



# Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

## President's Address Questions and Answers Session

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October 4, 2015

**Linda:** Welcome everyone. I'm Apostle Linda Booth, joining you from the Community of Christ broadcast studio for a live question-and-answer session with President Steve Veazey. In a pre-recorded President's Address we've just seen Steve standing in the Independence, Missouri, Temple and reading paragraph 15, regarding priesthood, from the 2013 words of counsel. You've listened to him speak in-depth about the meaning and implications of those words as he walked the Worshipers Path and into the Sanctuary where he shared the blessings of priesthood in his lifetime.

Already some have responded to those words and sent us questions about the address and paragraph 15. We want to hear from you as well. Please e-mail your questions to [AskSteveVeazey@CofChrist.org](mailto:AskSteveVeazey@CofChrist.org) or post them to social media with #AskSteveVeazey. We will share as many of your questions as possible during this broadcast.

We are broadcasting live in English, French, and Spanish to reach people throughout the world. To assist our excellent translator's, we will talk slowly and pause after each question.

Steve, early in your address you talked about five principles of priesthood calls. The second being "God calls whomever God calls to priesthood." Our first question comes from Tricia. She wants to know, "If God calls whomever God calls, what makes someone a committed disciple?"

**Steve:** Well first of all, I'd like to thank everyone for joining us tonight and taking the time to be here to continue this important conversation as we explore the words of counsel. So, thank you for sharing in that. And thank you for all the questions such as this one.

So what makes a committed disciple? First of all I want to emphasize that the passage says "God calls whomever God calls" from among committed disciples. Typically that's the pattern we see. A committed disciple...it's like, you know one when you see one! They're filled with the love of Christ. The gospel is alive in them. Fundamentally we would see expressed in their lives evident love of God and love of neighbor as one loves oneself.

A committed disciple is actively involved in the faith community using her or his giftedness in support of the ministries of the church and participating fully in congregational life. I think the scripture in Galatians chapter five where it talks about the evidences of fruits of the Spirit that are characteristic of those in whom the Spirit of Christ lives is also very pertinent. That scripture talks about the characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, generosity, gentleness, and self-control as being characteristics of those who are walking the path of discipleship and following Christ.

I think also a committed disciple is committed to the mission of Jesus Christ as we understand it and as we express it in the life of the church. A disciple is committed to sharing the gospel with others. A disciple is committed to serving the poor and abolishing poverty. A disciple is committed to peacemaking. A disciple is committed to developing other disciples and congregations engaged in mission. I think a committed disciple would embody and express the mission of Jesus Christ in his or her life.

**Linda:** Thank you, Steve. We've received several questions similar to this question from Diana who sent it in through e-mail. Her question is, "What should I do if I feel that I'm called to priesthood, but haven't officially received a call?"

**Steve:** That's a very interesting question and I know there are people who struggle with a personal sense of call. And yet that call is not officially processed right now. As I said in the address, sometimes a personal feeling of priesthood call doesn't necessarily mean that one is called right now. It can be a call to further preparation in terms of creating capacity in one's life for the ministry that will be in the future.

And so the best advice, or counsel, that I could give someone who is sensing a priesthood call is that they should continue to focus on their own spiritual formation and formation as a disciple. They should study the scriptures, and the ministries, and the mission of the church and understand that their own giftedness can be expressed in support of that mission and those ministries. So, I think the best counsel is continue one's own spiritual and disciple formation and let the call to ministry, or ordained ministry, unfold in its due time.

**Linda:** Here's an e-mail question from Greg. He asks, "What is the definition of an active priesthood member?"

**Steve:** Again, that's a question I've heard discussed a lot in the life of the church. An active priesthood member, and I don't mean to be simplistic, but I want to talk in terms of foundational principles. An active priesthood member is one that is fully engaged in the roles and responsibilities of their particular priesthood office in the life of the church and in relationship to other priesthood members in the life of the church.

Beyond that, I think our understanding of active priesthood ministry or membership has two elements, and that it is an interrelated state of being. Who am I becoming on a daily basis? Who am I as a minister that leads to active doing in ministry? So, being and doing is who I am as well as what I do.

At the last World Conference, we shared a brochure called *Ministry and Priesthood*. This has been made available throughout the life of the church for the last several years. Inside this brochure there is a definition of Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry. I'd like to share these because I think they answer the question in quite a comprehensive way.

These are aspects of faithful priesthood ministry.

- Engage in ongoing faith and spiritual practices. That's the *being* part.
- Affirm and promote Christ's whole mission of invitation, compassion, and justice and peacemaking.
- Provide ministry that is consistent and affirmative of the church's identity, mission, message, and beliefs as expressed in the official documents of the church.
- Exemplify and model a holistic, moral, and ethical lifestyle.
- Here's one that's especially important: model generosity. Exemplify generosity as a regular contributor to mission tithes and, as an example to church members, both local and world mission tithes according to one's true capacity.
- Protect the safety and well-being of children and youth, including, where it's applicable, being a Registered Children and Youth Worker.
- Of course, actively participating in congregational life or similar expressions of the church.
- Participate in educational and spiritual formation activities to magnify one's calling.
- And then, in conversation with one's pastor or presiding officer, develop and implement a plan for one's ministry that fits in with the priorities, goals, and needs of the congregation or mission center.

That's a review of the Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry and we reference those principles to define active priesthood in the life of the church.

**Linda:** Your answer is causing a bit of a conversation on Twitter. Perhaps this question is more for clarification than anything. The question on Twitter is, "So, if someone isn't called, they aren't committed to Christ?"

**Steve:** No. I never said that. And that's kind of a turning around of the words. What the counsel said is priesthood are called from *among* committed disciples. But I also said in my address, not all committed disciples are called to priesthood. Discipleship is the foundational ministry of the church. To be a member disciple is the highest calling. Some are called to priesthood roles and offices to serve the needs of the church and the needs of all the other member participants.

**Linda:** I just want to make a note for those who are watching, if you're looking for materials to deepen your discipleship and also to help in your priesthood development, in November, Herald House will be offering two resources. One is *Ministry of the Disciple*

and the other is *Introduction to Scripture*. These are great resources for all members of the church.

Steve, here's a question from Justin in Ohio. He says, "Will the church in the near future expand its effort to provide in-depth training for priesthood on worship and sermons to reach diverse populations?"

**Steve:** In terms of priesthood education, we're always trying to offer educational opportunities and courses, such as Temple School courses, to help with different aspects of ministry. We have planned a number of new priesthood courses that are Temple School courses we'll be making available in the near future, including courses that deal with public ministry, preaching, and worship ministries.

The responsibility for priesthood education primarily lies in the congregations and mission centers of the church—to identify needs and opportunities for development and then match the resources and courses available from the church to those needs. So I would certainly hope we are offering relevant priesthood education opportunities in the congregations, mission centers, and fields of the church.

**Linda:** Here's an e-mail from Dick. His question is, "Will new policies and procedures be used for evaluating a priesthood members' development and service?"

**Steve:** I don't know that it's so much new policies and procedures as it is giving adequate or sufficient attention to the policies and procedures we have. Going back to Doctrine and Covenants 156 there is a call for inquiry to be made about the continuing commitment of those priesthood members who have decided to become inactive. There are processes available in the life of the church to make that inquiry.

Our main focus though is on helping priesthood gain a sense of fulfillment, and joy, and excitement in their ministry to bless the church with all they have to offer. So, most of our policies and procedures are about being supportive of priesthood, helping them develop their giftedness and sharing in ministry that will enrich, bless, and edify the church in all of its expressions.

**Linda:** We have several questions having to do with moral behaviors, Steve. This one comes from Jennifer in an e-mail. Her question is, "How do the principles of moral behavior in relationships help the well-being of community?"

**Steve:** Well the principles of moral behavior in relationships, and I assume the reference is being made to Doctrine and Covenants 164, provide foundational principles that individuals can think about as they are making more specific decisions about attitudes, behaviors, and the nature of relationships. These principles provide resources and provide guidance for people as they navigate the complexities of ethical and moral decision-making in the world today.

When we have those who are called to be our leaders and our servants making ethical decisions, then the whole body is blessed with well-being. That's what the words of counsel are calling for. One of the principles of ethical decision making is to always think of the impact of one's behavior on the lives of others, especially those who are most likely to be influenced by our example or persuaded by our example. So, if we

are making decisions that take into consideration, “How does this benefit others?” then obviously others will be benefited by the decisions we’re making.

**Linda:** Here’s a question from Twitter and I’m going to read it as it is. It says, “As a potential member, what are the different offices of priesthood?”

**Steve:** Well, this feels kind of like a test! But I’m happy to try to respond. The priesthood is organized into two groups, the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood. Those names come after figures in the scriptures who exemplified certain types of ministry.

The priesthood offices in the Aaronic Priesthood are deacon, teacher, and priest. The priesthood offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood are primarily related to the offices of elder and high priest. Some elders are called to be seventy who are special missionaries. High priests may be called to be bishops, evangelists, or apostles.

I think I’ve covered all the priesthood offices of the church. Particular priesthood office holders may be elected or appointed to other presiding roles in the church, such as pastor or mission center president. Those aren’t priesthood offices per se. Those are particular leadership roles in the life of the church that are often filled by priesthood.

**Linda:** We have an e-mail from Kevin and I’m assuming he’s referring to one of our Enduring Principles in Community of Christ that All Are Called. This question is, “Is priesthood still necessary in Community of Christ?”

**Steve:** The reference All Are Called comes from several scriptures, particularly Doctrine and Covenants 119. It is referring to ministry in general first. All disciples are called to ministry. And then, through additional scriptures and sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, some disciples are called to priesthood ministry according to their gifts.

And yes, I think priesthood is inherently part of the church’s nature, organization, and structure. It’s how God provides for certain essential roles and ministries and for the sacraments of the church. As I mentioned in the address, in the Doctrine and Covenants the phrase occurs: “this priesthood was placed in your midst from the [earliest days of the rise] of this work for the blessing and salvation of humanity” [Section 156:7a]. So, I consider it to be very essential to the nature of the church itself and how the church is called to offer ministry to its members as well as to the larger world.

**Linda:** Here’s another e-mail from a person named Kevin. His question is, “How can the priesthood structure be used in a non-hierarchical way?”

**Steve:** I appreciate that question very much because it gives me an opportunity to make an essential point. We as human beings tend to organize our understanding of function, of organization, from high to low or low to high. And that’s not the intent of the priesthood structure of the church.

We need to look at it on a plane and how the offices relate to each other to serve the members of the church, to serve our congregations and the mission of the church

throughout the world. That's why we stress so much that priesthood is not to serve ego needs. It's not for personal pride or lifting up oneself.

The image for faithful priesthood ministry is Jesus on his knees with a towel around his waist washing the feet of his disciples. Everything we do in ministry should be expressed in that spirit and in that attitude of the Christ coming among us as one who serves.

I really want to stress that. It is the spirit of servanthood that defines ministry in Community of Christ, particularly through the priesthood offices of the church.

**Linda:** This is from a Gmail account. It says, "Why would someone in an 11-year committed relationship be denied priesthood on the basis of not being married?"

**Steve:** That's a question that gets in to a lot of details and nuances that I may not be aware of. So I want to be careful with such questions. What I can answer in a foundational way is that the church promotes marriage, the church promotes the sacrament of marriage, and we expect the priesthood members of the church to promote, and demonstrate, and teach the sacraments of the church in their lives and through their own example. So, that would be one reason why there might be a lack of response or questions being raised in this particular situation.

As I said in my talk this evening, we need to talk about the principle of covenant. Now, covenant is more than human intention or feelings. It's more than just a human contract. Covenant involves recognition of God's initiative in a relationship and the way the church establishes and recognizes covenant is through certain ministries that we call sacraments that involve priesthood and important symbols and things are said and done in a consistent way. So, there is a public witness that we are establishing and upholding covenant. So, a long term committed relationship, while it may be a commitment between two people, is not a covenant in the sacramental sense of the term.

**Linda:** Here's an e-mail from Barry. He says, "Why not recognize that All Are Called as they are? And, if certain habits (such as overeating or smoking) affect one's ministry, provide the help that's needed instead of being concerned about divisive rules about specific behaviors."

**Steve:** First of all, we always want to provide the help that's needed no matter who it is, whether it's a member or friend of the church. So, I want to affirm the pastoral concern of the church from the very beginning.

Secondly, priesthood members are certainly not perfect. That's not possible for human beings. Priesthood members are called to exemplify certain characteristics within their lives. The Spirit has guided the church to identify certain principles, qualities, and characteristics that should be evident and should be considered when a priesthood call is being considered.

So, we do have to have certain standards. Included among those standards is avoidance of addictions or habits that cannot be good for us in terms of our health. That's why we uphold those standards.

**Linda:** There are several questions here that are sort of like “What if...” So, this first one is from Michelle. It’s an email that says, “Is it ok for priesthood members to withhold financial giving to influence congregational decisions?”

**Steve:** In response to that question, I would say, “No. That’s not ok.” Because, to use one’s finances to attempt to influence the outcome of decisions is the opposite of my understanding of stewardship as response to what I have already received freely through the grace of God. The phrase “freely you have received, freely give” [Matthew 10:8] comes to mind when I think about this question.

I’m also reminded of a scripture story in the Book of Acts where an individual named Simon observed Peter and John healing someone. And he went to them and said, “I’d like to give you some money in order to have that power in my life.” Evidently, according to the story in the Book of Acts, that really upset Peter and John. They said, “Your heart is obviously not right because that kind of attitude does not express an understanding of the gospel as we have experienced it.”

The gospel is God’s gift in Jesus Christ that comes to us freely. Our generosity is meant to be response in a worshipful attitude to that generosity that’s already come from God. So, using finances to try to control or dictate an outcome of a decision-making process wouldn’t be in harmony with my understanding of stewardship.

**Linda:** Here’s an e-mail from Matt. The question is, “Community of Christ has a seminary through Graceland University. What do you see as the role of seminary for forming disciples, preparing leaders, and developing priesthood for ministry in church and the world?”

**Steve:** The role of Community of Christ Seminary at Graceland University is one that is essential because of the need for us to grow in our understandings theologically, our understanding of scripture, the history of the church, and our understanding of mission today. It is a role that should continue to expand into the future as we have the resources to grow the offerings of the Seminary.

I would like to see many courses available to the priesthood of the church to magnify their callings through both increasing understanding and knowledge, and spiritual formation as disciples in ministries. I think the Seminary has an essential role and my hope and vision is that it has a growing role as we go into the future.

**Linda:** This e-mail question comes from a member in Europe: “What would you do if a church leader used the authority of her or his priesthood office to harass another?”

**Steve:** Let me say in response to that question, fundamentally priesthood office should never be used to harass anyone in any way, to dominate, control, suppress, or manipulate. That’s misuse of priesthood and it’s something the scriptures caution us against. I guess my response would be one of trying to be very clear: priesthood office authority or title should never ever be used to harass, dominate, control, manipulate, or do violence in any way.

**Linda:** Here’s any e-mail question from Rebecca and it goes back to the moral behavior question. It specifically asks you to define moral behavior.

**Steve:** I don't know if it's possible for me to define the totality of moral behavior. I can say, as I've said previously, that moral behavior first of all has to do with who I am as a child of God. Who am I as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Is Christ living in me? Am I living in Christ? Is love of God and love of neighbor as I love myself at the core of the way I view life and make decisions? Those are some of the foundations of moral behavior in relationships.

Secondly, as I said earlier, and I appreciate the opportunity to emphasize it again, moral behavior is not self-centered. It's not about just what do I want, or what do I desire, or what my wants may be. Moral behavior always considers the wellbeing and the welfare of others. How does my behavior impact others? I know it's often been said, but it is a good point of reference, how does it impact the children in our midst?

How does my example, how does my behavior, how do my attitudes impact and influence the most innocent, the most vulnerable, to what's going on around them? Moral behavior always considers the other and the other who is nearby and known, but also the other that I may not even know who lives in another part of the world, because what I do and how I conduct myself and what I consume, my whole lifestyle impacts others both near and far away.

**Linda:** Here's a question that might have a personal answer. This question is from José and he asks, through Twitter, if you could share one of the calls that you've had to priesthood and the significance in your life.

**Steve:** I've experience various calls to priesthood. One of the most significant in my life was as a young college student and I was called to the office of elder. I sensed that that call was coming. And in some ways felt it was not the right time because I was so busily engaged in my studies and in university life. But the call did come and the pastor shared with me his testimony of the call. As that testimony was shared with me, I felt the affirmation of the Holy Spirit that it was time for me to respond to that particular call in my life. It became a very affirmative and challenging experience that helped me understand what it was to have a lifelong calling to ordained ministry in the life of the church. It was very meaningful.

**Linda:** This is a question from someone who identifies themselves as a fellow seventy: "How did your serving as a seventy impact you as president and prophet of Community of Christ?"

**Steve:** Well, it certainly did impact me and it continues to impact me. My calling in ministry as a seventy motivated me to go beyond the typical confines of congregational life and into the community where I met all kinds of people from all walks to life. I discovered how much the gospel meant to them when I and others were able to connect it with their needs, their yearnings, their hopes, and their aspirations.

Nothing to me is more joyful than sharing the gospel with someone and journeying with them as they make their commitment to Jesus Christ in the fellowship of Community of Christ, and to see their life come alive—to really see new life in Christ being manifested. As president of the church I not only remember that, but I want the church to stay focused on the ministries of invitation and welcoming, inviting and

including the ministries of evangelism and disciple making that keeps both the church and others fresh in that experience of sharing the gospel with each other.

**Linda:** We are just about out of time. Before I ask the last question, I want to announce that the archive video of the address and the entire live question-and-answer session will be online on CofChrist.org early this week. So, share it with your friends and share it with others and you can review it yourself later.

The last question comes from JC through e-mail: "We continue to lift up the Mission Initiatives. How should priesthood lead Christ's mission?"

**Steve:** Priesthood should lead Christ's mission by embodying within their lives the different dimensions of Christ's mission, so the church is free to pursue Christ's mission. Let me put it a little differently. A primary calling of priesthood is to equip and lead the church in fulfilling Christ's mission. The primary ways of doing that are to exemplify it within one's life and then to help everyone in the church to use their gifts and resources to support and pursue that mission also.

Embodiment of the mission and helping others engage in the mission are how priesthood members empower the church and free the church to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ.

**Linda:** Thank you, Steve. And thanks to all the congregations, groups, and individuals who have gathered with us. It is such a privilege to join together on this journey of discernment with you, Steve.

As we prayerfully consider the words of counsel you offered in 2013, it's hard to believe in less than a year we will be considering that counsel at our World Conference on June 4-11, 2016. So, mark your calendars for World Conference and for the next in the series of President Addresses on April 3, 2016.

Thank you for continuing to prayerfully reflect on the words of counsel. On behalf of President Veazey and international leaders, I thank you for the many ways you make Christ's mission real in your homes, your communities, and for our world.