



# Community of Christ

---

## Historic Sites Foundation

### Our Heritage of Developing Disciples to Serve

Community of Christ Heritage Day

Sunday, September 17, 2017

#### **Prelude & Gathering**

#### **Congregational Life (Announcements)**

#### **Prayer for Peace**

#### **Welcome and Call to Worship:**

*While welcoming the congregation, the worship leader should introduce the annual Heritage Day service and the "Develop Disciples to Serve" theme for the service.*

#### **Scriptural Reading: Doctrine & Covenants 85:36a**

*Therefore, verily I say unto you, my friends, Call your solemn assembly, as I have commanded you; and as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning even by study, and also by faith.*

#### **\*Opening Hymn: *We Limit Not the Truth of God*, CCS 69**

#### **\*Invocation**

#### **\*Response**

#### **Our Shared Experience in Developing Disciples to Serve**

*The section below includes two testimonies from Community of Christ members that focus on how learning from the past has enriched their lives.*

#### **Testimony #1**

*Testimony by David Howlett, Elder and Assistant Professor of Religion at Skidmore College*

As I was doing research for my master's thesis, I spent day after day in the Community of Christ archives, mostly pouring over old application forms for Zionite colonies that were envisioned by church leaders and laity in the 1920s. Back in the 1920s, members of the RLDS church really, really wanted to build a physical community that would be the Kingdom of God on earth. Motivated both by a desire to eliminate poverty and a millennialist belief that the end was a moment away, members tried to set up cooperatives where people would help each other, would take care of the poor, and be unified as one body. Of course, their hopes were not met completely, as the communities never were built or the communities never functioned in the envisioned capacity. Knowing this, I scanned their applications looking for what they expected for the future, asking rather academic questions through the lens of critical theory about power and the human body. What I found is hard to verbalize. Even while trying to guard myself against nostalgia (and

trying to definitely not feel like I was LDS), I experienced a surprisingly deep, spiritual connection to the people that I met on the yellowed application forms. Here were very ordinary people, old, young, immigrants and citizens, people of other nations, saints, and even a few scoundrels. They all longed for something better for themselves and their children. Many had problems in their lives--from sick children to bed ridden spouses, and from broken homes to broken bodies. Some were poor and some had modest means. The year on most of the applications was 1930, and the applicants were all struggling, but they were struggling forward. I was sad for many of them when I read about their own human brokenness, but I was also grateful for their lives. To my surprise, I recognized the last names of some of the applicants. They had been the grandparents and great-grandparents of people that I knew. No, the people who filled out the applications were not omniscient, and they were wrong about a great many things (as I am sure that I must be, too). But, as theologian Paul Tillich once eloquently stated, "Ultimate concern is ultimate risk and ultimate courage."<sup>1</sup> These saints displayed such human courage in the face of life's most difficult questions.

In a less philosophical and more confessional mode, I might add that even in their brokenness, the hopeful, ordinary saints of the 1930s served as a conduit for divine grace to many individuals. Even in their limited understanding, they provided hope, friendship, and spiritual communion for countless people. Even in their weakness, they passed on a goodly faith and heritage to others. Or to paraphrase Pelikan, they were "under God, the means through which has come the only life" that I have, that in a metaphorical sense, we all have. With God's grace, then, may we all grow in a mature appreciation of our past, as we too, take our places in the ongoing story of history, "as heirs yet free."

## **Testimony #2**

*Testimony by Eva Wasonga Wanyando, former World Service Corp volunteer from Mombasa, Kenya*

I was brought up in Kenya, all of my family lives in Kenya, and just about everything I knew was about Kenya and no other place in the world. If somebody would have come to me while I was still in Kenya and told me one day I would be serving as an interpretive guide at some of the church Historic Sites, I would have said a big "**No!**" But during the years of 2003-2004, this would become one of my life journeys as I served in the *Community of Christ* World Service Corp as a Historic Interpreter at our Historic Sites.

I served both in Nauvoo and Kirtland and I am very glad that I had the chance to do this. Other than experiencing different weather conditions from my home country of Kenya (like the heavy winter snows of Kirtland and the high summer humidity of Nauvoo), not having access to some of my indigenous foods in the grocery stores of both communities, and missing my family back in Kenya - my experience as an interpretive guide was worth remembering.

It was a time of knowing who I really am! Meaning - I was discovering more about my church, more about me as an individual, and more about the faith journeys of the founders of the church and their dedication to the Restoration as the church has been planted today in many parts of the world. I also became more aware of where we came from as a church. There is an African proverb that says, "know the past to be able to better the future." Knowing the history of the church by visiting and serving at our Historic Sites makes me and others from outside North America more motivated to work for the betterment of the future of the church in our home congregations.

---

The most interesting part of my experience at our Historic Sites was sharing what I learned with other visitors who were also interested in knowing more about our history. This installed a sense of pride and confidence in me for being a member of this faith movement.

I discovered there were some similarities between the members of the early church in Kirtland and Nauvoo and the members of the church in my home congregation in Kenya, such as Spirit-filled two hour Church Services, Baptisms in Rivers, and Minimal Musical Instrumentation in Worship Services. All of these similarities made me feel a part of this Restoration movement, while I shared with visitors its story.

All of my friends from other nations who have also served as historical interpreters at places like Kirtland and Nauvoo share the same feelings of pride in our service at these sites as I did. May God bless all those who have made it possible for the preservation and upkeep of these treasured places for us who are from far away countries to come and learn more about our place in this *Community of Christ*!

### **Small group activity**

*Invite the congregation to divide up in groups of 3-5. Reflect on the questions: "Like the testimonies we heard, how has your life been impacted by learning? Have you felt spiritually impacted as you increased your knowledge and pursued the Mission Initiative of Develop Disciples to Serve? How do you feel the calling of the Mission Initiative to "Develop Disciples to Serve?"*

### **Morning Message: Brief message or individual testimonies based on the Mission Initiative of Develop Disciples to Serve**

*Consider inviting one of the congregation's Sunday School instructors to share a sermon on s/he feels a personal calling to help Develop Disciples to Serve. Have them share about their experience as an instructor in the classroom sharing the story of Jesus Christ and inspiring people of all ages to live Christ's mission. If you are unable to find a single Sunday school teacher willing to deliver the morning message, consider inviting 2-3 teachers to share a brief (3-5 minute) testimony about their experience in helping Develop Disciples to Serve.*

### **Hymn: Lord, Lead Me By Your Spirit, CCS 209**

### **Evangelist Prayer for the Congregation's Sunday School Teachers**

### **Disciples Generous Response:**

*Both individuals and the congregation is invited to designate all or a portion of an offering for the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation in an effort to help preserve and share church heritage for future generations. Donations may be sent to: Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, P.O. Box 338, Nauvoo, IL 62354. If individual donors wish to receive a receipt acknowledging their tax-deductible donation, please indicate as such when submitting the donation.*

### **A Shared Past of Grace and Generosity:**

As Christian Primitivists, we focused in our formative years on recreating Christianity as we understood it in its earliest form. Inspired by the New Testament book *The Acts of the Apostles*, we invited members in the 1830s to give all they had to the church so that the surplus of the wealthy could lift up the poor. This system proved to be far more popular with the poor than the rich and we soon began to move away from attempts at living "all things common."

We didn't forget the underlying principle, though, and continued to work to meet the needs of those around us. We used collective farms in Far West, Missouri; the Female Relief Society in Nauvoo, Illinois; the Order of Enoch in Lamoni, Iowa, and Stewardship communities in Atherton,

Missouri. Throughout our history, we have attempted to live our discipleship by offering all we are and have to God's purposes as revealed in Jesus Christ.

### **Blessing and Receiving of Mission Tithes**

#### **\*Closing Hymn: *The Spirit of God like a Fire is Burning*, CCS 384**

Historical Note: Our final hymn is a hymn that was written for the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. It is appropriate that we conclude a worship service with a hymn that was written for a house of worship that illustrates the importance of education within our faith community. Like the Temple in Independence, the Kirtland Temple was used for education. It was referred to as a "house of learning" in the Doctrine and Covenants (section 85). The upper court of the temple was traditionally known as the "School of the Apostles," where early church members anticipated hundreds of students filling the classroom space. The classes would focus on training missionaries on church beliefs and scripture. The third floor of the Kirtland Temple was used as classroom space by the Kirtland High School. This school included 135 to 140 students attending classes during the day on a variety of subjects: arithmetic, grammar, geography, reading and writing, Latin and Greek. In January of 1836, early church leaders established our faith community's first church seminary. The seminary was called the "Kirtland, Ohio, Theological Institution" and was among the first five seminaries in the state of Ohio. For these reasons and more, the Kirtland Temple was a "house of learning" in the 1830s and continues to be used as a place of learning and spiritual formation today.

#### **\*Sending Forth/Benediction**

*In the benediction and/or sending forth, incorporate the service emphasis of church heritage and the theme of "Develop Disciples to Serve."*

#### **\*Response Postlude**