

Conversation and Testimony with President Veazey

President Stephen M. Veazey presented Counsel to the Church on January 17. Afterward, Apostle Linda Booth talked with him about the document and his experience. Following is a transcript of their conversation. Ask your pastor or mission center leaders to see a DVD of the conversation or view streaming video at www.CofChrist.org/wc2010/counsel.

L: Welcome, I'm Linda Booth, I'm a part of the Council of Twelve Apostles and also serve the church as director of Communications. I'm here today with President Steve Veazey and we're going to be talking about words of counsel that he gave to church on Sunday, January 17th. Nearly 1,600 people gathered at the Temple and perhaps five times that many from 19 countries, six Canadian provinces and 48 US states participated via the Internet.

Sharing the counsel three months in advance of what will be considered at World Conference is unprecedented, Steve. Could you tell us why you and the First Presidency made the decision to share the counsel so early?

S: It was primarily my decision as I thought about the journey that we had been on as a church, especially in terms of prayer, discussion, and discernment regarding conditions of membership. And I had been journeying with the church during that process of discernment and the words of counsel began to emerge out of that shared experience, but I felt it was important not to wait until World Conference but to go ahead and share the words of counsel so that the church could continue to participate in that experience with the Presidency.

L: Well, I thank you on behalf of leaders and the church for putting your trust in us to be on that journey with you and to encourage us to be a prophetic people. In the counsel to the church there are several references to God's Spirit leading you to new understanding. Could you please share with us how you made yourself vulnerable to God's direction?

S: Well, I think with each person it's unique in terms of the spiritual practices that work best for us, even as we may try new experiences in order to expand our capacity to sense God's Spirit. But for me it's primarily being very intentional about taking time to become quiet and to first of all center myself in God's presence and God's love. I primarily do that by going to a quiet place or secluded place and spending some time with scripture first. I read from the Psalms; I read the ancient prophets; I read from the New Testament; I read from all the books of scripture of the church that have a devotional theme or spirit to them. And that causes me to be open to God's Spirit in ways that I don't think I would be otherwise.

So, I was very intentional over a long period of time of practicing those spiritual disciplines within my life. And that's one of the fundamental steps of spiritual openness is to first to carve out the time, because our lives are so busy and we can become so distracted by other voices and influences calling for our time and our attention and attempting to influence our thinking. Secondly, an important part of the process was trying to set aside my own agenda, my own ideas, my own pre-conceived notions and let go of that. And that is probably the most difficulty step because it's so caught up in our own egos. So we have to quiet our ego even in order to hear God's voice breaking into our own consciousness and often times it's

that still, small voice that comes once we've put ourselves in a position to actually hear it and be alert to it. So, those are some of the steps that I took.

L: I also noticed, Steve, in several sessions with the World Church Leadership Council as well as with the Expanded World Church Leadership Council which is, as you know, the gathering of leaders from all over the world who come together. I notice you taking notes; you're very attentive in listening to the voices of people. Did that contribute to that openness to God's direction?

S: It certainly did and that would be another dimension of the process. I believe that God's truth, God's word can break into our lives in a whole variety of ways, however God chooses for that to occur. So, part of the process of discerning God's will is to listen very carefully to what others are saying out of their own lives' experiences, their testimonies, their insights, and even their persistent questions. It's often the questions that can lead you in the direction of discovering God's truth more than you've seen it before. So I take notes in order to go back and reflect on what people are saying because I don't think any one person has all the truth and that part of being a participant, a member of the body of Christ is to recognize and respect the role and the giftedness and insights of others in the community as they might affirm our insights or as they might open our minds to new truths.

L: You also, you and the First Presidency, also asked the church to join in the discernment process on conditions of membership. I know many individuals and congregations intentionally went through a discernment process and they sent those testimonies and their comments of that experience on to you and to the First Presidency. What was the impact of the church-wide discernment?

S: First of all, I want to thank everyone who participated in the process. Like you said, there were individuals who did that on their own. There were small groups that perhaps for the first time tried to implement processes and spiritual practices that maybe they weren't totally familiar or comfortable with. There were whole congregations that engaged in that. I am deeply appreciative that people were willing to engage in the journey with us. I am so appreciative of the messages that came, the summary of meetings that people provided, the insights that they identified, and their affirmation that regardless of the outcome of the process, it had been very important and it was a blessing to simply to have participated in it. That was part of the point of the whole activity in the life of the church.

Our primary desire was to respond to the counsel in Doctrine & Covenants 162 that said we are called to be a prophetic people and we need to discern together the will of God for our particular time and the places where we serve. We live in a new world and that new world requires new forms of ministry and I think we made some definite steps forward in the process of being that kind of people.

L: I would agree because I hear that testimony when I am out in the field from those people who did participate in that. I am also hearing the need, as we move forward in our journey of God's people together, to continue to use those discernment practices and processes so that we can continue to listen to God.

S: Absolutely. Discernment is not so much about particular issues, although it may seem that way right now. Discernment is a lifestyle of disciples who are always endeavoring to be more open to the presence and guidance of God's Spirit in their lives. So we are learning how to do that more effectively in the church and we are doing it all together. And that's wonderful.

L: That is good. And even children as they're learning now that that's a part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, I get excited thinking about the possibilities of us as a people and a church as we move forward together.

S: Certainly. I received some correspondence from younger people. I was particularly excited to hear from them and to come to understand how they were taking these questions very seriously. I think that bodes well for the future.

L: I would agree, Steve. Let's move now into the counsel itself. There are five sections and each one has an introduction or are you calling them introductions or does it even matter how we refer to them?

S: It's introduction, explanatory comments, preface to each paragraph that's in the counsel.

L: I found them each one as important for my study as even going into the counsel itself. So those prefaces I think are very important. So in that introduction to the first in particular, you talk about how the Holy Spirit focused your attention on Galatians 3:27. I am going to read that for those listening to this interview: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself 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." Why is this scripture so important to Community of Christ at this time?

S: Well first of all, as background, in my own process of prayerful reflections, study, and discernment, I tried to be very conscious of a whole number of scriptural passages which seem to have some bearing on the issues before us. I studied all of those very carefully and part of my experience as I shared in these comments was over time being drawn to focus on this particular passage of scripture and it was like the Spirit told me to not only pay attention to it but it kind of fixed my attention on it.

I was already very familiar with that passage of scripture, I thought, because it was one that I had studied before. But I had to spend more time with it to understand additional applications that were inherent in that particular passage of scripture. So I hope that that is a testimony to others. That scripture study is so essential to our understanding of God's will and that when we're looking at particular questions, the Holy Spirit will illuminate passages of scripture that we may be very familiar with and yet they still have treasures of understanding for us to uncover or discover. That's part of the process of being a spiritually discerning people who see scripture as an indispensable aspect of how we come to understand God's will and God's purposes.

That particular scripture, I even dug back into the original languages of Aramaic and Greek in order to understand each word. And as I did that, my appreciation for it grew and grew and

grew. I also learned by using some commentaries that that particular phrase is one of the earliest phrases associated with Christian baptism and that people who were being baptized probably said that in terms of how it applied to their own lives—that they understood that in being baptized they were entering into a new community that reflected the personality and attitude of Jesus Christ.

All of these categories that had separated them, that separated them in those days and that continue to separate people today, were dissolved, they were no longer primary. That in Christ these kinds of dividing walls have been taken down and we become one in Christ Jesus where we have a fundamental appreciation for the worth of each other. And that became such a powerful notion to me. I thought it originally applied to questions of baptism but then I came to understand that it really applied to what it means to be the Community of Christ and that baptism is one of the ways in which we enter into that reality, that truth, that transformative experience. So that's why it became very important to me.

L: Well, and that explains, it helps us understand this inspired counsel because in that preface it also talks about the experience that you had where you understood what it meant to be a new creation among those who dare to live his message in sacred community. So I got really excited as I thought about what that might mean. Have you ever experienced a group of people who dared to live that message and sacred community? And if so, what was it like?

S: I've caught glimpses of it. That's what's so encouraging to me. In congregations that are taking seriously what it means to be Community of Christ and that is to live the life and personality of Christ in community with each other. I've seen that spirit, that attitude, that perception of each other and others growing in them. It feels like you're coming home. It feels like you're home but maybe for the first time when you're in that environment of that kind of spirit and love and it's like a magnet.

Just as people were attracted the personality and message of Christ had pain their lives, suffering in their lives, questions about their own sense of self-worth, they were drawn to Christ. And so it is with those expressions of the message of Christ in congregational life where this attitude is what has become preeminent in congregational life. It's hospitable, it's welcoming, it's warm, it's non-judgmental, and obviously there are boundaries in terms of how we behave and relate to each other because it's all emerging out of maturing in the love of Christ. And so I've seen it.

I've experienced it in a testimony my brother shared with me once. My brother was always very interested in the concept of the kingdom of God, the cause of Zion. He was very involved in the larger community and he shared with me one time that he was praying about what the kingdom of God was like and he had this experienced he said where he just felt God's love for the whole creation and for other people.

Then he said he tested it by trying to think of people he really didn't like or people who had offended him or people who disgusted him. And he said he could not feel anything but love and a desire to extend himself in service to them, to help them find reconciliation with God and others and fulfill the potential of their lives. He said he could not force himself to act or to think as he might typically have. So that helps me, it gives me a guidepost. It gives me a

glimpse into what this is talking about, but a lot of this is saying is what can be, that perhaps we've caught a glimpse of what can be if we move in this direction in response to God's Spirit this will then increasingly be our experience. When that community emerges in creation it will be like light, leaven, and salt; it will transform. That's who we are called to be.

L: Yes, definitely. There's a human tendency to always want definitive answers to address complicated issues. There are a lot of complicated issues before the World Conference. However, this inspired counsel asked the church to distinguish between more universal spiritual principles, which I think you've already talked about in that sacred community that you caught glimpses of, and you separate the sacred, universal, spiritual principles from the details or implications of all these issues. Why are the spiritual principles that you brought up often, or that have been brought up often in this inspired counsel, why are they are so important to the church? Is there a link between that and the Enduring Principles that we find in the "We Share" document. [www.CofChrist.org/discernment/weshare]

S: I think the constant challenge in terms of understanding and applying the gospel to our lives is to always be distinguishing between the broader, more-foundational principles and particular expressions or applications of those within our lives, our local setting, our own culture, and to understand both the relationship between the two but also the difference and what is it that is most foundational that we always have to keep in mind as a point of reference?

I think a good example is when the Expanded World Church Leadership Council was dealing with various issues. And the Expanded World Church Leadership Council is a group of about, over 50 people representing different nations and cultures from throughout the world, and we were wrestling with some specific issues—some more moral and ethical issues, as well as condition of membership and so forth. We found ourselves very frustrated because initially we didn't have a common understanding of what our foundational principles—some call them core values, others might call them the most basic beliefs—we didn't have a common language to talk about those. So we had to back up and spend a lot of time clarifying what our foundations were. And when I refer to principles I am talking about foundations upon which we can then build particular expresses of the gospel in different parts of the world and develop policies and procedures that reflect those principles but also are relevant to the circumstances where people live.

Sometimes we are trying to ask questions that are not even—or answers—that are not even in their minds. So we have to find a way to relate the principles to the situations where people live. But before you can do the specifics you have to understand what the basic foundations are that are Enduring Principles of the church. We've done that in the life of the church and those are contained in the "We Share" document.

In terms of the World Conference we need to do that kind of work there also, especially in relation to ethical and moral issues that are rising with great intensity in some parts of the world. Before we address those we need to consider and consent to some fundamental principles that will be our foundational understandings, and then we can ask ourselves how our proposals, how our resolutions, how our policies line up with those. That's why they're so important, otherwise we may be coming at issues from different assumptions and it's

important to clarify what our initial assumptions are so that we can better talk to each other about the principles and when I use a phrase, “the worth of persons,” or, “all are called according to their gifts,” to have a more common understanding throughout the whole church what that means.

L: And so at World Conference, I noticed as I looked at the schedule, that the first few days are not typical for World Conference. Is that the kind of way in which we are going to approach World Conference those first few days by understanding what our common, universal principles and foundational principles are?

S: Yes. Well the theme of the conference itself, “We Share,” refers to the “We Share” document, which contains a lot of material in terms of foundational understandings and principles. But also the words of counsel identify certain principles fairly consistently, and by presenting the counsel to the church we are asking the Conference to consider and consent to those principles and that’s part of the process of common consent in the life of the church.

Before we get into any kind of formal consideration, we’re going to practice once again how to talk to each other to seek understanding first, to listen to stories and testimonies so we can see what it is the Holy Spirit is seeking to do in our midst. And how do we have effective dialogue, which is particularly challenging in an international assembly—a multi-lingual assembly? So we think it’s so important that we have that experience. We’ve scheduled it into the World Conference so we can talk about the issues that are coming before the Conference. But we will not be bound in any way by parliamentary procedure. So we are looking forward to that experience.

L: That will be a good experience and I ask for the church’s prayers as we come together to do that. In the introduction or the preface to paragraphs one, two, and three, the counsel states that to be divinely led, a prophetic people, it’s necessary to reevaluate existing understandings and customs to allow added insights and interpretations under the Spirit’s guidance. Steve, it’s really difficult to reevaluate those long-held beliefs. Why is it so important for us to do that now?

S: Well, I think it’s important for us to do it now because there are, there is a convergence of questions and issues that ask us to do that and require of us to do that. That’s the process that we’ve been involved in, in terms of conditions of membership. The church itself passed the resolution on conditions of membership and said, “We want to look at this.” Now that’s an expression of a prophetic people who are saying, “We have some questions and we’re open to examining it.” So, in many ways the church itself has signaled its desire to examine certain issues and questions.

Then the larger scope is actually a part of our faith heritage, our faith tradition, and our faith journey. A part of our system of belief and practice includes fundamentally the principle of continuing revelation, which is a humble confession that at any given time we may not have understood all of God’s will, all of God’s purposes, and all of the ways in which that might be expressed. And so the very fact that we have that belief and that practice says that as a people we’re going to be involved in that kind of reflection and reevaluation to see if there is some expression of God’s will that perhaps we have boxed in that we need to open up in order for it to fulfill its ultimate purposes. The very nature of an open canon of scripture

says that we can expect that there's additional insight that will come from time to time that will help us be aligned with what God is doing in the world to bring about God's purposes.

Also, as will not be a surprise to anyone, there are issues that the church is facing today that have never been faced by the church before. And there are questions coming out of society, our time in history, that have never been asked before. And we are fortunate that we have this openness, this belief in continuing revelation, so that we can be open to what God may be wanting to share with us now in this particular time in history as we face those new challenges of ministry that are before us.

So all of that says that from time-to-time we're going to be involved in looking at important questions, whether they're questions of faith, or doctrine and belief, or sacramental practice. The key for us is to at the same time affirm what remains basic, what remains fundamental, and how it is we are staying true and faithful to the very foundations of our faith. That's a very dynamic process. That's why we often refer to ourselves as not just a church but a faith movement or a prophetic movement. That has a dynamic of openness and energy to it that I think is important to who we are.

L: It also opens up an element of struggle and there's blessing in struggle. Following a preaching assignment this past Sunday, a man came through the line, shook my hand, and expressed his sense of struggle in the reevaluation of what he termed "the old RLDS beliefs." And he asked me as in the struggle if there was still a place for him in the body in that struggle. How would you have responded to him and to the others who may be struggling in a similar way?

S: First of all, I would say of course there is a place. That's in the very nature of who we are. It's in the very nature of being sacred community. So I would want to express to anyone who may be struggling or questioning that I understand. I've been through that in my own life as I have had to look at my beliefs, my understandings, the faith that was passed to me by my ancestors and those who went before, and also what I was coming to understand in my own life and experience. So I understand that struggle and sometimes it can feel gut-wrenching. So first of all I want to acknowledge that I understand that.

One of the burdens that I carry is that I know that there are people who may be hurt or who may disagree with things that I say, that I say on behalf of the church or that I feel led to bring as counsel to the church. If I had time, and I try to make time for these kinds of conversations, I would want to sit down with individuals and talk about what is being termed as "RLDS beliefs." I suspect as we shared with each other we would find at the most basic level that we have more in common than we have different perspective. And so we always have to keep in mind that we tend to focus the attention on what we perceive is different from each other, a lot of energy goes there, it's good to step back every now and then and reaffirm what we appreciate about each other, how much we love each other, and that our core belief about what God has done in Jesus Christ and the calling of the church to fulfill divine purpose in the world, to pursue the cause of Zion, the core values of the church are shared much more broadly than they are points of contention.

But I'd want to have conversation. I would listen very carefully. That's part of loving each other. I would ask individuals about their life journey and how they had come to hold certain

beliefs and I would show respect for that. And then I would also want to share my own journey, my own experience, my testimonies. Also, affirm my belief that God is in the church, and that God is guiding the church, and that those who have laid the foundation for that are the reason we're here. Their sacrifice, their commitment, their insights, their faithfulness have set the foundation upon which the future builds. There's deep appreciation and respect for that.

- L: In paragraphs one through three in the counsel to the church, you deal with those foundations. The foundations that were there in which the counsel says were proper to insure the rise and cohesiveness of the church during its early development and in the following years. You're referring to baptismal practices there. However, it also says a growing number have come to understand the "redemptive action of God and Christ while uniquely and authoritatively expressed through the church is not confined solely to the church." Can you please explain what that means?
- S: One perspective I want to share at this point is that in bringing counsel to the church it doesn't mean I understand it all in terms of its ultimate implications. It means that I have enough clarity and affirmation behind it that I bring it forward and I continue to interact with it and learn from it. What was in my heart and mind and experience when crafting these particular words were insights from the past that I have come to really appreciate and if students of history will pardon me for not being able to quote directly, Albert A. Smith said once during a time of questioning and struggle in the church and in the world, that God has many forces for good at work in the world and we see but a small part of that at any given time. Now for some reason that thought, that quote was brought back to my mind as I was wrestling with these words that needed to be shaped into counsel to the church.

Secondly, out of my own experience, I have traveled the world extensively and I'm always looking to see what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world to bring about God's purposes because I think that's a very important indicator of what God's will is. I've been in situations, and I'm thinking of one in particular right now, where I was talking to a man who had been baptized as a Christian and he lives in a country that goes to great extents, extremes to suppress Christianity. But he was baptized because he heard the gospel from some missionaries and he endured in his faith through years of persecution and he continued to meet with a group secretly. Now I was talking to him and I was listening to his testimony. I experienced the affirmation of the Holy Spirit saying to me that I needed to respect this man's commitment and that it wasn't appropriate to require him to be re-baptized—that his baptism was genuine in terms of the fruits of discipleship that were evident in his life.

Now he had discovered Community of Christ, which hadn't been in his awareness for all these years we were present there. And that he was longing to be a part of this community because he was recognizing where his discipleship needed to be focused for the remainder of his life. That was a very powerful experience for me. I said to myself at that time, and as I expressed in the counsel, the Holy Spirit is leading some people who have already made a commitment to Christ to focus or express their discipleship in the Community of Christ. That's according to God's purposes and we need to respect that.

Now the counsel is not just based on that experience. What was very interesting was in the discernment, the prayer, and the discussion process in the church, others shared almost

exactly the same testimony. So it became an affirmation that this is what the Holy Spirit is doing in the whole world today to bring about God's purposes and Community of Christ is part of it. We need to understand that. It's not a denial of the legitimacy or the authority of the church. God is saying that Community of Christ is the destination for disciples of Jesus who have been shaped out of other experiences, places perhaps where the church was not even present, but for God's purposes they came in contact with the gospel. They have matured in that gospel. They are more dedicated as disciples than a lot of people that I know and they want to be a part of Community of Christ. That's what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world.

L: That's marvelous, Steve. I noticed and felt very strongly in the counsel the fact that Spirit is urging us, those of us who have been baptized into this faith movement, to examine the depth of our baptismal commitment, to be fully immersed in the servant life of Christ. For me that's a profound call and I am very thankful that God has pointed us in that direction. Explain why this is so important to the church and the world. Why do you suppose God has prompted you to share this urging?

S: It did come as an urging and it was a little surprising to me. I was focusing on the question of re-baptism of others and in the midst of that experience I had the distinct impression that God wanted to say something to the Community of Christ. And that was: Are we taking our baptismal commitment seriously? You know we're, I don't mean this in any kind of discourteous way, sometimes we judge other Christians when we should be looking at the depth and quality of our own commitment. If we will do that, then we will discover even more blessings within our lives as we grow as disciples.

It was also a sense that perhaps many have begun to take that commitment casually and have not understood that it's an initial step on a lifelong journey of discipleship and you need to stay on that journey. Since I have experienced this counsel, I've begun to implement within my own life a daily remembrance of my baptism and so I'm trying to respond to the counsel that's there and I'm finding that to be a very enriching experience. For me, it involves water. Whenever I'm experiencing water, perhaps washing my face, bathing, or drinking water, I use that as a trigger to remember my baptismal experience, which is so meaningful to me and is the foundation my discipleship.

L: I will commit myself to looking at water in a new way, Steve. I know that I need to and I'm sure others can admit that they too need to go deep in their discipleship and understand what that commitment means every day—not just on the day they went into the waters of baptism. I also am beginning to understand as I read this counsel over and over again, that there is a strong sacramental link between baptism and confirmation and the Lord's Supper. If that's true, explain to us and help us understand that link and what difference that will make in our lives if that profound link becomes a reality.

S: Well, I think you've identified one of the themes that runs throughout the counsel. Once it was completed and looking back on it, there's definitely a message about continuing to take the sacraments of the church very seriously. Now to put that in a bit of context, if we go back to Doctrine and Covenants 158, there's counsel that says continue to look to the sacraments of the church (and again I'm paraphrasing) to spiritually enrich the body. And if you'll do that through more prayer and preparation, we'll see more clearly the divine

presence among us.

The sacraments are the international language of the church. We have a relatively large number of sacraments compared to other churches. So there is something about Community of Christ that says words can only take us so far and then we need to move into those sacred ministries that are rich with symbols that draw us, if we are open, into the divine presence so that we can experience spiritual transformation. That's a lifelong process.

Now in terms of baptism and confirmation, obviously, how do we hold those in high regard as an important part of becoming a true follower of Jesus Christ? We would relate that to the baptism of the water and the spirit. When we participate in those activities, we're drawn very close to the experience of our Lord who showed us the way. It's where we make covenant with God. It's how we respond to what the Spirit is always doing in relation to us. But we can do it with tangible symbols so we can mark that day, that decision, that occasion. It's in our memories.

But covenant has to be strengthened and renewed as we try to live it out. So the sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Communion reminds us on a regular basis of our initial covenant, the promise of God's Spirit being with us. It draws us into deeper understanding of the life, death, and resurrection, and continuing presence of Christ. It goes beyond that in our understanding to say that discipleship is also about living in community with others. So it's not just a personal experience with Christ. It's always related to our relationships with our brothers and sisters in the congregation. So it actually is a time of healing, and repairing, and reconciling the congregation.

This counsel calls us not only to understand all of those dimensions, but also to understand that as disciples of Jesus Christ in community with each other the sacrament ultimately calls us into ministry and mission, individually and as congregations. That the mission is proclaiming Christ and promoting communities of joy, hope, love, peace, the cause of Zion. And if we will allow the sacrament to shape us, then we can be an expression, the best expression, of the Community of Christ that God's calling us to be. So, yes, they are all related.

L: Yes. And then I'm also reminded in the Doctrine and Covenants it talks to us about generously sharing those sacraments with others, so that they then can have that experience...

S: Absolutely.

L: That brings restoration in their lives.

S: That's the joy of it. We grow in it. This is the gospel economy. We grow in it as we give it away. As we share it we grow in it.

L: Yes.

S: Bit of a paradox, but that's the way it works.

L: Yes. And when we're occasionally in those congregations that really have caught what matters most in the sharing of those sacraments, and the witness, and the invitation, and the ministries of Jesus Christ, we see their sacred community, don't we?

S: Absolutely. You can see it. It's hard to describe it with words. But you know it when in the midst of it.

L: You definitely do. You definitely do.

L: The universal spiritual principles were again brought up in Section 6a and this section tries to guide us to these difficult questions about responsible human sexuality; gender identities, roles, and relationships; marriage; and other significant issues. There's people on multiple sides of some these legislative issues concerning, particularly same-gender marriage and the ordination of homosexuals, and they have wanted the counsel to give specific answers and support their opinions. Yet these universal principles seem to help us be united in this diversity. Can you share your experience with this portion of the counsel and how that might help in our diversity of thought as we move forth in unity?

S: I am aware that many had hoped or desired that there would be some kind of final, definitive answer. I understand that. I wrestled with that. My experience was that the answers are in the journey and that the journey is very important to how we come to the answers.

So we're back to the concept of what are our fundamental core values or principles that can guide us as we try to address a whole array of issues. And that's why in the preface, just as an illustration, I named some of the issues. And there are probably those who have no clue what some of those issues may be. And that's the very point—that we don't understand what all of the issues are that people are struggling with in various parts of the world. We see the issues that are most prominent in our own nation, our own state, our own town, our own culture. In order for the church to address these issues, again we are first going to have to agree or at least achieve the highest level of consent we can, that there are certain principles that we will use as our compass as we go on this journey and this compass points us in the direction we need to go. But there's still journeying to be completed in relation to some of these issues.

The counsel also provides assurance that even as we look at these principles, that there are certain behaviors, activities, and kinds of relationships that are contrary to God's will. Those are not condoned or overlooked in these principles. So we are being provided some boundaries, if you will, in terms of God's eternal purposes in human life. Now, another aspect of this is there may be some other questions that we also have to address and there may be some blessings as we continue to struggle with how we will resolve some of these issues.

A fundamental one is how do we really view and use scripture? And it may take these kinds of difficult questions around which there's a lot of energy to get us to the point that we're willing to look very seriously at how do we responsibly use scripture in the context of our sense of God's Spirit guiding us today, knowledge that is available today that wasn't available when some of the scripture writings writers were expressing their best understandings. I

don't mean that to devalue scripture. But sometimes it takes difficult struggles to come to understand other important and perhaps even more foundational issues in the life of the church. It took the question of what is the role of women in the life of the church to push us to new understandings of what we mean when we say "all are called according to their gifts," which we have repeated often as a fundamental principle of the Restoration movement. It took a difficult question to get us to understand better what we meant by that.

L: I'm glad we struggled with that question.

S: Absolutely.

L: In paragraph 7c it says a timely resolution of pressing issues in various nations is necessary so that the restoring work of the gospel can move forward. I think that's what you're referring to, those pressing issues, so that we can be freed up in other ways to do the restoring of the gospel. So how will a timely resolution of the pressing issues occur?

S: Well, first it will occur through the World Conference considering these words of counsel. They will be introduced first for discussion and consideration, and finally for decision in terms of whether people can affirm the words of counsel as being an expression of God's nature and will. If that occurs then we're going to be sharing with the church a way forward.

I know that there are some who are frustrated that perhaps issues are not being resolved fast enough. Of course others feel that issues are being pressed too fast. And that's always the nature of life in the church and in the larger world. But we'll be talking about how it is that the church officers can provide perspective and input, and where as it says "appropriate and possible" we can convene national assemblies or conferences, or field assemblies or conferences if those cover several nations. Then move into a process of dialogue out of which greater understanding comes and more voices can be shared. And I think that's the way we need to pursue such questions and issues in the life of the church and we will hopefully be experiencing some new models of how to do that.

This counsel also says it's not appropriate to just sit back on these issues and wait until all the nations and cultures resolve them. That's not the right position for the church to be in and this is in no way from my perspective simply putting issues off. It's about how we resolve those issues according to our principles and our fundamental values as a church. So it's a way to move forward that takes principles that we have considered and consented to, that allows church officers to lead in their responsibilities as they're called to lead, but also engages the church in consideration, dialogue, and trying to achieve the highest levels of consent in relationship to what those directions forward may be.

L: Thank you, Steve. The last portion of the inspired counsel, the introduction to paragraph 9, talks about you resting with God in prayer and meditation and then how these words came to you of challenge and promise. Could you tell us a little bit about that experience, which sounded as if it was a surprise to you?

S: Yes it was. I kept thinking I was finished and was somewhat relieved because it had been a strenuous process. These are not easy questions and it's been a challenging process for me

as I thought about the implications in the life of the church and in the lives of people. But literally as I said, "I'm going to set the words aside and let them rest"—part of the process of discernment is to come to a tentative sense of conclusion and then to pause and open yourself to a sense of confirmation and peace, or a sense that things may not be complete or they may not be entirely as they should be expressed.

So I was very intentionally trying to do that while having in the back of my mind that most of it was there. I was engaged in my quiet place in prayer and reflection. I was reading scripture, then I was just sitting very quietly and the essence of this concluding section sprang forth. I guess the way I would describe it would be like a spring welling up and springing forth. Not all of the words were there but the key thoughts came very quickly and I remember reaching for my tablet and just writing as fast as I could afraid that I might miss some of the richness of the moment which was a welling up of the Spirit wanting to assure the church that even though some people may be surprised, even though some people may be anxious about these words of counsel, that indeed God was leading us, that God has been there in the past, in our eventful history, that God is with us in the present, that this is how God is moving us into the future. And that in many ways we are poised to move into that next phase of our journey which will actually, when we get there, we may wonder why it is that we were reluctant to move into those expressions of community in and through Christ that we're really all yearning for deep down. But I had such an affirmation of the, as it says in the counsel "divinely instilled vision and calling of the Community of Christ," that it brought me a sense of peace that we are responding to what God is calling us to be and to become in the world.

L: Thank you, Steve, for taking this time. I thank you on behalf of the church for your willingness to share and carry the burden of being a prophetic officer and the office you hold on the church's behalf. I also thank you for your personal testimony and for making yourself vulnerable to God's grace. So, thank you, dear brother.

S: Thank you.

L: I invite all of you, my brothers and sisters, to join with the World Church Leadership Council in prayerful support of Brother Veazey as well in support of the World Conference that we as a church may continue our journey with God into the future. Amen.