



INLAND STREAM

INLAND WEST USA MISSION CENTER NEWS

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Pay Attention

By John VanDerWalker

Inland West Mission Center President

One of the themes for our reunion experience this summer is “Pay Attention: What More is there to Discover.”

A few years ago when I was working at Samish Island Campground and Retreat Center I was mowing the hay field down on the end of Scott Point. It was an summer day and the grass was pretty tall so I was going slow. With the big seven-foot mower deck grinding away, my ears were protected by hearing protection, I had on my “farmer” straw hat and was feeling quite comfortable just doing my thing. I have to say that I loved the work there. Anyway as I was mowing along I smelled something, that I tried to identify, on the next pass of that same area I smelled it again: strawberries!

I mowed forward a few more feet, shut down the equipment, crawled off of the tractor and began to peer through the tall grass to see if I could find what was making the smell. My eyeballs are in my head which is about 5 feet 8 inches above the ground so seeing wild strawberries from way up there with them being way down there amongst the mowing debris was not working, I needed to make a closer observation. So I dropped to my hands and knees and began to search. Before long I found the pungent little berries, a little bigger than peas, hugging close to the ground, and the feast began. It was not a feast of quantity but a feast of intense flavor and great satisfaction. The satisfaction came from the fact that by being open to the environment around me I was able to be blessed.

I have a photo of an hours old fawn taken at Samish while mowing a different part of the campground with a hand mower. The little deer was curled into a ball waiting for mom to come back after the rest of the birthing process was finished. Again, I was blessed because I was paying attention.

I have been in the outdoors a lot in my life, from beekeeping to outdoor sports like hunting and fishing, all activities that require your “head to be on a swivel.” I recall that sometimes when glassing the side of a hill for deer I would see the flick on an ear or the glint of sun off an antler tip, and once I noticed the red spots under sage brush only to discover it was the morning sun shining through the ears of jack rabbits.

Paying attention presents opportunities.

As a disciple of Jesus I have been blessed with paying attention as well. When I learned that a man was trying to develop a feeding program for migrant labor children, I was able to connect him with church members who provided integral assistance in helping him to eventually feed several thousand kids. All I

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“Awaken to New Possibilities”:

What does freedom to follow God’s call look and feel like?

By Brittany Mangelson, Utah Expansion Minister.

In the Spring of 2017, a growing number of Latter-day Seekers were commenting about how “lucky” it was just to be in Salt Lake/Utah as a seeker. The idea was that seekers had each other. More support, more resources, more conversation geared toward our particular quirks. I have to admit, it’s rare to hear that living in Utah is something that is “lucky” but the comments stuck with me and I wondered how we could intentionally reach out to seekers beyond our borders.

Others were feeling a similar pull. The need was obvious, and the need was great. In 2017, only a handful of groups were doing church online. Zoom was something the majority of the world had never heard of. Community of Christ had not made provisions for online sacramental experiences. Still, possibilities were right in front of us.

It took several months to figure out what this could look like. We had no idea how a typical worship service would translate online. We knew we needed to get the word out, so a website was built, a Facebook group started, and invitations were given.

By the fall of 2017, Forward With Community launched. Looking back, those first few months were pretty comical. Clunky, too long, too short, many gentle nudges of, “You’re muted!” Despite this, sacred community was built.

Seekers from all over the country, and a family in Brazil, regularly attended. Guest ministry from across the church brought a diverse perspective and seekers were able to “meet” us from the comfort of their home.

When the pandemic hit, Forward With Community was ready to support local ministries online. Jason Eyre and I felt incredibly prepared and qualified to migrate Salt Lake online thanks to the 2 1/2 years’ experience we had with Forward With Community.

Forward With Community is still going strong into its 6th year. We’ve added mid-week discussions and classes to our list of offerings. We’ve seen multiple seekers get connected to local congregations and officially join the church through baptism and confirmation. One participant, Heidi Ramirez, traveled to Salt Lake in the summer of 2022 and I had the honor of baptizing her. She faithfully serves her local congregation in Orlando, but the majority of her conversations happened online.

It seemed so impossible back in 2017 to provide meaningful connections through a screen. So many questions lingered. “How would we experience sacred community if we couldn’t see body language? Couldn’t hear each other sing? Couldn’t hug and hold hands?” I’ve learned some powerful lessons over the last 6 years about how the Spirit moves in and through us, even when we are physically separated. I’ve seen transformation happen through a screen, and shared my testimony with church leadership that what we had created was just as “real” as any cottage gathering or house church group in the church.

In 2019, I tearfully celebrated with joy when the First Presidency provided a way to share in Communion online. Forward With Community had been waiting for this and each month we celebrate this holy Sacrament together with intention and wonder.



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really did was pay attention to the gifts and needs around me and when the two intersected I put a knot on it.

Jesus was a master of paying attention. Once while walking through a pressing crowd, he was touch by a woman who needed to be made whole. In the midst of the crush of humanity, Jesus sensed the touch and healing occurred, but there was more than healing, there was a testimony of how faith can change everything that has come to us through the ages. (Luke 8:43-48)

We are in a position that demands our attention, not to anything specifically, maybe, but generally. Many of us are struggling to find how the church should be in the future, to sense where God is leading us we will need to have our “heads on a swivel.” We will need to allow our senses to be ready and open to see, smell, feel those things that will lead us to ministry. By assuming this posture of awareness together we can find wonderful ministries and programs to be a part of that will enhance the health and well being of our communities.

May you be blessed with Holy Attention: the kind of awareness that comes from formation of the body and spirit that allows for divine sight. Fred Craddock says that sometimes if your really want to see you need to close your eyes. Sometimes if you really want to smell strawberries you need the aromas of mown grass and diesel fumes. When we are open, the important stuff can still impact us positively, despite everything else that is going on around us. Then we can feast.

Pay Attention.~

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We didn't know how this would go, but in response to a growing request, we decided to be awake to this new possibility and go where God was calling us to go. There wasn't a blueprint. There wasn't a road map. Instead, we had supportive leadership, creative ministers, and a desire from seekers to learn more about this church.

From Doctrine and Covenants 163:1

“Community of Christ,” your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go. ~

From World Conference



Inland West Mission Center 2023 Reunions



Join us in these times of gathering as a community!

Samish Island Reunion

Joining with Canada West Mission
Center (BC)

July 22 to July 29

Samish Island Campground

Bow, WA

Guest Ministry:

Apostle Art Smith,

Scott Murphy, First Presidency

Director: John VanDerWalker

Contact:

jvanderwalker@cofchrist.org

Red Cliffe Reunion

July 7 to July 11

Red Cliffe Campground

Huntsville, UT

Guest Ministry:

Jenn Kilpack,

World Church

Director of Communication

Director: Tyler Marz,

Bob Cadman & Penny Young

Contact: tmarz@cofchrist.org

Online registration, costs, and other details is available at

www.cofchrist-iwest.org and at each Inland West congregation. If you have questions, please contact the director listed with the reunion.

Community of Christ members and friends often gather together in fellowship and learning experiences called reunions or inter-generational camps. In this relaxed and casual atmosphere, participants share the Enduring Principle, Blessings of Community.

Ask and Dream

By Tyler Marz, Utah Expansion Minister

One of our daily reunion themes this year is “Ask and Dream” under our greater theme, “God, where is your Spirit leading next?” This year we embark on a journey of discernment. A time of wandering and pondering, wondering, and musing. We are invited to dream and ask what prophetic imagination might reveal.

When we are asked to dream, I can’t help but think of my own dreams of what I wanted to be when I grew up. As a kid I had many, some of which evolved around the TV shows I watched. For a while I was really stuck on the show ER. I wondered, would I want to be a nurse or doctor when I get older? I was fascinated by the things they could do to help people.

Later, I discovered a passion for the Spanish language and music. I took classes all through high school and into college with a desire to teach. While I didn’t land in either of those professions, what they both have in common is a desire to help others—in healing and learning.

I realized that while those career paths weren’t for me, what was at the core was a desire to help. That continues in my life in many forms today: in pastoral care, offering spiritual direction, teaching, helping those in faith transition, and even baking something for a friend.

In President Veazey’s address “*Boldly Venture*” he says that “discernment is a willingness to venture with God beyond the familiar.” As we discern what is next in the future of our church either locally or worldwide, what do we dream of? Put yourself in the shoes of a child, able to be anything when you grow up. If Community of Christ could be anything, do anything, become anything what would you dream of?

In our Mission Prayer, we ask for an openness to the Spirit, being fully awake and receptive to its whisperings, with courage to risk something new that we might be a blessing. In our asking and dreaming, perhaps this prayer is a good place to start and a helpful guide to keep in mind as we discern.

When we ask and dream, let us dream big, no parameters, think outside the box, outside of what has been done and explore something new, *beyond the familiar*. Of course, there will be time for refinement and discerning, but it starts with an openness to the great expanse of possibilities. So, take a deep breath, and dream big to what could be! ~

More from World Conference



“Act”: What are the next steps we will take together?

By Brittany Mangelson

I've been a member of the Salt Lake congregation since the first Sunday of 2015. 8 years later, on the first Sunday of 2023, I became the pastor of the congregation. In those 8 years, we have had 5 different pastors. I am the only one of those 5 who is a lifelong Utahn with no plans of ever leaving. I don't say this to brag (who brags about living in Utah their entire life?!) but to show that with local leadership, a sense of permanence has settled on the congregation. It almost feels like our training wheels have been taken off. We are being trusted to govern ourselves.

With this has come a heavy responsibility. We've been through a lot the last few years. We lost a dear friend of the congregation (a spouse of a member) to Covid, have had significant mental health crisis', have had employed ministers move, new ones come, and have had to manage all of this while reconstructing our faith and belief in God. Learning a new church culture has certainly been met with bumps in the road, but with 2023, a new vision has been cast.

Getting to that vision was an intentional process. The new leadership team started the year in a weekend retreat. In a process that included spreadsheets, Google docs, and post-it notes, we prioritized what we thought were the needs of the congregation as well as actionable steps to get us there. We meditated, debriefed our experiences with the congregation, and committed to each other to always lead with Christ's message of peace.

We were ready.

The congregation was ready, too. I have never seen the amount of volunteerism that I have seen in the last few months. We have added a third Sunday school class for the kids, monthly activities for them outside of church, and have added several opportunities for additional fellowship for the adults. We've given seekers the opportunity to stay after church on Communion Sunday to chat about the specific quirks of this particular faith journey.

Christ's peace is leading the way and that vision is all we have needed to act.

Over the years, I have been my own worst critic. I have a habit of getting in my own way and letting self-doubt be what leads me. This is not a sustainable way to be a disciple of Christ. Thankfully, with deep self-reflection, therapeutic skills, and finding my own ministerial style, some of those deepest points of self-doubt are starting to heal. As disciples, I think we all need to get out of our own way from time to time and simply let the Spirit breathe.

This is about so much more though. This is about the theology and values of Community of Christ coming alive in people here in Utah. This is about throwing open the church doors, and showing up for each other every week with the hope that what we are doing will make a difference.

There is something magical when you see someone who's only been around for a couple of weeks turn around and become the one doing the inviting. I witnessed this happening time and time again. Our message is strong, our mission is clear. We have what we need—just as we are—and that is enough. Amid doubt, hurt, and deconstruction, we can still invite others to Christ.

I remember asking John Hamer back in 2014 about the saints who stayed in the Midwest after the exodus from Nauvoo. What did they do all those years between 1844 and 1860? How did they stay together? What did they believe?

John's reply? *“They simply kept being the church.”*

And we simply keep being the church. The body of Christ, disciples who dream big and act on Christ's peace and vision of hope. Generously sharing the sacraments, our resources, our spirit. Thinking outside of the box, believing what we have is enough, and stepping out in faith. I truly believe this is the way forward. That is my vision for the future.

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From Doctrine and Covenants 163:10a

Collectively and individually, you are loved with an everlasting love that delights in each faithful step taken. God yearns to draw you close so that wounds may be healed, emptiness filled, and hope strengthened. ~ Editors note: Over 90% of those who attend weekly worship at Salt Lake City Community of Christ are Seekers or members with LDS heritage.

God's Grace and Peace through Jesus Christ Be with You! **By Gil Martell, Billings, MT**

Like Paul's greeting in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:1-9, NRSV), I share with you, Inland West Mission Center Saints, a personal letter of God's love and encouragement.

Grace and peace to you from God and Jesus Christ. May each of you experience a personal assurance of God, the Holy One, as a blessing of love for you!

As the Apostle Paul expressed concern and love for the personal and community life of the Corinthians, I'm inspired by the Holy Spirit to affirm my love and concern for you, your families, friends, and congregations.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are called and invited to follow Christ's way of living with joy, hope, love, and peace. As you embrace the disruptions and challenges of your daily life continue to share generously God's forgiveness and compassion. May you be open to the Grace and peace from God and the Beloved, the Peaceful One, Jesus!

Today, the Voice of Divine Grace, unconditionally proclaims, you are loved. You are also God's Beloved Child and the Holy One desires a personal relationship with you. The Holy Spirit is always present as you transform as a disciple of Christ's love and peace. Have the courage to risk something new to share the reign of God's Grace even now in the midst of life's sufferings.

I have been blessed and overwhelmed by the faith and commitment you boldly walk the disciple's path following Jesus Christ. Continue to share kindness, encouragement, forgiveness, and invitation freely.

Embrace others with joy, not despair. With hope, not fear. With love, not hatred. With peace, not violence. As God invites and welcomes you unconditionally, invite and welcome others. Live with faith, trusting God's presence is with you now, in both your joys and sorrows. Experience the peace of healing with the assurance of hope in the struggles of life challenges.

Paul reminded the Corinthians they were not alone in their testimony of Jesus Christ. Paul's wisdom and blessings for community is also for us today as diverse communities of Christ. All of us are "... together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (v. 2).

I am thankful and blessed by your living testimonies of Christ Jesus that each shared in our Mission Center. Continue to live with the promise, God is with you and leading you to be an expression of the Holy Goodness. Trust the Spirit continues to move in the lives of others even when you are not aware of it. Have faith that your responses to the Divine Call to share love does have an effect. Do not be discouraged by what you want and expect, just trust God uses you. Always remember you are invited to participate in Divine Grace not given ownership or control, so do not let uncertainty overwhelm you - God is in Charge not you. When you respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit, yes, you may feel doubt and pain from your expected results, it is God sharing God's pain to be healing love for the bruise and broken hearted with you, because our loving God trust you to share compassion healing.

We are all called to be Christ sacramental given of self for the salvation of humanity. Let's us embrace each other in confidants that we are together sharing Christ's Mission. Amen! ~

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**Mark Your Calendar!
Inland West Mission Center Conference
will be held on September 30-October 1
in Boise, ID.**

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