

RELG 5340: Community of Christ 2
Informed Essay 2
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Enduring Principles as Expressed 1946-1978

Introduction

Enduring Principles as expressed by Community of Christ in *Sharing in Community of Christ* are derived from over 180 years of ministry in the Restoration (with over 150 years of the Reorganization) and form the foundation of our current movement. When their roots and formational development are examined during a particularly revolutionary time of church history during the tenure of two prophet-presidents, we find these concepts challenging leadership, members in the field, and outreach in new areas. Church identity and mission formation finding its base here was not without personal struggle, contention, and questions of apostasy.

Each Enduring Principle as described in 2013 has brief statements that help explain its meaning. Some of their focus can be traced to the historical period being considered, others are expressed anew with implications for response in today's context. Four specific principles will be illustrated as their development was modeled by the post-World War II generation from 1946-1978. Indications of these principles can be found in goals defined at the start of Israel A. Smith's presidency in 1947, a 1966 statement of church objectives that was reviewed in 1973, various conference resolutions, reports of missional field endeavors, and several sections of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Worth of All Persons

As expressed in 2013, this principle encompasses four characteristics. First, God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth. Second, God wants all people to experience

wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. Third, we (the church) seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth. Fourth, we join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed.¹

Conference resolutions in 1948 and 1950 relate to racial equality. The first stated, “All men are God’s creatures. He created of one blood all nations and races, and in the presence of God divisions of race are transcended; ‘There is neither Greek nor Jew, ... Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all.’ ”² The second adopted recognition that racial equality had legal and international implications and was but one aspect of human rights. It affirmed the ideal that there was nothing in the law of the church which created or tended to create racial inequality or discrimination, but to legislate with respect to a specific race raised the implication that race had previously been unjustly dealt with in church law and discipline, to which they “cannot and do not admit.”³ The church itself considered all equal, but they faced criticism in the domestic field from members against integration.

As the church grew internationally through the 1960s and 70s, considerations of the worth of persons was critical to the ministry. In 1962, an advisory committee on equality was created to address issues of justice in social, political, and economic fields as well as the understanding of human relationships.⁴ This was expanded in 1964 requesting guidance in addressing social, economic, and moral problems in a Christian manner during rapidly changing,

¹ Community of Christ, *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, 3rd ed. (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 2012), 13.

² General Conference Resolution 963, “Racial Equality,” *Rules and Resolutions*, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, October 8, 1948.

³ GCR 976, “Racial Equality,” April 8, 1950.

⁴ World Conference Resolution 1032, “Committee on Equality,” April 3, 1962.

turbulent times.⁵ In 1968, congregations and members were encouraged to reach out with a greater expression of Christian love to share a message of faith, hope, and brotherhood with all racial and ethnic groups, with an emphasis on the Negro race in troubled areas.⁶

Redemptive ministries in the international church often included the need to offer health ministries (WCR 1109), education (WCR 1102), reconciliation (WCR 1132), and alleviation of world hunger (WCR 1148). The combination of evangelism and missions met the people where they were in their local circumstances and brought them to where they had hope in themselves and one another for a more just and humane future.⁷ As called for in the Doctrine and Covenants, “Let my word be preached to the bruised and brokenhearted as well as those who are enmeshed in sin, longing to repent and follow me...My Spirit is reaching out to numerous souls even now and there are many who will respond if you, my people, will bear affirmative testimony of my love and my desire for all to come unto me.”⁸ Particular issues with extending the invitation to polygamous cultures were countered by the call to interpret and administer doctrine of the gospel in a manner appropriate to personal circumstances. The message of gospel reconciliation and restoration meant all people are of worth.⁹

An exploration of redemptive ministries was adopted in response to the call to the “bruised and brokenhearted” as noted in the scripture above. The conference was very concerned that the Restoration offer holistic ministries to those suffering from alcoholism, marital conflict, emotional and mental health issues, and financial distress leading to increasing alienation in

⁵ WCR 1045, “Social, Economic, and Moral Problems,” April 11, 1964.

⁶ WCR 1075, “Gospel to Racial and Ethnic Groups,” April 6, 1968.

⁷ Richard P. Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, vol. 2, *The Reorganization Comes of Age, 1860-1992* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1993), 347.

⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 154:9a-b, April 6, 1978.

⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 150:11a-b, April 11, 1972.

society.¹⁰ This assessment would pull the mission forward into the 1980s. As summarized in 1973, a main objective of the church is to “Emphasize the ultimate value of persons and provide the environment in which the entire range of human relationships is enriched.”¹¹

All Are Called

This foundational concept is closely related to *Worth of All Persons*, yet relates more specifically to disciples called to minister with Jesus Christ in restoring the worth of people in responsive ways. We find opportunities to minister as found through these brief descriptions: 1) God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God’s purposes; 2) Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry; 3) Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world; and 4) We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God’s call.¹²

It can be said throughout the history of the church that all persons are called to participate in God’s work. It was acknowledged in new ways during this time period as the international church grew and concerns of civil rights, especially race and gender, came to the fore domestically. It became important that the church needed to be led by those who arise out of their own unique cultures.¹³ Indigenous leadership and theology needed to be developed that honored the expression of the gospel in non-Western ways.

In keeping with racial integration in the USA society, congregations were encouraged not to practice racial discrimination. Discretion was encouraged as people worked through the

¹⁰ WCR 1151, “Redemptive Ministry,” April 8, 1978.

¹¹ First Presidency, “Church Objectives Reviewed and Restated,” *Saints Herald* 120, no. 4 (April 1973): 4.

¹² *Sharing*, 13.

¹³ Howard, 349.

process, but barriers needed to be broken. The church could not imagine segregated churches in a society that teaches the gospel of Jesus Christ. People of any race ordained to the priesthood were to be allowed to function freely according to their gifts and callings.¹⁴

Equality for women was recognized in the encouragement through a conference resolution calling for the church to hire women in positions not scripturally requiring priesthood.¹⁵ A further resolution rescinded historical prohibition of the ordination of women and reported that there was no ultimate theological reason that women could not hold priesthood. Careful consideration of the issue was encouraged due to existing cultural and social conditions that could prevent acceptance of women's priesthood ministry. But the step had been made.¹⁶

The need for more local ministry led to the call of self-sustaining Seventy in 1954,¹⁷ but the quorums were slow to respond.¹⁸ The First Presidency felt that those who had the desire and gifts to do missionary work should be able to step forward in their call to advance the task. The need for more quality ministry in local and international jurisdictions lead to extending the call to retired church members.¹⁹ Their wisdom and expertise was a valuable resource to the church, and being called in new ways presented new opportunities to serve that honored their giftedness.

Unity in Diversity

Diversity can be explored from multiple perspectives—people, theology, ministry needs, and social context (and many more). In fact, we can say diversity is itself diverse and finding unity within any one question of diversity finds a new challenge. Descriptive statements found in

¹⁴ GCR 995, "Racial Integration," April 13, 1956.

¹⁵ WCR 1116, "Opportunities for Women," April 15, 1972.

¹⁶ WCR 1141, "Ordination of Women," April 1, 1976.

¹⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 143, April 7, 1954.

¹⁸ Paul M. Edwards, *Our Legacy of Faith: A Brief History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1991), 250.

¹⁹ WCR 1053, "Utilization of Retired Members," April 22, 1966.

the *Enduring Principles* lead us to consideration of diversity for individuals and communities in these ways: 1) Community of Christ is a diverse, international family of disciples, seekers, and congregations. 2) Local and worldwide ministries are interdependent and important to the church's mission. 3) The church embraces diversity and unity through the power of the Holy Spirit. 4) We seek agreement or common consent on important matters. If we cannot achieve agreement, we commit to ongoing dialogue and lovingly uphold our common faith in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church. 5) We confess that our lack of agreement on certain matters is hurtful to some of God's beloved children and creation.²⁰

In the earliest portion of this time period, requests for unity as found in the Doctrine and Covenants relate several times to a relief of contention within the leading quorums²¹ and quarrels over "minutiae" by the membership.²² Unity, without much expression of diversity, was expected. Presiding Evangelist Elbert A. Smith (1946), in his testimony regarding the death of Frederick M. Smith, noted that the Lord had not changed in regard to the work of the Restoration. Those who had turned away from the path for trivial offenses needed to be united through reconciliation while there was yet time. It was important that the Saints could dwell together in peace.²³ Later in Israel A. Smith's address to the conference, he stated that the world was in confusion (immediately post-World War II) because the gospel of Jesus Christ had not been sufficiently taught and received among the peoples of the earth. The priesthood needed to bring the body of Christ to a unity of faith and action. It was important that the Presidency and

²⁰ *Sharing*, 13.

²¹ Doctrine and Covenants 141:7a, October 2, 1948.

²² Doctrine and Covenants 146:3, April 2, 1960.

²³ F. Henry Edwards, *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, vol. 8, 1926-1946 (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1976), 358.

Council of Twelve bring about complete harmony and unity among the quorums and councils of the church—not much room for diversity here!²⁴

In essence, embracing unity in diversity is acknowledging pluralism and allowing different voices to bring clarity to theology and mission. “Unity and diversity can coexist in the church if unity is seen as dedication to the same goals and diversity is seen as a variety of ways of achieving these goals.”²⁵ The first objective in the 1966 *Statement on Objectives for the Church* was to clarify the theology and unify the membership in their faith. Understanding the basic beliefs of the church required the “interpretation of religious experiences in all ages” and various education initiatives in the 1960s and 70s were critical in promoting this objective.²⁶ The theological task was further restated in 1973 as:

“The continual process of interpreting and proclaiming the meaning of the gospel is crucial to the achievement of the mission of the church. The church bears its witness in a time of cultural diversity and change. People are enriched by such diversity even as they address themselves to the shaping of change and the transforming of culture. The church ministers as the one body of Christ. Such unity is expressed in terms of commitment to life which gives the church flexibility to respond to the call of God in the ever changing world.”²⁷

We see here the recognition that the church was being affected by the mission and world it served, and it needed flexibility to stretch together and meet the call. There was also an appreciation extended to the church leadership by the 1974 Conference stating, “...we unanimously voice our intent to support and uphold our leading councils more diligently in our prayers, and in our Christian witness and mission, and we sincerely encourage them in their quest for ever more effective ways to strengthen us through the living Christ

²⁴ Ibid, 364.

²⁵ Peter A. Judd and A. Bruce Lindgren, *An Introduction to the Saints Church* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1976), 101.

²⁶ “Statement on Objectives for the Church,” *World Conference Bulletin* (Monday, April 18, 1966): 239.

²⁷ “Church Objectives Reviewed and Revised,” 4.

so that all people of all nations can be united together for the cause of Zion.”²⁸ This is dated the same day as a resolution from W. Wallace Smith calling the church to be in the forefront of organizations recognizing the worth of all persons, in order that “Working together to this end will promote unity, resolve conflicts, relieve tensions between individuals, and heal the wounds which have been sapping the strength of the church, spiritually, and materially.”²⁹ Creating unity through diversity (as well as answering *All Are Called*) is especially expressed in 1976 by this resolution:

“...Each person is unique in his or her own gifts... There is a need for greater understanding of each other’s calling... There is need to share ideas and views for the enhancement of the work entrusted to all...[we] continue to encourage the creation of ways for the integration of all persons where feasible in the congregations, district, stake, regional, and World Church activities.”³⁰

The practice of common consent and commitment to dialogue described in this *Enduring Principle* is very different currently than in this era of discussion. It would seem church members and leadership didn’t know how to handle dissent which was only compounded by the extreme social change domestically and a growing international church.

Blessings of Community

In finding Blessing in Community, the gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God’s grace and each other. True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. True Community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-

²⁸ WCR 1121, “Church Mission and World Witness,” April 1, 1974.

²⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 151:9-10, April 1, 1974.

³⁰ WCR 1142, “Integration in Church Activities,” April 2, 1976.

centeredness, isolation, and conformity. Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.³¹

This principle appears to encompass many of the others listed in the *Sharing* document as well as the foundations of those already discussed. Blessings of Community will not be achieved without acknowledging the call of all our giftedness, challenging unjust systems in the process of restoring the worth of all people, and finding a unity of purpose through all the diversity of input presented by God and the world. Zion community becomes more reflective of people and process rather than a specific place. Brotherhood expressed in community brings a willingness to gradually extend justice.³² Nurture and growth opportunities were extended to many groups of people in an effort to equip members and leaders with spiritual, moral, ethical, educational, and vocational resources to prepare for the establishment of Zion.³³

Kingdom qualities were identified early as “industry, forethought, thrift, cooperation, kindness, temperance, patience, and compassion which are best matured in saintly homes.”³⁴ The *Church Member’s Manual* of 1957 states:

“The building of the kingdom of God is the controlling objective of [RLDS] corporate life. This kingdom is different from any that has gone before. It will take over the best values of the present world order, such as industry, thrift, and delight in craftsmanship, but the kingdom is a new creation shot through and through with a new spirit and enlightened by a new understanding. As a member of the church which is striving to develop this kingdom, you are invited to participate in the activities which add to its growth.”³⁵

“We believe...In the Divine Commission to the church to establish a Christian Community called Zion built upon the basis of stewardship and the principle of

³¹ *Sharing*, 13.

³² WCR 1032, “Committee on Equality,” April 3, 1962.

³³ WCR 1047, “Programs for Young People,” April 11, 1964; WCR 1054, “Family Ministry Coordinator,” April 22, 1966; WCR 1130, “Task Force on Aging,” April 6, 1974; WCR 1143, “Task Force on Single Lifestyle,” April 2, 1976.

³⁴ GCR 972, “Home and Family Life,” April 8, 1950.

³⁵ Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, *Church Members Manual: Duties and Privileges of Members*, 2nd rev. (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1957), 26.

equality of opportunity, and where each member shall give according to his capacity and receive according to his needs.”³⁶

Efforts by individuals to apply Zion principles in the communities in which they lived were a step in a new direction, and education was needed here as well.³⁷ After generations of professing that kingdom community was for members setting themselves apart, moving out in mission to the community would require a change of perspective. Israel A. Smith, while in French Polynesia, realized that local gathering was applicable as the church grew internationally. Larger population centers in the domestic field were also encouraged to find ways to “meet the purposes of Zion.”³⁸ W. Wallace Smith further established (similar to his father) that the “gathering” as experienced in the early church was not applicable to the Reorganization as it grew to become a world church.³⁹ As counsel in 1964--“Instruction given in former years is applicable in principle to the needs of today and should be so regarded by those who are seeking ways to accomplish the will of their heavenly Father. But the demands of a growing church require that these principles shall be evaluated and subjected to further interpretation.”⁴⁰

Gathering in community enables the members to receive the necessary power and strength to do God’s will. Worship, education, pastoral care, and stewardship all combine to equip and enable evangelism and Zion building. The church (its people) acts as the “agent of transformation of the societies of the world into the kingdom of God.”⁴¹ The church exists as an integral part of the larger cultural environment and is called to serve as a leaven in society as members labor together with God for the accomplishment of the work entrusted to all.⁴²

³⁶ Ibid., 126.

³⁷ WCR 1072, “Service to Local Community,” April 6, 1968.

³⁸ Paul Edwards, 253.

³⁹ Ibid., 259.

⁴⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 147:7, March 11, 1964.

⁴¹ Judd and Lindgren, 96-97.

⁴² “Church Objectives Reviewed and Revised,” 55-56.

Conclusion

As stated in the 1966 Objectives, the mere pursuit of the objectives (principles) would “unify the membership in purpose.”⁴³ Several of these Enduring Principles find their roots in Protestant Liberalism expressed through the Social Gospel and promoted by Frederick M. Smith through 1946. Setting a flexible foundation in the era served by his brothers becomes important to the formation of an inclusive theology that opens the church to the world and the world to the church.

⁴³ “Statement on Objectives,” 240.

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