



THE WAY FORWARD

SERIES BY PRESIDENT VEAZEY - OFFERS
CHALLENGES, HOPES AND MORE.

"ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSE OF WAR AND VIOLENCE
AND WORKING TOWARD THE ELIMINATION OF THESE."

—WORLD CONFERENCE RESOLUTION 1177

"WE, AS A CHURCH, OPPOSE ALL FORMS OF DESTRUCTIVE
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CONFLICT, WAR, WITHHOLDING OF FOOD, TERRORISM,
AND MENTAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE."

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This is the first three in a series of messages recorded by President Steve Veazey. To watch the video versions, go to www.youtube.com/user/CofChrist. English, French, and Spanish versions are available. The purpose of this series of messages is to describe major opportunities and challenges before the church as we journey to 2023 World Conference and beyond. The Council of Twelve Apostles and others will lead discussions and planning in the fields in response to what is presented.

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit is stirring fresh expressions of gospel community amid massive cultural changes and human need. Community of Christ is discerning what God is doing and our response. Doctrine and Covenants 162:2c states that we “live in a world with new challenges, and that world will require new forms of ministry.”

This series of messages grew from talks with the World Church Leadership Council and others about opportunities and challenges before the church.

In these messages, I’ll highlight major opportunities and challenges. The Council of Twelve Apostles and others will lead discussions in the apostolic fields about what is most important in each.

Of course, the unpredictability of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and other global maladies will be considered. With that said, let’s begin with a major opportunity!

MESSAGE 1: A DOOR TO GREAT OPPORTUNITY!

There are many opportunities to spiritually connect people to God and the gospel in Christ-centered community! God relates uniquely to each of us while inviting us into spiritual community, fashioned in the love of Christ.

This is God’s way of redeeming and transforming the world. Inviting and being with others in this way is central to God’s nature as expressed through the church. The Holy Spirit is always fitting people together in Christ to become a dwelling place for God on Earth (Ephesians 2:21–22).

Once, after baptizing three older adults, one said to me, “Why do you think it took us so long to find this church?”

Later, as I pondered that question, the Holy Spirit reframed it in my mind as, “Why did it take the church so long to find these people?”

How would your congregation or group answer that question?

There is remarkable response to the gospel as shared by Community of Christ in some nations. Baptisms, confirmations, and ordinations occur frequently. The gospel is embodied in Christ-centered communities of invitation, generosity, and peace. Response to the cause of Zion is evident!

Let’s celebrate what the Holy Spirit is doing in these nations! It is like the Spirit-led growth of the early church depicted in the Book of Acts. Apostle Paul described it as “...a wide door for effective work has opened...” (1

Corinthians 16:9 NRSV).

To respond fully we need more culturally relevant disciple- and leader-formation (education, training) materials and experiences in local languages.

The gospel is shared most authentically through the languages, stories, symbols, music, and art of human cultures. It does not truly take root in people’s lives until that happens.

At the same time, the gospel transforms cultures as it becomes rooted in them. This is called “inculturation.” It is how the gospel is embodied in human lives and societies. The process is ongoing.

In response to our “great door of opportunity,” we must find ways to increase support for disciple and leader formation (education, materials, training) provided in local languages and cultural themes. The Holy Spirit is urging us to act before opportunities are lost. How will we respond?

MESSAGE 2: POVERTY TRAPS

Many members and friends are trapped in poverty. This is caused by unjust economic and political systems, plus human greed. That means people caught in poverty don’t have the same opportunities as others. It is wrong to blame them for these circumstances!

Once, while ministering in a poor area, a pastor apologized to me because there were not more people gathered for a morning class. He explained, “Most of them are still out looking for something to eat today.” My heart broke for them.

Are you willing to have your heart broken, too?

Poverty is not inevitable! Humans choose to keep economic opportunities away from the impoverished.

While there was progress in recent decades, poverty is increasing again because of climate change, pandemics, inhumane immigration policies, high inflation, overconsumption by some, and wars.

David Beasley, head of the UN World Food Program, said its latest analysis shows that “a record 345 million acutely hungry people are marching to the brink of starvation”—a 25 percent increase from 276 million at the start of 2022 before Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24.

The number stood at 135 million before the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, according to a news article on July 7 this year.

The Enduring Principles of the church offer an alternative, more hopeful vision for the world. Making Responsible Choices with that vision in mind has never been more important for the welfare of all of us.

Jesus highlighted “good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18 NRSV) as essential in his mission. We are being faithful to Christ through local and global initiatives to abolish poverty and end unnecessary suffering.

Good news is more than words or good intentions. Truly good news arises from cooperative efforts with those trapped in poverty to change the conditions that perpetuate poverty. Walking closely with those living in poverty transforms us as we grow closer to them and Christ, who is always serving among the “least of

these” (Matthew 25:31–46 NRSV). As [theologian] Henri Nouwen wrote:

When Jesus says, “What you did to the least of my brothers, you did to me” (Matthew 25:40 NRSV), he is addressing to us a direct invitation not only to help but to discover the beauty of God in those who are to be helped. ...[This is through] the smiles of the children, the hospitality of the people, the expressions they use, the stories they tell, the wisdom they show, the goods they share; there is so much richness and beauty, so much affection and human warmth...

World Hunger projects funded through Worldwide Mission Tithes are one way we do this. This money secures wells for sanitary water, develops fish farming as a food source, offers skills training matched to employment opportunities, and provides microloans for income-producing initiatives.

Apostle [Catherine] Mambwe reports that a solar-powered irrigation project in two African villages is transforming lives and giving real hope!

Support also is provided for ministers working to reduce poverty in the United States.

There are proven methods that reduce poverty! We know that empowering women makes a big difference! We know our impact increases when we partner with others.

We know that utilizing local resources to meet needs identified by the people helps avoid dependency and creates sustainable efforts. There’s much we can do to reduce poverty.

Remarkably, there are amazing expressions of grace and generosity among those living in poverty.

Obviously, those trapped in poverty have limited financial means. However, they give what they can of money and goods to support church ministries. They want their contributions to support local and worldwide ministries because they desire others to experience the hope they have through Community of Christ!

They do this because they see the transformative effect of Community of Christ where they live. A new member in a lower-income nation once told me that “Whenever Community of Christ comes to a village, that village becomes better for all.” What a wonderful expression of the cause of Zion!

Members in lower-income areas do not want to be dependent on others. They strive for personal and church self-sufficiency. They just need help freeing themselves from the cruel clutches of poverty.

Others can help by giving to worldwide ministries that support the church in those areas.

Regardless of economic circumstances, members in lower-income nations have a wealth of gospel passion, spiritual energy, and love of community. These are priceless gifts they want to share with others. Their enthusiasm for witness, invitation, and ministry can

bless the church in other nations where participation is lagging.

How can different areas of the church give from their kind of abundance and receive what is needed for mutual enrichment? We can form partnerships between fields, mission centers, and congregations around the world that facilitate reciprocal sharing of gifts, blessings, and resources. All will be blessed!

Such global relationships are central to what it means to be Community of Christ engaged in the cause of Zion.

How could your group, congregation, or mission center be part of a mutually enriching partnership with the church in another part of the world?

MESSAGE 3: GOD’S KIND OF JUSTICE

Injustices contrary to Jesus’s peace are causing devastation around the world. These include racial, economic, gender, sexual-orientation, immigration, and climate-justice issues.

While these injustices have been around a long time, there is a backlash to recent efforts to realize a world of justice and peace for all.

Various times I have asked Black American church members about their life experiences. While I was not surprised, I was deeply affected by their accounts of unrelenting discrimination, oppression, and violence directed toward them. Their backs have been against the wall for a long time. They are pleading with us to stand up for and with them!

Sometimes, they told me, they feel that the church is only interested in certain kinds of diversity that don’t seem to fully include them.

What can we do to seek God’s kind of justice with Christ? One thing for sure is that we must move beyond idealistic words about the Worth of All Persons, Unity in Diversity, Sacredness of Creation...and act in ways that work. Many of our young adults and youth tell us this is particularly important to them.

Unfortunately, human- and environmental-justice issues often are relegated to the hyper-polarized, partisan-politics realm and dismissed as “too controversial” for church involvement.

That vision of holistic salvation (shalom) and restoration for people, societies, and the Earth (Doctrine and Covenants 165:1e) calls us to engage justice issues as gospel imperatives—just like Jesus!

This takes vision, courage, and persistence! It also takes a spiritual life grounded in God’s love that opens us to divine love for all. This empowers us to act positively from a stance of what we are for and not just what we are against.

The churchwide discussion of nonviolence, initiated by World Conference Resolution 1319, is related to pursuing God’s vision of holistic salvation and peace for people, groups, societies, and the planet.

This is not a new topic. In 1982 the World Conference approved WCR 1177 entitled "Peace." It provides a broad overview of our position related to peace and violence, including a statement about "Addressing the root causes of war and violence and working toward the elimination of these."

It also declares:

We, as a church, oppose all forms of destructive violence, such as national and international conflict, war, withholding of food, terrorism, and mental and physical abuse.

So, a foundation already has been laid for understanding the relationship of nonviolence to peace.

However, there are many questions to explore:

- What about Jesus's teachings about forgoing revenge violence in a violent world?
- How do we understand violence and nonviolence in various cultural and vocational settings, including professions entrusted to protect others from violence?
- How do we "unmask" subtle but real forms of violence that many do not see as such?
- How is abusing natural resources and the atmosphere to the point life cannot be sustained violence against us, others, creation, and God?
- What is the difference between peacekeeping, which may allow injustices to persist, and peacemaking, which seeks just peace, not just the absence of conflict?

There are no simple answers. But the conversation is very important, and it takes a lot of time and effort to have a churchwide discussion on these questions in multiple languages, especially during a global pandemic.

Materials and opportunities, including online gatherings, are available to guide discussion and feedback.

The Presidency will update the 2023 World Conference about progress. Common-consent-building activities will encourage the sharing of perspectives and ideas.

How are you and your congregation, group, or mission center participating in the worldwide church conversation on nonviolence? Have you provided comments or questions to support the discussion?

