

Community of Christ

Counsel to the Church

While sharing with the church in prayer, discussion, and discernment about important issues, I received an increasingly strong sense of divine direction about conditions of membership and other pressing questions. A significant aspect of my experience was God's Spirit drawing me to consider various scripture passages. After I thoroughly explored many passages, the Holy Spirit focused my attention on Galatians 3:27–29:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

While I studied this passage, the Spirit helped me see much broader dimensions of God's grace working through Christ to transform human relationships in a divided world. As a result, I have an even-greater testimony than before of the power of the gospel of Christ to birth a new creation among those who dare to live its message in sacred community.

As the significance of what was unfolding became more obvious, the Spirit led me to consider a series of Doctrine and Covenants sections. Each addressed spiritual and relational dynamics of being a prophetic people. (For example, see Sections 10:6, 147:7, 149:4, 161:5, 162:2, and 163:7.) These include distinguishing between more-universal spiritual principles and particular expressions of them within the confines of human history and understanding. Being a divinely-led prophetic people involves—as a necessity—reevaluating at times some existing understandings and customs to allow added insight and interpretation under the Spirit's guidance.

With that background in mind, I present the following counsel to the church in response to the guidance of God's Spirit. I offer this counsel in humility, fully aware of my limitations and weaknesses, which I always carry as a burden. I also present these words with full conviction of their truthfulness as an expression of the spirit of wisdom and revelation that flows from God's eternal being.

To the church:

1 All who actively engaged in prayer, discussion, and discernment about important issues in the church's life are commended for your faithful response. Your disciplined effort to open your lives more fully to God's Spirit in response to the call to be a prophetic people has become a blessing to the entire church. Your spiritual yearning for light and truth has created a favorable environment for the Spirit's movement to provide inspired counsel as authoritative guidance for the church.

2 a. Instruction given previously about baptism was proper to ensure the rise and cohesiveness of the church during its early development and in following years. However, as a growing number have come to understand, the redemptive action of God in Christ—while uniquely and authoritatively expressed through the church—is not confined solely to the church.

b. God’s grace, revealed in Jesus Christ, freely moves throughout creation, often beyond human perception, to achieve divine purposes in people’s lives. In harmony with God’s will, the Holy Spirit leads some people already committed to Jesus Christ through Christian baptism to further focus their response through church membership.

c. Individuals previously baptized of water in an attitude of humility and repentance and as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ may become church members through the sacrament of confirmation of the Holy Spirit.

d. Confirmation should follow a time of intentional preparation that includes exploring the church’s mission, beliefs, and understanding of discipleship expressed through covenant with God and others in sacred community.

e. During the confirmation prayer include an acknowledgement of the grace and authority of Jesus Christ through which baptism occurs. Also, bear witness to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which weaves people’s giftedness into beautiful patterns of community to enrich their discipleship and to strengthen the fabric of the church.

3 a. All church members are urged to examine the depth of your baptismal commitment. Having been baptized and confirmed, become fully immersed in the servant life of Christ.

b. Live the meaning of your baptism daily as you grow in the skills and qualities of discipleship. Actively and generously support the ministries of the church, which was divinely established to restore Christ’s covenant of peace, even the Zion of your hopes.

c. The Eternal Christ invites those who have yet to experience the blessings of baptism to “Follow me in the way of righteousness and peace.” Be baptized of water and the Spirit and discover your spiritual home as a fully functioning member of the body.

Some have continued to express concerns about how the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper should be conducted. In other places, the meaning and potential power of this sacrament has been lessened by a lack of understanding and preparation. Because of these circumstances, the following counsel is given as confirmed by the Spirit:

4 a. Serve the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to all committed followers of Christ as a visible witness of loving Christian fellowship and shared remembrance of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. Individuals may choose whether or not to receive the emblems according to their faith and understanding in harmony with guidelines provided by the First Presidency.

b. This pastoral provision does not lessen additional meanings associated with this sacrament in the church’s life. When the church gathers for Communion, highlight the opportunity for members to reaffirm their baptismal covenant, to reconcile strained relationships, and to commit together to the church’s mission of promoting communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.

c. Explore all the ways the Lord’s Supper can spiritually form the church community into a true and living expression of the life, sacrifice, resurrection, and continuing presence of Christ. Inherent in this sacrament is the divine call for the church to be a sacramental offering for the blessing, healing, and peace of creation.

Serious questions about moral behavior and relationships continue to arise in many nations. These issues are complex and difficult to understand outside their particular settings because of strikingly different cultural histories, customs, and understandings of scripture. For example, the

issues include female submission, female genital mutilation, child brides, forced marriages, and sexual permissiveness. They include cleansing and exploitation of widows, harsh conflicts over same-gender attraction and relationships, and varying legal, religious, and social definitions of marriage, to name just a few.

Over the last several years the need to resolve various moral and justice issues has intensified and become more complicated because of the growing international diversity of the church. The church has been told in previous counsel that we have been given the struggles and joys of diversity for divine purposes. (Doctrine and Covenants 162:4) In response to my prayerful pleas for light regarding God's purposes being worked out through our difficult struggles over various issues, God graciously blessed me with the following counsel:

5 It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

6 a. As revealed in Christ, God, the Creator of all, ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in the principles of Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness, against which there is no law.

b. If the church more fully will understand and consistently apply these principles, questions arising about responsible human sexuality, gender identities, roles, and relationships; marriage; and other issues may be resolved according to God's divine purposes. Be assured, nothing within these principles condones selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive relationships.

c. Faced with difficult questions, many properly turn to scripture to find insight and inspiration. Search the scriptures for the Living Word that brings life, healing, and hope to all. Embrace and proclaim these liberating truths.

7 a. A world-wide prophetic church must develop cultural awareness and sensitivity to distinguish between issues that should be addressed by the World Conference and those that are best resolved nationally or in other ways.

b. Fundamental principles of ethical behavior and relationships should be addressed by the World Conference. The Conference should not decide specific policies for all nations when those decisions likely will cause serious harm in some of them.

c. However, timely resolution of pressing issues in various nations is necessary for the restoring work of the gospel to move forward with all of its potential. Therefore, let the proper World Church officers act in their callings—as already provided in church law—to create and interpret church policies to meet the needs of the church in different nations in harmony with the principles contained in this counsel.

d. Where possible and appropriate, convene national or field conferences to provide opportunities for broader dialogue, understanding, and consent. In those gatherings, let the spirit of love, justice, and truth prevail.

The Council of Twelve and the Council of Presidents of Seventy have given ample attention to the previous instruction calling for the greatest collaboration possible among the leading missionary quorums. Because of their diligent efforts to create even-closer relationships to

strengthen the church evangelistic and community-building mission, I now am free to offer the following counsel:

8 a. The importance of evaluating and aligning ministerial roles and relationships to reach individuals and nations most effectively with the liberating truths of the gospel is always incumbent on the church.

b. For this purpose, the number of quorums of seventy and presidents of seventy may be adjusted at times to respond to evangelistic strategies in apostolic fields. The First Presidency, in concert with the Council of Twelve and the Council of Presidents of Seventy, will provide procedures for determining the number, makeup, and roles of quorums of seventy and presidents of seventy.

c. Let the evangelistic ministries of the church accelerate.

While finishing this counsel, I paused for a time to rest with God in prayer and meditation, seeking added confirmation and clarity. From that devoted time with God, these closing words of challenge and promise unexpectedly sprang forth and found their place in this document:

9 a. Beloved children of the Restoration, your continuing faith adventure with God has been divinely-led, eventful, challenging, and sometimes surprising to you. By the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church.

b. When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ's new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your wholehearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God's covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.

c. This covenant entails sacramental living that respects and reveals God's presence and reconciling activity in creation. It requires whole-life stewardship dedicated to expanding the church's restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of persons, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering.

d. If you truly would be Community of Christ, then embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ.

e. The challenges and opportunities are momentous. Will you remain hesitant in the shadows of your fears, insecurities, and competing loyalties? Or will you move forward in the light of your divinely instilled call and vision?

f. The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead.

The burdens of the prophetic office have increased dramatically since the last World Conference. However, my dedication to the church, my love for our people, and my conviction regarding the church's divine calling have not waned, but have grown stronger.

With deep trust in the spiritual competency and maturity of the church, I turn the words of this counsel over to you for prayerful consideration and continued discernment. As we continue our journey together, may the gracious Spirit that blessed me similarly bless those who seek divine affirmation of this counsel.

Stephen M. Veazey
Prophet-President of the Church

The Temple
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