

**Mormon Stories Episode 592:
Stephen M. Veazey – Prophet-President of Community of Christ Pt. 3**

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A City Creek condominium owned by Terry Wittenberg [fan of John Dehlin]

Content: Prophet-President Steve Veazey discusses if church leaders or during World Conference could affect Words of Council considered for canonization (p. 1 – p. 2), how God reveals himself for communication and why God doesn't reveal himself today like in the Bible or the early years of the Restoration (p. 2 – p. 3), "no one speaks infallibly for God" (p. 3), how he perceives himself and Community of Christ's role in Christianity (p. 4 – p. 5), if Community of Christ's finances are public (p. 5 – p. 6), how Community of Christ could reject doctrines coming from Joseph Smith Jr. (p. 6 – p. 8), how someone from an LDS background could embrace another Restoration church if they had very negative feelings about Joseph Smith Jr. (p. 8 – p. 10), comments on what he knows about the Latter-day Seekers initiative (p. 10 – p. 11), what congregations Latter-day Seekers can connect to and how to find a congregation via the church's website (p. 11 – p. 12), where he sees Community of Christ in the future and shares his testimony p. 12 – p. 13).

Dehlin: A quick micro question about revelation. So, I can imagine you authoring some draft based on conversations with members and your own reflections and feedback from leadership and your own sense of history, but I could imagine if I'm that role having a close group of trusted friends where I could say here's the draft, what do you think? Oh, let's fix some grammatical syntax stuff and maybe given you some things to think about it, maybe some feedback, maybe some of the Apostles, maybe some remember the First Presidency and having that be a bit of a collaborative process before it's formalized and presented to the Church body. Does that in any way reflect what happens or not or are you comfortable even talking about that? I'm just curious. That's what I would just imagine happening.

Veazey: I again speak from my experience. I think it may have happened in various ways with previous Presidents of the Church. I have two counselors in the First Presidency, and I involve both of those Councilors in reviewing what I have written as what I understand to be Words of Council to share with the Church and they very prayerfully reflect on that and share comments. Typically, affirmation or sometimes they encourage me to go to say more. They feel like maybe I haven't expressed everything that needs to be expressed so often the encouragement is continue in the process and reflect more on that. There are a few other trusted colleagues that I may share a portion with or the whole text and I listen to their council. The reason I do is that I feel again very strongly that what is shared in that mode is not being driven by my emotion or my particular priorities and I think the best way to be accountable in the revelatory process is to

involve others with you in the journey to the point at which you have to decide as Prophet-President whether to present it as revelation or continuing revelation to the Church or not. And then the interesting part is this has become a part of who you are but then you have to let go of it and give it to the Church and you can feel particularly vulnerable at that point on the human side. You know what's going to happen from this point on? Yes, I ask others to do that to help me be assured that's what I'm presenting is of the quality and of the nature and worth that kind of consideration by the Church.

Dehlin: What I'm sort of hearing is that you'll- when you seek for feedback either from trusted colleagues or the Church membership that either the feedback comes in the form of affirmation or please expand, right? And that you may even get feedback that expresses disagreement or concern but there's never a process of the words coming from others into the document. It sounds like it's pretty important from what I'm hearing that the actual words come from you? The final words.

Veazey: I-

Dehlin: That others aren't crafting the words. You're crafting the words. Is that true?

Veazey: That's true. Now in my understanding of human nature, I may be impacted by what I've heard from others or ways of expressing something but when it is presented to the church I include an introductory preface that presents it as what I am presenting to the church in my role as Prophet-President with the church's understanding of what that role means and that I am presenting it. It's not the First Presidency presenting it or a select group of people presenting it. I am presenting it.

Dehlin: Okay.

Veazey: And that's my understanding and that's the church's understanding.

Dehlin: Okay. So, the way that we're taught about Joseph Smith [Jr.], a physical appearance of God and Jesus was like crucial part of the story and even as I think about the rustiness of my church history something about Kirtland and the appearance of Elijah or the appearance of celestial beings and angels [LDS D&C 110]. There's something bold about the claim of physical manifestations and Book of Mormon has the finger of God touching the stones with Brother of Jared and Moses claiming the burning bush like- it seems like the beginning of the Restoration there was a real materiality to it. Specially in terms of God appearing to the Prophet and I'm wondering whether that's like- has that continued at all with your predecessor or you if anyone is comfortable talking and if it hasn't, have you ever thought about why?

Veazey: So, you're asking about that kind of encounter or how we would understand that?

Dehlin: Joseph [Smith Jr.] would say God and Jesus appeared to me.

Veazey: Yeah.

Dehlin: Modern LDS Church members would say yeah, the Prophets- all the LDS Prophets have probably had that experience. Now no one has been said they have, but I think as members there is a general assumption that's what's going on. That Thomas S. Monson goes to holy of holies, you know, there's a chair there, God or Jesus comes and sits down, and they have that conversation. You know I'm exaggerating but there's a materiality to the appearance of Peter, James, and John in our tradition hands on the head of Joseph [Smith Jr.] and Oliver [Cowdry] or whatever. John the Baptist laying his hands on the head to deliver the Aaronic Priesthood, right so you know to what extent do you think that is the experience of your predecessors or of you? Or is that not how you understand what being a Prophet is about and if it's not, how do you explain it? So to be crude have you seen God, have you seen Jesus? But I don't want to be that crude, but I think you can see where the question's coming from.

Veazey: Yes, yes. In general, I believe that God reveals God's self to persons especially in initial or originating kinds of experiences in ways that a person might expect or could best understand. To me that's another expression of the grace of God. As I travel in other cultures, I hear people talking about experiences with God that have elements of their unique culture in it so I understand the time in which Joseph Smith Jr lived, grew up, the types of religious experiences that we're going on and that's the kind of experience that various persons were having so all of that's working together in his experience of encounter with the Divine. My experience of encounter with the Divine has not been in material or material-like form or image. My experience- the best way I can describe it is a thrust of Light and Intelligence experienced as Love but it has content that comes into my being and I recognized it as beyond me and that has been the most typical kind of experience that I have had. I understand that to be an expression of the being of God. I understand that to be an expression of the living Christ, an Eternal Christ and those are the words I use to describe it but that's more the nature of my experience with it.

Dehlin: And for someone who would say: well, you know, if the Book of Mormon got it wrong on skin color and if you know a previous section of the Doctrine and Covenants said polygamy was okay or not okay or if scripture can be fallible- if the Bible has things that are wrong about race or gender or whatever, why should we listen to you now? What would you say?

Veazey: Well, I probably wouldn't try to convince them, but if there was something in them that was responding to what I was saying I would encourage them to give attention to that and to see where it might take them but also again it's a very important principle in Community of Christ that no one speaks infallibly for God.

Dehlin: Including you?

Veazey: Including me and that's why it's very important to me to be accountable to others and the church and the church is involved in discerning what goes into the Doctrine and Covenants which is the living, open part of the church's canon which can provide perspective on the Book of Mormon, biblical literature as well as perhaps open some new dimensions of a understanding.

Dehlin: I think there's probably an assumption or perception in our tradition that Thomas S. Monson is the most righteous man on the planet and that he has a connection to God that no one else has. That there's something special about that. Is that how you- you know, do you have a sense of your own worthiness or righteousness or worth relative to others? I mean you encouraged me to call you Steve like within 10 seconds of meeting you. I don't know if people stand up when you walk into the room in your tradition. That's how it is when the Prophet walks it in ours. Do you think that your worthiness is greater than others and do you feel like the revelation that you receive is in some way privileged versus the revelation of just a average member if your faith might receive or someone who's Buddhist or you know Muslim?

Veazey: Yeah, no. I don't perceive my worthiness or righteousness to be above anyone else in the church or in the world. What I perceive and experience is that in the church there is this role of Prophet-President and the function of the role is to hopefully keep the church prophetic as a faith community and growing in its experience with God and so out of God's grace, God blesses the human being that is in that role for particular time. Others could serve in that role and God would bless them in that role. So, do I try to live an ethical, moral life? A righteous life as I understand it? Yes. Do I make mistakes? Yes. Am I fallible? Yes. But to me that makes the Gospel's message of grace and forgiveness and reconciliation more real and more believable, not less so.

Dehlin: What's the difference then between what you might perceive as revelation and what an average member or a non-member might? Or is it all from God?

Veazey: I think the difference is what is its scope so overtime throughout its history, the Church has established the understanding that Prophet-President is the one who speaks to the whole church. Others speak within the context of their lives and their situations so we certainly affirm that anyone can have encounter with God and that connection with God is very important. It doesn't have mediated by anyone or anything else. At the same time we're all fallible as human being so not everyone can speak for the Church or to the Church so there is a designated person and process for the health and well-being of the Church or one can envision how it could get chaotic at times with many people claiming to have that responsibility to speak to the whole church.

Dehlin: What is the role- how do you see the role of Community of Christ in the world? So, in our faith tradition it's really clear: there's one true church. It's the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We have exclusive priesthood authority. We are God's only true church. Period. Our Prophet speaks for God and he's the only one and every other church is illegitimate and its authority and errant in its doctrine. It's pretty simple. Are you guys the same or is it different? And the flip side of that is are you just one of many churches all doing your best and you're called to your people, but other people are called to their people and their many paths up Mount Fuji? I know it's a long question, but I think you get the sense of what I'm asking.

Veazey: Yeah, we wouldn't see ourselves in the description that you gave although there would be some members who would find a lot of comfort and affinity with those statements, but as a church that's not where we are. We understand our mission in the World in terms of proclaiming Jesus Christ as evangelism but particularly promoting the expression of the Gospel in communities of justice and peacefulness which we would equate with the hope, the cause of Zion. Seek to establish, bring forth the cause of Zion which is very much a part of the vision and spiritual impulse of the early Restoration church. So, we have understood the zionic cause in terms of community transformation throughout the whole world and that the Community of Christ is to be leaven, salt, make sure that that dimension of the Gospel is not lost because so much of Christianity especially in the western world and some other religions is all understood in personal individual terms. It's just about me and my salvation but we understand the gospel not only in terms of individual salvation but social salvation through the transformation of- in community and also including concern for the Earth— environmental salvation. So, we believe that within the spectrum of Christian churches, Community of Christ has a particular role to play in holding up those themes of the gospel and making sure they're not lost. That they're very important to the coming rein of God on Earth and we have been established and entrusted, shaped through our history and sacred story to be the voice of witness for those dimensions of the Gospel.

Dehlin: Would it be an inappropriate analogy to say that God's orchestra of churches has many instruments. A tuba and a trumpet and a trombone and a timpani and Community of Christ is one of God's instruments in His orchestra of churches?

Veazey: We would probably say yeah, we're in the orchestra and we have several instruments- [Laughing]

Dehlin: [Laughing]

Veazey: That are essential to the overall music and sound because of who we are, because of our history and our understandings. So yeah, I know I think that's a good description. We would understand our role as presenting an alternative to judgmental religion and Christianity, rigid religion and Christianity, condemning

religion and Christianity, while still being very serious about what it means to be Disciples of Jesus Christ and how we live in the world. We would especially see our role in emphasizing how the Gospel is lived out in relationships in community and how Christ can be experienced in those community relationships.

Dehlin: Okay. [...] Are your finances public?

Veazey: Yes, they are very public.

Dehlin: Why is that important?

Veazey: Well, that goes back to our desire to be transparent and our desire and willingness to be accountable and so it's a part of being responsible. It's a part of an understanding of the stewardship of church leaders to be accountable to the church through whose generosity the church finances are being- church funds are being financed so its kind of in our DNA. It's probably also part of being a movement that comes out of questioning so it's okay to question leadership. It's okay to question those who have responsibilities and that's considered to be healthier for the body.

Dehlin: How do you think about- okay, so in the LDS church we seem to pay a lot more attention to later kind of Nauvoo-era Joseph Smith [Jr.] then sort of Kirtland-era Joseph Smith [Jr.]. It's maybe oblivious to many of us that he actually did experience a transformation. That it wasn't just one monolithic Gospel from start to finish-

Veazey: Right.

Dehlin: -but I think people who read the history realize that there was an evolution there and that ,you know, Book of Mormon Kirtland Joseph Smith maybe had a trinitarian view of God and Jesus and a more traditional Protestant sort of theology, but then you know we see that in the Nauvoo time period things like celestial marriage, eternal Marriage, Melchizedek priesthood, proxy work for the dead, three degrees of Glory, man becoming a god someday like we I would characterize that is sort of Nauvoo-era theology and it just seems like Community of Christ has just sort of said: yeah, we kind of like- we're going to draw a little line in like, you know, around this date. Anything that Joseph [Smith Jr.] said or revealed or did or believed afterwards, we're going to kind of ignore and we're going to kind of stick to a prior- earlier versions. How do you just kind of embrace early Joseph Smith [Jr.] and sort of ignore later Joseph Smith [Jr.]?

Veazey: Well, I think it's through an understanding again of both human nature and how God interacts with humans and so for us church leaders don't need to be perfect or infallible. They themselves can be evolving in different directions and we believe within the Church of today there are checks and balances that maybe weren't as present in the embryonic church or the church that was emerging as the

Restoration so yeah, I've heard it described as, you know, Nauvoo-era, Kirkland-era. RLDS is more the Kirtland Church. LDS is more the Nauvoo Church. In my study of history, it to me it's very hard to distinctly draw those boundaries because I see the evolution in thinking and there are some beginnings of the Nauvoo period in Kirtland so it's hard for me to distinguish the categories that way. So, we have to look at our whole journey and so we learned from the Nauvoo-era. We look at it honestly and we understand the dynamics that were going on. Joseph Smith the Third who eventually became the leader in the Reorganization was greatly impacted by that era. Not by embracing all of it but seeing where maybe there needed to be some adjustment and moderation. Staying true to his understanding of the earliest tenets of the movement like open canon of scripture, continuing revelation and the cause of Zion, but learning from the history he charted a different course for the Reorganization and eventually the Community of Christ. So, with theological reflection, honesty, accountability, learning, the movement can be self-correcting if you're open to that and that's our story.

Dehlin: A maybe less diplomatic way of putting that is that at some point Joseph [Smith Jr.] kind of went off the rails and made a mess of things?

Veazey: [Laughing]

Dehlin: And you had to go through a filtering process of discerning when Joseph [Smith Jr.] was speaking as a Prophet and when he was kind of speaking in crazy terms? Is that a totally unfair way to characterize in more- in less diplomatic terms?

Veazey: [Laughing] Certainly-

Dehlin: Because really-

Veazey: Certainly, less diplomatic terms-

Dehlin: [Laughing]

Veazey: I would say that my understanding as I view the history is that the founding Prophet Joseph Smith Jr and associates were involved in very speculative theological explorations and trying that out, testing that out and also trying to reconcile it with previous pronouncements but also being willing to just be wide open in terms of how to understand God and how it all fell together or how it all worked together in terms of life on Earth and life in the hereafter. So, yes I would say there was a point at which things began to take a turn but I also look back in Christian history and I can see similar tendencies. I can see very fallible people and prophets in the Old Testament, but to me that makes the whole history become more believable because I see it as the human story of encounter with God and then how God's grace hangs in there with us as human beings over time so I look at David the writer of the Psalms and I see tremendous moral flaws in

him and yet he wrote some of the most beautiful expressions of praise and repentance that continue to inspire us today out of his own experience. So, that's a way I view it and I view Joseph Smith Jr in the same way. I also recognize his religious genius in terms of how he was trying to respond to the pressing questions of the day and the skepticism towards any continuing Revelation. That's where I really relate to Joseph Smith Jr. and he challenged that skepticism. His witness was a response to a lot of the skepticism of his day and that launched a whole new kind of religious movement that has various expressions today.

Dehlin: I want to move to talking about the Latter-day Seekers movement, but this sort of is a bit of a bridge to that. You know if I were to summarize what I hear you say about Joseph [Smith Jr.] is a lot of brilliance and inspiration and he was God's Prophet. He did a lot of good things. Mistakes were made and, you know, it's our job to sift.

Veazey: Yeah.

Dehlin: You know, and your church has worked hard to sift. There's a type of person who sort of experience within the LDS tradition is sort of deep disappointment and disillusionment where it's not just a- you know, there's a threshold of like yeah, I made some mistakes: maybe had an affair or maybe, you know, swore or maybe had a- you know claimed a revelation that really wasn't. That's maybe in the realm of sort of acceptable foibles for a Prophet you know, but then sort of when there's- when it gets to the level of you know, marrying underage girls and pressuring them and pressuring their parents and offering salvation exchange for what was ultimately likely sexual experience with you know teenage girls. Sending men on missions to marry their wives while the men were on missions. Marrying you know women who are married to other men and financial improprieties and open lying and denials about those practices. For many it reaches this point, and I'm going to tie this into the LDS Seekers Initiative, for many of us it's sort of like leaves us with this pit of sickness in her stomach where it's beyond the "made mistakes, still a good guy!" It goes to sort of deeply flawed, tragically flawed, and egregious behavior by the end of his life. Stomach so sick that I would never want to build any sense of belief upon anything tied to the name Joseph Smith Jr. again. Have you ever had to wrestle with that level of disappointment or disillusionment in Joseph [Smith Jr.] and what could you offer to someone who feels that about Joseph [Smith Jr.]? Who loves Steve Veazey, who loves Community of Christ in 2015, the messages but is stuck with that deep sick pit in association with Joseph Smith Jr.?

Veazey: That's a question!

Dehlin: [Laughing] For many that's the question to whether-

Veazey: Yeah.

Dehlin: -the LDS Seekers initiative is even viable for them. It's like-

Veazey: Right.

Dehlin: New wine, old bottles.

Veazey: Yeah.

Dehlin: Like if we're going to build, let's not build on Joseph [Smith Jr.]

Veazey: Yeah. Again, I have to speak out of my own experience, so I've been shaped by RLDS-Community of Christ experience where we did not view Joseph Smith Jr. in that way so-

Dehlin: Never viewed him as idyllic is that what you're saying?

Veazey: Idyllic or-

Dehlin: So always view him as human and flawed?

Veazey: Yes. Now again individual people would look at that to various degrees of affirmation about the characteristics of Joseph Smith Jr. and early in my life that would have been the image that was presented to me but in the RLDS-Community of Christ experience there is room to explore and question and then find the best in the restoration movement. That is not all dependent on one person or the founding prophet of the movement, but there are principles that can be enduring principles that are very important to one's faith journey that are valuable and that are a blessing to people so in our experience it's not focusing on the person of but it's drawing out of the history, out of the journey: what are the principles that help us relate to God and be faithful to God. Now the experience your describing is not an experience I've had because I didn't start at the same place in the LDS church. I'm a child of the RLDS-Community of Christ experience so I- for such persons I would want to listen to where they're coming from and understand that pain and understand what that must be like, but it's not just LDS Seekers. There's a whole world of hurting people out there that are questioning some of their original understandings of gospel and church and so they're moving beyond what was presented to them and in fact there's research on the Stages of Faith development that include as an individual pushing against what you've been presented as truth and then determining what you accept into your life as truth and continuing to develop as a human being of faith and spirituality and so to that degree I can understand how difficult it must be when truth has been presented in that way and then there begin to be legitimate questions and an eroding of some of that in the person's mind and experience. So, I would assume that's an experience that has a whole range of emotions with it. I think what Community of Christ offers is a community of compassion and understanding where there's room to continue that journey and there's

understanding and there's acceptance of where a person may be in their faith journey and a willingness to offer what are our experiences been out of the same soil and to understand that there are expressions of the restoration movement that don't carry with it some of the things that may be causing them the most trouble in their lives.

Dehlin: And so, you would not look favorably upon those actions of Joseph [Smith Jr.] that I mentioned, true?

Veazey: I would not look favorably on those.

Dehlin: Yeah.

Veazey: No.

Dehlin: But it sounds like what you're saying is for Community of Christ it's never really been about Joseph [Smith Jr.] as the center. It's about God manifesting His Spirit in the Spirit of Christ in the Restoration and that that's your focus. Not the individuals involved.

Veazey: I would say that the RLDS Church may have been at a similar place but out of our journey in response to the continuing revelation, we are now at a place where that's not the concern. Our concern is how can we be faithful to the life and mission of Jesus Christ today understood in a restoration context which includes continuing revelation and open canon of scripture, lay priesthood or a priesthood that is not just professionalized in a few people. All of that that's recognizable from the early days of the church that were beginning to be expressed we may not express it in the same way. The cause of Zion is there in the movement.

Dehlin: So, tell us briefly about the Latter-day Seekers movement and for- there will be tens of thousands of progressive and post-Mormons who listen to this podcast. I know it's not in your sensibility to poach or to you know make hard sells, but you know there's a lot of people without a spiritual home. Tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands if not millions of ex-LDS who without a spiritual home. What is the Latter-day Seeker initiative offering?

Veazey: Well, actually I'm just learning about the Latter-day Seeker Initiative and I do want to you know emphasize what you already so graciously lifted it up is it's not the intention of the Community of Christ to be arm-twisting or proselyting or sheep-stealing ever how you might want to phrase it. So as I understand it there are those from the LDS Church who are searching out Community of Christ because of what they've heard or what someone has said about our movement and we are being asked questions about who we are and so we're responding to questions and overtures to the Community of Christ as we would to anyone who is inquiring or seeking and we're going to be honest and open about who we are if that's helpful to some people then that's great. But we're not saying that we're

trying to extract people from another church or from where they are on their life journey right now, but if we can offer perspective or if we can offer a congregational and church experience that's helpful to people in their on-going journey in relationship to God then we're going to do that as a loving, compassion people who affirm the worth of all people.

Dehlin: Do you have a sense for whether of in Utah or Arizona or California former LDS you know who attend a Community of Christ service that maybe there will be innovations in those services that would be more resonant to someone coming out in LDS tradition such that in some ways they can feel a bit more familiarity? Do you have a sense whether you're trying to innovate or experiment or harmonize what that Sunday experience might be so that it would feel more like home to someone coming out of the LDS tradition or has it even been thought through that way?

Veazey: There may be some people thinking about that, but it's not an overall Church strategy that I'm aware of but it wouldn't surprise me because as a church we are very creative in our worship. We try to express the gospel in ways that are relevant to people, in language and symbols, in music and art that that may be helpful to them and meaningful to them so we are not so rigid in terms of our worship experience or even how we organize our congregations so that there wouldn't be opportunity for some of that to occur. At the same time, we're called to be who we are and so we're very used to saying "you're welcome! Come and see, come and experience! Hey this is who we are!" At our best, at a worst with all of our blemishes and our struggles as well as our highest aspirations and our best experiences and you're welcome to be a part of that to whatever degree you want to be a part of that.

Dehlin: Are there specific cities or geographical regions or congregations where've you seen an infusion of former LDS? Where you're sensing sort of the critical mass of former LDS sort of starting to congregate? I don't expect you to know about every congregation in your fold but do you have a sense for where there's some energy of former LDS sort of really starting to join and affiliate cuz if there's listeners out there they're going to say: well, how do I- where do I go and how do I do it and where are some places where with other former LDS and find some people who kind of get where I'm coming from and I won't feel so alone with this Missouri church that is totally culturally different? Where can I find other people like me to at least partially commune with? Do you have a sense for where those places might be even generally?

Veazey: Well, generally and this won't be a surprise, it seems to be where there are the largest concentrations of LDS members and congregations. So, in this area-

Dehlin: Salt Lake City?

Veazey: Salt Lake City and Virens and western parts of the United States but again we don't have a stated strategy of strategically going to areas and...

Dehlin: Targeting.

Veazey: Targeting.

Dehlin: Yeah.

Veazey: In terms that we would be doing here what we're doing anywhere which is presenting the Community of Christ as who we are and that attracts people from various backgrounds and life experiences and that's how we are all over the world. We are who we are.

Dehlin: Yeah, okay. Well, I've heard about critical mass in Salt Lake City. I've heard about Phoenix. I've heard about Oakland and there may be others as well, but we could even maybe put some of that at MormonStories.org and some links to some of the congregations. Maybe a congregation finder for those who are interested in maybe attending a local service where people live.

Veazey: Well you know the best way to identify Community of Christ presence is through the Community of Christ World Church website.

Dehlin: And you have a congregation finder?

Veazey: We have a congregation finder "Locate a Congregation".

Dehlin: And you're in every major city pretty much? Most major cities?

Veazey: Most major cities but not necessarily all of them.

Dehlin: Okay, last two questions. This is been wonderful. I've really enjoyed your spirit, your temperament, your wisdom, your knowledge. I'm just really inspired and grateful for your time and grateful for your insight. I have two questions, and I'm just going to throw them both out but they're really quite separate: the first is again Christianity is in decline in the Western World especially Protestant Christianity so what's your- I mean I know it's your job to be optimistic, but do you have an outlook for the future of Community of Christ and its vitality and you know how it's- if it's like under attack, under assault, thriving? Like how do you see the future in the face of so much decline? That's going to be the first question and I can guess what the answer is going to be, but I'll ask it anyway and then what we always do with Mormon Stories at the end in have people bear their testimony which is how we describe sharing just a summary of your beliefs and a final message with the audience so I'll leave you with those two questions.

Veazey:

Well in terms of the future and the viability of Community of Christ, I'm very realistic about the challenges we talked about earlier where people are questioning organized or institutionalized religion and churches and that's impacting Community of Christ in this part of the world. But as I'm reading the times and the culture when I say the times, the nature of what's going on in society and in cultures and even recently here at the Parliament of the World's Religions I keep hearing themes as what people desire that are very much a part of what Community of Christ is attempting to achieve and has some degree of experience with: Continuing revelation. How do we understand scripture? What is the role of every disciple, believer, member? Is there place for me? Justice, peace, environment issues. Spirituality that's not just individualistic but that's in community. So, I keep hearing these words: justice, peace, spirituality, community and I'm thinking: well, you know we've come this far and we're used to challenges. We're used to being on the edge. That portends well for Community of Christ experience and message in the future. Our challenge is to present ourselves in a way that people can come to know us. I recently shared in the baptisms and confirmations of three new members who are older adults and after the service, one of them asked me: "why did it take me so long to find the church?" but that wasn't an expression of this person's sincerity and it was you know why weren't you accessible to me? And that really went to the core of my being cuz what I heard was: why did it take Community of Christ so long to present itself in the world? and that's a question that I want to continue to think about and find ways to creatively increase the visibility of Community of Christ. Not in a prideful way, but as an invitation to this kind of experience so I think with some of our enduring principles drawn from the early days of the movement but refined overtime through history, expanded, broadened and deepened but still very important. There's a need, a desire, a yearning for the kind of experience and message that we present in our understanding of the Gospel. Personal testimony. I would I would hope that my testimony is heard through I've been able to share through your questions and in our discussion which I really appreciate. My core testimony is when I was a young pastor when I was in college and I was working with a group of average ordinary human beings who are trying to figure out who they were and how to relate to God and what to do and what's the church? I entered that experience thinking I had all the answers and I was preaching all the answers and then came to a point where I ran out of all of that and I remember crying out to God what would- what do you want me to tell these people? and even in the way I put that describes how I was kind of viewing the situation and it was one of those pivotal experiences in my life of the trust of Light and Truth that really got my attention and what formed in my experience was: tell my people just how much I love them, and that's when I as a person went from a gospel of law to a gospel of grace and that has been an experience that has been foundational to everything else that follows cuz that's what I did and when I did that, all the problems didn't go away but there was some healing and reconciling that began to happen in the lives of people. So, my experience is people don't need to be told how wrong they are or how bad they are. What they need to understand is how precious they are and how gifted they are and that's the creation that God is

wanting to bring into greater expression in the world and that's where I line up and that's where the best of Community of Christ lines up.

Dehlin: I'm going to get skewered if I don't ask one final follow-up question: LGBT friendly?

Veazey: Yes.

Dehlin: The whole Community of Christ?

Veazey: In the nations of the western world and Western Europe, the issues are still being worked out in other nations and we're giving those nations latitude to continue to work on it. There would be compassion and understanding in some of those nations but not full access to ordination and marriage but in the United States, Australia, Canada, British Isles, Norway and increasing number of nations policies are reflecting full inclusion and welcoming.

Dehlin: Including priesthood and marriage and someday maybe an apostle?

Veazey: God calls-

Dehlin: There's no- there's nothing that organizationally would prevent that?

Veazey: There's nothing organizationally would prevent that.

Dehlin: We're rooting for you John Hamer!

Veazey: [Laughing]

Dehlin: [Laughing] Beautiful. Well, Steve Veazey I think the best compliment I could pay you is that you make me want to be better human.

Veazey: Thank you.

Dehlin: Well, thank you for joining us on Mormon Stories.

Veazey: My pleasure and thank you for the invitation.

Dehlin: So, with that again, thank you so much President-Prophet Stephen Veazey or as you prefer to be called Steve. Thank you for joining us today on Mormon Stories. It's been a pleasure. I also just want to thank Terry Wittenberg for allowing us to be here today in this beautiful place. I want to thank John Hamer and Seth Bryant for helping to organize this, and I want to thank Ken Sorensen MD, Michael Martindale for doing all the video and audio that you see before us and want to encourage listeners to please join us at MormonStories.org if you have questions or comments or feedback. I think people from Community of Christ will be

willing to sort of entertain some of those questions or comments. Please check out their website.

Veazey: C, the letter C, of Christ dot org [CofChrist.org].

Dehlin: C of Christ dot org. Please check them out as well and please join us again for another Mormon Stories soon and all the best to Community of Christ.

Veazey: Thank you.

[End of Part 3 of 3]