff that no one knows what's in it, or you open a closet door and everything falls out. Those, that's another part of being good building stewards, is, how do we shape up our buildings to be like fresh and clean and inviting? So sorry, just a little bit even...

Humberto Tinsman 49:17

Can, okay to risk being friends. Can that be your first section of your addition to the Doctrine and Covenants? Can we just make that? Hey, the church is not yes, yeah. My Okay. Quick segue, my one of my first, my first year here at the Albuquerque branch, I cleaned out the church library because they

had books like The Nixon Papers and Beachbody workout 101, and just and again, we understand it when people pass away and they were great stewards of the church, all of their belongings should go to the church, but there's limits, folks. So yes, yeah.

Jacob Ross 49:56

Yeah, yeah, we've had that issue, and I one of the perks of our current. Current congregational building. And, I mean, we're looking at is making our space more available for other groups to use, not not other in the past, we've, you know, had another congregation who rented, did services, and, you know, then, then that comes out, like people are competing for time and for space, and there's people on Sundays, you intersect and all conflict there. But, I mean, I think you have to be self aware of what you're dealing with. And even though you enjoy that space and you love using that space, it does not mean that an outside group is going to come in and go, Oh man, I can't wait to pay X dollars an hour to be here.

Stassi Cramm 50:44

Yeah, yeah, exactly. You're nailing it.

Humberto Tinsman 50:48

And I think, you know, kind of the heart of this question, like many of the questions, it is broad, because every building comes with its own challenges. Every building needs to be looked at as its own in that, unfortunately, there isn't a really good one size fits all model, because, and I should say also, I'm glad that you said it should be a constant question, because it is my first year at in the Albuquerque branch. No, I would say we don't have a use for our building, because we only use it on Sundays now because of successes of outreach programs like scouting and different community programs. Yes, our building matters now, because it's not just being used on Sundays. So yeah, I'm glad that you mentioned that it's a it's a continuous conversation.

Jacob Ross 50:50

What's that line Larry had? It was, our buildings should be a place for community, not just worship, right? Something like, yes,

Humberto Tinsman 51:41

Yeah, yeah, yeah, our building should be a place for community, not just worship. Yeah, definitely. So I'm going to skip down a little bit, because we've talked a lot about, you know, your plans and times for questioning. So I'm going to move to again, a very broad question. So, I apologize, but in your mind, what is the future of groups that might not be what some would think as traditional groups in the Community of Christ, meaning groups like the LGBT plus community, the LDS seeker community, other converts or other people of color, Latin American, obviously very biased, but other peoples of colors In the church. You know, what? What do you see as their continuing role or voice as the church continues to grow in those areas?

Stassi Cramm 52:28

Yeah, so, you know, again, very broad question. I think, if the question is, do I believe that Community of Christ is called to be an inviting, inclusive, accepting community, then my answer is emphatically like, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. If the question is whether I believe Community of Christ is fully living into this calling, then my answer is, unfortunately, not yet or not fully. We have significant room for growth as we continue to be shaped and guided by the spirit, and the nature of that growth really depends on where you are attending church. You know what country you're in, what part of that country you're in, in in our best of moments, we hope that our church culture influences our citizenship in our national culture, but often what happens is our national culture influences our behavior within our church culture and and so,

you know that's, that's the role of repentance and forgiveness and, and so we're a work in process. But the vision is as strong and compelling as it has ever been, and I think that we're really guided by the work that was done some time ago, and that appears like in the Sharing in Community of Christ. We are one. We are many. And those words, which were written out of an international leaders meeting are so powerful, even today and, and just really give us a vision for the unity that we are called to create, and the diversity that we are challenged to celebrate and to fully embrace. So I feel like that we're in this space which where we must continually repent for any past prejudices. You know, one of the one of the topics from World Conference, one of the resolutions that you know, got referred to the First Presidency was about section 116 and the Doctrine and Covenants. And, in the coming months, you know, you're going to be seeing some information about that, and in consultation with people of color and with the Diversity and Inclusion Team and the Church and History and Sacred Story Team, we have decided, President Veazey in particular, but collectively, the First Presidency that section 116 will remain in the Doctrine and Covenants because no one felt like it should be removed. That was considered to be, you know, an act of denying our past. But we're adding a new preface to it to put it in context and and we're making an editorial change based on some notes and stuff that we found, which will create a slightly different paragraph break that we think is more representative of the original intent. So, that's just an action that from a section that was added to the Doctrine and Covenants a long time ago, but we're continuing to be open to, you know, how we should be handling it in, you know, the current day. So, your listeners can watch for those announcements on social media and stuff. But having said all this, I get that inclusion is really difficult, and that the path is not easy, and that it leads to really difficult conversations because individuals disagree on the most faithful way forward. And back to my earlier comment on trust, we have to start with the common ground that we are all motivated to faithfully live Christ's mission, and that whatever stance we are taking, we're doing that because we are trying to be faithful, but we're just going to have to keep working together and keep centering ourselves on what does God's unconditional love for all people look like? And then how do we embrace that and live that and yet still hold ourselves accountable for being faithful individuals and a faithful community. So these are really essential conversations for us, and we want to be the signal community for the rest of the world. We want to stand out as being those people who truly practice God's unconditional love for all people, and so we must have the courage to continue as we strive to become the community that I think God is really calling us to be. And

Jacob Ross 57:52

I think that's such an important point, right? Because we touched on this in an earlier comment at some point talking about cynicism and division. And you know, there is that disconnect, in my opinion, sometimes, between people who identify as Christians and then their willingness to love all of God's children. And I think it's important to prioritize. Well, this is kind of what Jesus's whole thing was. And there's, you know, there's value in making sure you're following what he taught and not what other people who taught you. And maybe in Sunday school, for example, think personally based off their own prejudices and personal beliefs.

Humberto Tinsman 58:46

I just want to say, as a person of color who has experienced racism within the church with outside the walls of the church and working with others, social justice is never a fast process, and nor should it be. But the thing that I that I tell folks, as you have shared, is to not lose hope that there is process, there is ways forward, and I think as we continue to have these important and often very vulnerable conversations on all sides of the spectrum. I do see the calling of Community of Christ, of coming together and recognizing that these are not things that can be wished away in a week conference. These are not things that should be wished away in a vote that it takes a lot of soul searching, of discussion, of hard conversations, and times where we need to leave the table because we can't, we just cannot agree of where we are. So yeah, that was really cool to hear some of that news. Look at that. Yeah, Ministry for Dummies on the forefront of church news. Folks. Come on now,

Jacob Ross 59:52

As we often say, yeah.

Stassi Cramm 59:54

Well, one of the questions I told the Quorum of High Priests just recently, we were. You know, they were having an online gathering together, and I was, I was sharing with them. And, you know, there's no question that some of these feel like overwhelming, and, you know, and some of these topics, people are just like, oh, this is too contentious. I just want to, like, walk away from it. It's just too much. So, the question that is really like driving me forward as I think about stepping into this new role is, yeah, there's like, 100,000 different reasons why I would like, turn and run and say, never mind. You know, I'm not going to go, like, just disappear. But what keeps driving me forward is the question, What if we get it right? You know? I mean, I think if we really trust in that, continuing revealing God that we've all experienced in different ways, yeah, there's lots of topics that are really tough and overwhelming and that we may have to work really hard at but if we cling together, and we keep leaning into the future, and we keep listening, and we keep trying and we keep experimenting, what if we get it right? I mean, hallelujah, you know, we will, in fact, be a transformative presence in the world. And back, you know, to what Jesus said. It's about yeast and salt. We don't have to be the dominant, large, consuming, overtaking community. We can be the small, impactful community that's transforming the world, and that's what I'm looking for.

Humberto Tinsman 1:01:41

Amen, amen, amen. I love it. We have two final questions for you. So thank you for all the time that you've made with us.

Jacob Ross 1:01:50

Officially, past the one hour mark,

Humberto Tinsman 1:01:51

we're almost

Stassi Cramm 1:01:52

You guys have a lot of cutting to do.

Humberto Tinsman 1:01:54

No, no, no, this is all...

Jacob Ross 1:01:56

That's too much work. We're just gonna, yeah, we just want to trim the front and trim the back. We're gonna,

Humberto Tinsman 1:02:01

yeah, we don't. We don't have an edit budget anyways.

Stassi Cramm 1:02:03

Oh yeah, just put it triple speed and get through.

Jacob Ross 1:02:08

There you go through.

Humberto Tinsman 1:02:10

So we bypassed this. But I think we should ask it, because it's crucial to ask, what was that moment like when you were asked to serve in this role, like, what was that experience? How does that even happen? What can you share with us? I mean, and you already talked about, like, wanting to run away, that would have been my first reaction. But truly, what was that experience like for you?

Jacob Ross 1:02:36

What a positive endorsement that was for yourself there, Humberto,

Humberto Tinsman 1:02:38

I would say, real positive experience. But, yeah, what was that experience?

Stassi Cramm 1:02:42

Yeah, so I know we're long, so I'll try to, like, keep this brief, because it is, it's, I mean, I'm still processing, so, you know, so this is, this is an answer that's unfolding. So, you're just getting kind of the, you know, raw in the moment. But for the most part, last, the end of last August, when we when it became clear that President Veazey health was going to limit his ability to do the discernment process, and Scott Murphy and I needed to go to the Council of 12 and say, we're, you know, the presidency, you know, Steve has asked us to turn this over to you. At that point, really, for the next several months, all that Scott and I really focused on was the integrity of the process. And so, my brain was, you know, in my like process mode of, how do we create space? How do we give support to the 12? You know, what do they need? All that kind of stuff. So that's kind of where my brain was. Then, you fast forward, and kind of their final action. They went through all these different discerning phases, soliciting support from the church, et cetera, et cetera. They went into retreat, and then Scott and I had a meeting scheduled with the President or the 12, Mareva, and with the Secretary, Richard James, at the end of that retreat, so that they could sort of report out where they were. So, so we had a call scheduled and then, you know, we got an email from them, and they said, hey, you know, we're really ready to do this. And so, instead of doing it like the next day, it was better for them if we did it on this Saturday night as they wrapped up. And so, in my mind, it's like, okay, well, suddenly it's like, oh my gosh. You know, we're going to hear like who it is, and this is going to, you know, impact all of us as we lean into the future, and, and so, you know, Mareva starts talking and, you know, and, and I don't even know how to describe it to you, but just because of the nature of the words, because of like, this, like this whole like feeling, I was like, Oh my gosh, I think she's going to say it's me, you know, and it's like, anyways, and so it was this very like overwhelming feeling, yeah, and, and, and yet, you know. So someone was like, Well, were you surprised? Well, the answer is yes, very surprised. And no, not at all. So, if you can imagine both of those feelings simultaneously, that's like how it felt. So, you know, so she kind of said stuff. I don't even really remember what she said. It was they knew that I wasn't hearing at that point. And, you know, they just said, we need to hear from you by then. And I was like, well, you'll hear from me probably before then, this was before Christmas. And so, you know, my husband and I talked, and I talked to the family and, and my husband finally said, Look, he's like, This is dumb. He goes, there is no scenario where you are going to say no. He said, There's 1000 questions of insecurity and, and, you know, sense of overwhelmed, this, all that kind of stuff. But there's no scenario where you're going to say no. So he's like, why don't you take the pressure off of the Council at 12 and, you know, and tell them that you're going to say yes, and then you can go, you know, go through all your struggles. So, so I got to them, like, before, you know, Christmas, so that they weren't like, holding their breath to see if they would need to go discern another person if I said no. So, then later, I was like, preaching, like, early January, and I really hadn't stopped to even think about everything yet, and it was an online sermon, and at the end, there was a little bit of extra time. And so they asked me kind of the same question. Same question, although I hadn't really even thought about the question yet. And I was like, Oh my gosh, I don't really know so, but what I came to understand, just even processing with them, is,

in retrospect, I can see where the Spirit was trying to prepare me for things, but I did not recognize that as I was moving through it, you know, and, and it's, you know, it's a lot, and I feel really unworthy, and I suspect that anybody that's ever said Yes, probably, you know, feels that way. And I'm very humbled that that not only the 12, but then when it was the call was presented to the Joint Council, that everyone supported the call, I still have like this, you know, imagination of like getting to the 2025 World Conference, and like the conference, like laughing and saying, no, no, no, no, no, we're not going to approve her call, you know. So that's those human, you know, insecurities. And yet, in, in a, in a very like, humble way, when I went to work for the church, I basically said, Here am I God, use me in the way that you need me to be used. And so, once you relinquish yourself to that sense of response, then if this is the call that comes, I trust the calling process. I trust in the Council of 12, and I ultimately trust in the wisdom of the World Conference, and if they approve the call, then with humble gratitude, I will pour my life into doing the very best that I'm able to do.

Jacob Ross 1:02:52

So our last question for you today is this bit lighter? What are some of the lessons you've learned about international travel? Is there a place in the church you're looking forward to visit? Are there certain things that have happened in your travels around, going to congregations that are just you can't believe that happened, like, What in the world?

Stassi Cramm 1:08:59

Yeah. So, what I know is that if you're traveling internationally, you really do want Global Entry. So you know, just, you know, Global Entry is, like the best thing ever, and I don't know why I ever traveled without it. Two, it's really important that you check the status of your immunizations more than just a few days before you travel, because a lot of them takes, you know, like months of series of shots or whatever you know to do. So that is, like, really important and really horrible that Malaria pills, because you do malaria prophylactic, you know, you just take the pills in case you get it. They really do make you have the craziest dreams ever. So that's like the closest I've ever come to taking hallucinogens, and I mean the wildest, craziest possible dreams. Turns out that the US is the only place that has decaf coffee. No Canada, some of the Western places, but mostly decaf coffee is a US thing. So traveling with decaf coffee, if you are a coffee person and don't want to do tons of caffeine, is really important. Always having Kleenex or some form of paper tissue at hand wherever you are is always, always important. And I love hand sanitizer. I mean, it's like, better than perfume when you're traveling. So the best kind of hand sanitizer, Morava gave me some recently when I was in French Polynesia that has, like, it's kind of like, you know, the the it's got, like, a natural smell to it, or whatever. It doesn't smell like all, you know, like it's like Bath and Body Works esque type, yeah, exactly. So that's like the best, because then, you know, you go through, like a reception line, and then you can just, like, kind of smack it on your face, on your neck, on your arms, and then you know, you're all fresh again.

Jacob Ross 1:10:56

You don't smell like you fell into, like a moonshine jar or something,

Jacob Ross 1:11:00

yeah, what was, what was the equivalent of the Peace Corps? We had the service world, service, course, like a micro version of that, where you get to experience community,

Stassi Cramm 1:11:00

Yeah, exactly. So those are, like, some of the practical things. But what I will say is that the love and acceptance of Community of Christ members is worldwide. And although there are 1000 different ways to worship, a whole bunch of different language, there is a recognizable feel and community to Community of Christ experiences in all the places that I've been, and I have been just privileged and

humbled by every gathering that I've ever attended. I have I'm not well traveled in Asia. So that would certainly be one of the areas I'm also not well traveled in South America. So there are a couple of places, you know, in the world where I look forward to opportunities to gather, you know, with our people. But, and I'm a strong proponent that we really need to create partnerships that allow people to experience each other's cultures. And so that means not always bringing people to like the US, but, you know, but taking people to other places, not to do mission, but to experience the church and create relationships. So, in I think it was 2010 International Youth Forum got canceled, so myself and Greg McDonald ended up there were 10 youth from the United States who had already purchased plane tickets to go to Africa. So, we ended up taking that group of 10 high school students to several countries in Africa. It was one of the greatest experiences I've ever had, and I think we should be creating those opportunities. So that's, that's one that's on my wish list for others to make happen. I want to be able to be Captain Picard and just say, make it so.

Stassi Cramm 1:13:07

yeah, okay, absolutely.

Humberto Tinsman 1:13:09

I just, we need to address something very, very quickly. Stassi, are you a Star Trekker?

Stassi Cramm 1:13:14

I love Star Trek.

Humberto Tinsman 1:13:16

Already got my vote. I mean, you already had my vote, but I mean also, Oh, I love it. Oh, my gosh, yes, yes, Voyager is my favorite. We talk about Voyager too much, but I was raised with Next Generation, as everyone should be. So, yeah, sorry...

Stassi Cramm 1:13:30

How could you not love a series that in the 1960s had a black female communication officer. I mean, my hero.

Humberto Tinsman 1:13:40

exactly, exactly, first interracial kiss ever in us, television history, in television history in general. Oh, sorry, sorry, we're devolving. I apologize. Thank you. Thank you so much. I hit it real quick. Listen, listen,

Jacob Ross 1:13:56

I didn't have anything on here.

Humberto Tinsman 1:13:57

Oh, my gosh. Oh my gosh. Anyways, thank you so much for being with us, answering our questions and the questions of this audience. Dear listeners, if you have more questions that you have for Jacob and I or for Stacey, you can also reach out to her on her email we that's included at cofchrist.org and I know that she would love your questions and comments. But also, if you'd like questions to us, you can answer our question form at ministryfordummies.org and we'd love to hear it. But with that, Jacob, take us to the outro.

Jacob Ross 1:14:31

Once again. Thank you, Stassi for joining us here today, and thank you to all four or five of our listeners for joining us this podcast.

Stassi Cramm 1:14:40

Thanks for having me. I do need to say that so thanks for letting me be here.

Jacob Ross 1:14:43

Well, you know we're so thankful that you joined us. This podcast is made possible by listeners and disciples of Christ and by the members of the Community of Christ. Without you, we would not be here if you have any ideas or questions about the podcast, as Humberto said, please go to our website, ministryfordummies.org, and fill out our questions or comments form. There. We look forward to seeing you and thank you for following along with us today.