



INLAND STREAM

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AWAKEN TO A RESTORED CREATION

By Susan Oxley

Seattle, Washington | North American Climate Justice Team

Climate crisis is real, urgent, and a threat to all of life. I witnessed the signs during my years as an apostle. I stood on the beach in French Polynesia, as church members mourned the rise in sea level that threatened their community. I saw the devastation on Tubuai caused by Hurricane Oli. I prepared to evacuate with Linda and Terry Reed as flames from an uncontrolled wildfire leapt above the neighboring ridge. I traveled roads like washboards in Alaska, where the melting permafrost buckled asphalt and rendered housing developments unstable. I watched starving polar bears in Canada hunt for sea ice frozen solid enough to provide access to their food supply.

These were urgent reminders of coming climate emergencies. Our lifestyle is founded on a climate pattern that no longer exists. The time to wake up and be ready to respond has long since passed. As a church, we need to embrace our heritage and redefine what it means to be a restoring church.

In the 1800's, new religious groups formed with the intention of "restoring" the primitive Christian faith described in the New Testament. The Latter Day Saint movement promoted strong community bonds, the power of covenant, and the belief that all life is sacred, experimenting with communal living, and gathering principles. We attempted to restore priesthood, scripture, sacraments and theology to the ancient primitive church in order to build the kingdom of God Jesus preached.

The RLDS faith discarded claims of Christian primitivism and emphasis on restoration ebbed and flowed, reinterpreted through the years. Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b provides a new interpretation of restoration:



“The restoring of persons to healthy or right relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.”

– Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

THE WORDS THAT BIND US

By John G VanDerWalker II

Inland West Mission Center President



As a life long member of Community of Christ, I recall Sunday School in my youth and the curriculum we studied. I remember the Stepping Stones quarterly with stories of brave Saints on the frontier, glowing stones in a boat, and the rightness of our church which had been restored by the mighty act of God. I realize now that there was so much context that was not included in those lessons, and our teaching of the story of the church was done in much the same way I was taught the story of our nation, complete with George Washington chopping down a cherry tree, and Yankee Doodle and very little context.

The new curriculum came to Sunday School around 1970 and I was living in Maryland attending the Metropolitan Branch in Washington DC, right there on Embassy Row. While not fully grasping what the new curriculum was about, I began to understand how appropriate it was for us to learn about our faith in the context of the

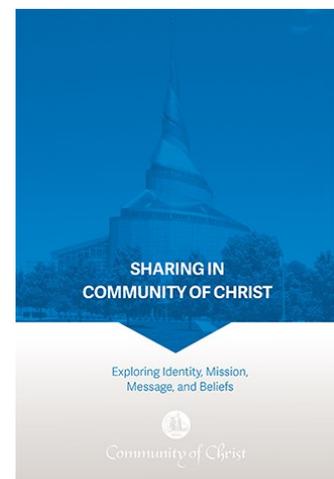
“In the future the Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives will be our binder of faith as a community. We are challenged now and will be challenged in the future to apply them and interpret them faithfully for the situations we find ourselves in. “

culture we lived in. When I moved to Idaho later that year and began to settle into the congregation in Buhl, my Sunday School teacher, Aunt Lorene, could not grasp why the material was talking about race and poverty instead of Kirkland and the Book of Mormon, she had no frame of reference for a discussion about inner-city blight.

I did. One of my first trips into DC with my mom and dad was in our '65 Galaxy 500 to see the Mall and where dad worked in the Interior Department building. Part of our tour was into the residential part of the city, the part that only two years before had been on fire during 4 days of rioting in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Dad started the tour with “Lock the doors, boys.” I saw first-hand, out the window of our Ford, urban blight, poverty, hopelessness, and block after block of burned and ransacked buildings . It was 1970. In the neighborhood I lived in Silver Springs, I had a friend that was black, I played football with Chinese nationals, and we learned about Jewish holidays in school and sang song of Hannukah during the Holiday program. (The great thing about that diversity was that Holiday break was longer, to accommodate all of the different religious holidays.)

It took me a long time to figure out why folks in Buhl could not relate to what the new curriculum was trying to teach. It was all about context, my frustration came from trying to share my experiences and having my story met with stares that communicated “Huh?” The church of the 1970s was robust and growing and we looked at ourselves as one church, the one true church, but in fact we were quite complex in our diversity even though, then like now, the church membership in the USA was mostly white we were very diverse in our contexts. We were being held together with a story and a set of beliefs that set us apart.

Then in 1984 the church was led to the prophetic understanding that half of the population was being denied priesthood and that women were being



called to ordained ministry. The cracks began to show. Context had a great deal to do with the ease or difficulty of accepting this prophetic call. The nature of the prophetic is context, the needs and resources and the successes and failures are all part of being prophetic.

The church is currently moving toward a decentralized model of community, one that will be very much formed by our local contexts, I suspect. But unlike the story that bound us in the 70s we now have a set of principles that transcend context—because they are broad enough for interpretation and application to our various places. Abolish Poverty and End Suffering can be interpreted for situations from the war between Israel and the Palestinians or the administration of a local animal shelter.

In the future the Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives will be our binder of faith as a community. We are challenged now and will be challenged in the future to apply them and interpret them faithfully for the situations we find ourselves in. We can act in honest unity with our brothers and sisters from around the world because of these principles. These principles will form our ministry individually and corporately in ways we cannot anticipate now.

Recently the members in the southern part of the mission center joined with over 300 volunteers to plant trees along a riparian area in an effort to refill the Great Salt Lake. This effort recognized the principle “Sacredness of Creation” and “Worth of all Persons.” I really doubt that there was a lengthy conversation about the principles in the decision to do the project, they have become a part of our DNA and therefore a base for the choices we face. The fact that the congregation was honoring creation through restorative effort as well and building relationships with Native Americans proves the effectiveness of the Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives in our life as the Body of Christ.

As we enter 2024 I challenge you to revisit those statements, in fact studying again the book “Sharing in Community of Christ” might be a great way to start the new year, and it will give you a good base for our discussions at Reunions and in our preparations for mission center conference.

Have a Merry Christmas and may 2024 be a blessing to you and your community. ~

Awaken to New Possibilities: Mission Center Conference Reflection

BOISE, IDAHO | SEPTEMBER 30 to OCTOBER 1, 2023

By Michelle Phillips, Communication and Administrative Coordinator, Inland West Mission Center

The conference began early on Saturday morning with check in. As this was my first opportunity to attend Mission Center Conference, I especially enjoyed helping check folks in and getting to know people from around the Mission Center.

The Boise congregation provided a lovely opening worship service. Formation time included break out groups with reflection questions. After lunch, the legislative session was called to order and included reports from Brittany Mangelson & Tyler Marz, Mission Center Budget and sustaining of officers, and the presentation of call to ministry for Tyler Marz to the office of Seventy. The day concluded with a Plenary Session by Karin Peter.

Sunday morning brought the conference to a close with a beautiful worship and communion service. We were blessed to witness the Tyler’s ordination to the office of Seventy by Karin Peter and Joann Fisher.

One of the highlights of Mission Center Conference for me was meeting so many of our members, including Barbara Horner. Barb shared her recipe for communion bread with me, a recipe she inherited from Jessie Fletcher of the Boise congregation. I will cherish this recipe as a tangible reminder to not only look forward to new possibilities, but to also honor the past and the rich heritage we within our own Mission Center. I look forward to seeing even more of you next year for Mission Center Conference in Whitehall!



2024 BOOK CLUB

By John G VanDerWalker II

Inland West Mission Center President



Community of Christ has a long tradition of being an informed denomination. During the 1960s and 70s the church's publisher, Herald House, produced new titles almost every month and those were sent to subscribers who received a book on a regular basis. We were a community that read about our faith.

In those days we were also very much involved in legislative action during our district conferences, we were, after all, buying and developing land for congregational buildings, campgrounds and passing budgets for a large array of camping and retreat events. Things have changed. Herald House no longer publishes many books, and our mission center conferences come together for fellowship and just a little legislative work.

In the staff debrief of our 2023 fall conference, it was mentioned that we had a lot of down time that allowed for ample visiting and fellowship. While both of those things are positive and help to strengthen the body, there was some concern that there was too much "free time" and that participants may feel a need for more structured activity.

To address this, I am proposing that we, as members of the mission center, spend the year in preparation for conference by reading a book together. The title is not yet chosen, however it will be in alignment with our focus on climate justice, which will be the theme for Reunions this year.

To assist in the preparation, we will be sponsoring a book club that will break the book into sessions, and each session will be offered three times during a week by three different facilitators at various times that will be determined prior to launch. As an example, we might offer the session on Sunday afternoon, Wednesday evening and Thursday morning thus allowing maximum participation for each part of the book. Participants could go to one or three session on the same chapter and hear various thoughts on the text from folks across a wide range of opinions and perspectives.

Please keep an eye on announcements through the Weekly Newsbrief and your congregational announcements. This should be a fun and informative way to pass the winter months and prepare us for conference. ~

“Awe is the gateway to compassion. It is a deep awareness that we are creators, creators who work with the Creator, in an ongoing project of crafting a world. If we do not like the world or are afraid of it, we have had a hand in that. And if we made a mess, we can clean it up and do better. We are what we make.”

— **Diana Butler Bass**, *Grounded: Finding God in the World—A Spiritual Revolution*

Mark Your Calendars!

June 27 - July 1 | Red Cliffe Reunion | Huntsville, UT
July 13-20 | Spectacular | Graceland University in Lamoni, IA
July 20 – July 27 | Samish Island Reunion | Bow, WA
September 28 – 29 | Mission Center Conference | Whitehall, MT



“AWAKEN ...” CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Simply put, we are called to restore right relationship with all creation, all beings, all of earth’s beauty and function. From the beginning, we were called to bring forth God’s “kingdom,” “reign,” or “Zion.” Ancient prophets envisioned it as a world where even the wolf and the lamb could co-exist peacefully. Jesus taught that it was a change in lifestyle, that would bring justice and new life.

Never has the world needed a restoration to that vision more than now. Never has the call to examine our lifestyle and societal norms been more fiercely urgent. We cannot continue to support a lifestyle of wastefulness, built-in obsolescence, consumerism, and plastics. We cannot continue to disrupt the balance of nature with more and more carbon emissions.

The consequences of societal greed shout from the daily headlines: hurricanes and storms, drought and fires, rising seas and melting glaciers, the starving and extinction of animals and humans. Climate change is accelerating toward deadly tipping points. Environmental stresses are causing food insecurity in developing nations and prompting or increasing political instability globally. Nature’s imbalances multiply whatever society or political threats emerge in the scramble to maintain a way of life that is not sustainable.

The declaration of a Climate Emergency at April’s World Conference defines our faith journey as a call to action. The World Church theme for next year is “Heal the Earth: a Restoration Imperative.” The imperative is for action now, not by just a concerned few, but by everyone. “Recycle, reuse, repair and repurpose” provides a starting point, but is not enough. We can’t recycle our way out of this emergency.

The market is transitioning to clean energy, electric vehicles, new agricultural techniques, and sustainable investments. Employment gains in renewable energy are outpacing job loss in the fossil fuel industry. But systemic progress is slow. Many corporations have pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions—but few are implementing their plans. Sharper declines are needed.

Actions we can take:

- protest societal wastefulness and consumerism;
- advocate for sustainable building codes, construction practices, and zoning laws;
- sign green petitions demanding accountability from local, state, and federal legislators;
- stand with marginalized populations condemned to industrial polluted land, and redress the inequalities;
- and accept the financial consequences of saving our planet, because making a difference will be costly in the beginning.

What are you willing to do to ensure a restoration to God’s preferred future for our planet? We must face a difficult reality with courage and hope based not on our own comfort, but on the possibility of restoring life for younger generations, in a future we will not live to see. Restoration is a call to compassion for others. Now is the time. Now is the day. Join me in making a difference. ~

Reunion 2024 Theme **"Heal the Earth: A Restoration Imperative."**

In response to World Conference Resolution 1325 Climate Emergency adopted April 25, 2023, Community of Christ declared a climate emergency. Reunion 2024 is an opportunity for education, formation, and a call to action based on this World Conference Resolution. Through classes, worships, and additional invitations for reunion directors and planning teams, communities will be invited to explore the many intersecting issues of justice and peace that find root in the climate crisis. Learn more at <https://cofchrist.org/news/reunion-2024-theme/>.

INLAND WEST MISSION CENTER CAMPING FUND

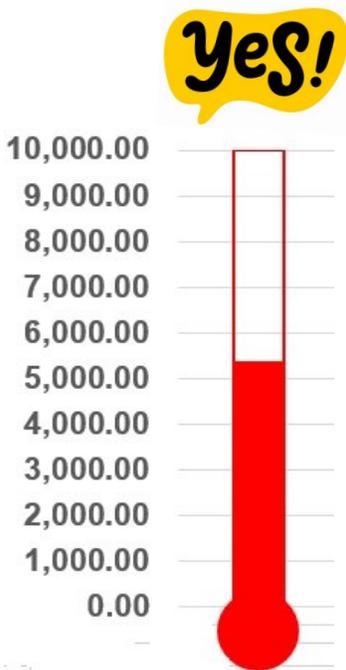
This year for the first time we were able to draw from our newly funded Inland West Mission Center Camping fund to support our Mission Center Events. At the beginning of the summer, we withdrew 2% of the funds currently in the Camping Fund investment account. This amount totaled \$14,095.00. There has been enough interest earned on this account to cover that withdrawal so the principal was not touched. We were able to support several events through subsidies on a per camper basis or by covering cost of a portion of the event.

These are the events the fund supported:

\$ 700.00	Rocky Mountain Mission Center Youth Camp - support of 7 youth to attend
1,973.79	Red Cliffe Reunion – Cooks’ Salary and expenses paid. Red Cliffe Reunion also was
sup	ported by free use of campground (free camper days) as part of the campground sale.
3,022.57	Samish Island Reunion supported through reduced registration fee
822.51	Samish Island Campground purchase of fans for the Christian Fellowship Center
3,700.00	Samish Island Campground to refurbish of one rustic cabin
547.80	Women’s Retreat – guest ministry expense paid
1,200.00	Whitehall Retreat supported by reduced registration fee
\$ 11,966.67	Total used from Camping Fund in 2023

The plan in 2024 is to again withdraw an amount up to 2% from the investment account depending on the need. This will be added to the funds leftover from 2023. We will continue to explore ways that events throughout the Mission Center can be supported through the camping fund. We are very grateful for this fund that was established when Camp Cascade was sold.

THE YES FUND: SUPPORTING OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Thank you for your generous contributions to the mission center’s Youth Empowerment Support Fund (YES Fund). The YES Fund was established to help youth and children throughout the mission center to be able to attend camps/reunions/retreats, Spectacular, and other approved activities. YES Funds help by sharing the cost of a child’s or youth’s registration fees and travel expenses. For many years we have been able to cover all of the airfare for Inland West MC SPEC participants.

The balance in the YES Fund \$5,372.43 as of December, 2023 .

Contributions to the YES Fund can be made in 2 ways:

through your congregation - mark your checks for “YES Fund” and your Congregational Financial Officer (CFO) will forward the money to the Mission Center Office

Through E-Tithing, select the Inland West Mission Center – YES Fund

This fund is administered by the Mission Center. Thank you for your help in supporting our youth and children.

Any questions please contact Sandy Decker at sdecker@cofchrist-iwest.org.

SPECTACULAR 2023, NORTHWEST DELEGATION

FROM ANGEL HOLMES

"I enjoyed the community. I liked the activities that they put on. I liked the fact that it was my first time that far from home. I enjoyed staying in the dorms. "

FROM TANNER JEFFREY

"SPEC gave me sight of my extroverted side and helped me overcome many social fears I had. I also had many chances to meet great People and even greater leaders. I enjoyed all of it and I'm glad I got the chance to go."



LIFE EVENTS FROM AROUND THE MISSION CENTER IN 2023

Blessings:

Finley Izaguirre, Hagerman, ID
McKenna Izaguirre, Hagerman, ID

Baptism/Confirmations:

Todd Barnes, New Plymouth, ID
Patsy Benboe, Billing, MT
Kim Flynn, Whitehall, MT
Hudson Frost, Lewis-Clark, WA
Alexander Gautney Lewis-Clark, WA
Melissa Grandy, Ogden, UT (November, 2022)
Ashley Rennie-Holloway, Billings, MT
Jared Thurber, New Plymouth, ID
Zayne Thurber, New Plymouth, ID



Ordinations:

Wendy Eaton
Elder, Utah Mission Ministries
Candy Graham, Deacon, Salt Lake City, UT
(December, 2022)
Tyler Marz, Seventy, Utah Mission Ministries

Marriage:

Brandon Akkermann to Katelyn Fogelman, Lewis-Clark, WA

Deaths:

Wilda Brock, New Plymouth, MT
Roberta Crabb, Sagle, ID
Donald Hillman, Sidney, MT
Norman Lewis, Pullman, WA
David Williams, Deer Lodge, MT
Joachim Stephan, Richland, WA
Norma Sorenson, Lewis-Clark, WA
Robert Vincent, Billings, MT (December, 2022)
Bruce Wade, Spokane Valley, WA
Robert Watts, Billings, MT (December, 2022)
Murvene Wilhite, Spokane Valley, WA
Joyce Sylvester, Spokane Valley, WA

If there are life events or transitions happening in your congregation please send them to Sandy Decker at sdecker@cofchrist-iwest.org.



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WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF

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