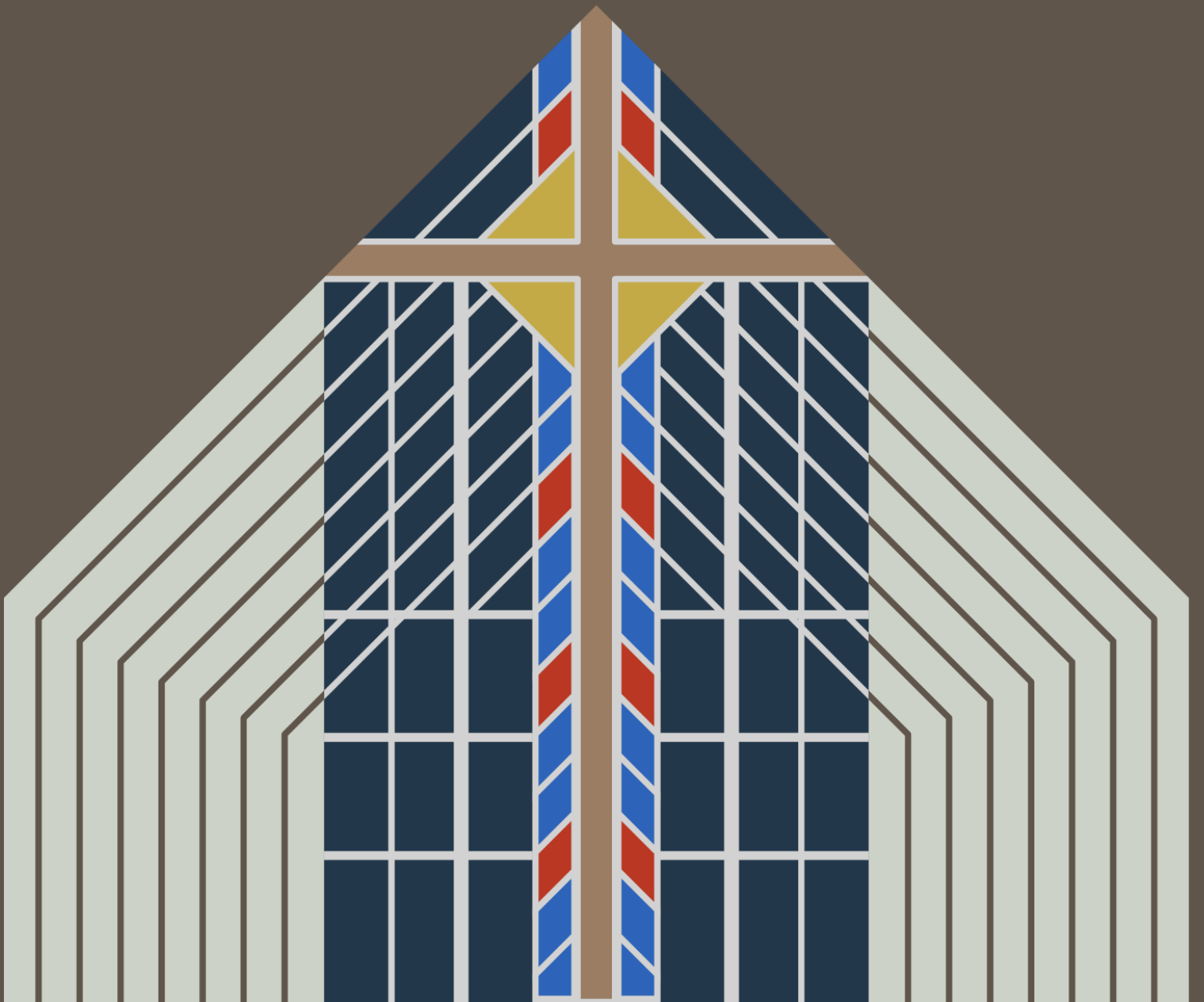


THE
SALT LAKE
RESCUE



"Whatever you have said in the dark
will be heard in the light.
What you have whispered behind closed doors
will be proclaimed from the housetops."
- Luke 12: 3

"The information is more important
than how it comes out"
- Robin Linkhart

About

The Salt Lake Rescue

In the Salt Lake City congregation of Community of Christ there was a newly-widowed polyamorous woman. Instead of providing solace and pastoral care as her and her family were grieving, Community of Christ's leadership chose to take action to attempt to remove her from priesthood due to her being polyamorous.

The Salt Lake City congregation found this abhorrent and demanded that their apostle, Robin Linkhart, come down and speak with them. Robin spoke with the congregation on October 22nd, 2022 at 2PM Mountain Time.

Many started seeing similarities to the LDS church's "Rescues", such as what happened in [Sweden](#) and [Boise](#), and so this meeting came to be known as "The Salt Lake Rescue". Further, like in the LDS church, members of Community of Christ were concerned about keeping the church's leadership accountable for what was said in regards to that extraordinarily sensitive topic. Since Utah is a one-party consent state, this meeting was legally recorded and is in full compliance with [Utah Code 77-23a-4](#).

The Transcript

The transcriber was given audio recordings of the meeting and went word-by-word through hours of audio to transcribe it.

In the process of transcription, names of those in attendance have been anonymized to "(Attendee)" or "(Moderator)". This makes it a bit confusing when referencing other people or what was said earlier, but the anonymity of those in the Rescue was more important than the clarity for the reader. The only exception to this is the church's leaders who are being held accountable and the woman who was disciplined, who upon her request is using the pseudonym "Vanessa".

A genuine effort has been made to make a transcript of the recording. That said, this was a difficult topic, and many people were fighting back tears as they spoke or otherwise weren't well heard, which made transcribing rather difficult. When a section of the audio just could not be discerned, the symbol "◆" was added to indicate that a transcription was not possible.

Introduction

Carla Long: Thank you everyone for being here; thank you all for coming. I am going to turn this over - this is Moderator, she's a licensed therapist - a group therapy - you can tell them- us- who you are. But she's going to be our moderator, so go ahead. (Attendee)

Moderator: My name's Moderator. I am here as a 3rd party moderator to make sure that everybody feels like they're being heard. My job here is to mostly focus on how we're communicating. And also, I don't know everything, but I can make some assumptions that there's probably some high emotions happening here. Some of this may even come from a place of trauma for some of you, right? So I asked Carla that if there's anything anyone doesn't want to share here, to contact her, to make sure everyone's being heard, or if there needs to be any follow up after. Also, I do have a list of crisis numbers if anyone needs to reach out for some mental help after.

I want to make sure that - (Attendee) said it very eloquently earlier - that we're all coming from this from a place of love and compassion, and so as we're communicating, keep that in mind; that this is a community, we love each other, you support each other, and hopefully the words that come out of our mouth match that intent.

Did everyone get a copy of this? (People talking over each other with affirmations that everyone has gotten the document.) So this is called a Rapoport Intervention which is just some basic communication skills. Let's try to avoid blaming each other, right? Take accountability for our feelings using "I feel" statements, try to avoid things like "she made me this, he made me that", and remember this is coming from a place of love. Try to be positive as we're responding to this. This is not a positive subject, and I totally get that, right? This is hard, this is loaded with emotion, but if we're yelling and screaming, we're probably less likely to be heard. But if we can use that emotion and our understanding of each other and other peoples' perspectives to form the way that we communicate, we are more likely to be heard. Listen for feelings; validate; I hope there's not any problems here. It seems like everyone- again- we're all coming from a place of love.

Any questions?

Carla Long: What about recording devices?

Moderator: Recording Devices and confidentiality, thank you. No recording devices, and with confidentiality, this is not legally confidential, but we ask that you all be respectful of each other's business. Use this as a safe place to communicate and not take something someone says and spread the word outside of what happens here. Again, not legally required, just kind of be respectful of each other's business. Does that make sense?

Okay, any other questions? Did I get everything? Did I miss anything? OK.

I'll just say one more thing: don't forget to breathe. Again, sometimes when we're stressed out with high emotions we forget to breathe. I think a few long, deep breaths maybe before we make assumptions or before we speak.

(Attendee): Can we breathe like Carla taught us to?

(laughter)

Moderator: I - yeah I'm a fan of that.

Carla Long: (Jokingly) nice and loud.

So I think the first part of this on the agenda is the discovery part, correct? And there was a list of questions that were given to (Attendee) by Thursday evening at 8 o'clock. Those questions have been sent to Robin, and I think that's where we're starting. Is that correct? That's what we all agreed on?

(Attendee): Say that again, Carla, sorry.

Carla Long: The discovery questions for Robin.

(Attendee): Yeah.

Carla Long: 'Kay

(Attendee): Did everybody get a chance to read the timeline and the things that were put in the document?

(Attendee): He's never seen the document and I know things were added after I was, because I got a text while I was on my way here, so maybe we should just read over them.

(Attendee): Do you wanna - I printed this out if you...

(Attendee): I also have not seen it since a couple days ago.

(Attendee): The only major things that were added - originally there were some things about (Mission Center President) in there that were taken out, and after we had a pastorate meeting and got his permission we felt we needed to clarify his role.

And on September 14th the pastorate team met and sent questions concerning the action to Mission Center President (Name), and then on the 15th he responded to the questions and sent them back. So we did want to have correct information in there for everybody to see.

(Attendee): Can I just ask, is there a goal in mind for this meeting?

Moderator: I am not aware of any particular goal, but my goal is to make sure everybody feels heard and has been able to express any feelings related to the matter.

(Attendee): I mean, we have a statement of facts, basically, which is here and I don't know how that's supposed to be used or what the purpose of it is.

(Attendee): Can I give clarity to that, because both of you, and I think a lot of you, missed the meeting after church last week. The timeline is a request from (Vanessa's partner), to make sure that we have all the facts on the table so we're talking about the same thing. Throughout this whole experience Vanessa has been very frustrated that we're all just kind of dancing around all these different dates and actions and conversations, but we aren't actually getting out on the table what happened. So the timeline was a request from them (Vanessa's partner and Vanessa) in order to just provide as much transparency as possible, so we all are having this same conversation.

So I don't think there was like an agenda or a meaning of it other than it was a request from (Vanessa's partner) and Vanessa so we were all on the same page.

(Attendee): For the timeline, but I mean for the meeting, this group. What is the goal of whoever set the meeting?

Carla Long: Well, I heard people say in the Sunday school class on September 25th that they really wanted to meet with someone with "institutional authority" or "institutional power". I want to do whatever I can to make people in this congregation know that they have been heard and want to be heard. I want people to know that we, and I, will do whatever I can to help this congregation become- continue to be a community.

So I think part of it is for Robin to listen for how we're upset; for her to hear that. I also think that if there's a possibility of reconciliation I would always be for that; I don't know if that can happen in a three-hour time period. Mostly, I just want people to be heard and know that they have been heard.

I think what (Attendee) said is really important; there has been A LOT of dancing around.

I actually haven't heard from a lot of people, right? And I would like to hear from people. I want to know what you're thinking too, and how you're feeling as well. It's not for me, I think it's for all of us to know where we're at. I think that's the importance of this meeting: for Robin to hear and for *each* of us to listen to each other.

If there's other understandings, I'm happy to hear them. I think we are all happy to hear them.

(Attendee): Well, I don't know that I was alone, but I did have the idea of having someone come out. I talked to Lach (Mackay) and said I thought it would be helpful.

Being heard is one thing, but actually taking action to resolve the problem is a different thing. So, I'm all about being heard, I don't usually have too much trouble with that, but I also hope that at the end of this, after people are heard, that the institution - we have somebody in the top leadership of the institution - will consider taking some action as a result of being heard.

So I guess I would add that to my list of hopes: that there's something more than just being heard, that it's actually the possibility of action being taken to resolve the problem.

Carla Long: Okay, thank you (Attendee), but it's not just being heard, it's also listening to each other. I don't want to miss out on that part. The listening is as important as being heard.

Anything else?

(Attendee): Dive in...

Carla Long: Huh?

(Attendee): I guess it's time to dive in!

Carla Long: Okay!

Agenda Clarifications

Outline

(Attendee): Just to give everybody the document and the framework that we did set together last week, we will start with some questions which have been sent to Robin in advance, and that is part of the discovery portion of the meeting.

We will then move into a sharing portion of the meeting, and people who have signed up will be invited to speak in the order that they signed up for the sharing portion of the meeting. The biggest ask of that is just to be as concise as possible so that it doesn't become miserable and lengthy and those types of things.

Then we will have a response from Robin where it'll shift and we'll go from the speaking or the sharing role to the listening role, and then there is open space for discussion at the end.

Vanessa's Statement in the Agenda

(Attendee): I will say that Vanessa called me and was on the phone with me for over an hour right before this started. She posted something that she would like everybody at this meeting to have read.

(Attendee): She had posted electronically in the required timeframe so I don't know if there's somebody that would make sense to read it for her, or...

(Attendee): Well, when you want to do that. I guess, you tell me when in the agenda and I will make sure it gets read, but I think that's...

(Attendee): If you want me to read something, I can read something.

(indiscernible comments coordinating how Vanessa's statement will be read)

(Attendee): So I think we'll turn it over to the moderator, and then to Robin for questions.

Moderator: Do you just want me to just read the questions?

(Attendee): I think that'd be great.

Moderator: Okay.

(Attendee): When are we going to have the Vanessa statement, is it...? When will we hear Vanessa's statement? Will it be after questions or...

(Attendee): I would consider it during the sharing part. I am going first at the sharing part; I could read it first. I think everyone would probably want to hear from Vanessa first, so I'll offer to read that.

Sorry about that.

Moderator: No, you're good.

You said you wanted to say something?

(Attendee): I'll save it for the questions.

Robin's Opening Statement

Moderator: Okay, question number 1: Why did we have to ask Robin to come out-

Robin Linkhart: Are you - I think you're going to read Vanessa's statement first.

Multiple people: No, that's for the sharing part.

Robin Linkhart: Okay, sorry.

Moderator: 'Kay, we ready?

Robin Linkhart: I do want to say something.

Moderator: Go ahead, yes.

Robin Linkhart: I just wanted to make sure that we were hearing Vanessa's voice when the group wanted to hear it.

First of all, I want to tell you how glad I am to be here, and to see your faces, and to have this opportunity to share together. I want you to know that I will understand in a deeper way than I have to now, but it hurts a lot here. I have heard from several of you, so I've had windows into the depth of pain and anger and sorrow and woundedness. I look forward to the opportunity to listen with my whole heart, and to hear not only your words but your spirit, and what you want to share about your experience and how it feels. I will do my very, very best to listen and be fully present with you and to honor you and your story and how this is for you.

When I respond to these questions I will do my best to share openly and honestly with you. There are parameters of what I can share, but I will be honest about that, and I will share from my heart as well.

I want you to know that me, World Church, the whole church - we honor our ties to each other in community, and we know that sometimes it gets really, really hard. This is the hard part of working through to the other side and finding a way forward together.

I just want to thank you all for being here and hanging in and having the courage to come and share from the depths of your soul.

So we'll go with the questions.

Moderator: You ready?

Discovery: Questions for Robin

#1: Why did we have to ask Robin to come out, given her history with our congregation? Why didn't she reach out to us in the form of pastoral care?

Moderator: Why did we have to ask Robin to come out, given her history with our congregation? Why didn't she reach out to us in the form of pastoral care?

Robin Linkhart: So, this will be my longest response to questions as we go on, so I don't want you to think "Oh great, it's going to be like forever that she's talking...". When I read this question, I just want you to know that I'm hearing this as a question about my function in regards to this congregation and my function of support for this congregation.

I just want to share a little bit about what my role is and how we support through a network of relationships. One of my roles as apostle is to support Mission Centers with a particular focus on supporting Mission Center leadership as they lead mission and ministry in this area of the church. You know that we are in Inland West Mission Center. I have six Mission Centers.

The Mission Center officers are specifically responsible for providing congregational support. It's not generally the norm that an apostle would provide frontline ministry support to a congregation. We're in a situation of a local matter, and generally that's best handled from the ground up and with the mission center doing a wrap-around of support.

Now, that said, it is somewhat different with this congregation, because part of my focused apostolic mission effort is to supervise two of the field ministers assigned here, so (Attendee) and Carla are the field ministers here. They're funded by the World Church budget, and it's the intention of this mission effort that the congregation function like other congregations. So even though this is in an apostolic mission area, an expansion area, it's still a congregation within the system of the network of support that the church has built in place.

It gets complicated, because in a lot of ways, and I know that you all have reflected on this in the past, is, it feels like "Salt Lake just wants to be a normal congregation like everybody else", and at the same time we do have this kind of odd relationship.

So I just want you to know that piece of the puzzle.

So, to that end, and with that backdrop, in light of recent events, I've been in conversation with your Mission Center President (Name) to discuss the emerging needs of the congregation that have come forward as we've journeyed through this time to establish his regular presence with you in ongoing support. Not just in the immediate future, but through the next year. Additionally, I've been in active conversation with both (Mission Center President) and Carla suggesting various support persons for consultation, or even in-person support. I've offered finding funding to bring professionals in - people who are certified in conflict resolution, counseling, and spiritual direction.

My pastoral care in the context of that network of relationships is focused on Mission Center leaders who are supporting this, and also the people that I supervise, so that would be Carla and (Attendee), and also (Attendee). So I'm here today in that realm of providing support for these key leaders here who have - you know better than I do - who have poured their hearts into supporting you. Part of that is that Carla indicated that what this group needed most was to share time, and that that was one of the best ways that I could support the whole.

I want you to know that I care deeply for this congregation. I care deeply about this ministry, not just here in Utah, but the way this ministry touches others across the globe. I have invested countless hours supporting the frontline support people and the processes that are in place and that are still unfolding, and you have been in my thoughts and prayers every day. I have carried this on my heart, and I have felt your pain.

I just wanted you to know that is my role, and I am here now.

#2 Does World Church care that we are suffering? If so, why have we seen no significant evidence of this caring until now?

Moderator: Question number 2, does World Church care that we are suffering? If so, why have we seen no significant evidence of this caring until now?

Robin Linkhart: So yes, World Church cares about your suffering.

I think it helps when we say the words "World Church" to think about who we are talking about. We're talking about - I'm assuming you're talking about the presiding quorums of the church, the First Presidency, the Presiding Bishopric, the Council of Twelve, Council of Presidents of Seventy. Those are people just like you who really, really care.

After World Conference we will have seven of the Twelve Apostles who were not born in the United States. We will have for the first time six females and six males. We will have many people of color serving. We have people who have seen the depths of humanity in horrific situations and we all care very, very much and are aware of the suffering that you're having. Not all of those people have benefitted from hearing directly from you face-to-face, but we do care.

And specifically, World Church has been caring in very tangible ways for this congregation for the past 10 years. I mean, you have two full-time ministers here. That's not Salt Lake, that's not the Mission Center, that's World Church putting funding where they believe it needs to be to

walk with people who are seeking and searching for a safe place to be, and to figure out what the next steps are for them.

(Attendee): And that will go down to one (full-time minister) in January?

Robin Linkhart: Right.

I also want to say that all the emails that you have sent to World Church, as far as the ones that I know of and I probably don't know all of them, but to my knowledge those have all been answered. Hopefully in a spirit of love and grace.

I am here with you today, and I am World Church. I want you to know that what I hear today shapes and forms me and how I share the story of what's happening here.

#3 Does World Church ask leaders to follow the rules for church discipline laid out by Joseph Smith, Jr. in his letter from Liberty Jail, which states that a reprove must be quickly followed by a noticeable, visible increase in expressed love in order to protect the relationships between church leaders and congregants? If so, does this apply to leaders above the level of local pastor?

Moderator: Question number 3, ready?

Robin Linkhart: Mmhmm

Moderator: Does World Church ask leaders to follow the rules for church discipline laid out by Joseph Smith, Jr. in his letter from Liberty Jail, which states that a reprove must be quickly followed by a noticeable, visible increase in expressed love in order to protect the relationships between church leaders and congregants? If so, does this apply to leaders above the level of local pastor?

Robin Linkhart: Okay, so Community of Christ follows principles and guidelines informed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, as well as Restoration principles that have endured the test of time. Those guiding principles apply at all levels of the church, and they are to be evident. So it is our hope that they are evidenced in the circles and spheres of all the places that we live and serve together. So that's an interconnected sphere of relationships.

We proclaim Jesus Christ, and we promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace. "Christian ethics" would be an umbrella term for what flows out of all of that, which is informed by our Christian heritage as well as our Restoration tradition.

So I would say that the spirit of Joseph Smith Jr.'s Liberty Jail Letter has flowed freely among you in this place during an incredibly difficult time. The evidence is seen here, because you are all sitting in this circle, open and listening. Leaders and members and friends together.

#4 Which World Church leaders and/or employees discussed Vanessa's post *before* the conversation in which it was mentioned to Carla that Vanessa needed to be released from priesthood?

Moderator: Thank you.

Question number 4: Which World Church leaders and/or employees discussed Vanessa's post *before* the conversation in which it was mentioned to Carla that Vanessa needed to be released from priesthood?

Robin Linkhart: So all the specifics that are connected with this priesthood action are confidential, and I will not be answering specific information about that.

What I will say is that, in general terms, it is very normal for an administrative officer to consult with next-level administrators to explore the specifics of policy, to explore options, and application of policy.

Truthfully, I will tell you that we don't deal with a lot of priesthood actions. I mean, I have served for pastor for a total of nine years; I only ever had to release a priesthood member one time. I have some things I deal with in my field as an apostle, but those are generally appeals that come forward. I support the leaders in the field, and assist them as far as being a sounding board and offer them pastoral support as they journey through that.

#5 Which church leaders participated in the conversation with Carla in which it was mentioned that Vanessa needed to be released from priesthood?

Moderator: Question number five is similar, but I'll read it anyway: Which church leaders participated in the conversation with Carla in which it was mentioned that Vanessa needed to be released from priesthood?

Robin Linkhart: So these are similar questions, and they both are requesting confidential information that I won't be sharing. I will say to this: I read these two questions, and to me they indicated a concern about proper process and/or application of upholding current policy for priesthood. That's a very valid question.

So, the way that gets reviewed is: The individual's right to appeal is the course of action available to request a review of the whole process, which would include all those confidential details. That is not done with an audience of membership of the church; that's done confidentially, but that is an avenue for complete review of everything from process to application of the policy.

#6 Where and when can we expect to see a comprehensive and current list of behavioral requirements for active priesthood?

Moderator: Question number six: where and when can we expect to see a comprehensive and current list of behavioral requirements for active priesthood?

Robin Linkhart: That is a really great question. I also just want to commiserate with some of the frustration that you have had going online trying to find things, because, when was it, first of this year we went from one website that I loved and I could put anything in the search box and it would give me at least forty things that connected directly to that, and now we have three. The [“Our \[Ministry\] Tools”](#) has been a repository for a lot of the kind of information that we could put our hands on immediately, and it has a sign-in and you have to submit information to get on the page, and it's still not working the way I would like it to work. So I feel for you, the Council of Twelve feels for you. We've had several meetings with the communications team to voice some of the specifics of frustration, and I just want to assure you that there is no intention or conspiracy in place to not be transparent. We really, really try to be as transparent as we can. Sometimes we don't get it right on our delivery system with technology or websites.

I want to apologize for that frustration, and let you know that I hear that, and we all have a lot of concern about that, not just for you but for all kinds of people that are trying to find things.

So, in response to that question, over the pass of probably several decades now, Community of Christ has really been moving away from a rule-based, black-and-white, vice list kind of approach, and embracing principles that, um, principle-based guidelines, I guess is what I would say. Those principle-based guidelines are partnered with expanded topic-based statements and resources centered on Christian ethics. For example, the Sexual Ethics Statement (see [Appendix B](#)) would be one of those. The Social Media Ethics Statement (see [Appendix C](#)). There's a wonderful Official Commentary of the principles (see [Appendix D](#)). In the Priesthood Ministry Course, lesson 5, in the Introduction to Priesthood Ministry, there's a whole chapter on ethics, morality, and holistic living (see [Appendix E](#)). In the Church Administrative Handbook, chapter 10 is titled “Ministerial Ethics” (see [Appendix F](#)). So there are different places where you find this, and it's written in the principle-based guideline language, which generally does not offer vice lists.

But I want to tell you that in response to recent events here, and a few other things across the church, we are in the process of expanding definitions and examples under the header, in The Priesthood Faithfulness Document, there's a category called “Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle” (see [Appendix G](#)). We're going to be working on expanding that with some examples of the kinds of behaviors that might come up in that category that would be difficult.

Additionally, we're adding six pages of content to the ten lessons [in] “Continuing your Discipleship in Community of Christ” to specifically enrich and deepen the whole context behind priesthood covenant and expectation, so that, in that section when people are learning about the church, they're going to get a lot of information. Some of them might go, “Whoa, I don't know if I even want to learn more about this.”

But none of this will represent what I think I'm hearing you ask about, and that is a specific comprehensive list of behaviors. We'll expand that, but it's just not something that we have done.

(Attendee): So are you saying there won't be a list of priesthood responsibilities and expectations that's made transparent to the membership, or you're saying-

Robin Linkhart: Well -

(Attendee): beyond what is already existent in the five different places? I guess I'm not, like...

Robin Linkhart: Everything that we have about priesthood is transparent and available for you to look at. The gap that I am seeing based on your feedback and some of the angst, is that there aren't lists of specific behaviors, and maybe I don't even know what kind of behaviors you're looking for. For us that would be going back to a vice list, and every situation is different, so it's applying principled guidelines, but I realize it's kind of nebulous when you say "moral ethical, holistic", so we hear that there's more specificity needed. I'm not sure that we're going to hit a target of a volume of specific behaviors.

(Attendee): So when you say it's "In Process", what does "In Process" mean? Just putting it all in one place to make it easier to find?

Robin Linkhart: What I'm talking about now is we're in process of expanding some examples of what comes under that category of moral, ethical, holistic lifestyle. We're always open to suggestions, or if you want to come up with a template, or things you want to see on a list, whatever helps.

#7 Are active priesthood holders permitted to discuss past rule-breaking behavior in public without consequences, as long as it isn't current behavior? Does the same answer apply to all the behavioral rules? If not, which ones and why?

Moderator: Alright, question number seven: Are active priesthood holders permitted to discuss past rule-breaking behavior in public without consequences, as long as it isn't current behavior? Does the same answer apply to all the behavioral rules? If not, which ones and why?

Robin Linkhart: So that's one of the questions where the answer is like, "It depends." Some of the questions would be "Are there existing legal implications?", "Is the sharing appropriate to the context?", there would be several considerations a person would need to make before they chose to share anything.

In general terms, I'll tell you that many people who hold priesthood have powerful testimonies of finding healing and wholeness when they've gone through really difficult times. Periods of living life in a way that did not reflect Christian ethics or morality.

I thought that it might be helpful for you if I gave you an example. This is a real example, but I'm not going to disclose any specific information, like the name or location. In the past few years I know a priesthood member who was arrested for a D.U.I.. This person was released from priesthood - it happened very quickly in response to that. It was an event that impacted this person's relationships, their job, their community, and so on. You can imagine. This came after many years of struggling with this, and maybe even struggling in the closet; I'm not sure if it had come to the fore very often before. This event precipitated seeking professional support and rehabilitation, and then a year or two later this person requested reinstatement to priesthood which was granted.

That experience and journey for this individual is a life-changing story, and it's a powerful testimony of God's grace, and a testimony of the faith community that embraced this person with love before, during, and after the D.U.I. event. We encourage people to share the stories of their lives.

Generally, with priesthood issues, if it's an active thing that's happening it could be an issue just depending on what it is. I can't really give it a blanket statement on that. But we, you know, most of us have pasts and didn't always make the best choice.

Moderator: Can I ask a follow-up question, hopefully? If someone is currently priesthood, and they disclose *past* behavior, can they be punished for that past behavior?

Robin Linkhart: Well, it depends what it is.

(Attendee): Yes.

Moderator: Okay, so "Yes" is the answer?

(Attendee): That's what I'm hearing.

#8 What is World Church's stance on "don't ask don't tell" in the context of priesthood behavior enforcement?

Moderator: Okay. Question number eight: What is World Church's stance on "don't ask don't tell" in the context of priesthood behavior enforcement?

Robin Linkhart: We expect priesthood to live a life of faithfulness according to the covenant principles that they agreed to before they were ordained, and we function on a principle of trust. So, it's a continued trust in each person, that they will live in alignment with their commitment and live into magnifying their call of ministry. It's a journey of becoming.

If we have concerns we visit with a person to gain understanding, and I'm not talking just potential issues that would precipitate a priesthood action. It's walking with people in their journey of ministry. Then, depending on what is revealed in a conversation as we walk and work with people to find resolution, different things happen. If a person has an issue, but they deny any cause for concern - if we sit with someone and say "Hey, is everything okay? Are there any

issues here we need to worry about?" and they say they're fine, I accept that, because we're living in a relationship of trust.

If information is recorded, we investigate. If a priesthood member self-discloses, we respond accordingly, which begins with conversation to discover a path forward.

So, Community of Christ does not have a posture of "Don't Ask; Don't Tell". If people have information, and they don't share it with the appropriate priesthood or administrators, we can't respond. We don't spy, we don't hold regular interrogations. If individual active priesthood participate in withholding information from administrators, I mean, that's another issue entirely.

We have systems at work. We are not operating from a "Don't Ask; Don't Tell" posture. We work with the information that we have. Our pastors try to walk with their ministers and be engaged in their life. If problems come up, we try to walk early on and work with the situation.

#8.1 Does the church recognize that relying on marginalized people to educate them just exhausts the marginalized people, while not guaranteeing that the marginalized person can come out of the closet publicly?

(Attendee): Can I ask a clarifying question? The "Don't Ask; Don't Tell" policy feels, or seems, like a particularly tricky line for the queer community. It puts a burden more on them than it does straight, cis[gender], het[erosexual] priesthood holders. Does Community of Christ recognize that? Because that's *really* concerning to me.

Robin Linkhart: We recognize that different people live vulnerable [lives] in our communities and on the borders and margins of community in ways that others do not. So we recognize that there's privilege across the globe for lots of different attributes or social systems or status. So yes, we recognize that.

I heard you say that we have a "Don't Ask; Don't Tell" policy, and that it particularly wounds the LGBTQ+ community, and *I'm* saying we're not operating out of a "Don't Ask; Don't Tell" policy. So were you talking about those kinds of policies?

(Attendee): No, so I'm saying that the way this is kind of operating, it causes the - and I'm not speaking for anybody in that community - I'm just saying, what I've heard, is that it makes educating their priesthood leaders, 'cause there's very few queer members of the upper leadership in the church, it makes educating them exhausting on queer priesthood leaders. And it puts the burden on them - on the priesthood holder - for both education and for, in some ways, closeting their lives.

Robin Linkhart: Okay, I think I hear what you're saying.

You're sharing that it would be really good if the leadership of the church assumed responsibility, in a proactive way, for educating themselves and investing in understanding and awareness of the different layers of how this marginalized community is impacted by different things that a

hetero-normative person wouldn't think about, because they haven't had to deal with that kind of -

(Attendee): Yeah, that's definitely part of it.

Robin Linkhart: Okay.

#9: What is the definition of "public" in the context of "it can't be made known in public or we have to act"?

Moderator: Okay, Question number nine: What is the definition of "public" in the context of "it can't be made known in public or we have to act"?

Robin Linkhart: I would say that public disclosure has nothing to do with an administrator's responsibility to uphold and apply church policy. The responsibility of upholding and applying church policy is there regardless of how the information comes forth.

So public disclosure is one way that information comes to the attention of a local administrator. I will say that public disclosure can complicate the pastoral response to the individual and the community. I would also say that in today's world of social media, that a disclosure on social media represents a global disclosure, which -

(Attendee): Even if it's someone's private social media?

Robin Linkhart: Well, I'm not speaking to everyone's different circumstance, but it can be across the whole world in social media. I'm not speaking to this specific situation, I'm talking about public disclosure.

What I need you to hear me say is that upholding church policy and priesthood ethics - how the information comes isn't the key game changer; it's the information itself. That information can be disclosed in lots of different ways, not just public.

(Attendee): May I ask a clarifying question?

Robin Linkhart: Mmhmm

(Attendee): I'm hearing - and I want to make sure that I have this correct - that if something is placed on social media, regardless of the audience that the settings of the post permit, that the World Church will consider it to be a post that could reach everyone in the whole world potentially, and will act accordingly?

Robin Linkhart: I'm not trying to speak on behalf of World Church - that the World Church is seeing that saying "Now the whole world knows". I'm trying to name a reality of social media that makes posting information on social media more difficult to respond to.

(Attendee): Let me see if I'm hearing this correctly: the reality of social media is that if a post is set to private or only the person who wrote it can see it, versus posted to [where] only ten

people can see it, versus the whole world can see it, there's still the reality that the world can see that post?

Robin Linkhart: I'm not speaking clearly.

There are multiple layers of how a social media post will play out and the number of people it reaches. It's a whole different way of communicating than what we were doing even ten years, or twenty years for sure. I'm just trying to say that it *can* get more complicated depending on what that situation looks like and how it rolls out. I'm just trying to name a reality that makes things more difficult.

(Attendee): I'm hearing that it's more about the information than how it's posted.

(Attendee): That's in direct contradiction to what I have been told in your and my meeting, and that's concerning to me.

(Attendee): I have also been given contradicting information to that.

(Attendee): That's very concerning to me.

Robin Linkhart: So we would stand on, the information is more important than how it comes out. I'm just trying to tell you that it does get complicated depending on how a public disclosure is made.

Moderator: It seems like there's an expectation of privacy somewhere right? And that-

(Attendee): No, there's not! That's what we're learning.

Moderator: This is the question, right? Should there be an expectation of privacy?

If I'm on facebook and I have ten friends and I post something that those ten friends can see, one of those ten friends could then take that back to the church and say "Oh hey, I saw this on so-and-so's facebook, just so you know."

Is there an expectation of privacy on Facebook in general?

(Attendee): No, there's not in Community of Christ.

Moderator: Or whatever other social media? Admittedly, I don't know very much about very many of the other social medias.

But Facebook, for example, there is this sort of "I can have this many friends" and "This many friends can see what I post". If I'm friends with the church leaders, they can see that.

(Attendee): Yeah, we didn't know that would be weaponized, but I'll be de-friending them immediately.

Moderator: I don't know the details, necessarily, of the situation that happened here, but it seems like, again, it's not how they get the information, but that the information got back to it. So

if we're friends with Carla on facebook, and Carla sees something we posted, and she takes that to leadership then it's kind of a "Who are you friends with on Facebook?" and "Can that information get back to...?" Does that make sense?

(Attendee): Yeah, no, we're learning that very clearly.

Moderator: So, I mean, in general social media is not considered an expectation of privacy. Does that make sense?

(Attendee): And who is a safe person? Maybe our priesthood leaders might know. Who are safe people?

Robin Linkhart: I just want to make a point of clarification. Priesthood is about our whole lives, not just our public lives. When things become public out of our whole life, it reflects on the person and how they bring their whole life to ministry. If it's an issue, it's an issue. Priesthood is not about Sunday only, or just part of your life, it's a whole integrated experience and responsibility.

(Attendee): Can I make a clarifying comment about what I was trying to say? I think (Attendee) and I may have been trying to say something subtly different. I had been told that World Church had a problem with the fact that there was a Facebook post that Vanessa's friends could see, not because that was how the information got to their attention, but because Facebook is for the whole world, so if someone from Africa who has a different understanding of polygamy were to see that post it could make the church look like something it's not. That was communicated to me by multiple people: that the fact that it was on Facebook was an important part of the church's response.

I was trying to hear, in what you said, whether that was true or not.

Robin Linkhart: I really appreciate your clarification. So the fact that something like that could happen would not be held against the person that made the disclosure. That's a reality of how things ripple out, and we may need to provide support to a different part of the world that gets upset about something, but that's not part of why an action would take place.

(Attendee): Okay, thank you.

#10 World Church doesn't permit ordained women to retain active priesthood status if their husbands take additional wives. What is the reasoning behind disciplining a woman for choices made by her partner?

Moderator: Okay, number ten: World Church doesn't permit ordained women to retain active priesthood status if their husbands take additional wives. What is the reasoning behind disciplining a woman for choices made by her partner?

Robin Linkhart: This is a really good question, and this particular challenge is in Africa, and perhaps elsewhere. The reason is, its upholding current policy.

But what I want you to hear me say is that specific concern is one of the concerns that brought the Council of Twelve to sponsor G-7 World Conference Resolution on Marriage.

Another example in this same category would be the fact that undocumented Haitian church members in the Dominican Republic cannot legally marry because of their immigration status. In many cases in Dominican Republic, that's been their home for many years, they've created families, but their marriage-like relationships are not legally recognized, so under current policy they can't be ordained. That situation and similar situations exist in other countries, and its prompting really important questions about an individual's eligibility to be called or serve in priesthood.

That's something that we take seriously, and the Council of Twelve is sponsoring this resolution, which, if it's passed, will replace World Conference Resolution 1182.

I won't go on further about that, but that's where we are and we're trying to change that, so that we can liberate principles, and the people who support those nations, that live in those nations, so the apostles in Africa and Dominican Republic can be culturally sensitive and hopefully make a change that is more aligned with justice.

#11 What are the similarities and differences in the way the Faithful Disagreement policy can look when used by liberal congregations as opposed to conservative congregations?

Moderator: Question number eleven: What are the similarities and differences in the way the Faithful Disagreement policy (see [Appendix H](#)) can look when used by liberal congregations as opposed to conservative congregations?

Robin Linkhart: It has universal application, actually, and looks pretty much the same, although the opinions that are held would look different.

Regardless of perspective, living in Faithful Disagreement means a continued loyalty and commitment to the identity, mission, message, and beliefs of Community of Christ. A person cannot ignore policies because they disagree with a particular policy.

Ethically, for example, as an administrator, if I disagree with a policy I still must consistently apply the official policies and procedures of the church. I know you guys studied this in a class here - "at no time is any action that harms the body of the church considered in harmony with the principles [of Faithful Disagreement]." That sentence comes from the document itself.

(Attendee): Could you read that again? I want to hear that again.

Robin Linkhart: "At no time is any action that harms the body of the church considered in harmony with the principles [of Faithful Disagreement]." So if people have different opinions

about a policy of the church, if they do something because they don't agree with that, that harms someone else, that's not okay.

(Attendee): That's slightly not true.

(Attendee): So is "the body of the church", what? The institution or is "the body of the church" the members of the church?

Robin Linkhart: It's the whole - the membership-

(Attendee): So I really want to believe your statement. I've been a part of congregations I can't ever go back to, because they *still* don't ordain women, because they *still* won't ordain queer people, because they're openly homophobic. I can't bring my babies there, because that harms us, but other congregations are safe. I've had to find that.

So how does that statement - and I was told when I asked about that - they're living in Faithful Disagreement and we have to respect where *they* are at in their journey, which sounds beautiful in a la-la-land sort of way, but I kind of love "Aspirational Jesus", but that doesn't go along with your statement.

Robin Linkhart: We're human beings, and we fail a lot of times, and we're trying to get better. We have bumpers, and if gets to a certain point we come in and intervene to the best of our capacity.

We could spend the whole evening talking about Faithful Disagreement, so I want to recommend [Project Zion episode #451](#) with Stassi Cramm who goes through and talks about that and the ins and outs of it.

The foundation of that rests on how we practice Common Consent. We dialogue and debate about issues. We vote. Almost never do we have one hundred percent on the same page, but we hold together community and agree to support what the majority rules, even if we don't agree with it. We work for change. We try to hold the bonds of community together and journey the way together. So Faithful Disagreement rests on that tradition on the body and we try to live into it, and sometimes we don't.

(Attendee): So the statement is an aspiration statement.

Robin Linkhart: I would say it is, just like all the Enduring Principles are aspirations.

#12 BYU has a policy that they overlook behavioral rule violations if the violation comes to light as part of a report of sexual assault or an investigation into sexual assault. This applies even if the information becomes public. Does Community of Christ have any remotely similar policy stating that violations can be overlooked when there is a broader purpose, such as protecting people's safety, or keeping the church from becoming a party to domestic abuse?

Moderator: Okay, question number 12: BYU has a policy that they overlook behavioral rule violations if the violation comes to light as part of a report of sexual assault or an investigation into sexual assault. This applies even if the information becomes public. Does Community of Christ have any remotely similar policy stating that violations can be overlooked when there is a broader purpose, such as protecting people's safety, or keeping the church from becoming a party to domestic abuse?

Robin Linkhart: Community of Christ actively works to protect the most vulnerable among us. We are mandatory reporters for domestic abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse - violence of any kind. We have five world conference resolutions that speak [about] and address this concern. Domestic abuse is one, sexual abuse of children is one, human trafficking is one, domestic and sexual violence is one, and most recently non-violence.

I don't one hundred percent understand every bit of BYU context and culture, but what I think I'm hearing is that in sexual assault the person that's the victim could be punished because of sexual activity or -

(Attendee): That used to be the policy. It was regular for people to be punished for being sexually assaulted. What's being said is that it is no longer the case if you come forward and say "I was assaulted". You cannot be punished for that, or at least that's the idea. How that actually plays out is... you know...

(Attendee): To add some clarification to that, it was common for peoples' police reports - they became public to the university through various avenues that could occur. It was common for those police reports to contain information like "the victim had been drinking", which would be a violation of the BYU rules and cause for punishment or expulsion from the university.

But if that information comes to light because the person was engaged in reporting an assault, or it comes to light in the purpose of an investigation into an assault, then that information is ignored in terms of whether a student could have action taken against them.

Robin Linkhart: As you describe that, I know nothing in Community of Christ where that would be a problem.

(Attendee): There's no policy to protect someone when they're in a situation of abuse? Is that what we're hearing?

Robin Linkhart: I mean, we're trying to do everything we can to support people in abusive - to protect them - to protect the marginalized - I... I'm not sure if I'm understanding the question though...

(Attendee): No, definitely not.

(Attendee): BYU believed that if action was taken against people based on the content of their police reports, it would make people less likely to make police reports in the future, and that therefore public safety would be endangered.

(Attendee): I think that what this question is getting at is that Vanessa made the disclosure that she made because her hand was forced.

(Attendee): She was abused.

(Attendee): And I think that that needs to be - whoever is asking the question is asking for that to be taken into consideration as to whether-

(Attendee): When it comes to pastoral care.

(Attendee): Yeah.

(Attendee): Yeah.

(Attendee): And when it comes to decisions made about... Anyway, yeah I think that's what the analogy is being told -

(Attendee): If you want to understand why we're SO angry, just SO angry, that's at the heart of it. Because you have a woman who's abused, and abused, and abused and then she's piled on top of. So if the church isn't understanding that, they're not understanding anything of why people are so angry or why something needs to be done.

Moderator: It sounds like there's a lot of different layers here -

(Attendee): Can I ask something really quick? And I'll try to be concise.

I think paired with what (Attendee) said, the "sell", if you will, for ExMormons to come to Community of Christ, the "sell" that I have been actively involved in creating, has been "Context! Context! Context! We take context into consideration." There's an exegetical context, there's a context for the church entering India, and now we have [Doctrine and Covenants section] 150.

There's such a focus on context, and so for this group - and I'm just going to speak for all of you, you can shoot me after or whatever - I think that we see the context is missing, and that actions were done by people - again this is what I'm hearing - that actions were done, that decisions were made, based on a Facebook post without any context.

If you want to talk about the gap, or the feeling of being blindsided, or the feeling of “This is being brought up like this is Kate Kelly again”, this is all those things that I think are pointing back to that gap of the context.

So this wasn’t just a woman who’s like “Hey! I’m polyamorous and I think it’s great!” It was a woman was literally at risk...

(Attendee): Was up against a wall with threats of her family being lost, so she had to come public. She *HAD* to, and there was *no* humanity in addressing that. There was “Let’s do it, and let’s do it now, before I’m no longer pastor.”

(Attendee): So the letters to the First Presidency, the letters to you, the phone calls to you, were trying to get people to see that context and were trying to get people to know that that context made a damn difference. I think the big heartbreak in this congregation is knowing the context made no difference.

I agree with (Attendee); I think that’s where a lot of the pain and frustration is coming from, because this is not a woman who’s trying to just like “F you, Community of Christ! Here you go, I’m going to take you all for a ride.” This is a woman who had already lost everything, it was a person who was losing even more.

(Attendee): And is.

(Attendee): I think if we can’t name *that*, then I do think that this meeting is not helpful.

So I want to use my privilege as a minister in the institution to just name that, and name that I think is where the real source of frustration is coming from.

(Attendee): And frankly, we’re just really lucky that at this point that we don’t have another body on our hands.

Moderator: It sounds like the real concern here is that this woman had been through so much already, and then on top of that she’s being removed from a place of value within the church -

(Attendee): Five days after her husband, who died by suicide,’s funeral.

Moderator: And that *THAT* context isn’t being taken into context while making this decision to remove her from the priesthood. Is that how I’m understanding it, correctly?

(Attendee): And we’re also pissed off; all of these questions and procedures and it feels like we’re just muddying the waters instead of naming. Abuse is abuse. Someone bringing up in “Joys and Concerns” their concerns isn’t the problem. It isn’t making a mountain out of a molehill. It’s talking about the conversation - the hard conversations aren’t the abusive part; the abuse is the abusive part.

The conflict that we’re having here - that’s not abusive, that’s not bad, this is good! This is beautiful! But the abuse is the abuse, and the abuse happened to someone we love in our community, and then the spiritual abuse happening to all of us, and suddenly we realize that our

pastors and our priesthood leaders are meeting without us and talking about us behind our backs, and discussing their “moral authority” over us, that we didn’t know even happened. [It] suddenly feels like we were living in Oz and that our sanctuary isn’t our sanctuary.

Robin Linkhart: Okay, I hear it loud and clear.

(Attendee): So there’s no policy to put the abuse in context is what we’re hearing in that answer?

Robin Linkhart: Well, I think we’re speaking different languages when you’re asking me that question, but I hear your point, and I understand it, and it’s well taken.

(Attendee): Okay.

#13 What is "extensive counseling" in the context of the process of priesthood status changes? (See [Appendix I](#))

Moderator: Question number 13: What is "extensive counseling" in the context of the process of priesthood status changes?

Robin Linkhart: I don’t know what the context of that is.

(Attendee): If I may, the context of that it states in one (handbooks?) provided to congregations about all of this that part of the line of how events should play out in a priesthood action is that “extensive counseling” should take place with the priesthood holder by the pastor before the priesthood action is decided on.

(Attendee): Before there’s a church court even held there needs to be extensive counseling.

(Attendee): This felt - this really was a case of Vanessa [being] forced to come out and subsequently immediately punished without a chance for that important context to happen. That counseling, that time where she could say “Look, this is what (Vanessa’s husband) did to me. This is what my marriage was. This is why I made these choices.” Without having that it falls back to the last question of “Context was missed, but the action still took place”. There wasn’t an understanding of why what she did is what she did. It was just “She did it, therefore she’s punished.”

Robin Linkhart: So the action that’s in place right now is not a priesthood release; its a time of pause for all of that context to come out.

(Attendee): Okay.

(Attendee): So the action that she’s in now, right? And we can talk hypothetically. If someone’s put on suspension, that counts as their extensive counseling time?

Robin Linkhart: No I-

(Attendee): Or is it meeting with, or... I am a little confused.

Robin Linkhart: I hear you.

I think the words “extensive counseling” can mean a multitude of things. What I would say is that time is to have conversation, discovery, if you will, context, [and] depth of understanding all the way around. Time for conversation with the individual about how they want to live going forward, or what the future looks like for them, or what they wanted it to look like. All those kinds of things.

Does that help?

(Attendee): No, but we’ll take it.

(laughter)

(Attendee): If I may, I think it might be helpful, and y’all can say no, if we explain what “suspension” is and what it is not. If we feel like this isn’t helpful then we can...

(Multiple people expressing approval)

Robin Linkhart: So, we haven’t gone over the -

Carla Long: I sent out all the documents and stuff, so if you want to describe it for people that might help.

Robin Linkhart: Okay, so suspension is used if a legal charge is brought up or when a priesthood member’s in trouble with the law. What it does is it pauses their priesthood, they don’t act in their priesthood while the legal process plays out and whatever happens, happens. That’s one of the places of suspension.

The other is a term called “accusation”. So if things come up and we need to discover more about what’s going on here, we have concerns, a suspension can be used for the same thing: to pause priesthood and have that time of, I’ll call it “discovery”, but conversations, context, all the things that need to be on the table while the administrator and the individual journey the way together.

(Attendee): And that’s separate from a “Leave”?

Robin Linkhart: A “Leave” is a voluntary leave. If there’s ever a question of cause for release it has to be a suspension and not a leave.

(Attendee): Is “Silencing” suspension?

Robin Linkhart: We don’t have a “Silence” anymore, [but] a “Silence” would be a “Release”.

#14 Does world church consider polyamory a part of the LGBTQ+ community? Is it recognized as a sexual orientation or defined at all in world church teaching.

Moderator: Question number 14: Does world church consider polyamory a part of the LGBTQ+ community? Is it recognized as a sexual orientation or defined at all in world church teaching?

Robin Linkhart: So Community of Christ consults reputable sources to inform our support and understanding of the LGBTQIA2S+ community and various tools that we use to accommodate equitable needs. I understand we're not perfect and we're still lacking, but we have made effort in that regard. For example, providing appropriate restroom facilities and/or lodging in our congregation buildings or campgrounds.

So we have not currently recognized polyamory as an orientation or part of the queer community. We are aware of current trends among some who practice polyamory to identify it as an orientation. The queer community is divided on its position in this regard, so I think that's an active conversation, not just among straight people, but the queer community is in that conversation as well.

Currently in the U.S.A., the legal protections afforded the queer community do not apply to polyamorous individuals unless they are already LGBTQ+. So there's definitely an overlap, but we also see polyamory in hetero-normative folks.

I just want to point out that National Conferences addressed same-sex marriage and ordination for people in same-sex marriages (see Appendix J) to provide a pathway for full access to all the sacraments in the church. It wasn't a National Conference about LGBTQ+. It opened the doorway for us to walk into, like in the U.S.A., education, awareness, dialogue, learning, making sure that the queer community is represented and has voice. All of those things are part of the "Living Into" part.

That is my honest response to where we are as far as polyamory being part of the LGBTQ community.

#15 My understanding is that Carla and others in leadership were aware of Vanessa's polyamorous relationship possibly years prior to it becoming public. Why was disciplinary action not taken as soon as it became known to any leadership? Why was it only when it became public?

Moderator: Question number 15: My understanding is that Carla and others in leadership were aware of Vanessa's polyamorous relationship possibly years prior to it becoming public. Why

was disciplinary action not taken as soon as it became known to any leadership? Why was it only when it became public?

Robin Linkhart: So first, from my perspective there are a lot of assumptions stated in that question. Regardless, I already stated some of the generalities that apply to administrative protocol. I mean, we work with the information we have when we have it.

So I think there are several different stories that don't match. "Who had what, when, where, and how".

(Attendee): That seems kind of a question for Carla. Nobody knows what you can say.

Carla Long: Well, what Robin said earlier I agree with. I put a lot of trust in the priesthood members in this congregation, and I hope that people feel like that they can come to me. If they are not living up to their priesthood responsibilities I would hope that they could come to me and talk to me about that. I trust that they do that.

I had heard rumors about Vanessa, but I trusted Vanessa, and I wanted to trust Vanessa, and I did trust Vanessa.

So that's where I stand on that question.

(Attendee): Do you still trust Vanessa?

Carla Long: Yes.

Robin Linkhart: That concludes the questions.

Moderator: Yeah, that's all the questions.

Sharing

(Attendee): Okay, your turn, (Attendee).

(Attendee): Okay, well-

Carla Long: Wait, one second. I saw that on Facebook there was concern about the amount of time.

(Laughter)

I want you to know that we are here until you do not want to be here anymore. So if you - I don't want anyone to walk away from here and say "I didn't get to say what I wanted to say". Okay? So if we need to go longer than when the Halloween party starts, that's totally fine. I want people to say what they need to say, and I want you to hear me very clearly: say what you need to say, be in this space, we'll be in this space till we don't need to be in this space anymore.

Moderator: I just want to add to that too, really quickly: being concise with the way we communicate and getting to the point will help everyone have an opportunity to make sure they have time to share.

Vanessa

(Attendee): Perfect. So on the list we have eleven people and then Vanessa as well as we talked about earlier. I've got the post, thank you (Attendee) for showing me that Vanessa had posted to the congregation facebook page. That I will read for us for context here. So I'll start with Vanessa. It says, and I quote:

"I wanted to give people a heads up that I will not be at the meeting at 2. I have such depleted emotional reserves right now. After all, I am just over two months out from the violent death of my husband and my ten living children need everything I have in my power to give them.

There has been so much back and forth about priesthood and, while priesthood is important to me, my children and my own mental health come well before priesthood. When I sensed a call to priesthood and then accepted the call when presented by Robin and Seth, I understood priesthood not as an elite connection to God, but as a commitment to walk with Jesus on one side and the people I would be serving on the other. It was a commitment to offer my energies, my time, my resources to serving the people I have chosen, who also chose me. I have done that to the best of my ability and continue to do that to this day. My transparent and honest choices within my relationships have not changed my commitment to God, to my congregation. I am very disappointed at the actions taken against me and find THOSE actions to be unethical and unchristlike. Be well my friends."

So that's the statement that Vanessa gave.

(Attendee)

(Attendee): Now, to delineate, I'll move into my own.

For context for everybody, I am a priesthood leader in this congregation, and I do serve in the pastorate. I think one of the teachings that brought me to this church in its Mission Statement is to "Abolish Poverty and End Needless Suffering". I've had lots of names for needless suffering as I've reached through my feelings and things.

I feel this action on Vanessa has caused, in my life, weeks and weeks of needless suffering. I have suffered significantly. My productivity at work has gone downhill, I've had to seek out friends for advice, I've talked to my parents less because I don't want to give them a bad impression of this church.

I went to Mission Center Conference just deciding if I would even come back [as] part of the church. It was a good Mission Center Conference, but what was good about it was it wasn't here, and wasn't on the stuff going on here.

I feel that it's been a struggle because I sit on the confidential side of things, and I feel like the story on that side has changed. That change has caused me even more and more pain this week, and it's hard.

My one request is to just end needless suffering, and that's my comment.

The next person on the list is (Attendee).

And Robin, you're welcome to restate your talking, since I interrupted that part of the process.

Robin Linkhart: Well (Attendee), I really appreciate you sharing the depth and the breadth of how this is has caused you suffering beyond the suffering of Vanessa, how it's impacted your sleep, the quality of your life, your work, and your relationships. I hear you asking to end the needless suffering.

(Attendee): Thank you.

(Attendee): May I make a brief comment? In Rapoport one of the essential things is to name the emotion that the other person is feeling, and I'm aware I'm out of order in speaking like this, but I would like to *insist* if at all possible that, Robin, you name (Attendee)'s feeling.

Robin Linkhart: You're feeling deep pain and loss, and I think a sense of betrayal.

(Attendee): Yes.

(Attendee): Can you say whether it makes sense to you, given what he said, that he would be feeling that way?

Robin Linkhart: It makes perfect sense to me.

(Attendee): Thank you.

(Attendee)

(Attendee): I'm going to try to be concise, but my thoughts have been all over the place, so I just jotted down everything I was thinking.

Many, in discussing this, have brought up that there is the main issue: that churches should stay out of people's bedrooms. They're not wrong; I fully agree with this. It is actually, in my sight, abusive to dictate what should and should not happen in peoples' bedrooms, except for cases of consent and abuse. But in this situation, there are issues beyond that.

This is not solely my trauma coming out; it is a trauma that I see in this church, and I see it really well, because it's a trauma that my former religion, the LDS church, shares. It is a trauma that needs to be acknowledged and healed, or toxicity, like I've seen in this situation, will continue to occur and injure the people and the church that I love dearly.

When this started, nobody was owning up to a decision made to take Vanessa's priesthood. No one was telling us what was going on. I know that you say that there is confidentiality, but confidentiality usually only helps the oppressor, not the abused.

I am tired of hearing that things have to be confidential. I understand it to a point, but it doesn't make me not tired of it.

The higher-ups were saying that it's up to local leaders. Local leaders hinted that they were feeling forced into this. That feels toxic to me. It felt very Mormon. It screamed "red flags" to me, of things that I experienced in the LDS church. It felt eerily similar to what happened with the Kate Kelly situation. In my mind, I just kept thinking "It's the same church; just different wrapping. Mormonism, just by a different name." I know that it's not excommunication; instead it's taking someone's priesthood, but if you cut off a hand instead of a foot it's still an injury. It may not be the same exact injury, but it's still causing pain to many of us.

On top of that, I got toxicity from - I was being gaslit by high-up leaders being made to feel like we were the crazy ones here. That we weren't asking the right questions, that "Just get to know the church better - you just don't know what you're talking about." It really felt like gaslighting. It was gaslighting to assume that I wasn't asking questions, to assume that we *weren't* trying to get to know the situation. That's a toxic place to be as well, to be told that "There's no problem here, it's *your* problem here." Again, same church; different wrapping.

When some of us stood with Vanessa in very appropriate ways, that I felt appropriate, following the word of the church, wearing what we wanted since there's no dress code, so we all wore rainbow attire to say that we loved Vanessa and that we stood behind her, supporting her.

There was a non-violence Sunday school, and people answered questions -

(laughter)

(Attendee): This should be for the sermon tomorrow.

(laughter)

(Attendee): They answered questions honestly, and to what their heart was saying, and it really connected with the Vanessa situation. Then, in a “Joys and Concerns” portion, at the “Concerns” portion, people stood up and voiced their concerns.

Yet what we heard was people saying that we were acting inappropriately. Where was the inappropriateness? I have no idea. We were wearing clothes, we were commenting on questions asked, and we were voicing concerns in a concerned area. And yet, we were told that we were attacking. It's the “same church; different wrapping” thing of, we were judged on our tone more than on being listened to and being given heart to our feelings. Yet, I saw that service as one of the most Christ-like services that I've ever been to. I see Christ as standing up for the marginalized, helping the hand that hangs down, and that's what we were doing, and yet people just focused on our tone.

I know that you've talked about this, but I felt abandoned. I know that it's not your place as an Apostle to commune with us anymore, and yet you are our friend as well as an apostle. You've been here with us on our faith journey, and it just felt [like] silence.

I have stuff written here, but I'm just not really feeling like going into it. Because of that silence, I just feel a wall. I have felt this wall with Vanessa. I've heard of her talking about the wall that she's gotten. I have a unique situation in that I have someone that I feel should lose their priesthood because I am a victim of his abuse, and yet when I tried to talk about it there was this wall.

Yet I see Vanessa, who she has been: one of the leading parts of me coming to Community of Christ. She has done nothing wrong beyond what rules there are for the bedroom and being honest about it. She has done no harm to anyone in this community, and in fact has done the opposite: bringing grace and love and truth and just everything good! Helping us. We were going to give up on Christianity, and we, because of sermons we heard from Vanessa, have felt like “Okay, we're going to give Christianity another chance.”

It's violent. I name this as violent, this action against not only Vanessa but the members of this congregation who connect so strongly to her.

That's all I'm going to say.

Moderator: It sounds like the general theme of this room is a lot of betrayal, right? Especially in your circumstance; you had come from a place where it sounds like there was some trauma and were hopeful that this was a new place - that you would feel safe here - and now it sounds like there's a whole lot of distrust for the system, which wasn't helped by your previous experience. You had hoped that - I mean, there's going to be problems, there's going to be disagreements. You understand that that happens and you understand there's this confidentiality thing, but it seems like you had also trusted that “Sure there's this confidentiality thing, but my church leaders are going to take care of us.” They're going to do the right thing.

(Attendee): I actually didn't know there was a confidentiality thing. Things [that] were taught to me, were "We are transparent." They put out their financials. They put out written minutes for people to read.

I think this confidentiality in this case seems [to be] furthering the abuse.

Moderator: And the distrust for the church.

(Attendee): You know, from a lawyer's standpoint, Vanessa waived all confidentiality publicly. So who does the privilege belong to? Does it belong to Vanessa to protect her, or does the privilege belong to the institution to protect the institution?

Where she's waived all confidentiality and we keep hearing "Confidentiality! Confidentiality!", that sounds, I think to most of us, like its protection of the institution against the individual that you would think was supposedly being protected by it.

So that's just like a technical point, but I think a lot of us are feeling that way.

Moderator: Yeah! For sure. My understanding of the confidentiality, as she explained it, was not related to Vanessa, but to the other players involved. Is that correct?

(Attendee): Yeah, the employees of the church.

Moderator: Right. Right. So I can definitely see why you're all thinking that everyone's being protected here except for Vanessa.

(Attendee): Do you want to respond?

Robin Linkhart: Thank you for sharing.

I think the bottom line of what [Moderator] said about your feeling is betrayed. Also feeling of being abandoned, a feeling of being disrespected, by experiences that feel like gaslighting. A feeling of confusion, because what you're experiencing now is not matching what you've experienced before now. It's hard to trust in the midst of that.

That makes a lot of sense in the context of everything you've described in your journey and how things have transpired. I connect with what you're saying, and it makes sense.

(Attendee): (Attendee), thank you. The next person that we have on the list is (Attendee).

(Attendee)

(Attendee): On the twenty-first of [September 2022], I wrote this letter and I'd like to read it to everybody and then I'll go from there. I'll shorten it, but it says:

"Dear faith leaders,

I am writing to express concern for the Salt Lake Community of Christ Congregation, Latter-day Seeker movement as a whole, LGBTQIA+ community, and the larger conversation of growth opportunities for Community of Christ.”

I wrote this to Robin directly, and I copied (Non-Attendee), and (Attendee), and (Attendee), and (Attendee), and a whole bunch of other people in the process. Carla as well. It says:

“Let me say that I firmly believe and understand that the intent of last week’s actions against Vanessa was based in a place of love, and protection, and discipleship by all parties.

Unfortunately the intent doesn’t outweigh the impact of those actions. The [impact] was spiritual violence on Vanessa, spiritual violence on the LGBTQIA+ community with whom those policies disproportionately affect, and a spiritual violence towards those within our community that do not support the unethical behavior, the lack of pastoral care, degrading abusive behaviors that diminished relationships, humiliated and shamed Vanessa, who is a member of our priesthood team, during her deep hour of need, and neglected the effects on our community.

Abuse often happens because of unequal power in a relationship. Through words and actions, the institutional power in this situation was used to harm, to manipulate, and to cause fear, leading to irreparable harm.

The definition of violence from the First Presidency of Community of Christ is:

‘Violence is, individually or collectively, by intention or neglect, bringing harm physically, emotionally, spiritually, or relationally to one’s self, another person, a group, a nation, or creation.’

Fear is the absence of love, and it is concerning to me that fear was the underlying driver of this situation.

(Attendee) was told yesterday by a member of the pastoral team, Carla was that person, that they had a real fear that if they did not do what was asked of them, then they were concerned for their job and new position, because people were watching.”

I have that recorded if anybody would like that. (See [Appendix K](#))

“While I understand this perspective, it is not an excuse. Perpetuating abuse is a choice. It is a tool of institutional authority and patriarchy that abuses all parties. Perpetuating abuse is not in alignment with the core principles and enduring values that we strive, as a community, to uphold.

I am concerned that when a member of our community was grieving and in a very abusive situation, that actions were taken focused on her admitting what was already known instead of focused on concern for the abuse being perpetrated against her and the pain that she was in.

I am concerned that when members of our congregation spoke their concerns vocally in our community we were told it was an ambush and that it was aggressive. We were told that this is not the space to express those concerns despite me putting in a call to multiple priesthood members prior to this, asking if it was appropriate and informing the person conducting so that she was prepared to handle that situation lovingly. Those people also told our pastor prior to the start of the meeting, so she would be aware and prepared.

We were told that wearing rainbows in show of support for the LGBTQIA+ community, because this enforcement of the policy disproportionately affected those members of our community in our pews, we were told that that created an exclusivity. We were told that if our pastor did not take this action that they'd send (Mission Center President) to do it.

At the pulpit on Sunday it was suggested that this was a problem because of *exmormon* trauma, but this is a heartbreak that is a spiritual trauma happening in *our* community, *this* community, with the name of *this* church used as a weapon in real-time.

From Parker's statement in Harmony (See [Appendix L](#)) it is also clear that this is not an isolated instance of misunderstanding, but a church wide issue."

And for context, (Hamony President) runs Harmony and he turned in his priesthood card over this (See [Appendix L](#)).

"This is an issue of misunderstanding "intent" versus "impact". As an institution we say that we align with our enduring principles, but our actions do not support our words. Poor reactions end up being perceived as entrenchment instead of growth, because we keep perpetuating the problem.

For me, I am heartbroken to learn and realize that this is not a safe place as I was led to believe. I recognize that it is on all of us to work to do better and build our community to be what we claim it to be and what we want it to be. Intersectionality is very grueling work and I understand that in the grieving, the fear, and the pain of the situations, that mistakes were made. No one expects our pastor to be perfect, just as no one expects perfection from Vanessa.

Our diverse leadership is the most beautiful and powerful part of our community. It's paining me to hear from community members inside our one location and out, that they are having a crisis of faith. Not in the core principles of the gospel, but in this institution. Just as I said in my now-blamed "hijacking" of the service on Sunday, in my "aggressive" comments, I stand by that.

I am concerned with the actions that are taking place, specifically in regard to the fact that a huge part of my growing and becoming close to the Divine is understanding and learning from those who do not have the same perspective that I have. It has helped me understand Christ in a way that I never could have done on my own. I am highly concerned that if we remove this diverse leadership from our priesthood team, then we won't *have* that leadership in our priesthood team, and we won't have and be able to

fully welcome the diverse community that has taught me more about Christ than I've ever experienced in my life before. I still stand by those words, and I will add on that I don't regret them and I will never apologize for them.

We want leadership that is human, and we want leadership that is flawed, and learning, and loving, and diverse. Please do not take that away from us on all sides. Do not arbitrarily enforce policies that exclude diversity. Please work to create a committee to work on updating the handbooks and manuals so that they are current and reflect [the] Enduring Principles as well as ensuring that they are not being used for weaponization in the future.

Please remove Vanessa's priesthood suspension immediately. Please remove the fear on employees of the church that they have around vocation, so that they can focus on pastoral care or create a general policy so that there is no further conflict going forward.

Please undo the unraveling. Please apologize. Please focus on Christ's teachings, on our enduring principles, and on the sacred ministry of that community building.

While we cannot obtain perfection, we should strive to learn. I want to be part of our healing community, and to make us the Christ-centered people that we profess to be. The need is for all community members to be able to do that authentically. We'll all be there with you if we can move this in a positive direction for everyone.

With all my love,

(Attendee)"

I'll go on to say that the lack of answer to that hurt me. The meeting with you in response to this hurt me and was exhausting emotionally, mentally, physically.

The entrenchment of "It's not up to me, it's up to local leaders", "It's up to the higher-ups", and now being told that - I think at the start of the meeting it was said three times that "This is a local matter situation". I feel very - I don't feel, I was - lied to by someone.

For me, priesthood has been my *one* issue. My *one* thing. My "ride or die" thing from the time I was two years old. Priesthood is *my* thing. That was my one thing. It is why it took me ten years to leave the LDS church. It is why I fought so ferociously for "Ordain Women" and worked forty hours a week for three years towards every action, as I watched my best friend get excommunicated, as I watched my family be torn apart, as I experienced my own family punish me for it, as I had a stake president and bishop show up on my porch every Tuesday at ten A.M. to two P.M. for seven months. It is why I *actively* tried not to be excommunicated from the LDS church for five years. It is ultimately why I left Mormonism, and it is why I came here. It is why I took five years watching and coming here and watching from a distance to build trust. It is why I took two years to join this church and to study and to read everything. We have a really high-level spiritual community. Like, you guys are all really spiritually brilliant and [have] high spiritual intellect, and priesthood is why I trusted that.

I asked every question I could, many of it pertaining to this type of situation, and I was told “It’s not a thing”. I was told “Church courts don’t exist.”

Priesthood was my thing. I didn’t even choose to be confirmed until I could be at peace that I would never have the priesthood, because I didn’t want it to be an assumed thing like Mormonism. Like, “I get it, I’m twelve and I have a dick”.

Like, I believed in it that much, and I no longer believe in the priesthood. It’s crap. It vanished in front of me. The very precious, very sacred gift that I had, that was my most precious thing, I realized, was only ever used as a position of power and authority and moral authority over me. And I’ve had it all along. I don’t think that that’s what the church - what Community of Christ - intended, but Vanessa taught me when she was at my house bawling hysterically and in the depths of despair over this, and then she turned to the people around her and administered to each one of us, being worried about *our* faith and *our* connection to God and *our* souls.

So you can take whatever you want from whoever you want, but you are not my pastor.

Moderator: She sounds angry. Yeah? Justifiably so?

(Attendee): Yes.

Moderator: So let’s dig deeper and try to empathize and understand her position a little bit more, church leaders. What do you think’s underneath all that anger? I heard a ton of deeper feelings. What do you guys hear?

Robin Linkhart: So, I hear a huge disconnect; that you’re experiencing disconnect with who Community of Christ said they are and how you’re experiencing it now. That you felt shame and accused. That you don’t feel safe. A deep, deep, deep hurt and distrust. You feel lied to. You feel ignored. Spiritual violence. And there’s a deep sense of loss in the midst of that. Deep, deep soul-level sense of fracture and loss.

(Attendee): Thank you, (Attendee).

Robin Linkhart: And for me that connects to the whole story that you told. It makes sense. I hear it.

(Attendee): I don’t think there’s ever any repairing of that, so I’m in grief right now.

Moderator: Thank you for sharing all of your emotions. I know sometimes when in a group setting we have this tendency to kind of shove it all down, but that doesn’t help. I know it’s scary, but this sharing of emotion is good. It doesn’t solve any problems, but we’re expressing it.

(Attendee)

(Attendee): The next person signed up to speak is (Attendee). (Attendee).

(Attendee): (Attendee)? I'm sorry, for other things going on today I have to leave. I wanted to let you know it's not because of anything that anyone has said, but I didn't want to get up and exit when people are-

(Attendee): Would you like a chance to speak?

(Attendee): Only if that's okay.

(Attendee): Is that okay (Attendee)?

Carla: It is (Attendee's) birthday.

(Attendee): Happy birthday!

(laughter)

(Attendee): I had typed up some things that I was just going to read, but I'm not going to read those anymore, because I've learned a lot during this meeting, and I feel like I've gained a lot of insight to things that I didn't understand very well, so some of the things I wrote don't really matter anymore. But I do just want to say a couple little things before I go.

I really appreciated what you said, (Attendee), and what you just said, (Attendee), and also the context that (Attendee) gave a little bit earlier about the abuse and some of those things.

I'm not as close to Vanessa as a lot of other people in the congregation are, and that's been a little challenging because I have been one of those people that has kind of pushed back against what happened in the initial meeting and some of the following events. I think a big part of where my pushing back came from was just confusion; I didn't know what was going on, I didn't know why it was going on, I felt "out of", like I wasn't a part of what was happening and it was very confusing for me.

That felt really scary for me, because it felt so divisive, that I didn't know what was going to happen to the congregation. And so my reaction to that was that that wasn't okay, that I didn't want people doing that in a service, because it felt too divisive and it felt scary to me.

I think the way that you explained why you did what you did makes more sense to me now, and I understand better why you chose to do the things the way that you did. I understand better how much you were trying to protect and care for Vanessa, because I didn't know as deeply how bad her situation was. I understand that more now.

I think just the final thing that I want to say, that I care so much about, is: I feel in this situation that I'm being forced to choose between Vanessa and the people that love her and the people that are affected, and the church. I don't want to choose between the two.

(Attendee): And she doesn't want us to!

(Attendee): And I know Vanessa doesn't want that either. I really love Community of Christ, and I want to be Community of Christ, and I worry sometimes when there's statements about longtime members or lifetime members, that they don't understand us, because I feel like that

creates an “us versus them” and I don’t want that. I want us to all be one, not like “Salt Lake Congregation” and “everyone else”, right?

So that’s a lot of where my feelings come from, is that fear of that division and not being part of the World Church, and not being part of a unified community. I don’t really have a solution right or anything, but those were the things that I wanted to express and the fears that I have - of just that division. I want to come here and be Community of Christ, but I also want to come here and be safe, and be inclusive, and be a family like I feel like we have been. I feel like I almost don’t quite know how to have both of those things.

That’s all.

Moderator: What did you understand out of what she just said?

Robin Linkhart: Well, I heard - I saw evidence of you doing deep listening, and you spoke to a sense of new insight and understanding. You talked about your feelings of being confused and scared and a sense that things could break apart, there was potential for that.

You talked about hard feelings and feeling like you’re forced to choose between Vanessa or the church, and you don’t want to choose; you want it to be all one and unified. You have a desire for safety and inclusion.

It all makes sense to me what you’re saying. I appreciate what you’re saying.

Moderator: It sounds like you felt like you were excluded initially, right? Again, I don’t know exactly how all of this went down, but what I’m going to assume is that those people that were close with Vanessa knew what was going on and everyone else was in the dark.

(Attendee): Yep, that’s how it felt to me. I don’t mean to say that in a way that I felt like she necessarily should have told me, I mean, that’s her personal information, so I understand that, but I felt like it created a lot of confusion, and that I felt like some of the following events- (Attendee) did a service, which I wasn’t able to attend because of a doctor’s appointment, but there was also not a lot of information about that. Afterward, I just felt like I wanted more full informed consent if I want to participate in what’s happening or not participate, or if I want to be involved or not. I didn’t feel like I was able to get that, so there was a feeling of exclusion, but also, I just felt a lot of, just, confused! I didn’t know what was happening, and I didn’t know how to be involved or how to not be involved. I wasn’t able to totally know what my feelings were, because I didn’t have all the information on this.

Moderator: Knowledge is power, right? A lot of us make decisions based on that. It kind of seems like - and this might be the case with a lot of you - “Oh, I thought I was safe here. Am I safe here? It doesn’t seem like *she* feels like she’s safe here. Should I feel safe?” So there’s this whole ton of confusion that comes from it.

(Attendee): Absolutely.

(Attendee): (Attendee), thank you so much for being here, and for voicing that. It was, I think that that’s part of what we need to hear, because those of us who are close with Vanessa, and

this is really- We have been in this huge turmoil, and I appreciate hearing that there are other people who are kind of outside of it and are feeling maybe excluded from things, so we need to work to make sure that they understand what has happened and how we're working through it to hopefully get to the other side. So, I really appreciate hearing from you today.

(Attendee): And have a happy birthday!

(Laughter)

(Attendee): May I reply to you also? I want to apologize. I am really sorry that I didn't put out enough information for you to feel confident that you knew what I was doing or whether you wanted to participate in it.

I was also feeling a lot of confusion about what I *could* say, or how to say it, or what would be appropriate, but this was after you had made a facebook comment- that I had replied to! - saying that there was too much exclusivity and confusion in the meeting for you to feel comfortable. I had tried to honor your perspective and see that and reply appropriately, and then I just walked right into that blind spot all over again.

(Laughter)

That was wrong of me, and I didn't even realize that I had done that until you said that, and I am so sorry that I did that to you. That I tried to make a space where you could be heard and comfortable and feel understood, and then absolutely violated that space.

I am so sorry.

(Attendee): I really appreciate that. It means a lot to hear that, and to feel like - like I've just felt a lot that I was the only one that had any of these feelings, and that everyone else was on the same page one way, and that I was sort of this outsider. I don't want to feel like- I just wasn't sure what to make of that.

(Attendee): I don't want to feel that way either, and if I had been feeling that way at all of this, I think that I would be really hurt by that, in addition to confused, and perhaps appalled, and other feelings. But just the hurt of being excluded repeatedly is really painful.

I am so sorry that I did that to you.

(Attendee): You are a very valuable part of this community, and I am happy to have you here. I think that that sentiment is probably ubiquitous.

(Attendee): The one thing that I hope you learned: when we decide to go to bat for a member of our congregation, we go all out. There's no chill in that.

(Attendee): (Attendee), you are excused to go anytime you need to, I promise we're not holding you here.

(Attendee): Thank you, no, and thank you for letting me jump ahead in line and share those, and for listening. I'm just glad I was able to come even if for a part of this today.

Bye everyone!

Carla Long: How many more people are on the list?

(Attendee): Seven

Carla Long: Should we take a five minute comfort break? And then pop back in? Is that okay with everyone?

(Attendee): I think that's a great idea.

(Audio from the break has not transcribed)

(Attendee)

(Attendee): (Attendee), you had something you wanted to say?

(Attendee): Yeah, so (Attendee) just came up and shared that - and said "you can share this". This is through my filter, I don't know - hopefully this is right - but she is very overwhelmed right now and she really appreciated what (Attendee) said, and I think identified with what (Attendee) said a lot, because she has felt maybe left out of some of the conversations, or she assumes that she's all on "Team World Church" when in reality she's not. She's trying to struggle [with] this balance between supporting Carla as a member of the pastorate and then also dealing with the injustice that she sees in all of this. I think that she is currently in a state of not feeling very regulated.

She wanted everyone to know she is not storming out out of anger, but that she was feeling very, very overwhelmed, and sends love, and support. I think she just needs to go take care of her heart and center and everything, but she loves us, she supports us all.

My read on that is she just feels pulled in a million different directions and she needed to to step away for her own mental health.

(Attendee): Alright, thank you (Attendee).

Moderator: Alright everyone, real quick: breathe. Deep breath. Remember why we're here. Okay.

(Attendee)

(Attendee): Perfect. (Attendee).

(Attendee): I have come to love this congregation in a very deep way. I imagine that two thousand years ago this is the kind of group that Jesus walked with; a bunch of imperfect fouled-up people, but with hearts of gold that show so much love and so much acceptance. That's really what brought me in.

We got baptized (date). We took lessons from Carla, we took lessons from (Attendee). The whole concept of grace was new to me. I ate that up; I thought "Yeah, that's the thing. That's what it's about. This church is different. [I'm] not expecting people to be perfect, but they get it." I think that's true of the vast majority of people that I've dealt with that are here, especially in this congregation. They get it.

So I was here at the funeral, and it was an unusual funeral, but beautiful too. I didn't know (Vanessa's husband), but I knew from discussions that Vanessa had been through a lot and that his death was brutal, violent, and here she is - I can't remember how many kids she has at home she's had eleven kids. She has a whole bunch at home, some that are small, some with special needs. She's not a wealthy person.

The world fell on top of her, and then after the funeral I start hearing that this thing's coming down; that they've decided they're taking away Vanessa's priesthood. I'm like "What the hell! Where in any of the gospel, where in any example of Jesus would this kind of behavior be justified?" A woman brought to him that committed adultery, the woman by the well, the woman who washed his feet with her hair, all of them condemned, supposedly for their sexual sins and how horrible they were, and Jesus was always the one who said "Your sins are forgiven, go your way." [He] stopped the people who were abusing the person. *That's* where Jesus was. Jesus wasn't about to come in and beat up on some woman because supposedly she had some sexual sin.

It was like a train coming down the track. It was like I could see people out there waving their arms [saying] "Hey, church leaders this isn't good! This is going to blow up! This is going to be bad! You're just going to blow the hell out of the Salt Lake congregation!" and the sense that it didn't matter [because] things had been decided, things were in motion, and "You can't stop a freight train".

Saturday night (Attendee) and I talked about it, and I'm like "You know, we do have a time for joys and concerns. I have a concern, and I think I'm going to state my concern." It wasn't like something was pre-planned way out in advance, it was really kind of last minute. "How do you stop a freight train when it's almost there?" Because the next day, that evening, everything was scheduled to happen. So, "where can I say anything?"

Somebody else had said "Hey, maybe we should wear rainbow colors, because that'll just say 'Hey Vanessa, we love you, we support you.'" So we went to (Attendee)'s and bought some ribbons and tie-dye. I took the shirt that I got baptized in and I tie-dyed it. (Attendee) made ribbons that she put out in front. Anybody who wanted to put a rainbow ribbon on could do it. I found a couple of welcome mats with a rainbow on them [that said] "Everybody's welcome here", that were on sale, bought those, and hoped, just hoped, that maybe saying something might make a difference.

I had been, maybe not as bad as (Attendee), but for three days I didn't work. I ended up just reading the New Testament, and going through commentaries, and watching videos on YouTube about how-

(Attendee): Looking up everything in the handbook and everything online that we could find.

(Attendee): -does this make sense?

Everything I saw said this is not what Jesus does. I was just hoping that maybe something could be said that makes a difference.

Then some other people joined. (Attendee) said something, (Attendee) said something, different people said, four or five people said something, hoping that it would be listened to. That was not the response; the response was so much worse. That just blew me away, because it was offered in entirely good faith. I was shocked that the response was not "Oh, gee! We hear you, maybe there ought to be a pause here, maybe there ought to be some more thought." The response was "How dare you ruin the meeting! Why are you attacking?"

I guess if I have to decide - and I'll be one hundred percent honest, I think I'm supposed to teach Sunday school tomorrow, [but] I haven't prepared. I have a hard time getting into that, and I'm not sure if I'm even going to be here. If I'm here, the reason I'm here is 'cause I love this congregation. I'm not here because the institution has shown itself to be stellar or what I thought it was.

I don't want to be critical and all that, but I wrote you, and I didn't hear a word back until Sunday morning. "Oh, that's nice..." It was a kind of a "Got your email." We were really out there going "Hey! This is going to blow up! This place is going to blow sky-high. You don't have any idea what this is doing.", and hoped somebody somewhere was going to say "Hey, let's wait a hot minute here and figure out what are we really doing.", and instead it just (blowing up noise).

I have no idea what happened in Missouri. I have no idea what meetings took place. I have no idea who talked to who. But you [Carla] told me you felt like you had been given orders and your job was on the line. If that's true, that's terrible. (Single sentence giving personal background information which would reveal the attendee's identity.) Last night I had a discussion with my brother-in-law who's a prosecutor. We talked about prosecutorial discretion. Just 'cause you can, doesn't mean you do it. If you don't believe in the case, you don't go ahead with it. Maybe somebody else is going to be assigned that case, and maybe they do it, but if you don't think it's the right thing to do, [then] you don't do it. You have a choice. We all have a choice. We can't say "Somebody ordered me to do it". If you think it's wrong, you don't do it.

I don't know how that is in the Community of Christ, but I would hope that if a pastor thinks there are extenuating circumstances that ought to be considered and maybe this isn't the right course of action, that they have the discretion to say "No." I think other people were trying to say that, but it was not heard.

I don't have a whole lot more to add. These guys have all said things much better than I can say them. (Attendee) and (Attendee) both had some pretty hard, deep feelings about all this and the unfairness, the inequality involved in the whole process that, once again, we're doing nothing to the men, but the women are getting stomped on. We went through this with "Ordain Women". You can have women in the leadership, but you *know* who was always on the frontline to confront Ordain Women. Now we send the women out to do the dirty work. Patriarchy doesn't

go away just because you have women in leadership. I hope, as an institution, whether I'm a part of it or not, somehow Community of Christ will figure that one out and get rid of all of these vestiges of patriarchy and honestly have equality in this church.

That's all I have to say.

Robin Linkhart: (Attendee), I'm hearing a really, really deep sense of love and compassion to the core of your being for these people and for Vanessa. A real deep experience of what you found in this congregation, and a violation of that. A sense of disconnect and disruption in your life as a result of that. An absence of grace in the midst of what has transpired. And a lot of really deep feelings of injustice and violence.

(Attendee): That summarizes it up well, yeah.

Robin Linkhart: I'm also hearing that you have a sense - that you have a shred of hope about something.

(Attendee): I hope so.

(Laughter)

(Attendee): I really- we went through so much. I was sort of immune on the board of Ordain Women. The women got it bad; attacked constantly, church leadership calling them in all the time. I was the only man on the board, and [I was] never called in once. Nothing. But I felt for them, and it was so inequitable.

I don't want that here. We thought this was the safe place, and now we're having to do the same thing over again like "Maybe we won't be hurt again". Maybe [Dallin H.] Oaks' spirit is alive and well here, "We don't apologize". Maybe that's what goes on here. I hope not. I really hope, soon, that there's an apology. I really hope, soon, there's corrective action. I hope this train is stopped, and we can get back to really living the example of Christ. That's my hope.

Robin Linkhart: I just want to say too, that in the context of the story that you've shared, and all the things - the feeling I have a deep understanding of how you came to experience these feelings in connection with all of that.

(Attendee): Thank you.

(Attendee): Thank you, (Attendee). Next on the list is (Attendee)

(Attendee)

(Attendee): Thank you. I'm only three tissues in!

I have a lot to share and I'll echo what (Attendee) said. I thought this was a safe place, and I took seven, eight years to trust it. I finally decided this is worth the work of disappointment, being here talking to people instead of leaving officially. Since leaving [that] community I felt like this is a place I can be safe, where I see everyone else is safe, because, I didn't leave the LDS

church so much because I wasn't safe there, but because I couldn't feel safe in a place where not everyone was.

I've been having debates with one of my colleagues. He's writing a book about organized religion and Atheism. He's lovely, and he's handling it in such a thoughtful way, and he talks to me about it because he knows that I am both religious and leaning Atheist, and not willing to look at things in an uncritical way. I've been telling him over and over again "All these things that you're saying about organized religion, that there has to be an 'in-group', there has to be an 'out-group', there has to be punishment, there has to be indoctrination, or religion doesn't survive as a religion," I've been telling him, "No! You don't know my church! We're not that way! We're this special unicorn where religion and inclusivity and situational ethics and grace for individuals can survive."

I don't believe that as much anymore. I want to believe it, and I want it to be shown to be true, but I'm in this place right now where I'm - I've told people I'm having a second faith crisis. I've worked out all my "God stuff", I've worked out my own spirituality, and my ability to feel close to the Divine, to step into my ethics and my sense of what's right and how I live in the world, and I'd hoped to do that in community, so I'm not in a "faith crisis", but a "community crisis".

I've been pretty quiet about all this. It just takes a lot to ruffle me. That doesn't mean I'm not raging on the inside and that I'm not eyeing the door, because I don't know right now.

You know, a lot of what's brought me so deeply emotionally close to this is my history with Vanessa. We've never been *best* best friends, but there's the best friend circle and the one just outside of that. For twenty years we've been in the circle just outside of that. We've watched each other grow up, and I've been there when both of her daughters died, and watched her go to Africa and adopt children, and watched and she joined Community of Christ, and came out as bi[sexual], and all of these things as I was watching her thinking, "I see this person with this core, just unshakable set of ethics and goodness stepping into a life that is unconventional and not ordinary." It gave me permission to do the same, to follow my ethical core, to do what I thought was right in community and in my family.

In so many ways that - you know, talking to her and the complexity of the situation she was in, that sure, she could have chosen monogamy and divorce, and those beautiful kids who loved their dad *and* their mom, and their dad and moms' marriage, they could have either stayed together and both of them been miserable, or they could have gotten divorced and then their kids would have been miserable, but she found a third way, that- all of the core principles of inherent worth of all human beings, of grace and generosity, of honesty and openness. It worked for their family and kept them all as intact and healthy as possible.

That was acceptable until, because of the abuse of her very mentally ill and hurting husband, she had to go public about it. It was the publicness; it was the coming out that was the moment that, "No, we don't do this." That's how impacted me, because it means that any of us who are doing the same thing, struggling with abuse, struggling with difficulty, trying to find a third way that is as Christ-like and honest as it could possibly be, that the only thing that keeps us out of the crosshair is if we're quiet about it?!

I'm done with that. I did it for thirty-five years in the LDS church, and I'm not doing it in a faith community again. So, if that's what this continues to be, I don't know that I can stay. But I want to, and the reason I continue showing up is, you all are my people. I love you! If it were just commitment to the institutional church I think I'd be done, but it's my people that I keep coming for, and I'll keep coming for as long as I can and hope for change.

And that's all I had for the discussion.

Robin Linkhart: Thank you for sharing, (Attendee). I am hearing a deep love for people and a lot of value for a safe space, safe place. In the midst of everything that's happened there's this huge loss and fracture that's like a bleeding fracture, in this deep crisis of community, that connection. That has been my feeling for you. There's a lot of anger feelings in there as well.

I also heard this really deep respect and honor of Vanessa and the journey that you have witnessed with her and how she has had this solid core, this way of being and living, that sounds like a life-driving force, and you've witnessed that. That has empowered and modeled for you a way of being that you feel is right for you.

I hear a lot of commitment. A commitment to honor yourself, that you will not be forced to be quiet about who you are, and a really deep commitment to these people.

Moderator: Could I add to that too? It seems like your experience - and probably most of your experiences' - with religion has been very black-and-white. You either do this, or you don't fit in, and then because of that you won't feel whole, or accepted, or feel included.

It sounds like your hope for this church was the gray area, and I think you did a really great job of describing how Vanessa went from this black-and-white thinking to find[ing] the gray area. To make her family whole still, but also find a little bit of happiness.

Very eloquently put.

(Attendee): Perhaps I think the key thing, the key take away, is that when I hold her actions and [her husband's] actions up to the light of Christ and of our Enduring Principles, I don't see those violated. There are plenty of cases of polyamory or similar things where it could have been pursued out of selfishness or out of any other negative reasons, but what I actually see is them choosing the most Christ-like, the most grace-filled, the most honest and good options available to them with the realities before them.

To have that, not just "You broke the rules, therefore you get the punishment," okay, whatever. But it's like, "Yeah, you broke the rules, but you broke the rules in service of higher laws." I can't stand that; that's what feels like injustice to me.

(Attendee): Thank you, (Attendee).

(Attendee): I need Robin to say how (Attendee) feels, and whether it makes sense to her. I don't know if I'm the only one who needs that, but I need that.

Robin Linkhart: I thought I, um...

(Attendee): I may have missed it, and if I did I'm sorry. Could you say it again?

Robin Linkhart: You want me to say all the feelings again?

(Attendee): Could you at least say that you understand how those feelings could come from where her perspective is?

Robin Linkhart: Yeah, I can totally do that. I was getting ready to do that.

(Attendee): I'm sorry.

Robin Linkhart: No problem at all.

One of the things that what you shared, (Attendee) has really helped me see is your experience in looking through the lens that you have seen, it has brought a lot of enlightenment. All of your feelings that you shared earlier connect to that deeply, and I feel a deep sense of understanding of how this all makes sense, and how that connects with you.

(Attendee): I also want to say, real quick, I kind of am mad at (Vanessa's husband)-

(Laughter and agreement)

So thank you for extending the same grace that is so obvious to me for Vanessa, to him.

(Attendee): Vanessa and I have had long talks about the horrific abuse he endured as a child, and so he comes from a place that I can't help but just want to pull him aside and save him too. Don't get me wrong, I am pissed off at that man, he hurt his family so badly, and yet, I can't say that if I were in exactly the same shoes I could have chosen anything different. You never know.

(Attendee): Thank you, so much.

(Attendee): Can you tell us the rest of the order?

(Attendee): The rest of the order is (Attendee), (Attendee), (Attendee), (Attendee), and (Attendee).

(Attendee)

(Transcriber's note: The audio in this section was patchy.)

(Attendee): The last month has been a lot. ♦ and the last month especially. I had felt ♦ with both of them they had the ♦. And screamed at the injustice. (Non-Attendee) has, and I'm not going to hold back from how he phrased it, so that's just (Non-Attendee), he said over the phone to me the other day, "What the fuck is happening up there? Why is there so much pain just being added to?" I told her I had no answer. Let her know that this meeting was going on, and that I, if she had anything to share, I would share it. And that's, for the most part, what she had. She said a little bit more than that, but I would rather leave that off because it's not conducive to this conversation.

I do have, (another Non-Attendee) wanted to be here. She's worked twelve days straight and is taking care of herself today. She did write something that she asked me to read. Understand that, not being here, she wanted to participate 💎 in this conversation. What she said was:

"The death of (Vanessa's husband) hit us all hard, but it hit Vanessa a lot harder. Not only is she the primary caretaker of a bunch of kids, but she is left with the financial burden from that. She was also forced to come out when it should have ultimately been her decision to tell people.

The fact that some individuals had a bad reaction to it is completely messed up. I thought we are a church that accepts everyone. Why does it seem like we aren't being accepting of the fact that this beautiful woman was forced to come out in one of the most horrible ways? Because trust me, it isn't easy to be the congregation's 💎. Especially if reason people are doing such is because of coming out.

I for one stand with Vanessa and love her completely. I love how beautiful, strong, and intelligent she is. The fact that her priesthood could be revoked is completely messed up. I don't at all think that just because this woman is out now, by being forced to come out, should also lead to her priesthood being revoked.

I also believe that a lot of the higher-ups don't understand the first thing of how it affects the lives of people that an individual comes out to. There's some things my family doesn't even know about how I felt going to a church and being the gossiping of the church."

And she continued with that.

"There was also a lack of pastoral care, not just for the congregation, but for Vanessa's family. Where's the love and support that the pastoral team hasn't shown? When are we going to get the pastoral care that is very much needed?"

A lot of what's been said today, and this is me, has clarified a lot for him. He understands that this pause is giving that chance of discovery.

It definitely has eased my heart. I can say, for me, when I first learned while I was at work, I stopped on the way home where (Attendee) was at the time, and walked in and was just like "I'm done. I can't go through this again. I'm done, I quit, I resign from the church. I can't" He looks at me and says, "Wait a minute, first what's going on?" I went in really hot and just like (pounds fist).

I'm thankful for him, because in the one moment where I completely lost all of my cool he kept a level head. And he reminded me "This is not the LDS church". I'm going to say it again: "This is not the LDS church." The thing that drew us partly to Community of Christ is the fact that if there is something in place that we feel needs a change, needs to be made, there's a process we can do it. While we're still kind of clueless on the whole method of that, we're learning.

So while yes, there's been a lot of hurt, a lot of anger, a lot of pain, and at times questioning my own willingness to stay in an uncomfortable place, I won't leave this church. I believe what we have is worth fighting for, and to hear the others say that they question whether or not they can be here or continue to come or even be involved, destroys me because I don't want that for anyone. ♦ spiritually, utterly destroy this church if we -

And while I see that the pain that my children are going through, and I had to let them know I had no answer, and while we may not be getting everything we want answered in the manner that we want it answered, I am reflecting on that as a parent who, I can't answer their question, because I don't have the information where certain things are confidential. I understand that coming from the World Church that in certain conversations certain things are confidential. I can understand that. It doesn't mean it doesn't make me mad, but I do understand it.

There's a bigger part of me that just wishes I was seeing a sane response played out. And I ♦ was here. I'm wishing that this same response was being played out toward (Non-Attendee), and harm, and danger, and destruction he created in (Attendee)'s life, and what he has done to someone who is a loving, caring, supportive person. And he continues to hold priesthood. He may not be acting on it, but he continues to hold that position that's in the church. But Vanessa, who has been nothing but grace, and love, and find every way humanly possible to love each and every person, got knocked down again, when it shouldn't have been.

I know that this is not the end of the journey for Vanessa. Logically I can see that, but my heart is kind of rage-filling, but that's okay.

It feels like there's been a very definite disconnect, because while (Attendee) may not have been very vocal at first, she has spoken very vocally, and nothing has happened. And it continues to harm her, and I can see that it harms her.

I don't know that I will understand why it happened the way it has, between- the difference between Vanessa and (non-Attendee). Unless (Non-Attendee) were willing to come down from his narcissism enough to admit what he has done. He's too much like my ex-husband.

I just want those feelings to be known. That frustration, that anger, that hurt. I just want it to be known.

Robin Linkhart: I'm hearing your deep connection with your children and your deep listening of their concerns, it connects with things you feel also, and when they put colorful language to it, it kind of helps that kind of come alive.

(laughter)

You also feel a lot of compassion that (Non-Attendee) voiced about the journey of coming out and how that happens, and how there can be grave injustice in that coming out if it's compromised in any way. And there's been- you have felt disconnected from leadership, but very connected to this group of people.

I heard a feeling of deep gratitude for what you've experienced, not only in your journey to this place, but being here today and having your sense of understanding. Some pain and discomfort about what it feels like to walk through this, but a deep sense of commitment to the journey.

I want to thank you for sharing your story, and how that really helps me connect with your feelings, and how that is part of your story and that makes perfect sense in the context of what you're experiencing.

(Attendee): Thank you, (Attendee). Next is (Attendee)

(Attendee)

(Attendee): I don't really have anything to say that hasn't been said already as far as the impact this has had on me.

I don't read scripture as much as I used to, but I still do. There's a lot of grace examples with Jesus, but the one that I like the most, that I had a little bit of a different take on, I don't even remember which gospel it's in, but Jesus is out preaching and a crowd of people just show up with a woman that wasn't just adulterous one, she was caught in the act. In the act. They drag her out to Jesus and they've got stones and said "Okay, according to Mosaic law she has to be stoned to death." So they hand him a stone and expect him to do it. Everybody usually takes this as "Okay, well he who was without sin can be the first stone, so none of us can do it", but the lesson for me was that Jesus could. He was the only one that could. And he let that stone drop. If He can let the stone drop for a sinner, I hope you can let the stone drop for a righteous woman.

Moderator: It sounds like there's a perceived lack of forgiveness that's happening. Is that what I'm getting from you? Like, "This happened, and Jesus preaches all this forgiveness, but here we are and we're not forgiving".

(Attendee): It's a compound thing, too. This isn't just this issue; this is [also] the timing of it. There was nothing good about this for Vanessa, at all.

(Attendee): Jesus drew a line in the sand. I feel like people here threw stones. I feel like the Pharisees threw a stone.

(Attendee): Yeah, the timing in Vanessa's life, but also timing for our congregation. Two weeks before Vanessa had her priesthood suspension Carla gave a sermon about Christ having his feet washed by the hair of a woman, and the Pharisees came in and condemned that woman and said "If you knew what she did you would not honor her priesthood and her authority to administer to you". Christ said to her, "No, I honor her. I know her heart. The circumstances be damned."

Then the pastorate team proceeded to wash the congregation's hands.

(Attendee): It was beautiful.

(Attendee): It was.

(Attendee): Two weeks before stones were cast at the person washing my hands! The timing is appalling! We listened to you! We paid attention!

Moderator: Where are you at, what are you understanding from this dynamic, and what you're getting from ♦?

Robin Linkhart: Well, I'm hearing a call to justice and prophetic truth. Shock and woundedness at what you have witnessed and how it's been experienced not just by Vanessa but all of you. And I would say-

(Attendee): It felt like, I don't want to put the focus off of the damage and harm done to Vanessa, but it also felt like "We don't care about the congregation either." Even though warning, after warning, after warning was delivered that you're going to blow this place apart, it didn't matter. "Blow it apart."

(Attendee): I put it in writing the night that this was brought up to the pastorate, and I mentioned specifically in my writing that this was going to cause huge pains in our congregation, and I said I would not throw the stone. It's all in writing, but it is in a confidential place and I did ask that it be kept confidential.

Moderator: Can you understand how we've arrived at these feelings of inconsistency? It seems like, for one, but also a lack of - it sounds like they feel like nobody's really listening to them.

Robin Linkhart: Yeah, I hear that, and I hear a sense of being cast out and not valued as people, as a faith community. I hear people doing the best they can to try to let somebody know what's happening, and begging for something to happen to make it stop.

(Attendee): Okay, next is (Attendee). (Attendee), thank you.

(Attendee)

(Attendee): First of all, I took some medication before I came to try to stop any panic attacks. We've been here a while. I don't think they're still in my system.

I recognize that I'm the only church leader in this room right now that some of you trust. I've been told that by a lot of people. While I'm honored, that trust is also a lot. I- [coughing] I'm also pretty sick.

I have not known what to say in this moment. I've told several people that I feel like I'm in the middle of a pond [on] paper-thin ice. I work for Community of Christ. I am not assigned to Salt Lake, but a lot of you have told me [that] the only reason you're here is because of me. My hope and that trust - I just want to thank you for that.

When I thought about what I wanted to say, I just kept coming back to this image. I don't know exactly what time (Vanessa's husband) died, but it was somewhere between the hours of 11:30 and 12:30 at night. I got a text the next morning from a friend of the congregation who used to

be a seeker, and she had been connected through Vanessa's sister-in-law; she knew what happened to (Vanessa's husband). She said, "This is bad. He's gone." I didn't want to believe it, because I had just talked to Vanessa about this and just had worked through the suicide attempt before, and I did not want to believe that it was "successful", and it was.

I was in the middle of a meeting for work, I turned my camera off, I texted the supervisor of that team, one other of my supervisors; I said "I gotta go." I drove down to Vanessa's. I texted Vanessa, assuming she wouldn't answer. I texted (Vanessa's daughter) and she answered and I said "I'm on my way. Am I helpful? Am I not? Let me know." She said, "(Vanessa's son and daughter) are asking questions, and (Vanessa's son) and I don't know what to say."

I showed up to their house, and there was a sister-in-law there, I'd never met her, she hugged me, we sobbed. Vanessa was downstairs asleep. (Vanessa's daughter) grabbed my hand, took me to her room, and we started playing Barbies. (Vanessa's son) came in and just like saying "Hey, did you hear that the sky is blue?", he said, "Hey, did you know my dad killed himself last night?" I took him and I said "You are loved. We love you (Vanessa's son). You know that we love you."

(Vanessa's daughter) came in and we just held each other and sobbed. I have no idea the timeline - Vanessa woke up, I was the first person that she hugged, she collapsed in my arms, literally dropping to the floor. We fell to the floor together, and the weight of her body crushed me. We were just on the floor.

(Attendee) showed up, (Attendee) showed up. Ward members showed up. Family showed up. I talked to the Bishop of the ward. I called (Vanessa's husband)'s work and told them he was gone. With the physical weight of Vanessa still imprinted on my body. I was so happy the way this community showed up for her. We had a GoFundMe, I was one of the- I don't even know; I was in a total blur. I saw the donations come in. I saw the ward show up in one of the most healing ecumenical- like, my Ex-Mormon heart was healed in a very big way. (Attendee) raised two thousand dollars in twenty-four hours to get her new flooring. I just kept thinking, "This is who we are! This is community! This is why I'm still a Christian!" Because, like (Attendee), my faith in God is paper, paper, paper-thin sometimes, but I believe in community.

I've been a big part of welcoming people into this congregation. I'll never forget when (Attendee) asked me to baptize him.

I have tried in all of my unfortunately ridiculously heterosexual cis-

(laughter)

Like, I have tried to listen, I have tried to be the best ally, I have tried to say that this place is different, and while I still think it is, I have to be honest. This hurts. This is hurtful. I made it very clear from the very beginning that I disagree with this decision with all of my heart. I have never wavered from that. That position has put me in a really uncomfortable situation, because I've been accused of not supporting leadership, or not providing the right amount of care, or not doing or not saying or whatever, but when you feel the physical weight of Vanessa on you, I can't support what's happening, and I never have. I don't blame any one person. These are my

callings, these are my friends, these are people who showed up for Vanessa in visible and invisible ways.

I do not know how to balance any of this, and I have felt ripped in a million pieces. I have been hesitant to make this about me, but I've not been well; I've lost weight, my anxiety is through the roof, I haven't slept, I've had people actively looking for other employment for me [and] I've been offered another job outside of Community of Christ, I've felt like a fraud, I've been heartbroken at some of the simplistic framing of this from people that I thought understood the queer community or the Ex-Mormon community, I've been torn to shreds over that and I have questioned my own integrity over this.

I don't want to give up, I don't want to find employment outside of Community of Christ, but I'm really wrestling with how to have integrity being, again what I've been told, The. Only. Church leadership, the only person who is employed by Community of Christ that people trust. I don't know what to do with that. All I've wanted was for everyone to win, and it turns out that all of my worst fears have come true. I hear how every player in this broader conversation has been misrepresented, misjudged, I'll use the word "attacked", and I haven't known what to defend and what to stand up for.

At the end of the day, I just think about answering those questions for (Vanessa's son), but also being - I don't even know what we're doing's for Vanessa, but the fact that she keeps showing up, and the fact that she doesn't want us to lose hope, and the fact that someone like little (Vanessa's daughter) trusts me and when she runs to the baptismal font during class because she just needs to cry, and I say "Hey (Vanessa's daughter), can I come down there and sit with you? I think the font's big enough for both of us", she goes "Yeah, you can come sit with me." I don't know how I can look at those kids in the eye and say that we value their family structure when we're doing this. I know that if that puts me at odds with World Church or whatever - again, these are all my friends. World Church is my friends, World Church is also me.

I don't know what to do with any of that. I'm so damn tired, because I really thought that that rally around the English family would carry us through, and that break, that very visible break, is what is splitting me in two.

I feel like a fraud, so I don't know why anybody trusts me.

(Laughter)

I don't know what else to say. I'm just really sad, obviously. Just really sad. I love everyone involved, and everyone on all the sides.

At the end of the day, what I keep coming back to is collapsing on the floor with Vanessa. That moment feels like the only thing that matters.

That's it. That's all I got.

Robin Linkhart: So (Attendee), I'm hearing a sense of responsibility and a weariness of the trust that this community places on you. Your gratitude for this community, and also a sense of

responsibility for this community, and your deep connection with Vanessa and her family and witnessing front-line response, and seeing the beauty of this community's response, and how the beauty of that feels completely opposite from a priesthood action to Vanessa. There's just this deep rupture of hurt and a sense of being criticized all around in how you're trying to bring support. There's uncertainty. The anxiety is an uncertainty that you feel in the face of all of that.

I think that, you didn't say this but I think you feel betrayed.

(Attendee): Yeah.

Robin Linkhart: and abandoned to some degree.

I want you to know that it all makes sense to me, and I understand.

(Attendee): I feel like I've gotten pushback when I said, "These are the messages that I'm hearing from the ground." Kate Kelly - I've been told "This isn't Kate Kelly. This isn't excommunication. This isn't..." I'm in this weird place because it's almost like when you're the messenger and you're trying to say "Hey, this is what's happening on the ground", but you're also what's happening on the ground. Some of the messages I have not necessarily agreed with that I've tried to share, but some of them I have.

And so I have felt betrayed and abandoned with the simplistic, maybe corporate line that I've gotten.

(Attendee): She's right. We do trust (Attendee). She's had the ultimate integrity, honesty, everything about her is good.

(Attendee): I'm a mess, (Attendee)!

(Laughter)

(Attendee): The way she has handled herself I wish everyone would. (Attendee) too. They've been such examples, and to realize they were out there - I knew they were to some degree, but I didn't know the whole degree. The degree which they were out there yelling in the wilderness, "This is bad! This is bad! Stop! Stop!" and they were just rolled over. I don't know; something's wrong in the institution to roll over them like that and not listen.

(Attendee): I love what you said. I am deeply sad that this has been like "Ex-Mormon shit!" and "We're weird!" and "We're full of drama" and all of that, when you were an expert and you weren't a resource that was utilized. I'm sad that the beautiful resource that you have freely given to all of us *and* to Community of Christ, *and* to Carla, and to everybody, I'm sad that that wasn't seen or recognized as the gift that it is.

I don't know if that makes up for it, but thank you, for even after having that ignored, you're still willing to be here. So thank you.

(Attendee): Can I reply to (Attendee)?

(Attendee): Sure.

(Attendee): Can I publicly thank you? You have been a fantastic listener to many people for what feels like to me a very long time right now.

(Attendee): It feels like 18 years.

(Attendee): I didn't know that you were holding trauma in your body every time we ask you to listen to us. I want to honor that and thank you for the gift that that is. It's a huge gift. I didn't know that you were giving us that gift.

(Attendee): I want to add to that and say "Thank you" too, and that I'm sorry, because this was never supposed to be something that you had to do, going to bat for Vanessa and queer people in general, and you chose to do it. I don't know of a better definition of "Ally" than that.

Moderator: You're carrying a lot of weight. You so beautifully described a feeling of weight that you *literally* felt from Vanessa, but on top of that you've got the emotions of her kids, you've got the emotion of your community, and you, it seems like, you're also kind of like the mediator for all of the conflict and you're fighting the good fight and you're trying to make a change. I really hope you have some help, 'cause that's too much for any one person to handle. If you need anything feel free to talk to me after, but I really hope that you've had some help through this process outside of this.

(Attendee): Thank you.

(Attendee): I'm going to kind of bridge- So that letter I wrote: I am going to apologize to you for, before you make your statement, only because I didn't know how things worked. I didn't know. I thought that there was an entire pastorate team and everybody was on that like (Attendee), and (Attendee), and (Attendee), and (Attendee), and (Attendee), and that everybody communally does what needs to get done. I didn't know until (Attendee) told me that the buck stops with you. I didn't know that.

I tried to write that letter saying "Hey, I'm concerned for our whole community and I'm concerned for the whole pastorate care of the community". I didn't know how ultimately this structure was set up; that you decided everybody on the committee, everyone reports to you, and I just didn't know all of that.

Your response to me makes so much more sense, 'cause I didn't know that, 'cause it was presented as so "community", which, I love that you've given us that gift, but like I didn't *know* that *you* built that community, and you're a part of that, but I didn't know how much of that was on you.

My letter wasn't ever meant to be a personal attack to you, but I understand that it was. I apologize.

(Attendee): Can I ask for just a pause? Could we take a mental health break?

(Laughter of agreement)

Moderator: Yeah! Take a few minutes. I also just want to say that on the time, it is almost 5:30.

(Attendee): Oh, wow.

Moderator: So there is also going to be some emotional burnout that happened, and it's going to continue to happen, and it's going to happen even when you go home. It's important for you all to plan ahead for that. Make sure you're hydrating, using coping skills, surrounding yourself with positive support.

So now you have a few moments to try that before Carla. Just take a couple minutes; bathroom break, get some water.

(Several minutes pass by for the break)

Moderator: Are you guys all ready to get this party started again?

(Attendee): I just want to toss out there: I did not intentionally sign up last.

Carla Long

(Attendee): Alright, I'll turn the time over to Carla.

Carla Long: I have so much to say. I have no chance of saying things that I wanted to say, that I wanted to make known. All that seems not so important.

I'm not another person who gets depressed very often. I'm a person who sleeps eight hours a night, I eat three full meals a day, I'm just really normal. Normally I'm just who you know I am, and this has broken me. I am broken, and I have been broken for a long [time].

(Carla's child) asked me, she's like, "When are you going to cry again today, mom?" She knows I'm ready💎.

I have made a lot of mistakes over the last month and a half, two months, three months, whatever. I am so sorry those mistakes caused you more pain, caused me working💎, and has caused Vanessa pain. If I could go back and do things again I would do them very differently.

I love this congregation so much. I love how quirky we are, I love how low-church we are. I love that you can depend on each other to get through those hard, hard times that you've all had. I have sat down with everyone in this circle and heard about your lives, about your pain, about your hurt. I know what you've been through, I don't know everything you've been through, but I know what you've been through. I have cried for you, and bled for you, and only only only wanted to create a space where you would feel at home and safe and like you had found your place. That's all I've ever wanted. I am heartbroken that this is not that space for you.

I have taken a lot of hits in the last month or so, too. Sometimes I feel like I'm swiss cheese; things just keep going through me and going through me. I have felt so much anger. SO much anger at things that do not feel fair. I recognize knowing how I feel is really important.

Even though you may not think it, you may think that- you may think whatever you want to about me, but Vanessa is in my heart and in my head all the time. When (Carla's child) wakes me up

at 4:45 in the morning, which he does frequently because he comes in and sleeps in the bed, I am awake for the rest of the time and the only person I'm thinking about is Vanessa, and her priesthood status, and this situation, and how I can make it so that people feel safe in the congregation again, how I can make it so Vanessa can be whole.

I am so, so sad that this is where we are. I'm so, so sorry for the hurt that I have caused to everyone in this circle, for the pain that I have inflicted upon your lives. I hate it so much, and I punish myself for it all the time. I'm so sorry.

I'm done.

Moderator: Thank you, Carla. Thank you for all of your honesty. I think you all have a certain perception about what's happening. Do you see it differently now?

(Attendee): Can ♦ say that I'm sorry for any pain that we've caused you for our misunderstanding and for not seeing how thoroughly this affected you. I saw you as another victim in this, but I see how truly that was not ♦

(Attendee): ♦ that this has happened today. I'm kind of grateful for it. I was telling ♦ earlier I've heard everyone. We've both talked to each other. I think we've all been so caught up in what we're saying, I know I've done this, that this has afforded me the opportunity to sit and hear my friends and their pain, and how much we do lean on and support each other. It's just a ♦. But it's happened, and I know more about so many of you than I ever did before. It just makes me care about you and love each of you even more.

(Attendee): Can I reply to Carla?

One of the multiple elephants in the room, I think, is cultural differences. I think that those have been really painful for you, and I'm so sorry that there's been that pain as you've been here. One of the ways that has affected us as a congregation, I think, is that it's been hard for us to sometimes even understand the facts about what you're saying about this situation because our paradigms are so different.

In the last week or so I've been replaying every single thing that I have heard you say about this situation to try to make sense of it. What could Carla's perspective possibly be? How could I put these phrases together in a way that makes sense? It was really hard for me, and I think that's because I have a whole lot of cultural blindspots, blindspots I didn't know that I had. I finally, a couple days ago, able to start making some sense of it and I was like "Wait a second... I think Carla had a plan". I literally did not see that until two days ago. I think that you had tried to tell me that, and I just could not hear that because I had a lot of blindspots and I was really emotional and we weren't communicating effectively. I don't think that's your fault, and I'm sorry for treating you like you didn't have a plan.

Moderator: I want to comment on your comment also, because you said something about maybe not wanting this to happen today, but look at all the progress you guys made as a community. Even if nothing *really* comes from this, you guys have been able to sit down and talk about your differences like humans, or adults!

This is how change happens. This is how we grow as people, and being able to see the noble intent that we have. And that even though we as people might have tough decision to make, doesn't mean we're bad people. Keep that in mind.

I, as a therapist, think that hopefully this is really great for all of you guys to sit down and be able to get this out.

(Attendee): I have a very real fear that Vanessa's private sex life has been put on the altar, that everybody showed up here honestly, and truthfully, and respectfully, and put everything out on that altar to try to protect her, and that none of it matters and it doesn't change a damn thing.

Moderator: I'm going to let Robin respond to that one.

(Attendee): That's what's going through my head too. This has been really good, but if nothing happens-

(Attendee): Then we've just participated in our own spiritual abuse.

Robin Linkhart: I want to respond to that, but I know that (Attendee) still hasn't had the opportunity to speak. Are you okay if I wait until after (Attendee) speaks?

(Attendee): [Yes.]

(Attendee)

(Attendee): I was asked to make this about me and how this situation has affected me. I hate that, because I want to center Vanessa, but I am going to try and answer the prompt that was given to me, which is "How has this affected me?"

I want to honor that what I have to say may be hard for Carla. Carla, I want to lead with, none of this is personal. Some of it is about you, but I don't blame you as a person for the actions that I think you've been forced to take, including actions that were between you and me in this situation. So I am sorry if this is hard to hear, and I think it might be, but I really want to emphasize that this is not personal, if that makes sense at all.

There's a Steven Robinson quote from my very Mormon childhood that has been echoing in my head a lot lately. Steven said:

"Enduring is not always overcoming; sometimes enduring means being crushed and ground to powder with His name on your lips."

I feel like that's where we are, that as a congregation we're being crushed, ground to powder, and crying out "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!", and not having any response from the heavens, or from Missouri, or from anyone except each other. Maybe that's what it means to be in a community, is that when we cry out, we answer.

Lately I have believed that my emotions about the actions taken against Vanessa's priesthood status were not approved of. I have believed that my perspective of what is important and what

is not important has not just been disagreed with, but has been not even seen with a curious stance or well-grasped. Instead, there has been quickness to jump into correcting my beliefs about what is important and what is not important. There has not been curiosity after that of whether the correction helped me feel better about anything.

As someone who is only involved in the action against Vanessa's priesthood in a very tertiary way, if that, if I cannot be heard without my relatively calm thoughts shot down, I cannot imagine that those who are more emotionally impacted by this situation have been able to find space for their emotions and their perspectives to be heard in curiosity or compassion.

So what is my perspective? I am horrified and appalled that no flexibility can be given in either actions or timelines. That no flexibility to a young widow with children who are listening to see if they should also vilify their mother-

If we are moving to a principles-based model, and our documents *explicitly* read that adverse action against priesthood *MAY* be taken, not that it *MUST* be taken, then why are we allowing principles of caring for vulnerable widows and orphans to be secondary to someone at World Church's desire for immediate enforcement against a "vice" from an unwritten vice list? I believe this shows upside-down values, which literally brings shame to the name of Christ in our local area. I see this as shockingly, horrifyingly wrong.

Please see that I have not said that the church should abandon the monogamy teachings, or that it shouldn't abandon them. I am talking about elevating the enforcement of an unwritten vice list above a principle which has been central to Christianity since before the New Testament was written.

Every time someone tells me "but a rule was broken", or tells me "The appropriate avenue to address your concerns here is to amend [World Conference Resolution] G-7 to remove the monogamy language," I feel less and less hopeful that I will ever be seen or understood. I feel less hopeful that my congregation will ever be able to uphold two-thousand year old Christian ethics that are central to the way we are supposed to be showing love. I feel more and more alone, and frankly abandoned.

Every time that I am told that the church can love, support, and take care of Vanessa's family without allowing Vanessa to continue as active priesthood, I wonder how people cannot see or acknowledge that church discipline action of any kind, temporary or permanent, is a heavy stressor for Vanessa, and a giant flashing neon sign to her children during an unspeakably painful and sensitive time for her family. When this is ignored or goes unspoken, Vanessa is being ignored, and her precious children, many of whom have lost other parents, and would be expected to need profound support in continuing to trust their only remaining parent, are being ignored.

Watching this immoral harm perpetrated against these vulnerable people whom I love harms me. Seeing injustice and harm perpetrated against my loved ones is actively harming me as well as the other witnesses. *This* church harmed me in September. I am absolutely appalled that when I spoke to honor the trauma in the room during joys and concerns, and invited us to be

proud of the work that we have done individually and as a group, and gentle as we hold that work that we have done, that within minutes my words were used to silence all of us as our position was reframed as solely the result of Ex-Mormon trauma. I continue to be absolutely appalled each and every time that my words about our trauma continue to be used to minimize and deflect away from the real harm that is being done in real time, separate from any of our past trauma.

I do not regret the words that I said, but I have come to regret my willingness to stand up in this space and honor us in the only way that I know how to honor people. I no longer feel that it is safe for me to speak my words to my friends in this space, out of fear that they will again be weaponized to harm both me and those that I love.

Real harm was done here. It was not just our past trauma.

So that's my answer to the question of how this has affected me.

I was also asked to answer the question of what we need to heal. My answer to that is my opinion. I'm not married to my answer. I've done some brainstorming and I'll share my thoughts.

I believe that we need World Church to be hyper-focused going forward on how to love and protect Vanessa. We need policies developed *immediately* to ensure that more important principles never are made secondary to enforcement of a vice list, whether written or unwritten. I want World Church to lead out actively and immediately in finding creative ways that Vanessa's gifts can continue to be visibly used in our congregation.

I want a formal apology issued to Vanessa for the lack of normal historic Christian focus on caring for her as a widow with children. I want a formal apology issued to me, as an individual, and I want individual apologies issued to every person in this room for the harm that has been done to us as we were forced to watch violence be perpetrated to a woman who had already suffered unimaginable violence.

My hope is that the sense of active harm and the sense of frank betrayal that I am feeling will be reduced by these repairing actions to the point that I, and everyone else in the congregation, might be able to stay here in our local community. I don't want to lose this, and it will be lost if we don't have someone lead out immediately in two ways: first, a realignment to basic historic Christian focus on protecting widows and orphans, and second, on quick thinking and implementing of creative ways to protect and support and love Vanessa, including honoring Vanessa's beautiful giftedness in congregational ministry.

That's all I have to say.

Robin Linkhart: I heard a lot of prophetic statements, (Attendee). For me, they focus on the heart of who Christ is and the heart of how we should look and act in community. I heard your anger and appalled feelings, horrified feelings, and a call to action to use principles in a way they are intended to be used, and to put the most vulnerable in the center of that lens, and a specific statement about widows and their children.

I also heard you speak to a sense that you have heard of using non-vice lists and principles to talk about approaches to these kinds of situations being absolutely not meeting the need, and upside-down application of what we say that we believe.

I heard you share about feeling unheard and dismissed, and sometimes being judged and shamed in that sense, and your prophetic statement that that which goes unspoken goes unheard and ignored on behalf of Vanessa, and she loses her voice in the context of that happening.

I heard you talk about pain that has resulted from, I'm going to say Community of Christ, both in the congregation and beyond, who are smokescreening and I would call it even gaslighting by pointing to Ex-Mormon trauma, and minimizing the trauma that is happening in the now, that's happening here in this place and throughout the community. That is also being used to deflect answering hard questions, and to take responsibility for wrong actions.

I didn't get it all down, and I would love to have a copy of what you shared, but I heard you very specific restating things that need to happen from your perspective, that need to happen as soon as possible, including a hyper-focus on how to love and protect Vanessa, to liberate her giftedness for the community to use, and work here.

I also heard you say that if *all* those things happen, we *might*, might, have a chance at healing.

I want you to know that I'm hearing you, and everything you said makes sense.

(Attendee): Can you see how I would feel hurt and betrayed?

Robin Linkhart: Yes! Yes-

(Attendee): Can you see how I would feel appalled and shocked?

Robin Linkhart: Yes.

Discussion on Future

(Attendee): I think too, that it's important that the church understand that all of us have- I mean, we've been told we're disruptive, we've been told we're attacking, we've been told all this and that, but actually everybody here has given quite a gift in the fact that we've kept it all here, in-house. Somebody said they hadn't talked to their parents, maybe it was (Attendee), I can't remember, because they were afraid of not wanting to say bad things outside about Community of Christ, because we're all desperately wanting to preserve this church. This community.

I mean, we know how to blow things up.

(Laughter)

(Attendee): If we wanted to blow it up, we'd blow it up.

(Attendee): Yes we do!

(Attendee): We don't, but we need the church to respond, just like (Attendee) said; her list was perfect. Do those things, everything's good, we're all good.

(Attendee): We're not asking them to stop the priesthood action?

(Attendee): That was not on my list, and I don't know whether Robin has the power to do that. My understanding, which is limited, is that Robin does *not* have that power, so I didn't put it on the list of things that I think that Robin has the power to do.

(Attendee): But we're hearing both that Robin doesn't have the power to do that, and it's a local congregation, so somebody in this room has that power.

(Attendee): I think somebody not in this room has that power. I think the First Presidency has that power.

(Attendee): The letter in the note says that (Mission Center President) is the next line of appeal. So I would ask Carla *and* Robin to both approach (Mission Center President), have Vanessa file the appeal and grant an appeal for all of our sakes, that's my understanding.

(Attendee): Could I correct what I said really fast before you reply? 'Cause I think I said something that I don't actually agree with.

I think that Robin may have the authority to consult with (Mission Center President), or respond, if it is appealed to Robin. I would hope that the appeal would be successful on grounds that Vanessa requested leave without using the word "leave", prior to any of this occurring, and that properly she should have been on leave, which would have made it impossible to take action during this time.

I think that those would have been appropriate grounds to say "Oh, darn it, we can't take action now. What we have to do is backdate a leave when this first all came out in September." I think that could still be done.

(Attendee): I would challenge back when all this was happening ♦ back when ♦ and Vanessa ♦.

(Words of agreement)

(Attendee): There's a date in the timeline when Vanessa requested to leave the pastorate.

(Attendee): And certainly, from our perspective of the congregation, it was "Don't call her about Sunday school anymore. She needs a break for her family". I don't know if the word "leave" was used or not, but when I talked to Lach [Mackay] he openly was like "Well, why wasn't she on leave? 'Cause this would be a non-issue."

Robin Linkhart: It actually would still be an issue, but what I need you to hear me say is do not do what (Attendee) was telling you. I need to just say a couple things:

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

I'm sorry I didn't come sooner. I was not seeing the depth and the magnitude and the ramifications from afar. I misinterpreted, and I also put a Community of Christ person feel just angry and pissed off 💎, and I put that 💎 on yours, and I did not hear it as I needed to hear it from who *you* in the core of who you are.

(Attendee), I did not know that you and others still felt connected to me as your first pastor. I didn't realize you still have a need to be seen and heard by me, because of the relationship that we shared, and I'm sorry.

On behalf of Community of Christ, I want to apologize for the pain that has happened in the wake of human error, and misunderstandings, and a desire to be faithful, and trying to do the right thing.

I don't have a magic wand, but I have a strong voice, and I have influence. What I want to do is to try to find a third way that we can work on. In a state of suspension we have a lot of latitude to explore that. I can't make any promises, because I am not the ultimate power.

It's also connected; we are interconnected with each other beyond this place. That's a stewardship of holding something very tenuous together. That can be difficult, but I think we have a chance to try and make it better, and I will work on it.

This is really complicated, because we do uphold the principle of monogamy.

(Attendee): I'm really mad at Joseph Smith.

(Laughter and agreement)

(Attendee): (Jokingly) That's a whole 'nother meeting though!

(Attendee): We can do a Sunday school series on that one. January and February

(Attendee): (Jokingly) I'd like to apologize for all my ancestors.

(Laughter and talking over each other)

(Attendee): At Vanessa's recommendation, and it's one that 💎 have as well, that after having read it probably three times in the last month or so, is the book "Shameless: [A Case for Not Feeling Bad About Feeling Good (About Sex)]" by Nadia Bolz-Weber, and I would challenge you to read that, because it is an amazing book at what sexual ethics can be in a Christian church.

I think that more than a lot of this, this book has changed where I'm at. I don't recommend a whole lot of books, especially non-fiction books, that one is at the top of my list. The only thing I could rate anywhere near 💎. To me that is how 💎.

Public Statements of Affection and Thankfulness

(Attendee): Can I say something? We're in the middle of a pond on thin ice. I recognize that my perspective is precedent ♦ so I want to go on public record, and thank both Robin and Carla for showing up in the ♦.

I hope the tension of folks who did not think this was going to go well today. Carla and Robin mean a lot to me on a very deep, personal level. I think you you showed up with faith, and you showed up with grace and dignity and maturity. I have a lot of hope.

I just think that that public thanking to both of you is important in this.

I know that at times things have felt like I have not been supportive of either of you, but I hope that you can hear me say that throughout this whole thing I have done my best to hold you ♦. Upholding what feels like an impossible dichotomy.

I was really, really worried about today. I heard all of the reasons from people, and the words that they were concerned- like the tenor that you weren't concerned that they were concerned- that this meeting was going to have. I don't think that those words necessarily happened, which was good. For those of you who have concerns, and I'm assuming that ♦ talking about, but I think that both Carla and Robin showed up today in a way that we needed them to. I just want everyone to hear my gratitude for them, because was big and healing for me.

(Attendee): Thank you.

(Attendee): We've met - we appreciate our moderator.

Moderator: I feel so much love radiating from all of you, and passion, and this amazing drive to get behind your people. I think that says a lot about your community, your congregation, and just willingness to go to bat for each other. I think that will take you far.

That's kind of all of the-




It was nice to be here and-

Does anyone have any questions or concerns?

(Attendee): Well, I just- I've been watching you the whole time. I felt like there was a point of change where , maybe, you came here with one sort of set of assumptions and thoughts about what was happening and at some point [you] kind of got it. I really appreciate that. At least I think I'm reading you right.

All of us want the best for this congregation. We are hoping against hope that you can help figure out a way to-

Robin Linkhart: Thank you, (Attendee).

I know my response to your email was short, but we *all* want the same thing. We , and in my experience, with these kinds of things- I mean, we all come with our own perspective, but when we show up and listen deeply, transformation and understanding  I wouldn't happen without that .

(Attendee): Just to kind of add to that, I wanted to say how grateful I am to be a part of a community where this can happen, a part of a community where we stand up when we see injustice. A community with friends who listen to our pain, and pastors who love us enough to admit when they could have done things better, and love us enough to keep trying so much, and have apostles who will sit down and listen to us. I'm really, really grateful that I'm a part of that.

(Attendee): There's a few people who aren't here that have just kind of gone after that day happened. I don't know, I hope there's a way to reach out and -

(Attendee): I have been thinking about the (Attendee) that were in this room and felt-

(Attendee): Actually (Attendee) was here before you got here.

(Attendee): Oh, no, yeah, I meant those *like* her.

(Attendee): Oh, gotcha.

(Attendee): Or (Attendee). [She's] one of the most brilliant people that I know. I love-

(Attendee): She ran church last week.

(Attendee): And I imagine she would be here if she could.

(Indiscernible talking over each other, concerned about those not in attendance)

(Attendee): I wondered if (Attendee), (Attendee), (Attendee), or (Attendee) if you would like to say anything. I know you didn't sign up to speak, but still, if you'd like to mention anything.

(Attendee): I gave Robin a paper here, and I think it would be an appropriate closing prayer, so when we're ready.

(Attendee): (Attendee), do you wanna .

(Laughter)

(Rock, paper, scissors being played)

(Attendee): While you guys argue it out, I'd like to suggest that before we have the closing prayer, maybe we could sing a verse of "For Everyone Born" together?

(Attendee): I'd like that.

Parting Question

(Attendee): You had said that you'd answer my question after she went. Could I get an answer to that?

Robin Linkhart: I'm sorry, you're going to have to repeat it. After everything...

(Laughter)

(Attendee): I'm just really concerned. I do feel like this was healing, but I also feel like I'll be holding my breath. We can't hold our breaths indefinitely. I'm very worried that after everyone's laid everything out, I feel like Vanessa has laid herself very freely on the altar, and everyone here has shown up to do the same. That if the baby is still going to be cut in half, we just participated in our own abuse.

Robin Linkhart: I hear you. I am committing to doing what I can to have a positive impact. I can't make any promises, because it doesn't belong just to me.

(Attendee): Do you have a response to that at all?

Carla Long: I have been- ♦ I had a plan. I do. The reason I put her on suspension was so that it wasn't going to be an automatic something. I feel like in some ways that people think that suspension is *the* release, but it's not. It's exactly what (Attendee) said; it's a time to explore, it's a time I committed myself to finding a fair way as well. Having brought Robin come out here was a really big step for that. I needed her to hear from *you*. I needed her to hear these words, and hear what I've been hearing, because it's bigger than me. It's me, but it's bigger than me.

I have cut arrow, after arrow, after arrow when all I'm trying to do is find a way where we can make it work.

That's my response. I'm still trying. I haven't given up. That's why I lay awake every single morning wondering, praying, "God, what could we do?" That's what I've been doing.

I know what you think of me. I get it. But I'm still going to keep trying.

I'm so glad that Robin was here to hear your words, because I could not adequately tell her what you were telling me.

(Attendee): Given that, I'm still concerned of the continuing abuse that Vanessa is experiencing just by the sheer fact that it exists.

I will leave that, because she is actually waiting in my home. So I will go and be with the person that laid herself on the altar.

(Attendee): I'm going to grab a stack of hymnals.

(chatting while hymnals are passed out)

Final Sharing

(Attendee): I do want to share, I'm just trying to get my composure here.

I have been a part of this congregation in a very real way. I feel that I'm a member. That I tend- that I used to be a member of this congregation, but in the midst of what. And that doesn't impact the amount that I care for every single person. But I've also felt very much caught in the middle of caring for people and loving the church that provided a space for me that no other church could, at least not in the way that I wanted it to.

I guess I just hope that you hear me when I say that I truly feel a deep sense of love and compassion for every single person. I mean it when I say that I hurt. As much as I wish I didn't I can't help it

I do things to help mitigate facts and not take it so personally, and for the most part I am successful, but I still feel like this.

Being in a unique position in leadership in a way that is separate from leadership of the congregation, I feel for those in the priesthood category of leadership and those who are on the pastorate team, and that they understand the struggle that it is to find community.

But I'm not, because I'm one of those in regards to this journey to figure out where my home was. How I went back to that place, because I thought it was, for a moment, and it taught me that it wasn't.

In some ways I'm sorry that I haven't offered better pastoral care, and that I've attached judgements and assumptions and things people have said. But I care.

Closing

(Attendee): Alright, you want to pass out the hymn books before-

Page 285. I'm not going to ask anyone to play it, so we'll just do it a cappella. I don't know if anyone has a favorite verse, I wondered about verse four.

"For just and unjust, a place at the table,
abuser, abused, with need to forgive,
in anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy,
for just and unjust, a new way to live."

(Sing verse 4 and the chorus together)

(Attendee): Shall we stand as we pray?

(Attendee): Be our shepherd so we do not want. Lead us to green pastures, show us the still waters. Restore our souls and lead us into the place of righteousness, for we walk in the valley

of the shadow of death, and we fear. Be with us, comfort us, prepare a table for us, that we may rejoice again in your abundance. Anoint us with the oil of wisdom. Allow our cups to run over with grace. Illuminate our path forward with goodness and mercy, that we may dwell in your peace forever.

Amen.

Appendix

There were many resources that were mentioned throughout the transcript. They have been collected here to provide transparency regarding how they were being used.

A. Oct 22 Onsite Apostolic visit - 2:00 PM at the CoC SLC Church
Building

A couple of important notes:

1. We were not able to find a pastor in the progressive clergy group to help us. We have been able to find a professional moderator who was recommended by the congregation and (person) has approved for us to use congregation funds to pay the moderator for their service from the budget.
2. If you want to share your experience as part of the sharing portion of the service, you need to sign up electronically prior to the meeting or before the start of the meeting on the ledger provided at the entryway.
3. The time to submit questions has passed. A final email and facebook review was conducted at 8:26 PM and questions will be sent to Robin later this evening to give her a chance to prepare.
4. We will start promptly at 2:00 PM. If you want to speak during the sharing portion, you need to email Jason prior to 1:30 PM Saturday (Item A) or sign up in person at the entrance and the sign-up will stop at 2:00 PM.

Oct 22 Meeting Agenda:

The congregation has requested a **3rd party moderator** who is not involved with the Community of Christ. Carla and Tyler were tasked to see if there is a member of the progressive clergy in SLC who could help.

We would like to approach this difficult discussion utilizing the **Rapoport Intervention** format for sharing and listening. It is listed below as Item C. Although it is a couples therapy tool, we feel the active listening and appropriate speaking requirements provide a healthy framework for covering pain and frustration.

- Discovery - recreation of milestones in the priesthood discussion and actions regarding Vanessa. Suggested/Iterated timeline is under Item D.
- Questions from anyone involved asked in writing and anonymized:
- Questions will be delivered electronically by 8:00 PM on Thursday October 20th to (Attendee) (Item A below).
- Questions will be sent to Apostle Linkhart on Friday to help her prepare for our meeting.
- The ongoing list of questions will be posted to this document and shared (read-only) with anybody who requests access (Item A below)

Question 1: Why did we have to ask Robin to come out given her history with our congregation? Why didn't she reach out to us in the form of pastoral care?

Question 2: Does World Church care that we are suffering? If so, why have we seen no significant evidence of this caring until now?

Question 3: Does World Church ask church leaders to follow the rules for church discipline laid out by Joseph Smith, Jr. in his letter from Liberty Jail, which states that a reprove must be quickly followed by a noticeable, visible increase in expressed love in order to protect the relationships between church leaders and congregants? If so, does this apply to leaders above the level of local pastor?

Question 4: Which World Church leaders and/or employees discussed Vanessa's post *before* the conversation in which it was mentioned to Carla that Vanessa needed to be released from priesthood?

Question 5: Which church leaders participated in the conversation with Carla in which it was mentioned that Vanessa needed to be released from priesthood?

Question 6: Where and when can we expect to see a comprehensive and current list of behavioral requirements for active priesthood?

Question 7: Are active priesthood holders permitted to discuss past rule-breaking behavior in public without consequences, as long as it isn't current behavior? Does the same answer apply to all the behavioral rules? If not, which ones and why?

Question 8: What is World Church's stance on "don't ask don't tell" in the context of priesthood behavior enforcement?

Question 9: What is the definition of "public" in the context of "it can't be made known in public or we have to act"?

Question 10: World Church doesn't permit ordained women to retain active priesthood status if their husbands take additional wives. What is the reasoning behind disciplining a woman for choices made by her partner?

Question 11: What are the similarities and differences in the way the Faithful Disagreement policy can look when used by liberal congregations as opposed to conservative congregations?

Question 12: BYU has a policy that they overlook behavioral rule violations if the violation comes to light as part of a report of sexual assault or an investigation into sexual assault. This applies even if the information becomes public. Does Community of Christ have any remotely similar policy stating that violations can be overlooked when there is a broader purpose, such as protecting people's safety, or keeping the church from becoming a party to domestic abuse?

Question 13: What is "extensive counseling" in the context of the process of priesthood status changes?

Question 14: Does world church consider polyamory a part of the LGBTQ+ community? Is it recognized as a sexual orientation or defined at all in world church teaching.

Question 15: My understanding is that Carla and others in leadership were aware of Vanessa's polyamorous relationship possibly years prior to it becoming public. Why was disciplinary action not taken as soon as it became known to any leadership? Why was it only when it became public?

Sharing: Individuals who sign up either electronically (Item A below) prior to the meeting or before the start of the meeting on the ledger provided at the entryway will be given the opportunity to share their experiences regarding the actions regarding Vanessa. The consensus of the group was not to limit time but as a courtesy to all involved to prepare for this portion with a concise description of their personal experiences.

Response: Apostle Linkhart

Discussion: Item B below is provided as potential options for sharing and discussion. All participants are asked to consider the questions and come prepared with suggestions.

Identification of next steps

ATTACHMENTS:

Item A: (Attendee)'s contact information

- Email: (censored)
- Facebook: (censored)
- The private messages inbox from non-facebook friends will be checked at 7:00 PM on Thursday.

Item B: Suggested questions for sharing and discussion

- What does healing in this situation look like?
- What does our congregation need in order to heal?
- What is at the source of our pain and frustration?
- What has been the hardest part about the last few weeks?

- What is our hope for the future of the congregation?
- How can we restore trust between the congregation and the church?

Item C: Rapoport Intervention

No one can engage in persuasion until both of you can state your partner's position to your partner's satisfaction. Slow down. Support your partner to stay in "what's this?" mode instead of "what the hell is this?" mode. Take turns as:

Speaker:

- No blaming, no "you" statements.
- Talking about your feelings
- Use only "I" statements about a specific situation
- State **positive** need. Within every complaint, there is a longing and a recipe.

Listener:

- Postpone your own agenda. Hear and repeat the content of the speaker's needs and perspective (the story).
- Hear the speaker's feelings (name emotions, feel them).
- Validate the speaker by completing the sentence, "It makes sense to me that you would feel that way and have these needs, because..."
- Okay to ask questions.

Flooded?

Take a break, self-soothe.

Item D: Timeline

Early August: Vanessa talks with Carla about how bad things are going at home with (Vanessa's husband) and asks to leave the pastorate, not be over Sunday School, and go back to being a "regular member" for the time being.

Aug 17: (Vanessa's husband) commits suicide in the middle of the night in the garage of the home while kids sleep. Vanessa and kids vacate the house at 2 AM so the police can investigate.

Sept 6: Vanessa made a Facebook post on her wall saying she will be posting about polyamory soon. Carla made a post on the congregation page announcing her call to the Presiding Bishopric.

Sept 7: Vanessa made a Facebook post on her wall stating that over four years ago she and (Vanessa's husband) opened their marriage.

Sept 7: Vanessa's Facebook post was seen by ?? who then said ?? to ??.

Sept 7: While Carla was in Independence, several apostles and a member of the first presidency noted that Vanessa's priesthood status was in question. Carla asked to wait a month before having the conversation with Vanessa due to the difficult situation and was told that she couldn't wait that long. (Mission Center President) was never brought up in the conversation.

Sept 9: PZP episode on nonviolence is released, featuring Vanessa.

Sept 10: (Vanessa's husband)'s funeral at the church

Sept 13: Vanessa was never removed from the pastorate chat group on Facebook and hadn't read or participated since the request to leave the pastorate. "Statement on Vanessa" popped up on the thumbnail and she opened and read the pastorate discussion about her and the directive from World Church.

Sept 14: The pastorate team met and sent questions concerning the action to Mission Center President

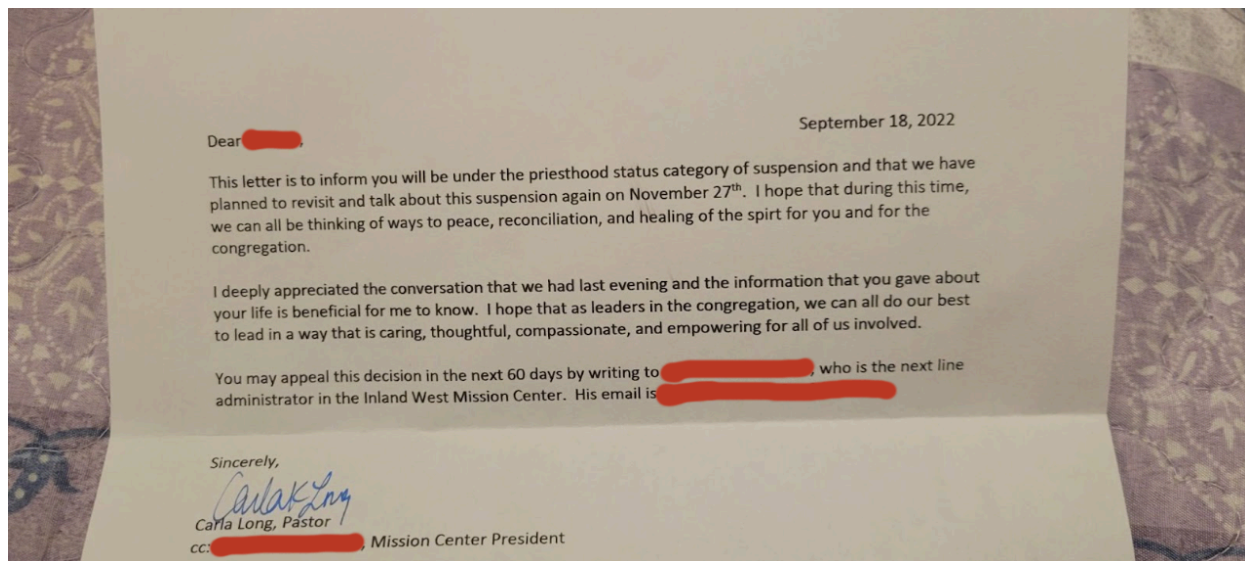
Sept 15: (Mission Center President) responded to the questions from the pastorate team.

Sept 15: Carla texts Vanessa "I am hoping that you have some time next week to meet with (Attendee) and me. Do you have an evening free? And if you want to, feel free to bring someone along:. Vanessa responded, "I guess Sunday or Monday evening I can present myself for execution..."

Sept 16: (Attendee) made a Facebook post in the congregation group discussing Jesus' teachings on love and punishment.

Sept 18: (Attendee) taught Adult Sunday School. During worship sharing in "Joys and Concerns" happened. Vanessa made a post in the congregation group suggesting the book Shameless by Weber. Vanessa's meeting with Carla (and (Attendee), (Non-Attendee), and (Attendee)) happened.

Letter from Sep 18 -



Sept 19: (Attendee) talked with three people (unsure if they are willing to be named) about her idea to serve communion on the sidewalk on the next communion Sunday. No planning was done via Facebook. (Carla's husband) made a Facebook post in the congregation group soliciting membership in a new committee to draft an amendment to G7 regarding non-monogamy.

Sept 22: (Carla's husband) made a Facebook post in the congregation group giving an update about the committee to draft an amendment to G7.

Sept 23: S'mores night at the (Attendee)'s.

Sept 23-25: Mission Center Conference was held in Spokane WA. Robin and Carla met and discussed Vanessa and the situation in Salt Lake.

Sept 25: A group discussion on what the congregation needs and the CofC legislative process was held during the Sunday School hour in the fellowship hall. Among other things, people said they wanted to talk to Robin.

Sept ?: The pastorate, via Carla, adamantly insisted to Robin that she needed to fly out. A visit was scheduled.

Oct 2: Communion was served by (Attendee) before church on the public sidewalk. (Attendee) started a Sunday School series about Mary Magdalene. Carla said "if anyone was hurt by my words, I'm sorry" from the pulpit.

Oct 9: Vanessa and the rest of the congregation learned during church announcements that Robin is coming to meet with concerned people on Oct 22.

Oct 13: (Carla's husband) made a Facebook post in the congregation group updating us about the committee to draft an amendment to G7.

Oct 16: Meeting held after church to establish framework for Oct 22 meeting and a draft agenda was put in place. (Attendee) spoke with Apostle Linkhart who agreed to the moderator and format for the meeting. Questions and timeline information was requested from interested participants until 8:00 PM Thursday October 28. (Attendee) will manage the document with view only access available to all who send him their email address for sharing on Google Drive.

B. The Sexual Ethics Statement



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Statement of Sexual Ethics

The International Leaders Council, a group of 84 representatives from around the worldwide church, considered the *Community of Christ Statement of Sexual Ethics*. The ILC reached general agreement about the statement's basic principles and affirmations, with specific concerns about how some phrases could be interpreted in various cultures. There may be additional revisions to this statement. Leaders in each field will determine how to best share materials and information in their cultural contexts.

We will ...

Uphold the principles of moral behavior and relationships provided in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6, approved by the World Conference, as foundational for sexual ethics throughout the worldwide church. These principles are:

- a. The worth and giftedness of all people
- b. Protect the most vulnerable
- c. Christ-like love
- d. Mutual respect
- e. Responsibility
- f. Justice
- g. Covenant
- h. Faithfulness

We also Affirm ...

- a. Sexuality is part of the goodness and sacredness of human creation and is not inherently sinful.¹
- b. Humans are born as sexual beings and sexually develop during various stages of their lives.

- c. Sexuality embraces the possibilities and joys of loving relationship, pleasure, reproduction, intimacy, and wholeness. All of these possibilities have physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects.
- d. Moral sexual relationships demonstrate the principles of Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness.
- e. People who engage in moral sexual relationships express sincere concern in motive and act for mutual consent, personhood, integrity, dignity, wholeness, and the Worth of All Persons. Human worth applies to all regardless of age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, or physical or mental capacity.
- f. The sacrament of monogamous marriage, based on the principle of covenant initiated by God, is the relationship through which sexuality can fulfill its potential to bless human lives. The sacrament of marriage stresses sexual fidelity to one's spouse. It promotes love, trust, companionship, intimacy, spirituality, and peace.²
- g. Couples involved in sexual activity have responsibility for each other's physical, mental, and spiritual health.
- h. Sexual ethics should be the same for all people without discrimination.
- i. People can lead fulfilling lives in harmony with God's will without being sexually active.³

In Addition, We ...

- a. Evaluate the morality of sexual activity by the degree of mature love, justice, covenant, and faithfulness present in a relationship.
- b. Stress that sexual desire itself does not morally justify sexual activity.
- c. Renounce as immoral sexual activities that are selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive.
- d. Denounce all forms of exploitation, abuse, and sexual violence. Sexual acts that degrade or dehumanize are contrary to God's will. No physical, emotional, or spiritual violence is acceptable.
- e. Offer safety and healing ministry to those who have been threatened, ostracized, abused, and violated, or whose relationships have been broken.
- f. Reject sexual expressions that damage or exploit others through harassment, violence, or abuse. These include, but are not limited to, sexual harassment,

pornography, genital mutilation, child abuse, incest, rape prostitution, and human sex trafficking.

¹ Some Christian traditions view sexual desire and subsequent actions as resulting from original sin and in need of constant forgiveness.

² Doctrine and Covenants 150:10a states that "monogamy is the basic principle on which Christian married life is built." The church recognizes civil marriages as valid. The church offers the sacraments of marriage, which is recognized as legal by most governments. In addition to the human commitment made that includes legal rights, the sacrament of marriage emphasizes God's desire to strengthen and enrich the marriage.

³ Christian tradition teaches that celibacy is a valid personal choice or even the Spirit's gift given to some as part of their discipleship or ministerial calling.

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C. The Social Media Ethics Statement



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Community of Christ Social Media Ethics Statement

What is an ethics statement?

An ethics statement provides general guidance. It may offer guidance in three ways:

1. provide rules or limits for behavior
2. name goals, values, or principles that define desirable or responsible action
3. describe quality of individuals or interactions expected for a community

An ethics statement may use any or all of these approaches to guide responsible action.

Community of Christ Social Media Ethics Statement

The mission of Community of Christ is to proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace. Social media provides opportunities for self-expression, community building, witness and education, faithful disagreement, and fulfillment of Christ's mission. Social media, which provides ways to make relationships and engage in dialogue, has tools to promote or diminish Christ's mission.

The purpose of this ethics statement is to affirm for Community of Christ disciples and priesthood that Christ's calling is lived out in all aspects of our lives including interactions on social media. Priesthood members and disciples of Jesus should consider the following guidance when using social media. The five elements of this guidance work together and should not be applied separately when applied to interactions and relationships on social media.

1. Promote Community

Do my responses and the media I share promote healthy lives and relationships in community?

Social media provide ways to express ourselves. We share through words, images, music, and video. Disciples of Jesus are encouraged to use social media to promote shared life in Christ. This includes celebrating life, praising God, praying with and for others, and bearing positive and prophetic witness.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God....

— Romans 12:2 NRSV

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

— Matthew 7:12 NRSV

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

— John 13:34-35 NRSV

2. **Empower Others**

Do my response and the media I share promote and build the worth of persons?

What we do on social media, like what we do in all relationships, can build up or tear down. Often, Paul instructs disciples of Jesus to focus on what builds up Christ and others.

Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

— Romans 14:19 NRSV

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

— Ephesians 4:29 NRSV

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

— I Thessalonians 5:15 NIV

3. **Affirm Diverse Perspectives**

Do I—or anyone—have a complete perspective? Do I trust that the Spirit moves in and through diversity, guiding us toward God's purposes? Have I listened to understand others who disagree?

Social media offer ways to discuss matters that affect our lives, families, community, and world. Discussions can lead to common consent and faithful disagreements. Whether building common consent or having faithful disagreement, disciples of Jesus are called to love one another, be quick to listen, use nonviolent language, and not think of themselves more highly than others.

...do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

— Galatians 5:13b-14 NRSV

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

— James 1:19-20 NRSV

...now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal, there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

— Colossians 3:8-11 NRSV

4. Courageously Challenge

When I challenge ideas or differ with others, what are my motivations? Whom does it benefit? Can I say clearly what shapes my feelings and point of view? Am I vulnerable to others? Can I offer a constructive alternative?

Disciples of Jesus are called to be a prophetic people and follow his example on social media. Through the Gospels, we see Jesus' disruptive and healing interactions with others. Before his prophetic ministry, Jesus was drawn into the wilderness to be tested and to discern. After, filled with the Spirit, his ministry drew controversy welcoming outcasts, forgiving sinners, confronting hypocrisy, and challenging worldly assumptions about power in word and action. Also, he was vulnerable to others' judgment. We are called to use words and actions that disrupt as well as heal to point to God's will and be vulnerable to judgment. We seek constructive alternatives for this world by discerning God's will together.

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness (justice), and all these things will be given to you as well.

— Matthew 6:33 NRSV, adapted

You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness. Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace. There are subtle, yet powerful, influences in the world, some even claiming to represent Christ, that seek to divide people and nations to accomplish their destructive aims. That which seeks to harden one human heart against another by constructing walls of fear and prejudice is not of God. Be especially alert to these influences, lest they divide you or divert you from the mission to which you are called.

— Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a-c

"For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye,

but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye?"

— Matthew 7:2-4 NRSV

5. Engage Others in Christ's Mission

Do the things I share engage others in Christ's mission of compassion, invitation, justice, and peacemaking? Am I proclaiming Christ and promoting communities of joy, hope, love, and peace?

Social media open new ways to create community and pursue peace. They hold new opportunities to invite others to Christ and fulfill Christ's mission. Disciples of Jesus are encouraged to find new ways to create pathways of peace and build community.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

— Isaiah 6:8 NRSV

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...."

— Luke 4:18 NRSV

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

— I Corinthians 9:19-23 NRSV

D. Official Commentary on Principles



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Commentary on Principles

After initial discussion, the 2016 World Conference referred a resolution on “Issues of (Priesthood) Morality” to the First Presidency. Referral is a parliamentary action that encourages the Presidency to act as determined best for the church. The referred resolution called “for meaningful and respectful dialog among members and priesthood about how individual, family, and congregational activities, lifestyle, and choices can be aligned more closely and more faithfully with the values and morals lifted up in the Enduring Principles and Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a–b.” The Presidency believes a common understanding of the Enduring Principles and the principles in Section 164:6a–b is important for such a discussion. The Enduring Principles help define the character and identity of our church. They arise from our response to the foundation of our faith—God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit—and our sacred story as a people. The Enduring Principles:

- Grace and Generosity
- Sacredness of Creation
- Continuing Revelation
- Worth of All Persons
- All Are Called
- Responsible Choices
- Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)
- Unity in Diversity
- Blessings of Community

Descriptions of the Enduring Principles are found in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Ed. and at www.CofChrist.org/enduring-principles. The sub-points under each principle offer additional explanations. Also there have been articles in the *Herald*, and the church has produced videos exploring the meaning of the Enduring Principles. This statement is commentary on the principles outlined in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a–b. By providing these basic explanations, the Presidency is responding to its responsibility to be the “leading interpreters...of the laws and revelations of God...” (WCR 386). The Presidency has received significant input from other church leaders representing various cultures while developing this commentary.

Commentary: The Principles

Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a–b identifies the following principles of moral behavior and relationships:

- The worth and giftedness of all people
- Protect the most vulnerable
- Christ-like love

- Mutual respect
- Responsibility
- Justice
- Covenant
- Faithfulness

These principles apply to ethical relationships in general and specifically to recently raised topics like sexual ethics, drinking intoxicants, and priesthood morality. The Presidency gives particular attention to these principles and the Enduring Principles as it considers policy questions. So, what do these principles mean?

- **The worth and giftedness of all people** means affirming that each person has equal worth as a child of God. Therefore, each one should have the same opportunity to express her or his potential and gifts in families, congregations, the worldwide church, and society. Characteristics like economic status, caste, sex, gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, body type, or physical or mental ability should not be used to assign people to a lesser position. Human diversity should never be the basis for assumed superiority, discrimination, or oppression. Rather, Community of Christ invites all to respond to God's call with the gifts God has given them.
- **Protect the most vulnerable** entails giving high priority to concern for the defenseless, dependent, weak, impressionable, and the least secure in families, congregations, and larger societies. The most vulnerable always include children and the child-like, regardless of age. It also may include the poor, sick, or elderly. In larger society, protecting the most vulnerable means high-priority concern for those most affected or potentially harmed by a situation, decision, or action. This may include persons or groups that historically are viewed as inferior or regularly discriminated against. Identifying the "most vulnerable" in various situations is vital when evaluating and developing church policies.
- **Christ-like love** is self-giving love. It is found where the salvation, well-being, and growth of others are primary in one's thoughts and actions. It is charitable, grace-filled, patient, and forgiving. It reflects God's love and demonstrates a spirit of generous servanthood. Christ-like love includes love of self and others, but it is not selfish. It affirms our integral relationships with each other by bearing each other's burdens and giving oneself for the well-being of others and the community.
- **Mutual respect** refers to healthy regard and concern for others as they would like you to treat them. Mutual respect is equitable, just, and reciprocal to the greatest extent possible. Sometimes mutual respect involves personal restraint and deference. It may feel demanding because respect for one person may cause us to choose that relationship over another, such as choosing to protect the most vulnerable. Mutual respect is not domineering, coercive, or one-sided.
- **Responsibility** means we are accountable (answerable) before God, the church community, and others. A responsible person responds to situations by making informed decisions and being morally answerable for his or her actions and related consequences. Responsibility is making wise judgments and just decisions that consider the potential effect of one's actions on others, the church, the most vulnerable, and creation. All disciples and priesthood members are called to make Responsible Choices.

Responsibility, however, assumes ability to respond. Some cultural and legal situations prevent persons from making the choices they believe are right.

- **Justice** has many forms, including respecting human rights, fairness, equality, fulfillment, and restoration. Justice is not about revenge. Justice finds meaning in the scriptural vision for right and healthy relationships in the reign of God. Justice comes when right and healthy relationships are nurtured in reconciliation, redemption, and restoration. A just outcome fulfills God's purposes and potential in people's lives. Justice is shared concern and action for the common good. Christ calls Christians to work for justice when others are being oppressed or have limited choices.
- **Covenant** is a particular expression of a sacred relationship, promise, and commitment between God and people. Covenant is more than a personal feeling or intent. It is not a restrictive obligation as understood in some nations. In scripture, covenant always begins with God's grace and reconciling purpose in human lives and our response. Covenant with God blesses persons, families, and congregations with vision, guidance, and divine help for righteous living. In the church, covenant with God is established and sustained through sacraments that involve shared worship, rituals, symbols, and priesthood ministry. Entering into sacred covenant helps us live moral lives and grow in healthy relationships with God, others, the church community, and the Earth.
- **Faithfulness** is fidelity to God and others throughout one's lifetime. Faithfulness involves loyalty, honesty, devotion, dependability, and trustworthiness. To be faithful is to be true and responsible to God and others with one's calling, word, agreements, promises, and covenants. Faithfulness brings belief and ethics together by uniting them in our covenant with God through baptism, confirmation, and responsibility to one another in Christ.

To ensure clarity and guide ethical decisions, Doctrine and Covenants 164:6b emphasizes that the principles cited do not allow for "selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive relationships." These terms help clarify behavioral boundaries when questions arise. Again, what do these terms mean?

- **Selfish** means one is self-centered to the point of harming or excluding others. Selfishness leads to gratifying one's own needs and desires at the expense of others without seeking their consent. It is a lack of full comprehension of how one's actions and behaviors impact others and the world. To be selfish is to be egotistic and self-absorbed.
- **Irresponsible** behavior is careless and negligent. It often is reactive or impulsive and lacks self-control. Irresponsible behavior takes risks without considering possible options and outcomes. It includes making decisions under the influence of illegal or controlled substances or avoiding responsibility by blaming others for undesired, negative, or destructive results. Irresponsibility is often the cause of unintended or unwanted consequences. People are not irresponsible if the action in question was forced on them against their will.
- **Promiscuous** behavior is indiscriminate, permissive, and unrestrained. Transient, casual sexual relationships are promiscuous and unacceptable. Promiscuity seeks self-gratification without consideration of or responsibility for the welfare or ethical concerns of others. It rejects the common good. Consent is not the only criteria for determining

appropriate interaction. An encounter between consenting adults still can be promiscuous.

- **Degrading** behaviors and relationships diminish, humiliate, and shame others, treating them as objects. Degrading behaviors undermine the worth of persons and the relationships of the community. They damage or destroy the promise of healthy relationships.
- **Abusive** words and behaviors harm people, relationships, or creation. Abuse can be physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, sexual, or neglectful. Abuse can happen because of unequal power in a relationship. Through words and actions, this power is used to harm, insult, manipulate, or cause fear. Abuse can lead to irreparable harm or death.

Principles are not sufficient in themselves to guide ethical decision-making. Principles must be carefully considered and applied with wisdom and discernment to particular moral questions. The Presidency, World Church Leadership Council, and Standing High Council are using these statements to inform our consideration of various issues, including questions of priesthood morality raised at the recent World Conference. The Presidency encourages the church to become familiar with these principles and explanations in anticipation of upcoming responses to particular issues.

E. Introduction to Priesthood Ministry Course, lesson 5



ETHICS, MORALITY, AND HOLISTIC LIVING

5

FOCUS

Covenant Principle: Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle.

OBJECTIVES

Learners will...

- **Know:** Know the importance of moral authority and its connection to the ethics of the church.
- **Know:** Understand the connection between morality and mission.
- **Know:** Know at least three reasons holistic living is important for priesthood members.
- **Be:** Reflect on ways to stay grounded when moral decisions may be hard.
- **Be:** Consider their strengths and weaknesses about holistic living.
- **Be:** Consider how to make space for deeper encounter with Christ, who leads us to more-holistic living.

- **Do:** Gain experience by talking with others about how integrating the church's ethics into practical situations helps guide behavior.
- **Do:** Compare and contrast the church's understanding of authority with images of authority in the larger culture.
- **Do:** Be able to engage in conversations to help others explore desires and obstacles related to wholeness.

RESOURCES

- Course book for each learner
- *Community of Christ Sings*, Herald Publishing House, 2013.

SUPPLIES

- Pens or pencils for all learners
- 100x150-mm/4x6-inch cards
- Flip chart or screen and projector



GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

Think about a priesthood member who you deeply respect and who has blessed your life in a significant way. What about this person made her or his ministry in your life so effective? How would you describe the person's morals and ethical behavior and how they contributed to the ability to minister?

Instructor: Ask everyone to consider and respond the question above. After two or three minutes, invite the group to share some responses. Point out any likenesses in comments. Note how those who have blessed us did so not only through specific acts, but through character.



ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

THE ESSENTIAL OF MORAL AUTHORITY AND HOLISTIC LIVING

Authority

Through the years, people often have talked about priesthood "authority." What does that mean? Consider:

Priesthood authority is the opposite of how people often understand authority. Instead of authority based on power and position, genuine priesthood authority comes from the example of Jesus Christ, who humbly knelt before the disciples and lovingly washed their feet before blessing all creation through his sacrifice on the cross.

What are some images and characteristics of "authority" portrayed in your community, your family, your work, your congregation, and in the media?

How do these images and characteristics compare to the example of Jesus, as stated above?

Moral Authority

Priesthood authority originates in God and is lived in the lives of people who are humble and wish to serve others. Multiple facets of authority are vital to effective ministry. There is a *legal* or *institutional* facet of priesthood authority. This means the priesthood license is given through the church and is necessary to perform sacramental and some other duties. This authority alone, however, is inadequate unless it comes with the authority of competence, which we will explore later.

Both legal authority and the authority of competence are important. However, a third type of authority also is essential. This is *moral* authority.

This comes from aligning one's private and public lives with the church's mission, Enduring Principles, beliefs, and ethics. A lack of such alignment lessens the credibility and effectiveness of the church's witness of Jesus Christ. It reduces one's spiritual standing in the eyes of members and friends to represent Christ genuinely in the world.

The church's *ethics* are principles centered in the life, ministry, and values of Jesus Christ. The church's



expectations for priesthood members are for *moral behaviors* that are aligned with the church's ethics. This means our morality is to be shaped by God's desires for our planet and human relations. Therefore, living a moral life is more than simply avoiding bad behaviors on a "checklist" of sins.

While avoiding bad behaviors is important, true moral authority has to do with living our lives in Christ so our relationships and interactions are healthy. We do not steal our neighbor's dog simply because stealing is on a list of bad behaviors. Rather, we do not steal our neighbor's dog because we want to be in right relationship with our neighbor! When we engage in immoral behaviors we diminish the witness of the church and our own credibility. This happens not just because we've "done something on a list of sins," but because we've done something that hurts or diminishes the worth of persons or the planet.

Let's explore an example:

Scenario

A good friend picks you up to go to a community event. You move the car seat backward to give yourself more legroom. When you do, you see a packet stuffed under the seat that looks like it could be illegal drugs. Your friend notices you've seen it. After a few awkward moments of silence, your friend confesses and says, "I'm not an addict, but sometimes I need something to help me get through the day."

We find this counsel in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a:

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.

Given the principles in Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a, what would you want to include in your conversation with your friend about illegal drugs?

Instructor: You may want to ask people to pair up and role-play this scenario, in which one person plays the part of the friend. When finished, guide a discussion about the experience. How did Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a help frame the discussion? What was hardest and easiest about the discussion?

Lean on the Faith Community's Ethics

Sometimes, moral choices are difficult because of difficult times in our own lives. During these times, our souls can become muddled in a mix of personal needs, competing thoughts, and what may be a way to "feel good again." Temptations abound and cover the full range of human experience. Some are financial, sexual, or drug and alcohol-related. Some may understand the need to promote ourselves above others or to distort the truth to look good to a colleague or friend. Whatever they may be, the temptation to stray from what we know is good often is most enticing when it connects to a point of personal need, fear, or brokenness. For instance, when a person is under extreme financial stress, the temptation to take more than a fair share in a business transaction might be rationalized as "OK." When a person is emotionally broken, the opportunity to engage in an inappropriate relationship might have momentary appeal.

When a person is fatigued, broken, or confused, her or his moral compass may not be in great shape. It is especially important during these times to trust in the ethics of the faith community, rather than following one's own wants. People often talk about "leaning on friends" during difficult times. The church is a community of friends and seekers. There is wisdom in leaning on the ethics of the faith community.

What have you found helpful when facing moral challenges or feeling unclear about the right ethical decision?

Morality and Mission

The church's ethics center on the life of Jesus and on God's good desires for humankind. So, when people live a moral life based on these ethics, they live their relationships in a manner that models healthy ways of being. When congregations live their lives this way, this creates a powerful witness in the community. This is because living a moral life is about living responsibly in the world.

One of the church's Enduring Principles is Responsible Choices. This principle affirms that we make choices that affect the lives of people around us. God loves the world, yet the world suffers from irresponsible choices made by humans. When our choices are contrary to God's intents for healthy living, we simply add our poor witness to the countless bad models people see every day. If, however, we can show the world a different way—a way based on God's vision for human relationships—then we create possibilities for healing and new life. In other words, the effectiveness of the church's mission depends on moral living. Priesthood members are called to model this.

Think of a problem in your community of concern to you. How might people's moral behavior help or worsen the problem?

Instructor: Put these two statements on a board, flip chart, or screen:

- Living a moral life is about living responsibly in the world.
- Poverty exists in our community.

Ask class members, "What does it mean to you if addressing poverty is a moral issue for Christians, rather than a social issue alone?"

Holism

You will notice this covenant principle speaks of modeling an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle. This is important for at least three reasons:

1. We are created for wholeness. We have the capacity for work, play, prayer, family, friends, and much more. When our lives become consumed by only one or two things, we become imbalanced and fatigued, and we don't live up to our God-given potential.
2. People do not need a religious version of the hectic, overworked, broken living that they already know. They do need to learn a more abundant way of living that includes time for family, friends, recreation, and meaningful living. Our talking about it or holding classes on it will not be enough. We must be intentional about learning to live more holistic lives. Priesthood members are called to model this effort toward wholeness.

3. We must seek to live holistically if we want to follow Jesus. While Jesus often was busy ministering, he also was intentional about taking time out. We often speak of the Jesus who healed, taught, and ministered. We also should talk about the Jesus who took breaks, went to parties, and spent time with friends. Priesthood members should model what it means to follow the “whole” Jesus, not only the Jesus of our favorite stories.



RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing

WALKING TOWARD WHOLENESS

Living holistically is a huge challenge. Many demands call to us every day, competing for our time and attention. The church is not so naïve to suggest that holistic living is easy. At the same time, the church’s primary loyalty is always to Christ, who wishes people to be whole.

Wholeness is made of many parts and looks differently to each person. Read each statement below and circle the number that best describes your life right now, with “5” meaning often; “3” meaning occasionally; and “1” meaning not often.

- I take time regularly for spiritual practices.
1 2 3 4 5
- I enjoy social time with friends or family.
1 2 3 4 5
- I get enough sleep. 1 2 3 4 5
- I use my gifts and talents in significant ways. 1 2 3 4 5
- I have a healthy diet. 1 2 3 4 5
- I get satisfactory physical exercise.
1 2 3 4 5
- I feel like I am living a purposeful life.
1 2 3 4 5
- I find beauty in the world around me.
1 2 3 4 5
- I laugh. 1 2 3 4 5

Many people today suffer from busyness and overextended schedules. Among so many demands, how do we even begin to live a more holistic life? Sometimes,

it’s as simple as talking about our need for wholeness and the challenges of living in a world that makes wholeness so difficult. Being that conversation partner for someone can be a great blessing.

If you are taking this course on your own, think of someone who you believe would find interest in and benefit from a conversation about wholeness and its challenges. Visit with this person. Remember, as a minister it is not your role to prescribe solutions. It is your role to create a safe space for conversation where the person can freely offer expressions and explore alternatives.

And/Or

Identify someone in your personal support network to talk with about how you can focus on your own wants and obstacles to holistic living.

Instructor: Have people self-select a partner for this exercise. Invite them to talk about wholeness, in which one person serves as the minister or “listener,” and the other has opportunity to talk about a wish to live holistically. Make clear the minister’s role is to ask questions that will help the person go deeper in describing wishes for wholeness and obstacles faced. After six to seven minutes, ask them to switch roles.



SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived

Introspection and Response

Think about the responsibilities associated with the priesthood office to which you’ve been called. In performing these responsibilities, how can you help others live more holistically?

In your own life, how can you make yourself most available to encountering the Living Christ, who calls us all to holistic living?



BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

Everyone makes mistakes. As a priesthood member, your call to model an ethical, moral, and holistic life is not a demand for you to be flawless. It is a call to set your compass to follow the ethical standards the church upholds and to seek to live as holistically as possible. When you stumble, rely on the faith community's ethics to help you get up and move forward. When others around you stumble, help them up with your love, presence, and companionship in the pathway of following Christ.

If you are taking this course on your own, take a few moments now and talk with God in prayer about your wish to live an ethical, moral, holistic life. End this prayer with silence, resting in God's love and assurance of God's desire to bless you.

Instructor: Ask learners to read the text of CCS 237, "God, Renew Us by Your Spirit," or CCS 190, "Breathe on Me, Breath of God." Ask them to identify a word or short phrase that touches them. Have them write that word or phrase on a card that you placed on their table. Explain that what they write will be their offering. For some, it will be an offering of healing or confession. For others, it will be an offering of thanksgiving or dedication. For others it may be different still. Then, invite everyone to come forward and place their cards in an offering basket you have set before them. Sing the hymn together, and have someone ready to offer an offertory prayer of thanks and blessing.

F. Church Administrative Handbook (2005), chapter 10

10. Ministerial Ethics

A. Ethics

Ethics can be defined as behavior that flows from our deepest commitments and beliefs. Just as parents should consistently act in ways that reflect their best understandings of what benefits children throughout their lives, so also should priesthood members act in ways that reflect life in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

B. Rules

Rules are often thought to be an appropriate expression of ethics. In many respects, ethical behavior in any aspect of life can be thought of in terms of general principles or rules that describe the kinds of behavior that are expected. Nevertheless, no single set of rules can ever perfectly describe ethical behavior. Life is full of examples of rules being broken for ethical purposes (lying to protect someone who is in danger) and rules being followed for unethical purposes (using a “technicality” for one’s benefit and another’s misfortune).

C. Ethical Principles

Certain ethical principles may be helpful, however, to help define ethical behavior by members of the priesthood. The principles that follow should guide priesthood members as they consider their role as ministers. In addition, certain policy statements relating to ethical concerns will also be noted.

1. Church members should accept ministerial callings on the basis of a sincere desire to be of service to God and to the purposes for which the church exists. Ministerial callings should not be understood as a way of obtaining higher status or as a reward for hard work.
2. Priesthood members should serve actively in their respective offices to the extent to which they are physically and psychologically able. Priesthood members should seek to be good stewards of their time, talents, and treasure.
3. Priesthood members should seek to increase their effectiveness through ongoing training and education.
4. While no one is without sin, priesthood members should seek to live an exemplary life, observing civil laws and behavior expectations of their respective communities.
5. Priesthood members should be able to qualify in the church’s registered youth worker program.

6. Priesthood members should observe principles of the following policy statements:

D. Priesthood and Promotion of Private Businesses

Members, and particularly priesthood, are discouraged from speculative investments and other questionable business ventures or their promotion. All people who may decide to invest in enterprises of this kind should do so only after thorough investigation as to the safety of the venture, according to sound business principles. Confidence in the ministerial position of another should never be a reason for making a financial investment (WCR 595).

Under no circumstance should the name of the church, or the names of its officers, its seals, its institutions, pictures of its buildings or personnel, or other aspects of church life be used to imply in any way that any business is “zionist” in character or endorsed by the church unless it has actually been officially authorized.

Members of the priesthood should never use their priesthood office as a means of encouraging anyone to participate in any way in business ventures (Standing High Council, October 15, 1964).

E. Privileged Communications to a Minister

Ministers are expected to observe a high degree of confidentiality in those trust relationships wherein individuals come for counseling, support, or confessions. Such matters should never become the basis for idle conversation or gossip.

Occasionally, ministerial confidences become involved in church court procedures or civil actions. Generally speaking, ministers are not required to disclose to church court information they may have acquired during ministerial labor or counseling. There are a few exceptions, such as when dealing with conduct requiring “casting out” (D. and C. 42:7e) or functioning as an administrator in silencing actions, but this standard prevails in most cases.

Civil court actions can be more complicated. Different countries, and states and provinces within countries, have varying laws that apply to ministerial privilege. When involved in such matters, ministers should develop an awareness of how this is handled in their own jurisdictions so that they can function appropriately within the laws of the land.

The Standing High Council has approved a statement, “Privileged Communications to a Minister” (January 16, 1997), which is available upon request from the First Presidency.

G. Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry

For all priesthood members and ordinands

Priesthood faithfulness begins with faithful discipleship. Faithful discipleship emerges from ongoing faith and spiritual formation. The constant call is to follow the Living Christ and to abide in increasing measure in God's love and vision for creation. Being comes before doing.

The following expectations will help me serve as a faithful priesthood member.

In response to God's sacred call and priesthood authority granted by Community of Christ, I covenant to...

- Engage in ongoing faith and spiritual practices to deepen my relationship with God and others through study and spiritual formation.
- Affirm and promote Christ's mission of invitation, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking; helping prepare others for Christ's mission; and partnering with other priesthood in leading congregations in Christ's mission.
- Provide ministry consistent with the church's identity, mission, message, and beliefs as expressed in Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs and other current official documents.
- Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle.
- Model generosity as a regular contributor to mission tithes (local, mission center, and worldwide ministries), according to my true capacity.
- Protect the safety and well-being of children and youth, including, where applicable, being a Registered Children and Youth Worker.
- Actively participate in congregational life or similar church expressions when congregational life is not available.
- Participate annually in educational or spiritual-formation experiences offered by my congregation, mission center, apostolic mission field, or World Church.
- Develop and implement a plan for ministry that uses my gifts to advance Christ's mission.

H. Faithful Disagreement Policy

Faithful Disagreement

Definition and Principles

World Church Leadership Council, March 2013

Definition

Faithful disagreement is defined as actions and/or responses by a person holding a different view about a specific policy, belief, principle, or other position of Community of Christ. This disagreement with a Community of Christ position or direction is helpful, responsible, faithful, and bounded by loyalty and commitment to the identity, mission, message, and beliefs of Community of Christ. A person who faithfully disagrees is welcome to share about the church position with which she or he disagrees. The intent of the sharing is to improve the overall faithful response of the church to God's intended direction without classifying others as unfaithful.

Principles

1. Community of Christ's Enduring Principles—Blessings of Community, Worth of All Persons, Responsible Choices, and Unity in Diversity—allow for faithful disagreement.
2. The commitment, in general, to the overall identity, mission, message, and beliefs of Community of Christ may serve to keep a person in the faith community even when that person strongly disagrees with a particular position. One's love for the faith community is stronger than any particular disagreement.
3. Holding a differing view from the Community of Christ position on a specific matter does not lessen in any way a person's participation as a faithful, generous, committed, and responsible disciple. Nor does having a differing view impact a person's eligibility to hold a priesthood office or partake in the sacraments.
4. A person with a differing viewpoint on a particular position is to be respected by the body. She or he may share a viewpoint as a personal opinion during discussions, meetings, training, and other conversations where it is suitable to share personal opinions.
5. A person is not to be excluded by a congregation or mission center because of holding a differing viewpoint on a specific Community of Christ position.
6. A member or a priesthood member with a differing viewpoint is not to use public-ministry opportunities to speak against the identity, mission, message, or beliefs of Community of Christ. Nor should a member or priesthood member publicly criticize the Community of Christ stance on the particular position with which the person disagrees. Public ministry must focus on proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in ways that align with Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs.
7. Agreeing with Community of Christ positions, official and unofficial, is not a test of faith for priesthood, members, and friends.
8. A person cannot ignore policies because he or she disagrees with a particular policy. Ethically, administrators must consistently apply the official policies and procedures of the church.
9. At no time is any action that harms the body of the church considered in harmony with the principles in this document.
10. In seeking to create genuine signal communities, we listen respectfully to one another's viewpoints. In addition, we try to see from each other's perspective. We trust in each person's commitment to Christ and motivation to see the mission of Community of Christ flourish. We seek to celebrate our unity while learning from our diversity.
11. As a community that embraces Continuing Revelation, we strive always to remain open to the Holy Spirit. We understand that sometimes both individually and collectively we respond wisely to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and sometimes we do not fully understand. Through our vulnerability to the Holy Spirit, we trust God will continue to guide us in refining positions held by Community of Christ.
12. Various legislative conferences and consent-building methods used by Community of Christ, allow a person holding a differing viewpoint to continue to seek change to the position with which she or he disagrees.

Background Information

Doctrine and Covenants 131:4 a–b; 164:5–6

1988 Standing High Council Statement on Ethical Dissent

National Conferences: General Questions and Answers, June 2012

I. Church Administrative Handbook (2005), Chapter 4, section F
(Priesthood Categories), sub-section 5 (Suspension)

[date]

[name and address of priesthood member]

Dear [name of priesthood member]:

In accordance with the policies of the church, I am obligated to release you from the priesthood office of [office]. I am taking this action because [state grounds]. You have been informed of the possibility of this step on previous occasions.

Release from the priesthood means that you no longer carry the privileges and responsibilities of your priesthood office. Please send me your priesthood license so that I can return it to the First Presidency. This action does not affect your membership status, and there is no sanction against you.

If you feel this action is unwarranted you have sixty days to appeal this decision to [name and address of next higher administrative officer].

More importantly, I would be most happy to talk with you if there is any way that I can assist you in returning to active participation in the life of the church. Reinstatement to your former office can be discussed on your request should you decide to return to active priesthood service.

Sincerely yours,
[name and jurisdiction]

cc: The First Presidency
mission center president
field apostle

A copy of this letter must be sent to the First Presidency so the release can be noted on the official records. As noted, this action may be appealed through the administrative line in the same manner as a silence.

d. *Reinstatement of Released Ministers.* A person who has been released from the priesthood may be reinstated to any office previously held. Initiation of such requests comes from the released person or from the pastor, after determining the commitment and personal stability of the individual and the acceptability of his or her ministry. The pastor discusses this step with the mission center president and then requests the First Presidency to provide information from the file, including a list of offices previously held. With this information in hand, the pastor meets with the individual to determine if there is a willingness to accept a return to priesthood responsibility and to a specific office. The released priesthood member and the pastor both write letters requesting reinstatement and enclosing all pertinent information. These are forwarded to the mission center president and transmitted through the administrative line for approval at each level. When the First Presidency takes

favorable action, a new license is issued and sent to the mission center president for delivery to the member. The minister is not reordained.

e. *New Calls for Released Ministers.* If a call to an office never held by the released priesthood member is in prospect, it should be handled exactly the same way that a new call for any other person is processed. Administrative reinstatement is not appropriate in this case.

f. *Release to Serve in a Different Office.* A priesthood member may request release for the purpose of serving in an office previously held but with a more narrow scope of responsibility than the one currently occupied. (For example, an elder may request release to accept the role of ministry in the office of priest, teacher, or deacon, if he or she has previously been ordained to those offices.) Such a request normally is initiated by the priesthood member, although it could occasionally be sensitively raised by the pastor or mission center president. Administratively, such requests are handled as a release from one office and reinstatement to a previous office and require the same approvals as any reinstatement.

5. Suspension:

The category of suspension is provided for those personal circumstances that may adversely affect an individual's ministry or make it unacceptable to a congregation. Divorce proceedings and other legal difficulties, such as criminal charges or bankruptcy, are illustrations of when suspension may be appropriate. This action is helpful to both the individual and the church in that the individual is not asked to offer ministry when in spiritual turmoil or during personal legal proceedings. No assumptions are made about guilt or innocence until the proceedings are concluded. It also protects the church because negative allegations, which are often made in such proceedings, could reflect adversely on the church.

It is premature to officially suspend a priesthood member just because the person is in marital counseling or having marital problems. A pastor should be alert and use the priesthood member's ministries with discretion if there are difficult circumstances, but suspension would be premature. Official suspension should be imposed at the time one of the parties has actually filed for divorce. Legal separation or other legally recognized initiation of the termination of marriage may be used to determine when to suspend.

The pastor, or other administrator acting to suspend, should write a letter advising the priesthood member of the suspension, clearly giving the reasons for suspension, and noting the specific time the suspension will be terminated. The end of the suspension period should be specified, either by date or at the outcome of certain proceedings. This letter may be patterned after the following model:

Dear *[name of priesthood member]*:

I have learned that you have *[filed for divorce, filed for bankruptcy, been charged with criminal action]*. Church procedures require that I suspend you from all priesthood activity while legal actions are in process. You will be suspended until *[date, or proceedings are complete, rulings are made and the matter is not appealed]*.

By this action the church is not making any judgments about your guilt or innocence. Priesthood members in your circumstance are suspended automatically without prejudice, and we trust that the freedom from obligation to provide ministry to others will allow you to give full attention to your personal concerns.

At the conclusion of the suspension period, we will need to review your situation to determine the future course of your ministry.

Sincerely,
[name and jurisdiction of pastor]

cc: mission center president

During the suspension period the priesthood member refrains from functioning but keeps his or her priesthood license. A minister who continues to act in a ministerial capacity while under suspension is in “willful disregard of the properly exercised authority of a supervising administrative officer” and therefore subject to possible silence.

In a timely fashion the circumstances causing the suspension should be reviewed with the priesthood member under suspension. If the cause has been removed, all actions are completed and no continuing negative consequences are apparent, the suspension should be lifted. The lifting should be communicated by letter with copies to all those given copies in previous correspondence.

If the proceedings have resulted in a loss of the capacity to minister by reason of proven moral turpitude, conviction of a felony, misuse or abuse of priesthood privileges, or other disregard for the standards of Christian conduct, the priesthood member should be placed under silence.

Suspension is, in general, not subject to appeal because it is normally temporary and has a stated termination time. However, if the suspended priesthood member feels it has been misapplied, he or she may appeal to the next higher administrative officer on the grounds of misapplication of suspension. Examples of such misapplication are: failure to give written notice, divorce proceedings have not been filed, or no termination of suspension is specified.

6. Silence:

The silencing of priesthood members is an administrative procedure by which authority to represent the church as an ordained minister is withdrawn. Silence is for cause and usually involves need for frequent and specialized ministry. Silenced members are required to relinquish their priesthood license and may not function as priesthood members. Silencing is an administrative action that does not affect membership status and is not within the jurisdiction of the civil or church courts.

a. *Ministerial Standards.* Ministers are charged with the personal responsibility of maintaining the highest standards of Christian conduct. This would require that the minister maintain a good reputation, especially with respect to prompt payment of financial obligations, propriety of social behavior, and a positive attitude toward the church institution and its members, avoiding extreme positions of a critical and disruptive nature. In actions of silence for unchristian conduct, the administrative officer should be precise in the identification of the particular act of unchristian conduct and state specifically how or why the behavior is unchristian.

b. *Grounds for Silence.* Grounds for silencing may include but not be limited to any one or more of the following (WCR 1192, adopted April 11, 1986):

- Conviction of a felony or other serious crime. A serious crime shall be defined as any criminal offense punishable by imprisonment for one year or more.
- Conduct constituting moral turpitude. “Moral turpitude” shall be defined as a depraved or immoral act contrary to generally accepted standards of Christian conduct as understood according to the teachings of the church.
- Willful disregard of church law, administration, or the properly exercised authority of a supervising administrative officer. “Willful” shall be defined as deliberate, voluntary, or intentional conduct. “Church law and administration” shall be defined as the composite of the directives expressed in the scriptures, as interpreted by the First Presidency with respect to church doctrine and disciplines, *World Conference Resolutions*, *The Priesthood Manual*, *Church Administrator’s Handbook*, and any subsequently published documents that relate to the above described directives. “Supervising administrative officers” shall be defined as those duly elected or appointed priesthood members who exercise greater administrative authority than the priesthood member to be silenced.
- Willful failure to preserve or maintain a shared confidence. The confidentiality of communication in the performance of ministry must be preserved.

J. USA National Conference Policy

Community of Christ

Priesthood Calling, Ordination, and Ministry in All Nations

Interim Policies for USA:

Authorizing and officiating same-gender marriages, civil unions, and legal relationships

Authorizing and officiating same-gender covenant commitment services
Ordination of priesthood of same-gender orientation

Preface

This document is an overview of administrative policies for priesthood calling, ordination, and ministry **in all nations**. Additional policy details are found in the most current edition of the *Church Administrator's Handbook* and First Presidency official statements.

Introduction

Priesthood is a covenant relationship with God and the church community. It involves committing one's life to bring blessing to others through the sacraments and an exemplary life of discipleship devoted to Christ's mission.

Priesthood calling and ordination involve God's grace-filled initiative in human life and people's humble response. Ordination is a sacred act of covenant-making that includes God's promise to bless priesthood members and the church community as priesthood members faithfully serve.

The following foundational principles relate to faithful priesthood ministry. Consistent application of these principles results in fulfilling, effective, and joyous priesthood ministry. These principles define "active" priesthood ministry.

Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry

(For all priesthood members and ordinands)

Priesthood faithfulness begins with faithful discipleship. Faithful discipleship emerges from ongoing faith and spiritual formation. The constant call is to follow the Living Christ and to abide in increasing measure in God's love and vision for creation. Being comes before doing.

The following expectations will help me serve as a faithful priesthood member. In response to God's sacred call and priesthood authority granted by Community of Christ, **I covenant to...**

- Engage in ongoing faith and spiritual practices to deepen my relationship with God and others through study and spiritual formation.
- Affirm and promote Christ's mission of invitation, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking; helping prepare others for Christ's mission; and partnering with other priesthood in leading congregations in Christ's mission.

- Provide ministry consistent with the church's identity, mission, message, and beliefs as expressed in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, 3rd Ed. (www.CofChrist.org/ourfaith/SharingCofChrist-3ed.pdf) and other current official documents.
- Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle.
- Model generosity as a regular contributor to mission tithes (local, mission center, and worldwide ministries) according to my true capacity.
- Protect the safety and well-being of children and youth, including, where applicable, being a Registered Children and Youth Worker.
- Actively participate in congregational life or similar church expressions when congregational life is not available.
- Participate annually in educational or spiritual formation experiences offered by my congregation, mission center, apostolic mission field, or World Church.
- Develop and implement a plan for ministry that uses my gifts to advance Christ's mission.

Administrative Procedures

The following statements highlight church policies regarding priesthood matters. They are provided to help church officers fulfill their responsibilities and to inform all priesthood members.

Priesthood Calls

The priesthood calling process includes:

1. Recommendation for ordination by the appropriate administrative officer in response to the spirit of discernment, wisdom, and divine direction. Full attention should be given to all elements of the "Recommendation for Ordination Form" in the *Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition*, on page 88.
2. Confirmation of necessary administrative approvals as specified in current policies.
3. Presentation of call to the candidate for prayerful consideration once administrative approvals are received.
4. Demonstration of support by a vote in a conference of the appropriate church jurisdiction.

Priesthood Ordination

1. The sacrament of ordination provides formal authority to function within a specific priesthood office in the church.
2. An ordination normally is performed by two members of the priesthood authorized to ordain people to a specific office. In some cases situations in local areas may require the ordination to be performed by one authorized priesthood member.
3. The ordinand and the administrative officers will choose the ordaining priesthood members. Qualifications for priesthood who can officiate in the sacrament of ordination can be found in the *Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition*, page 28.
4. The ordination is reported by the congregation or mission center recorder. Where possible, the congregation or mission center recorder should report details of the ordination to the Office of Membership Records at International Headquarters.

5. Recording of the ordination at International Headquarters results in the World Church secretary issuing a priesthood license, which certifies the individual as an ordained minister in Community of Christ.

Priesthood Ethics

1. The ethical standards expected of those who are called and ordained to serve in the priesthood are presented in the “Priesthood Standards and Qualifications” portion of the “Recommendation for Ordination Form” in the *Church Administrator’s Handbook: 2005 Edition*.
2. In addition, Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a provides clear guidance for moral behavior and relationships by listing ethics principles: **Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness**. To ensure clarity, Section 164:6b identifies types of behaviors and relationships that are not moral: **selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive**.
3. Additional priesthood ethics statements will be developed in the future and will be considered part of priesthood policies when made available.

Priesthood Ministry and Ordination

1. The church’s general policy is that ordination authorizes priesthood members to provide priesthood ministry wherever they live or travel. There is also a policy that priesthood ministry coming from outside a church jurisdiction should be approved by the appropriate church officers serving both the jurisdiction of residence and the jurisdiction in which the priesthood member will travel. Usually, this applies to ministry from outside one’s mission center, but mission centers may establish their own procedures for congregations within the mission center (See: *Church Administrator’s Handbook: 2005 Edition*, page 20). The basic principle is that requesting or receiving priesthood ministry is the responsibility of pastors, mission center presidents, supervising apostles, and other presiding officers of the church.
2. Priesthood members are not required to accept an invitation to officiate in an ordination. If, for any reason, a priesthood member is unable or unwilling to officiate in an ordination, the priesthood candidate should be referred to another priesthood member in an appropriately sensitive and pastoral manner.

Ordination of Individuals in Same-sex/Gender Marriages or Long-term Committed Relationships

1. If a policy is approved for a nation that permits people in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships to be ordained, that policy is applicable only in that nation. In nations where same-sex/gender relationships are not legal, serious harm and disruption to individuals, church organization, and mission could be caused by offering ministry from people in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships. Therefore, there will be nations where the priesthood ministry of people in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships should not be offered and will not be accepted (see Appendix).
2. If a nation has a policy that permits people in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships to be ordained, a person in such a relationship must be a citizen or permanent resident of the nation, reside in the nation, and be registered as a church member there to be considered for a priesthood call. If an ordained person in a same-sex/gender marriage or long-term committed relationship moves to a nation with policies that do not allow for ordination of such persons, the person’s priesthood license will not

be removed simply because of that move. However, as stated above, there will be nations where the priesthood ministry in committed, same-sex/gender relationships should not be offered and will not be accepted.

3. Priesthood members will be allowed to ordain those in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships only in nations where civil law and church policy permit such marriages or long-term committed relationships as legally recognized. Priesthood members must always abide by church policies and civil laws in the nation where they are offering ministry.
4. Priesthood members can travel to a nation where church policy allows ordination for those in same-sex/gender marriages or long-term committed relationships and be the officiating priesthood minister, provided they have approval from the pastor and the mission center president of the jurisdiction of residence, as well as the jurisdiction in which the ordination is to take place. If no congregational participation is involved, only the mission center presidents must approve.
5. In mission centers that have congregations in two or more nations that have different national policies, congregations must abide by the policies of the nation where the congregation is physically located.
6. Priesthood members are always responsible for determining how their involvement in ordination for those in same-sex/gender relationships will impact their ability to bring effective ministry in their home congregation, mission center, field, or nation.

Priesthood Ministry and Marriage

Aaronic priests and Melchisedec priesthood members are eligible to perform wedding ceremonies in all nations, subject to any legal restrictions of the governmental jurisdiction in which the wedding will occur. In addition, the following policies apply:

1. Marriage preparation should begin six months to one year before the marriage ceremony. While exceptions may occur, adequate time must be provided for premarital discussions between the officiating minister and the couple.
2. All marriages should be reported by the congregation or mission center recorder, and the officiant should follow all reporting requirements established by civil authorities.
3. For information concerning marriage standards, preparation, reporting requirements, marital discord, termination, remarriage, and other related topics, see the relevant sections on marriage in the *Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition*. In the case of previous divorce, the officiant must confirm the divorce is recorded with the church authorities prior to solemnizing the marriage, if the marriage involves a Community of Christ member or members. In situations of multiple divorces, the minister also should check with World Church officers for any additional information or guidance.
4. Priesthood members traveling into an area to perform a marriage must receive approval from the mission center president and apostle of the jurisdiction of residence, as well as from the jurisdiction in which the marriage is to take place. When a Community of Christ congregation is involved, approval by the pastor of the congregation where the sacrament is to take place is also required.

Priesthood Ministry and Heterosexual Marriage

The following statement will be used for heterosexual marriages:

The sacrament of marriage as celebrated in Community of Christ should be aligned with Doctrine and Covenants 111:2b. Thus, during the exchange of vows, the couple should be asked:

You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives?

After the couple answers in the affirmative, the officiating minister pronounces the couple "husband and wife" in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country and authority vested in him/her. Then, the officiating minister typically offers this blessing:

May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen.

Priesthood Ministry and Same-sex/Gender Marriage

If a nation has an officially approved policy that permits priesthood members to perform same-sex/gender marriages where they are legal, the following policies apply:

1. The following statement approved by the First Presidency will be used for same-sex couples during their marriage:

You both mutually agree to be each other's marriage companion, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?

After the couple answers in the affirmative, the officiating minister pronounces the couple married in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country and authority vested in him/her. Then, the officiating minister typically offers this blessing:

May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen.

2. For statements to use with civil unions or legal relationships please refer to the USA interim policy for authorizing and performing same-gender civil unions and legal relationships.
3. Priesthood members are not required to perform same-sex/gender marriages.
4. Priesthood members will not be allowed to perform same-sex marriages in nations where World Church policy or civil laws do not allow it. Priesthood members must always abide by church policies and civil laws in the nation where they are offering ministry.
5. Priesthood members can travel to a nation where the church policy allows priesthood members to perform same-sex marriages and be the officiating minister, if certain conditions are met: compliance with all relevant national and local government regulations and certifications.
6. Priesthood members are always responsible for determining how their involvement in solemnizing same-sex marriages would impact their ability to bring effective ministry in their home congregation, mission center, nation, or field.



INTERIM POLICIES FOR USA ONLY

Preface

The following interim policies are approved for implementation in the USA beginning March 31, 2014. These interim policies will be implemented in accordance with all World Church policies regarding marriage and ordination. The church in the USA will follow these interim policies for two years. At the end of this time the interim policies will be evaluated and revised as needed.



Reference: [WCR] Policy Number: National Policy-USA 70.00
[*Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition 6G;*] Effective Date: March 31, 2014
[Doctrine and Covenants 17; 163; 164] Revision Date:
[*Priesthood Manual 2004*]
[Ministry and Priesthood planning]
[National Conferences: General Questions and
Answers, May 22, 2012]

USA INTERIM POLICY FOR RECOGNIZING SAME-GENDER MARRIAGES, CIVIL UNIONS, AND LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction for Same-gender Marriages

Same-gender marriage is permitted in some places but not everywhere in the USA. Some states and other governmental units (e.g., the District of Columbia) permit same-gender marriages. Some permit, instead, same-gender civil unions or legal relationships such as domestic partnerships. Others, however, do not permit or recognize same-gender marriages, civil unions, or legal relationships from other states.

Same-gender legal relationships and the procedures by which they are established under applicable law vary between the states in the USA and other governmental units that permit them. Some states grant couples in same-gender legal relationships the same rights and duties as spouses. Others, however, grant them some, but not all, of those rights and duties.

For purposes of policy administration:

All states and other governmental units will be included in the term "state."

All same-gender "legal relationships" defined by some states in different ways (e.g., domestic partnerships) in which couples have rights and duties under law the same as or similar to those of spouses will be included in the term "legal relationship," regardless of specific local legal rights, duties, and terminology. The term "legal relationship" is different than marriage or civil union.

Interim Policy

1. Same-gender marriages, civil unions, and legal relationships that are valid under applicable law and in accordance with this policy will be treated like marriages within the church in the USA. The church has a long-standing policy of recognizing and recording civil or legal marriages, whether sacramental or not.
2. Same-gender marriage, civil union, and legal relationship terminations will be treated like marriage terminations within the church in the USA.
3. For a same-gender couple's relationship to be in accordance with this policy, the couple is expected to establish the most equivalent relationship to marriage (marriage, civil union, or legal relationship) that applicable law permits. If applicable law later changes and permits a more equivalent relationship to marriage, a same-gender couple is expected to establish the most equivalent relationship to marriage (marriage, civil union, or legal relationship) that applicable law then permits. This situation may occur if the couple's state(s) of permanent legal residence changes applicable law, or if the couple changes their state(s) of permanent legal residence.
4. If a same-gender couple later establishes a more equivalent relationship to marriage, they will be eligible (but not required) to have another Community of Christ ceremony that establishes or recognizes the establishment of that relationship.



Reference: [WCR]

[*Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition* 6G;]

[Doctrine and Covenants 17; 163; 164]

[*Priesthood Manual* 2004]

[Ministry and Priesthood planning]

[National Conferences: General Questions and Answers, May 22, 2012]

Policy Number: National Policy-USA 70.01

Effective Date: March 31, 2014

Revision Date:

INTERIM POLICY FOR AUTHORIZING AND PERFORMING CEREMONIES THAT ESTABLISH OR RECOGNIZE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SAME- GENDER MARRIAGES, CIVIL UNIONS, AND LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS ONLY IN THE USA

Performing Same-gender Marriages, Civil Unions, and Legal Relationships

In the USA, Community of Christ Aaronic priests and Melchisedec priesthood members are eligible to officiate at ceremonies that establish or recognize the establishment of same-gender marriages, civil unions, and legal relationships in states where applicable law permits such marriages, civil unions, and/or legal relationships, and they have met the legal requirements to officiate at such ceremonies.

Interim Policy

1. Community of Christ prescribes certain procedures within the marriage, civil union, and legal relationship ceremony itself.

Ceremonial Vows

The following covenant statement approved by the First Presidency will be used for same-gender couples during the celebration of:

Marriage—*You both mutually agree to be each other's marriage companion, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition: that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?*

Civil union—*You both mutually agree to be each other's **covenant** companion, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition: that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?*

Legal relationship—*You both mutually agree to be each other's **covenant** companion, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition: that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?*

2. An Aaronic priest or Melchisedec priesthood member is not required to perform any marriage, civil union, or legal relationship ceremony with which he or she is uncomfortable. He or she should refer the couple to another priesthood member in an appropriately sensitive, pastoral manner.
3. According to existing policy, any marriage, civil union, or legal relationship ceremony at a congregational facility requires approval from the pastor of the congregation. Use of a church campground requires approval from the mission center president. Using other church-owned property requires administrative approval from the First Presidency's office.
4. Nothing in this policy is intended to, or should be construed to, violate or oppose the federal or state laws of the USA. A couple in a same-gender marriage must satisfy the current legal definition of the state where the couple resides. With respect to that marriage, civil union, or legal relationship, a couple must abide by the legal rights and responsibilities defined by the state where the couple resides.
5. If there are conflicts between the provisions of this policy and the laws of the USA, immediately contact your mission center president and apostle.



Reference: [WCR]

[*Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition 6G;*]

[*Doctrine and Covenants 17; 163; 164*]

[*Priesthood Manual 2004*]

[*Ministry and Priesthood planning*]

[*National Conferences: General Questions and Answers, May 22, 2012*]

Policy Number: National Policy-USA 70.02

Effective Date: March 31, 2014

Revision Date:

INTERIM POLICY FOR RECOGNIZING SAME-GENDER COVENANT COMMITMENTS ONLY IN THE USA

Introduction for Recognizing Same-gender Covenant Commitments Only in the USA

Covenant commitment relationships are recognized only by Community of Christ and have no legal rights according to federal and state civil and governmental laws. The provision for a covenant commitment relationship is to give opportunity to express the principle of sacred covenant between same-gender couples where state laws do not allow for same-gender marriage, civil unions, or legal relationships.

Interim Policy

For purposes of policy administration:

1. Same-gender covenant commitments will be available only in states where applicable law does not permit same-gender marriages, civil unions, and/or legal relationships, and only when both persons in a couple have permanent legal residence in such state(s). Only same-gender couples, therefore, will be eligible to make covenant commitments, because marriage is available to all heterosexual couples.
2. Same-gender covenant commitments that are in accordance with this policy will be treated like marriages only within the church in the USA.
3. Same-gender covenant-commitment terminations will be treated like marriage terminations only within the church in the USA.
4. For a same-gender couple's relationship to be in accordance with this policy, the couple is expected to establish the most equivalent relationship to marriage (marriage, civil union, or legal relationship) that applicable law permits. If applicable law later changes and permits a more equivalent relationship to marriage, a same-gender

couple is expected to establish the most equivalent relationship to marriage (marriage, civil union, or legal relationship) that applicable law then permits. This situation may occur if the couple's state(s) of permanent legal residence change applicable law, or if the couple changes their state(s) of permanent legal residence.

5. If a same-gender couple later establishes a more equivalent relationship to marriage, they will be eligible (but not required) to have another Community of Christ ceremony that establishes or recognizes the establishment of that relationship.
6. Either or both persons in a same-gender couple may terminate their covenant commitment in accordance with guidelines provided by the First Presidency.



Reference: [WCR]

[Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition 6G;]

[Doctrine and Covenants 17; 163; 164]

[Priesthood Manual 2004]

[Ministry and Priesthood planning]

[National Conferences: General Questions and Answers, May 22, 2012]

Policy Number: National Policy-USA 70.03

Effective Date: March 31, 2014

Revision Date:

INTERIM POLICY FOR AUTHORIZING AND PERFORMING SAME-GENDER COVENANT COMMITMENT SERVICES ONLY IN THE USA

Introduction for Performing Same-gender Covenant Commitment Services

In the USA, Community of Christ Aaronic priests and Melchisedec priesthood members are eligible to officiate at ceremonies that establish same-gender covenant commitments in states where applicable law does not permit same-gender marriages, civil unions, and/or legal relationships, and when both persons in a couple have permanent legal residence in such state(s).

Interim Policy

1. Community of Christ prescribes certain procedures within the covenant commitment ceremony itself.

CEREMONIAL VOW

The following covenant statement approved by the First Presidency will be used for same-gender couples during the celebration of their covenant commitment:

Covenant commitment—*You both mutually agree to be each other's **covenant** companion, that is keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others during your lives?*

2. An Aaronic priest or Melchisedec priesthood member is not required to perform any covenant commitment ceremony with which he or she is uncomfortable. He or she should refer the couple to another priesthood member in an appropriately sensitive, pastoral manner.

3. According to existing policy, a covenant commitment ceremony at a congregational facility requires approval from the pastor of the congregation. Use of a church campground requires the approval of the mission center president. Use of other church-owned property requires administrative approval from the First Presidency's office.



Reference: [WCR]

[*Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition* 6G; 4]

[*Doctrine and Covenants* 156; 163; 164]

[*Priesthood Manual* 2004]

[*Ministry and Priesthood planning*]

[*National Conferences: General Questions and Answers*, May 22, 2012]

Policy Number: National Policy-USA 40.00

Effective Date: March 31, 2014

Revision Date:

USA INTERIM POLICY FOR ORDINATION OF PRIESTHOOD OF SAME-GENDER ORIENTATION

Introduction for Ordination

Ordination of members of same-gender orientation in the USA is authorized and will follow the policies established by the church for ordination. Policies and procedures for initiating calls are outlined in the current *Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition*. The First Presidency provides guidelines for ethics and patterns of behavior that are applicable for all priesthood.

Interim Policy

1. God calls people to the priesthood according to God's freedom, wisdom, and purposes. Race, ethnicity, size, physical ability, sex/gender, and sexual orientation are not grounds for deferring the calling of a person or approval of an ordination to any priesthood office. Calls to the priesthood are processed and approved according to established policies and procedures that are the same for all persons.
2. Church members in same-gender marriages, civil unions, and legal relationships that are valid under applicable law and in accordance with this policy, or in covenant commitments that are in accordance with this policy, are eligible to be called to serve in the priesthood according to established procedures.
3. This policy pertains to the ordination of Aaronic and Melchisedec priesthood members from among church members who are citizens or permanent residents of the USA, reside in the USA, or whose church membership is recorded in the USA.
4. If a person in a same-gender marriage is approved for ordination, the sacrament of ordination for a person in such a relationship should occur within the legal

- jurisdiction of the USA. Any exception to this policy must be specifically approved by the supervising apostle or apostles involved.
5. An Aaronic priest or Melchisedec priesthood member will not be required to perform any ordination with which he or she is uncomfortable. The priesthood ordinand should be referred to another priesthood member in an appropriately sensitive, pastoral manner.
 6. Nothing in this policy is intended to, or should be construed to, violate or oppose the federal or state laws of the USA.
 7. If there are conflicts between the provisions of this policy and the federal or state laws of the USA, immediately contact your mission center president and apostle.

Distribution

This interim policy will be distributed to the following church leaders:

- WCLC members
- World Church Legal Services
- USA mission center officers, staff members, and employees
- All pastors in USA
- All priesthood members in USA
- Other field officers, staff, and employees, as needed

The nature of offering priesthood ministry by people in same-sex/gender relationships can be disruptive and even harmful in some nations. Following are lists of nations where ministry by priesthood in same-sex/gender relationships will not be accepted and nations where it may be accepted. These lists are provided to guide the church in its sensitivity to the different cultures that form the international body of Community of Christ.

Nations where priesthood ministry by people in same-sex/gender relationships would not be accepted:

Aruba	Republic of Haiti
Cayman Islands	Republic of Honduras
Commonwealth of Puerto Rico	Republic of India
Democratic Republic of Congo	Republic of Kenya
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	Republic of Liberia
Dominican Republic	Republic of Malawi
Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal	Republic of Mozambique
Federal Republic of Nigeria	Republic of Nicaragua
Federative Republic of Brazil	Republic of Peru
Georgia	Republic of Sierra Leone
Islamic Republic of Pakistan	Republic of South Korea
Jamaica	Republic of the Congo
Japan	Republic of the Fiji Islands
Kingdom of Thailand	Republic of the Philippines
New Caledonia	Republic of Togo
Republic of Angola	Republic of Venezuela
Republic of Bolivia	Republic of Zambia
Republic of Botswana	Republic of Zimbabwe
Republic of China (Taiwan)	Russian Federation
Republic of Colombia	Ukraine
Republic of Côte d'Ivoire	United Mexican States
Republic of El Salvador	United Republic of Tanzania
Republic of Guatemala	

Nations where priesthood ministry by people in same-sex/gender relationships may be accepted, but requires administrative approval by appropriate church officers:

Argentine Republic	New Zealand
Federal Republic of Germany	Republic of Chile
French Polynesia	Republic of Hungary
French Republic	Republic of South Africa
Kingdom of Norway	United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Kingdom of Spain	Northern Ireland
Kingdom of the Netherlands	

Nations where priesthood ministry by people in same-sex/gender relationships has been approved by a national conference:

Canada

Commonwealth of Australia

United States of America

K. Carla Long Phone Call

Carla Long: "...trying to do her best, and we can trust Carla to do her best", but that's not what happened. It was like you didn't even know who I was anymore. I'm still trying my best.

(Caller): I believe you.

Carla Long: It's not like I'm not standing up and doing what I can too! But what I can do is -

(Caller): I don't know what your options [were]. Could you have said no?

Carla Long: Not if I had wanted to keep my job.

(Caller): Okay, so that's a choice.

Carla Long: I don't know! I don't know if I would have lost my job. I know that I would have been in deep, deep shit. And I also know that if I hadn't have done it, there would have been another person who did it.

(Caller): But that's a choice, Carla. I mean, all of us face those.

Carla Long: It was a choice to protect Vanessa!

(Caller): I mean, sometimes, you know... I'm not saying you made the best choice, the right choice, the wrong choice, but I know **Attendee's** choice was "I won't do it", and -

Carla Long: So she would rather have somebody who doesn't know Vanessa at all, who has no care - or who doesn't just understand who Vanessa is - she would rather have somebody else come in and rip it out of her fingers?

Well, that is, for me, that has no compassion at all.

(Caller): Well, I understand your-

Carla Long: and no courage at all! I have to have the courage to do it too! I'm trying to do it in a way that will help Vanessa - that will help not tear her apart. I asked for her to have more time, [and] that was denied.

(Caller): So, the manual says that only local leadership is supposed to be making these decisions, and then if they make a decision and it's appealed then those above can be involved.

Let me just give you a little clue here for those of us coming out of the LDS background. The LDS church has that policy that local leaders are the ones to make these decisions and those above are not to be involved in it. They tout that one, and they bring that one out every time and they say "This was a decision of local leaders". When it was Kate [Kelly], when it was Byron [Marchant], it was ordered from above, and that policy of "local leadership" was just run rough-shod over.

So I think that nobody seems to really know the manual and they don't get updated. What I'm hoping is this is now an opportunity to go back and make some real improvements in the church. That's the goal. It's not you, it's not to point fingers.

This showed there's some serious problems. People aren't following what policies that exist, and the policies that exist are incredibly vague. There's just a lot of real issues.

But for somebody with my background, to then see that in the manual, and then to hear you now say "Hey, I would have lost my job", and I feel your concern and pain, and I'm sure you don't have a bunch of money laying around, all that as well. That's a whole lot of pressure to put on somebody.

Carla Long: I shouldn't have said that. I don't know if I would have lost my job. I don't know. I know that it would have been - I know that things would have been very, very difficult for me, especially in this new position while I'm working very closely with the World Church Leadership Council.

That adds a layer to this that I had never had to deal with before.

(Caller): Well, I actually said that to (Attendee). I said, "They now gave her a new position, and then they tell her to go out and do this." I said, "That's a hell of a bind to be in." So I actually recognized that right off the top.

But, again, why aren't they following their policy? Why are they ordering you? Why are people who aren't supposed to be involved ordering you to do something?

Carla Long: I hear you, and that is actually one of the reasons I stood up and felt I've never felt more alone. It wasn't just from the people in the congregation. I felt like I had been cut loose from everything, because it is technically my decision, but it is also being watched very closely.

(Caller): Yeah.

Carla Long: But it is technically my decision, supposedly.

(Caller): But not really.

Carla Long: I mean, this polyamory stuff has ripples throughout the entire World Church that I'm sure - actually people know way more than I do, because I am completely out of a lot of gossip circles - so I know that there's many people who are very, very upset, and something like this happened before and I was thrown under the fucking bus again, and I was called "Satan" and I was called out for "ecclesiastical abuse" by people.

This is not the first time this has happened to me, and I didn't think it was going to be this hard again. (tearing up) Sorry.

(Caller): Yeah, no I just think the people need to understand what their - it's easy when you're on top to order something, and not really understand. You know, it's the principle, the person with the least information makes the decision.

Those kinds of situations are terrible. Like I said, (redacted due to identifying info) I'm kind of familiar with bureaucracy, and institutions, and all that. I'm sorry that you are in the spot you're in.

I think people have used the word “abuse” because this really does smack of institutional abuse, particularly given the timing. That’s the part that I just can’t wrap my head around. Did nobody at the top think “She just lost her husband to a violent suicide, her life’s been turned upside down, and now this is the time to do it”?

I also get the deep historical thing with the church. They were the “Anti-Brighamites”, the anti... They were Emma’s church. I get that. Like I said, I’m not pro-polyamory or pro-non-monogamy or any of that. I very much am grateful to be in an absolutely monogamous relationship.

The timing sucked. I can’t wrap my head around that one.

Carla Long: I don’t disagree with that. I fought for that as well, and I lost that battle. I think that - I know that the... ugh... I don’t know anything really...

But this is definitely a trigger point for members of the leadership in Community of Christ, and they... yeah.

And it was acted on very, very poorly.

(Caller): I agree.

Carla Long: But, but. In doing what I have done I have bought at least a little bit more time to try something different. To not make it so violent. I have at least bought me some more time to try to work with people and try and find a different way.

(Caller): Well, good.

Carla Long: And that’s what I’m trying to do.

(Caller): Good. And that might be... I don’t know... So here’s from my point of view: when Vanessa said “I waive all confidentiality”, I mean this is very legalistic, and you said “I still can’t say anything”, who does the privilege belong to? Is the privilege Vanessa’s to protect Vanessa, [or] is it the institution’s to protect the institution? I don’t know the answer to that, but if the privilege is really Vanessa’s and she’s willing to have it waived, maybe there’s some discussions that can be had.

I don’t know how publicly you would want to have that kind of discussion. Whether it would be helpful to do it on Sunday or just talk to people like you’re talking to me in private.

The fact that you are trying to buy time, you’re trying to figure out a middle way, you’re trying to figure out something that can work, and not be violent to Vanessa. Maybe people need to know that.

Carla Long: Well, it’s not really my - I don’t know whose confidentiality it is to waive either. I will tell you two things:

1. There’s no way that I would have said to a crowd of people, who is already somewhat enflamed, and made it work out well when I was standing at the pulpit.

2. A worship service is definitely not the time or place to have that happen.
3. I'm not really - Vanessa can talk about it all Vanessa wants, and if Vanessa has said things publicly, then I can say things publicly as well. But really, as far as I understand it, it's Vanessa's thing to share.

Vanessa is well aware that we are trying to find a third way.

(Caller): Oh, Vanessa is your defender.

Carla Long: And I'm hers!

(Caller): So, I mean, she's out there saying "I don't blame Carla", I mean she stood up in church and told you that she loved you. Everything I've heard from Vanessa is - I mean, this is the epitome of grace. She is telling people "Don't blame Carla. I love Carla."

Carla Long: And I appreciate that so much. Of course I appreciate that, and I think that she has been absolutely incredible. I, too, am trying to be incredible for her, and it takes a lot of courage.

And I love **Attendee** too, but if I were **Attendee**, and I say "I wash my hands clean of this", then there would be no grace period, there would be no suspension. That would have done no benefit for Vanessa, and no good for the congregation. So **Attendee** can say that all she wants, "If I were the pastor then I would just say 'fuck it'", but is that really helpful? Or is it better for me to get involved and get my hands dirty too? **Attendee** can say that all she wants. It's not going to solve anything.

(Caller): Well, is there a - I mean, do we even know who's pushing this? Do you know who's pushing this? Do you know who gave the order?

L. Parker's Harmony Statement

[\(Posted September 20th, 2022 in the "Harmony Table" facebook group\)](#)

To my Harmony Family:

In my time serving on Harmony's Board of Directors, I have fought hard for transparency and fairness in Community of Christ. And because of that work...I have been on the receiving end of much pain, heartache, severed relationships, and disappointment at the hands of the church as it maintains a posture of reactivity. I am hard on the institution because it is sorely out of alignment with its own vision of inclusion, and as a queer member of the church I cannot in good conscience represent (in an official capacity) a church that continues to harm those like me more than help in the name of "global diversity". It would be irresponsible of me.

That's why after much prayerful reflection, I have turned in my priesthood card. I did so because I am staunchly opposed to don't ask don't tell "policies" related to members' personal lives as well as the lack of transparency and blatant inconsistency with which "policies" are applied. Honesty is punished and sneaking is rewarded. Pastoral care is non-existent. Unique circumstances go unacknowledged. Nuance is ignored. Compliance is praised. "Policies" either cannot or will not be produced.

The total lack of strategic planning is harming some of the most vulnerable who are sold a bill of goods claiming we will love, include, and welcome them unconditionally...only to realize we haven't fully thought out what it means to be welcoming toward them at all. Real people get hurt when we try to appear a certain way without doing the work.

I love this faith community, and yet I've grown hoarse - tired of being strong at every turn when what I really need is an opportunity to let my guard down.

I didn't make it to the one-year point with priesthood. A younger (closeted) me sitting in a rural Oklahoma RLDS congregation wanted nothing more than to be fully welcomed into the church at all levels...but I've come to realize we aren't living this out (despite national conference action) precisely because we never had the forethought to ensure its success.

Years of asking simple questions such as:

- "Who authored the national conference policy?"
- "Were members of the Queer/2SLGBTQIA+ community present when the national policy was written?"
- "What was the plan to amend national policies?"
- "Who has oversight over these policies?"
- "Can Queer/2SLGBTQIA+ people currently serve in the C12 or FP?"

...are still* met with shrugs by some of the most influential and powerful leaders in the church.

It is not my intention to weaponise my priesthood calling. On the contrary, this priesthood card symbolises a lifetime of institutional harm that I worked hard to overcome without an ounce of official support or repentance from the church I sought approval from. But in order to have integrity, I cannot continue to act as a priesthood member of a church that professes to be a

safe haven and yet fails to even see the humanity in its own members. As much as it hurts, I know my past self would support this decision.

I will continue to proudly serve as Harmony President until my term ends in December 2023, and please know I will continue to push for progress. I thought that priesthood would allow me to sit at more tables, and maybe that's true to some extent...but the cost of entry is far too high for me and I simply can't justify it anymore.

Perhaps one day things will improve enough that I can step back into an official ministry role, but at this time I am so deeply disappointed, hurt, and embarrassed that such a change seems lightyears away.