

Grant McMurray and the Succession Crisis in the Community of Christ

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Members of the Community of Christ were shocked when our president, W. Grant McMurray, announced that he had resigned on November 29, 2004, effective immediately.¹ He cited some health problems but clearly the main reason was his admission of having made some “inappropriate choices.” He declined to name a successor,² as called for in the Doctrine and Covenants: “None else shall be appointed unto this gift except it be through him, for if it be taken from him he shall not have power, except to appoint another in his stead.”³

I got quite a few emails and calls from LDS friends from *Sunstone* and the Mormon History Association expressing shock and sadness. Lavina Fielding Anderson wrote: “It’s heart-breaking for us personally. Paul and I were trying to think last night of a time when we ever saw Grant when he wasn’t kind, funny, sensitive, self-deprecating, and articulate about really important things. We couldn’t. He’s one of the finest human beings I know, and the dignity and courage of his letter of resignation are all of a piece with that.”⁴

Speculation about the nature of those “inappropriate choices” naturally circulated, but it seems clear that Church leaders have kept a tight lid on the personal reasons for Grant’s resignation. His resignation without naming a successor, however, created a unique problem for the Church.

We of the Community of Christ tradition (until April 2001 the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) have always said that our priesthood, from the deacon to the president-prophet, are called by God. Through most of our history, three additional expectations have

governed the office of Church president: (1) the president has been a lineal descendant of Joseph Smith Jr.; (2) he served until his death; and (3) he named his successor. We have now abandoned all three of these expectations. In my view, these are all welcome changes.

When Brigham Young and the Twelve began the westward exodus in 1846, Emma Smith and many other Mormons declined to follow them. But it does seem to me that it was logical for the Twelve to lead the Church after the martyrdom of our founding prophet. After all, they were the "second Presidency"; and since Hyrum Smith had also been murdered, the only surviving member of the First Presidency was Sidney Rigdon, who was not in very good standing at that time. While members of the Reorganized Church have often asserted that Joseph Smith Jr. had made it clear that his son should succeed him as Church president, Grant McMurray in a 1980 article stated: "Joseph Smith, Jr., himself was largely responsible for the tremendous sense of confusion that followed his martyrdom in 1844."⁵ When the Saints in Nauvoo in August 1844 showed their preference for Brigham Young and the Twelve as leaders, their decision should not be perceived, McMurray continued, "as it has in much apologetic literature issued by the Reorganization, as a bald usurpation of power by Brigham Young, jostling young Joseph out of his rightful place."⁶

I can understand Emma's decision not to move to Utah with the Twelve. Her life had been uprooted enough. And she shared the overwhelming consensus of the western Christian world that polygamy was an abomination in the sight of God. Her decision was a good one, and certainly in some ways Lewis Bidamon was a better husband and father than Joseph. Emma's sons appreciated him as a stepfather.⁷

After the majority of the Saints relocated in Deseret in 1846-47, several men tried to assert Mormon leadership in the Midwest. According to Lawrence Foster, the most dangerous challenge to Brigham Young's leadership in the wake of the martyrdom came from "the brilliant and charismatic prophet, James J. Strang."⁸ Strang, who gathered followers in Wisconsin and later at Beaver Island in Lake Michigan, was probably the most promising alternative to Brigham Young and the Twelve in the short run. However, the Reorganized Church emerged from an 1851 religious experience of Jason W. Briggs, leader of the Church in Beloit, Wisconsin. Briggs had followed Strang until Strang embraced polygamy. Clearly the new church would oppose polygamy. But the other issue included in Briggs's religious experience, and perhaps just as important, was the idea

that the new president should be of “the seed of Joseph.” Emma had four sons and naturally the eldest, Joseph III, would be the first choice to fill that role. Although Joseph refused to discuss the matter when first approached by members of the new church, eventually he accepted the call to be its president. At age twenty-seven, he was ordained at the conference in Amboy, Illinois, on April 6, 1860. Mormonism valued lineage, so it was natural that a faction that did not support the Twelve would look to lineal succession as a sound alternative to apostolic seniority.⁹

Lineal succession in the presidency was very important in the early years of the Reorganization, as the authority-conscious church in the Midwest contended with its equally authority-conscious cousins in the West.¹⁰ McMurray notes that lineal priesthood was the primary focus in the early years of the *True Latter Day Saints Herald*,¹¹ which began publication in January 1860, three months before young Joseph’s ordination. According to McMurray, during the new publication’s first three years, “thirteen major essays are included with titles such as ‘Lineal Priesthood,’ ‘The Pre-eminent Birthright of the Tribe of Joseph,’ and ‘The Lineal Transmission of the Priesthood from the Days of Adam to the Last Days,’ and these do not include the countless references to the subject in other articles and in conference addresses.”¹² As it turned out, both of our churches made that initial succession their precedent for the future, although there was some uncertainty when Brigham Young died. I have long argued that both churches selected very bad principles of succession.¹³

Joseph Smith III served as president of the Reorganized Church for nearly fifty-five years, from April 6, 1860, until his death on December 10, 1914, at age eighty-two. He understood two principles with respect to succession: the president should be called by revelation and he should be a worthy, lineal descendant of Joseph the Martyr. By the 1890s, Joseph understood the need to prepare younger men to lead the Church when he was gone. His oldest son, Frederick, was ordained an elder in Lamoni in 1897 when he was twenty-three.¹⁴ But “Freddy,” as his father affectionately called him, had not shown a lot of interest in church work up to that time, and he was not very active after his new ordination either. Apostle J. R. Lambert expressed opposition to Frederick’s ordination on the basis of his poor record “in the past” and lack of promise for the future.¹⁵ But Frederick showed enough interest by 1902 that he was called into the First Presidency along with a very capable Canadian named Richard C. Ev-

ans.¹⁶ According to Roger D. Launius, R. C. Evans clearly desired to become the next president and saw the prophet's son as a rival.¹⁷

By 1906 Joseph had decided that God was calling Frederick to be the next prophet, and in Doctrine and Covenants 127, approved at the general conference on April 14, 1906, he said: "It is now declared that in case of the removal of my servant now presiding over the Church by death or transgression, my servant Frederick M. Smith, if he remain faithful and steadfast, should be chosen, in accordance with the revelations which have been hitherto given to the Church concerning the priesthood." If Frederick should "prove unstable and unfaithful, another may be chosen, according to the law already given" (D&C 127:8).

As Joseph Smith III neared death, he knew he needed to assure a clear pattern for future succession beyond Frederick's presidency. After consulting with Church leaders, he drafted a long document entitled "Letter of Instruction," intended to establish the principles upon which succession in the presidency would be based. Joseph knew how difficult the issue had been in 1844 when his father died without naming a clear successor and must have worried during the 1902-06 period that, if he died leaving succession vague, the Church might well split between followers of Frederick and followers of Evans. The "Letter of Instruction," published in the *Saints' Herald* in 1912, proved useful in determining succession thirty-four years later, when Frederick died in 1946, in 1995 when Wallace B. named the first non-Smith, and again in 2004-05 after Grant McMurray's resignation.¹⁸ Launius notes, however, that in 1912 the Quorum of Twelve specifically refused to endorse the "Letter of Instruction," and the general conference also did not take the action of endorsing it as Church policy.¹⁹ But it became precedent nevertheless.

Each presidential succession in the RLDS Church has been unique in some ways. Joseph Smith III died on December 10, 1914; Frederick was ordained on May 5, 1915. Frederick died thirty-one years later on March 3, 1946, without having followed his father's example of making a clear public statement about his successor. But on October 20, 1938, he had verbally instructed members of the Twelve and the Presiding Bishopric, according to the minutes of that meeting, that "in the event of his passing, Israel would be in line for the office of president." The minutes went on to say that by joining the First Presidency now, Israel "would have the advantage of the additional experience which this appointment would give."²⁰ After Frederick M. Smith's death, the Twelve took the leadership,

as suggested in the "Letter of Instruction," and asked the Presiding Patriarch, Elbert A. Smith, to seek the will of the Lord on this matter. Elbert reported to the conference that he had sought the will of the Lord over a period of time and received an increasing conviction that Frederick's choice of Israel should be approved.²¹ Elbert was the son of David Hyrum Smith and Israel's first cousin.

Israel A. Smith was a lawyer and very familiar with the history of the Church, which he interpreted legalistically. He did not want to have uncertainty about succession troubling the Church after his death, as had occurred when his grandfather was murdered in 1844 and when his brother, Frederick, died. So he wrote a letter, dated May 28, 1952, in which he declared that "in the event of my death, whenever it shall occur, my brother, William Wallace Smith, should be selected to succeed me as president of the high priesthood of the Church, this having been manifest to me by the Lord at the time he was chosen and set apart as an apostle and again when he was called to be a counselor and member of the Quorum of the First Presidency, at the General Conference of 1950."²² The letter was witnessed by F. Henry Edwards of the First Presidency and Presiding Bishop G. Leslie DeLapp. After Israel's death in an auto accident in June 1958, the letter was presented to the general conference held in October 1958. The conference voted to approve the letter and include it in the Doctrine and Covenants (now Section 144). W. Wallace Smith was ordained Church president at that conference on October 6, 1958.²³

The first three RLDS presidents served a total of ninety-eight years and died in office, like royalty. LDS prophets have also continued to serve until death. The RLDS tradition was terminated in 1976 when W. Wallace Smith brought a revelation calling for his retirement two years hence, and for his son, Wallace B. Smith, to be "prophet and president designate" during those same two years, "after which time, if he remain faithful, through the process of common consent of the body of my church, he is to be chosen as president to succeed his father" (D&C 152:1).

Eighteen years later, Wallace B. Smith also chose to retire rather than serve until death but he departed even further from tradition—that of lineal descent in the office of the president—by naming W. Grant McMurray to be his successor. McMurray is not related to the Smith family in any way. He had been World Church secretary for ten years (1982–92) and a counselor in the First Presidency for four years

(1992–96) prior to being ordained as president of the Church on April 16, 1996.²⁴ W. Wallace was seventy-six when he retired; Wallace B. retired at sixty-seven.

During the week of the 1996 world conference, some people passed out pamphlets on the streets outside the Auditorium opposing McMurray's calling; but their action made no visible impact. There was relatively little dissent in the Church regarding this break in the tradition of Smith descendants. Possibly most of those who think the president should be a lineal descendant of the founding prophet had already left the Church a few years earlier after Wallace B.'s 1984 revelation calling for the ordination of women.

McMurray served as president of the Church for eight and one half years, from April 16, 1996, until his November 29, 2004, resignation. He was not only the first non-Smith in the office, but he was also the first president of any Latter Day Saint church to have a graduate degree in religion from a theological seminary or a graduate school of religion.²⁵

W. Grant McMurray was born in Toronto on July 12, 1947, the son of William and Noreen McMurray. Grant firmly embraced the RLDS tradition as he grew up, seeing his church as "the one true church." He moved to Independence in 1959 with his mother and sister, Donna, after his parents divorced. His father had been a full-time Church appointee minister who lost his job when it became known that he had an alcohol problem.²⁶ Grant graduated from William Chrisman High School in Independence in 1965 and attended RLDS-sponsored Graceland College from 1965 to 1969, graduating with a major in religion and a minor in English.²⁷

During his high school and college years, there was a growing recognition that some Church leaders and members were rethinking many of the Church's traditional teachings in areas of scripture, history, and theology. This theological ferment was becoming very visible at Graceland, where some of the faculty were among the leading advocates of the new ideas that were emerging.²⁸ Grant recalls noticing quite a contrast in the faculty during his freshman year when he had "Introduction to Religion" from Donald D. Landon, a major leader of the liberalizers at that time, and "Introduction to Sociology" from Raymond D. Zinser,²⁹ a charismatic individual whose conservative approach to religion included an ability and willingness to give prophecies in church meetings rather frequently. While McMurray majored in religion, he always had an interest

in journalism and wrote articles for the student newspaper, the *Graceland Tower*. The late 1960s were turbulent times, and student protest at Graceland and around the country was at its peak.³⁰

One of the six religion courses that Grant took from me was “Latter Day Saint Scriptures,” a course that focused on the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. No one in Graceland’s religion department wanted to teach this course. Indeed, none of the three faculty members at that time had ever read the Book of Mormon.³¹ Perhaps foolishly, I volunteered. I was about halfway through the book when the course started. On the first day I asked the students—fourteen in all—why they were taking this course. Most of them said something like they were taking it for their spiritual growth, and so forth. When I came to Grant, he said, with an embarrassed look, “I am taking this course because I have never read the Book of Mormon and this course will force me to read it.” My response was, “Don’t worry, Grant, I haven’t read it myself.”³²

The students and the professor learned together, so the class was very discussion-oriented. I look back at this class as one of the most enjoyable I have ever taught in my forty years at Graceland (1966–2006). Two major conclusions reached by many of the students (and their instructor) were: (1) it is difficult to support the idea that the Book of Mormon is a historical account as claimed³³ and (2) there are significant problems with the RLDS practice since 1878 of instantly canonizing revelations from the prophet, because the faith community has not had an opportunity to consider the document at length and see if it meets the “test of time.” One of my students, Kathy Olson (now Sharp), took this class later and stressed this idea in a 1972 article in *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action*, a journal published and edited mainly by faculty at Graceland College.³⁴

After McMurray’s graduation from Graceland in 1969, he enrolled in Saint Paul School of Theology, a Methodist seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, which was conveniently located about fifteen minutes from the RLDS headquarters in Independence. A significant number of RLDS leaders in the 1960s and 1970s attended Saint Paul, including five who were later called to the Council of Twelve and the First Presidency.³⁵ McMurray recalls siding with the theological revisionists during those years, but he did not have a “faith crisis” as some seminary students did.³⁶ In Independence, McMurray and his wife, Joyce, attended congregations clearly identified with the liberal wing of the Church.³⁷ In the

1970s they attended the Presence Mission which included many prominent Church liberals.³⁸ When the Presence Mission folded at the end of the decade, many of its liberals transferred to the Walnut Gardens Congregation, which soon became known as the most liberal congregation in Independence.³⁹

The RLDS Church practiced closed communion, meaning that only baptized members of the RLDS Church could take the sacrament at the monthly service of the Lord's Supper. In 1971, while still a seminary student, McMurray was hired by the Church to work for Paul Booth, director of the Division of Program Planning. Booth put McMurray to work researching the issue of closed communion.⁴⁰ As a result, his first published scholarly article, "Closed Communion in the Restoration," appeared in 1971 in *Courage*.⁴¹ Whether to open the sacrament to Christians baptized in other denominations became a major issue in the Church throughout the 1970s and 1980s until finally, the 1994 world conference voted to approve a policy of open communion.⁴²

After fifteen months working for Paul Booth in program planning, McMurray, still a seminary student, was offered a part-time position in the History Department at Church headquarters, with the possibility that it would become full-time after a year. He would be working under the direction of Church Historian Richard P. Howard, one of the leading liberal thinkers in the Church. Howard had recently published *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development*, which won the Mormon History Association's 1969 "best book" award.⁴³ Howard's meticulous research into the evolution of the texts of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Joseph Smith's "New Translation of the Bible"⁴⁴ subtly challenged the literal interpretation of scripture that many members held. Perhaps as important as the textual reconstructions was Howard's introduction which explained and argued for a liberal interpretation of scripture.⁴⁵

Early in 1972, the first year that McMurray was employed in the History Department, he joined with Howard and others in founding the John Whitmer Historical Association,⁴⁶ and he authored some significant historical articles in the years that followed. Three years after he became president of the Church, he gave a paper at the annual meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association in which he reflected that it was interesting to note the subjects he had chosen to research, since they often had relevance for the presidential position he would ultimately assume.⁴⁷

One of John Whitmer's early presidents, he chose for his presidential address, "The Reorganization in Nineteenth-Century America: Identity Crisis or Historiographical Problem?"⁴⁸

In 1978 McMurray was invited to give the John Whitmer banquet address which is held in Independence the night before the world conference begins. Wallace B. Smith, the man who seventeen years later would call him to be the president-prophet, was being ordained at that conference. McMurray's lecture was, very appropriately, on the subject of succession: "'True Son of a True Father': Joseph Smith III and the Succession Question."⁴⁹ Wallace B. Smith had been an ophthalmologist in Independence for fourteen years prior to 1976. He had served only as a local leader in the Church and as a member of the Church's Standing High Council, which advises the First Presidency, when requested, on sensitive issues.

Prior to the 1982 world conference, McMurray was approached by Howard S. ("Bud") Sheehy, then a counselor in the First Presidency, inviting him to become the World Church secretary, replacing Roy Stearns, who was retiring in August. The World Church secretary is the executive secretary in the office of the First Presidency. McMurray recalls: "The First Presidency had wanted to upgrade the role of church secretary, so he or she would truly be the executive secretary and sit in on the weekly meetings of the First Presidency and the meetings that were held with the Executive Committee of the First Presidency, the President of the Twelve, and the Presiding Bishop."⁵⁰ Wallace B. Smith's other counselor was Duane E. Couey. Grant accepted the offer, with the change becoming effective in August, four months later. However, at the conference Couey retired from the First Presidency and was replaced by Apostle Alan D. Tyree, which caused McMurray to wonder if the offer was still good. "Personally I looked forward to working with Duane, whom I admired greatly," he told me in an interview. "But Alan said he supported the appointment, too, so the Presidency said the job was still mine."⁵¹

McMurray's first conference as World Church secretary was the April 1984 conference which split the Church. President Smith introduced the document that became Section 156 of the Doctrine and Covenants, approving the ordination of women and also announcing plans to build the temple. After a long debate, delegates approved it by a vote of approximately 80-20 percent. Some thought Wallace B. Smith—having three daughters and no sons—had introduced women's ordination to al-

low one of his daughters to succeed him. But since Wallace ultimately recommended a male successor outside the family, it appears that Section 156 was not based on this motivation. Although Wallace has never, to my knowledge, publicly discussed the background to this revelation, he clearly believed the male-only priesthood was based on culture and tradition, not divine will.

The controversy over the ordination of women was not handled well by Church leaders, and more than one-fourth of the active Church members withdrew their support over the next six years. Wallace B. Smith's counselors, Howard Sheehy and Alan Tyree, were both former apostles with significant experience in Church leadership. Possibly Wallace delegated too much authority to his counselors. At any rate, Sheehy was known for being rather autocratic, and Tyree was known for being certain of his opinions. Many Church members believe that too many leaders—from the World Church level down to the local congregations—were too punitive in responding to the critics of Section 156. Churches are voluntary associations which thrive only if their adherents willingly participate with their time, talents, and financial resources. Hundreds of priesthood members were silenced (removed from the priesthood) for their opposition to new Church policies, particularly the ordination of women. Understandably they left and joined with other like-minded Saints to form restoration branches totally independent of the RLDS Church.

Thus, McMurray became president in 1996 after Church-shaking changes had been introduced by Wallace B. Smith: (1) the ordination of women,⁵² (2) the dedication of the temple in Independence to the pursuit of peace,⁵³ (3) a policy change from closed to open communion for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper,⁵⁴ and (4) a break with the long-standing tradition of lineal succession in the presidency. As a historian, I would add a fifth change: a new era of historical professionalism and honesty, as seen especially in Church Historian Richard Howard's 1983 article cautiously admitting that Joseph Smith Jr. was a polygamist—a conclusion we had rejected since the presidency of Joseph III (1860-1914). That article was published in the independent *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* with the quiet support of the First Presidency, who wanted it to be published but not in an official Church forum like the *Saints' Herald*.⁵⁵

It appears that by 1992 Wallace B. Smith had made at least a tenta-

tive judgment that Grant McMurray was to be the next president, since sixty-two-year-old Tyree was released at that conference and replaced by McMurray. Three years later in September 1995, Smith issued a pastoral letter announcing that, at the April 1996 world conference, he would recommend that McMurray be approved as the new president and prophet. In that letter, he said, "The principle of lineage in the calling and choosing of a successor is important but not overriding."⁵⁶

McMurray was well grounded, both in the Christian tradition as a result of his undergraduate and graduate studies in religion and in the history of the movement he was about to lead by virtue of his decade working in the History Department. But certainly some veteran Church leaders would have preferred a president with extensive background in Church leadership outside the headquarters bureaucracy in Independence where McMurray had spent his entire career.

At the time McMurray became president, Gustav Niebuhr of the *New York Times* wrote that "McMurray's election was the latest move within the 250,000 member church as it struggles to redefine its identity and broaden its appeal." Niebuhr noted, "Even in small matters, differences are apparent. A visitor to Mr. McMurray's office is offered coffee, a drink shunned by Mormons." McMurray said to Niebuhr, "When you think about it, the Mormon Church and the R.L.D.S. Church share about a 14-year history in the early 19th century . . . and since then, we've developed on very different tracks."⁵⁷ Three months later the *Christian Century* observed, "McMurray's accession seems certain to accelerate the move of the RLDS Church away from Mormon tradition."⁵⁸ These observations were accurate.

During the eight and a half years that McMurray was president, he continued the direction that Wallace B. Smith had taken and, with skill and wit, effectively articulated an expanded vision for the Church. His writing and speaking skills were remarkable. Many Church members were highly impressed with McMurray's messages to the Church, finding them inspirational and motivational.

McMurray brought greater diversity into the presiding quorums. Wallace B. Smith had been president for twelve years after the approval of women's ordination in 1984, but he did not call any women to these high offices. No doubt time was needed to give women experience in other priesthood callings. When McMurray became president, some women had been in the priesthood for a decade, constituting a core of experi-

enced women now available for openings in the presiding quorums. McMurray called the first three women apostles (Linda L. Booth and Gail E. Mengel in 1998 and Mary Jacks Dynes in 2002) as well as the first woman to the Presiding Bishopric (Stassie Cramm in 2002). He also called the first African to the Council of Twelve, Bunda W. Chibwe from Zambia, in 2000.⁵⁹

Barely one year into his presidency, McMurray initiated a three-year program called "Transformation 2000," which sought to invigorate the Church over the following three years. Its goals were to develop a Christ-centered theology of peace and justice, to engage 20,000 youth, children, and young adults in peacemaking, to locate 200 model congregations committed to youth outreach and peace ministries, to create 200 new congregations, and to obtain 200 new full-time ministers in the Church.⁶⁰ "Transformation 2000" as it was called, was a modest success. In 2003 McMurray said that Transformation 2000 had "led to the addition of almost 200 new field ministers and that "more than 200 new congregations" had been planted. The World Church budget grew from approximately \$18 million to a figure that approached \$30 million."⁶¹

Under McMurray's leadership the Church finally established a theological seminary. When Church members began to go to theological seminaries in reasonable numbers in the 1960s and 1970s, they usually attended Protestant seminaries. Many Church people thought seminary education was unnecessary, if not counter-productive. One delegate to the 1970 world conference stated emphatically. "These other schools have nothing to teach us."⁶² But over time Church members began to see the value of seminary education, probably in part because of the contribution made in a variety of ways by people with graduate degrees in religion. Early on many of these students were headquarters staff members who attended Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. But as time went on, RLDS members were attending a wide variety of seminaries: Protestant, Roman Catholic, and even state universities. Finally the Church established the Community of Christ Seminary located at the Independence campus of Graceland University, less than a mile from Church headquarters.⁶³ When the 2000 world conference approved this seminary, the delegates and observers responded with a vigorous applause, a marked contrast to the world conference held thirty years earlier when much hostility to theological education had been expressed and when a suggestion by a delegate that we should move toward ordaining

women was greeted with loud expressions of shock. Conservative critics are right when they say the Church has changed significantly over the past three or four decades.⁶⁴

McMurray also engaged in scholarly debate with some of the Church's leading scholars when he was asked to give a paper replying to Paul M. Edwards, Roger D. Launius, Danny L. Jorgensen, and George Walton at the 1999 John Whitmer Historical Association meeting, held that year at Excelsior Springs, Missouri. These four had critiqued the Church at the 1997 Whitmer meeting in Kirtland. McMurray reviewed his own historical writings prior to becoming a member of the First Presidency, critiqued each of the four previous papers, and discussed the tension between the roles and goals of the historian and the ecclesiastical officer.⁶⁵

Over the past several decades, the RLDS Church has become more sensitive to various issues of Christian social concern. During McMurray's time in the presidency, the world conferences have passed resolutions on war and peace, military service, land mines, earth stewardship, globalization, children's rights and advocacy, the developmentally disabled, sexual abuse, homosexuality, discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, gun control, capital punishment, and organ and tissue donation.⁶⁶

One major issue in America as well as many other places around the world is the matter of homosexuals and their place in church and society. In the Community of Christ, this issue has been widely seen as significant for at least a decade. McMurray included very supportive statements on the topic—briefly in his 1998 world conference sermon and extensively in his 2002 world conference sermon. Gay and lesbian members and their families, listening to this message, felt they had received unprecedented support. But the 2002 statement created a backlash, possibly because McMurray honestly admitted that he had been aware of and agreed with ordinations that were approved for homosexuals in committed relationships, which is currently contrary to Church policy.⁶⁷

McMurray also acknowledged the guilt of white Americans in their treatment of Native Americans over the years. A Native American Conference was held at the temple in Independence, February 15–18, 2001. At that conference McMurray stated: "We must acknowledge our culpability in the vast mosaic of abuse, violence, disinterest, and insensitivity that have marked the experience of Native peoples in America."⁶⁸

After the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon, McMurray wrote "Faith Overcoming Fear: Pastoral Reflections on the Events of September 11." He noted that national pride was very high in the United States as a result of the terrorism. "But this awful act is not an attack on one country but rather is an assault on the human family." Reminding his readers that the major religions of the world share a commitment to peace, he wrote, "We must stand firmly against ethnic stereotypes and religious persecution." He also mentioned that the Church had become signatory to a statement by religious leaders in the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States titled, "Deny Them Their Victory."⁶⁹

And finally, during McMurray's presidency, the Church's name was changed to Community of Christ, reflecting the shift from being a sect-type to a denomination-type church. As a sect the Church focused heavily on convincing others—and probably ourselves—that the RLDS Church is the "one true church." Now the Community of Christ is clearly focusing more on Jesus and less on Joseph Smith. Theologian-in-Residence Anthony Chvala-Smith and Peace and Justice Ministries Coordinator Andrew Bolton are two examples of Church leaders who clearly see this shift and welcome it. In 2003 McMurray told the Mormon History Association that, on the one hand, "I believe he [Joseph Smith] was brilliant and visionary, probably a religious genius, certainly the founder of the most significant indigenous religious movement to be birthed on American soil," but on the other hand, "I also believe he was deeply flawed, with profound human weaknesses, inconsistencies, and shortcomings."⁷⁰

After McMurray resigned in November 2004, his two counselors, Kenneth N. Robinson and Peter A. Judd, continued to lead the Church until the special world conference held in June 2005. In his resignation letter, McMurray had specifically declined to name a successor, so the two-member First Presidency announced a process of "discernment," attempting to ascertain the will of God as to who should lead the Church.⁷¹ The Council of Twelve, in consultation with the First Presidency and the leaders of the other major Church quorums, and inviting the response of all members, led this process,⁷² which relied heavily on Joseph Smith III's 1912 "Letter of Instruction," dealing with the issue of succession in the presidency.⁷³ Sunday, February 27, 2005, was designated as a special day of prayer and preparation throughout the Church.⁷⁴ The Twelve reported

that, after an extended period of prayer and fasting culminating in a March 2 meeting, "God graced our efforts and gave to each of us a testimony that Stephen M. Veazey is called to lead the Church as prophet-president."⁷⁵ At that time Veazey, forty-eight, was barely one-half the age of Gordon B. Hinckley, ninety-five.

The choice was not a surprise because Veazey, the second youngest apostle, had been chosen by his eleven colleagues to be president of the Council of Twelve at the 2002 world conference. The Twelve's recommendation that Veazey be ordained Church president was approved by the delegates at the special June 2005 world conference. When the vote was taken, it appeared that from among more than two thousand delegates, fewer than ten delegates voted in opposition.⁷⁶

The McMurray presidency completed the elimination of the three expectations cited in the beginning of this paper. His two predecessors had retired rather than serve until death, McMurray was not a Smith, and he declined to name a successor when he resigned. The Church had to find an alternative to the tradition of one person (the prophet) naming his successor. In my view, this was the most positive side to McMurray's resignation. Hopefully this precedent will continue.

Many who knew Grant and Joyce McMurray thought Grant's role as "prophet" would be an uncomfortable one for both of them. At world conference the week he was ordained, McMurray said, "But to sit and listen while one is described as 'prophet, seer, and revelator' creates within me unimaginable turmoil. . . . We need to talk, my friends, about the way we have begun to move our identity as a people with a prophet to our calling as a prophetic people."⁷⁷ In McMurray's 2003 address at the Mormon History Association meeting at the Kirtland Temple, he recalled that a Salt Lake reporter had called him uncomfortable in that role. "Indeed I was," responded McMurray. "Seeking to discern God's will for us in our own time . . . is a shared task of religious inquiry, not a duty for one person locked in a closet."⁷⁸

As a personal comment, I will say that *I* would have been uncomfortable if McMurray had been comfortable in his role as prophet. Therefore, in my view, McMurray made an important contribution to the Church when he proposed that we should think of ourselves not so much as a "people with a prophet" but as a "prophetic people."⁷⁹ This perspective involved much more than a natural feeling of human inadequacy. The concept of revelation as occurring through a prophet, resulting in specific

directions to a Church the prophet presides over, seems vastly inferior to the concept that God's people will act in prophetic ways when they see the poor, the suffering, and the marginalized, or when they see people making gods of their possessions, or people killing others in the name of their gods. The God of Israel portrayed in the Hebrew Bible is certainly not one who communicated his will for Israel through one person who spoke for Yahweh to the community of faith. The prophets of Israel were not official Church spokesmen.

In his prayer at the high priests' quorum meeting at the special 2005 conference, Don Compier, dean of the Community of Christ Seminary, said, "We thank God for our growing recognition of the fact that discernment of calling is a collective responsibility of the entire body of Christ."⁸⁰ If God can make his preference known about who should lead the Church to one person, it seems to me that the divine mind can just as well move a group of people to choose the right leader. Since all such human judgments are fallible, it also seems to me that the collective wisdom of the general officers of the Church is to be preferred to the judgment of one person, no matter how spiritually gifted that person might be. And when that happens, it has the advantage that more people have taken ownership of the decision.

McMurray made a valuable contribution to the Church by declining to submit for the Doctrine and Covenants his letters to the Church recommending men and women for ordination as general officers of the Church. He began this with his first "letter of counsel" calling people to the higher quorums, at the world conference of 1996.⁸¹ Throughout the presidencies of Frederick M. Smith (1915-46), Israel A. Smith (1946-68), W. Wallace Smith (1968-78), and Wallace B. Smith (1978-96), every revelation approved for the Doctrine and Covenants included, at least in part, calling men to the presiding quorums of the Church. McMurray changed that tradition, and his successor, Stephen Veazey, followed suit when he became president. During his eight and a half years as president, McMurray did submit two documents for consideration, both of which were pastoral letters which the world conference approved for inclusion in the Doctrine and Covenants (now Sections 161 and 162). It has been my observation that these two pastoral statements have resonated very well with Community of Christ members, as they are quoted frequently in Church meetings. *Kansas City Star* reporter Mara Rose Williams described these documents as "major statements

calling for the inclusion of people of all races, cultures, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds in the church.”⁸²

At first glance, it may seem that the Community of Christ has adopted the LDS Church’s method of succession in the office of president. However, there are important differences. First, Church members outside the Twelve were eligible for the office. Second, Veazey was not the senior apostle and, by chronological age, he was the second youngest apostle. Veazey called the youngest apostle, David D. Schaal, age forty-seven, to be one counselor in the First Presidency and retained as his other counselor Kenneth N. Robinson, who had served in the First Presidency throughout McMurray’s tenure. Thus, the two youngest apostles in the Community of Christ were chosen to be the president and a member of the new First Presidency. And finally, Veazy’s selection occurred only after a period of “discernment” in which not only the Twelve and other leading officers, but the entire Church membership was encouraged to submit names and to pray for divine guidance in the discernment process. Therefore, it was not an automatic appointment of the senior apostle, but an un-predetermined choice by the Twelve. It was an open process which Community of Christ members see as being guided in significant ways by the Holy Spirit.⁸³

The new president of the Community of Christ was raised in Paris, Tennessee, a city where a young Wilford Woodruff spent some time on a mission to the South.⁸⁴ Despite his comparative youth, Veazey has had a more extensive and varied career in full-time ministerial service to the Church than any of his predecessors. The Smith presidents and McMurray had mainly headquarters assignments in their pre-presidential careers. Veazey was a pastor at age twenty and has been deeply involved in missionary work for the Church at various levels. He has been the apostle in charge of the Church’s work in Africa, in the American South, and in large portions of the Midwest, in addition to directing African American Ministries, and other assignments. In 1990 he was ordained a president of Seventy and an apostle in 1992, at age thirty-five. Before his calling as an apostle, his work had been entirely outside of Independence. In 2002 his colleagues in the Council of Twelve Apostles chose him as their quorum president.

As a gracious and much-appreciated gesture, the opening worship service of the June 2005 conference that approved Veazey’s ordination included a video highlighting major events in McMurray’s presidency. He

had been very well-liked by many Church members, and this recognition of his contributions provided a graceful transition to the new presidency. The Twelve presented their recommendation of Veazey to meetings of the various priesthood quorums and caucuses—the bishops, evangelists, high priests, elders, Aaronic Priesthood, the non-priesthood delegates,⁸⁵ the children and youth caucus, and the French, Spanish, and Tahitian language caucuses.⁸⁶ Each group discussed the Twelve's recommendation, then voted whether to approve or reject it.

In the high priests' quorum, former President Wallace B. Smith, who had called Veazey to be an apostle at the tender age of thirty-five, rose to say that few have exhibited the leadership qualities that he has seen in Veazey. "I can say unqualifiedly that Steve is called to this office," he stated.⁸⁷ In the elders' quorum, Paul DeBarthe from Lenexa, Kansas, advocated separating the two roles of prophet and president, arguing that these two are difficult for one person to achieve. This point has been raised in private discussions in the Church for many years, but rarely in public. In the delegates' caucus—intended for conference delegates who are not members of the priesthood,⁸⁸ two people objected to the fact that "seer and revelator" had been left out of the statement by the Twelve recommending Veazey to be "president of the high priesthood, prophet and president of the church."⁸⁹ They cited the language of "prophet, seer and revelator" in Doctrine and Covenants 104:42 (LDS D&C 107:92). Apostle Dale E. Luffman, presiding over the meeting, suggested that the word "prophet" pretty well covers "seer and revelator" also, then later noted that "seer" and "revelator" connote "images of magic and folklore" that, he suggested, no longer serve us well.⁹⁰

When all the delegates gathered for a business session to hear the reports from the quorums and caucuses, Veazey gave his testimony regarding his call. He quoted Joseph Smith III's statement to the 1860 general conference when he became Church president: "I have come in obedience to a power not my own." Then he left the chamber while the conference took up the matter of his call. All of the quorum and caucus meetings then reported, each supporting the call. Then individual delegates had the opportunity to discuss the recommendation. Finally, the conference voted on whether to approve Veazey for ordination. The vote was overwhelmingly in the affirmative, and Veazey was ordained at a special worship service on the Friday of the world conference, June 3, with six thousand in attendance.⁹¹

On the last full day, the conference considered and approved President Veazey's recommendations for ordination for various vacancies in the presiding quorums. In addition to calling Robinson and Schaal as his counselors, he also called four new apostles—two women and two men—and called R. Paul Davis to fill a vacancy in the Presiding Bishopric.⁹² There was concern expressed from both the French Language Caucus and the elders' quorum that all of the new officers are English-speaking Americans, even though the Church is becoming more international. Of the twenty-one men and women who are the presiding officers of the Church, only three are not U.S. citizens: First Presidency member Kenneth Robinson from Australia, Apostle Bunda Chibwe from Zambia, and Presiding Evangelist Danny Belrose from Canada.⁹³ The outgoing First Presidency of McMurray, Robinson, and Judd were all born outside the United States, but McMurray's family moved from Canada to Independence when he was in the upper elementary grades, and Judd has lived in the United States since he came to Graceland College from his native England in 1961.

Two other apostles were released prior to retirement. Outgoing Apostle Ken McLaughlin had asked to be relieved of his place in the Twelve, which was unusual given his comparatively youthful age of fifty-three. In his statement to the conference, he said, "I have long believed that people ought to sit at the table of leadership for various periods of time and then serve in other ways. Indeed, it is my sincere hope that such movement will become increasingly common in the life of the Church—so common that we fully embrace the understanding that the needs of the Church require the on-going alignment of individual giftedness and interests with new ministries important to the well-being of the church."⁹⁴

McLaughlin was raising a fundamental question for the future, not only for the Twelve but for the president: Would the Church be better served if general officers—including the president-prophet—were released after a decade or so to pursue other spiritual gifts and callings, making way for younger leadership? It will be interesting to see if Veazey serves until retirement—about seventeen years from now—or moves on to other ministries in later years.

Gail Mengel, one of the first two women called to the Twelve in 1998, was released so she could spend more time as the Church's officer concerned with ecumenical relations. She is currently serving a four-year

term as president of the ecumenical Church Women United.⁹⁵ President Veazey indicated that Mengel would concurrently serve as the Church's Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer.⁹⁶ Thus, her release illustrated the model that McLaughlin was suggesting.

A major theme of Veazey's conference sermon was "the cause of Zion," which is "one consistent theme at the heart of our journey as a people of faith." He stated: "At this point in our journey, we now understand that the cause of Zion cannot be separated from the message of reconciliation and peace brought by Jesus Christ."⁹⁷ Noting that Jesus "opposed the dominant religious and political trends of his day that were counter to God's purposes," Veazey said, "That is why he ate with sinners, healed the unclean, reconciled the guilty. That is why he tended to the needs of the poor and called people from all walks of life to a new kind of compassionate, peaceful community grounded in the love of God, self, and neighbor." The new president said: "We need to be especially aware of the condition of the most vulnerable in our midst: the aged, the young, the sick, the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. How are *they* doing? Are they experiencing well-being? . . . Are they unfairly hindered by the attitudes and actions of others who have a more secure or powerful place in the society?"⁹⁸ His concluding thought on the subject was, "If our vision of Zion does not promote the well-being of children throughout the world it is not the Zion to which God calls us."⁹⁹

Aware of the tension all Christians face between the message of the gospel and the influence of the surrounding culture, Veazey lamented, "Too often the church withdraws from its prophetic role in the world, reflecting biases and prejudices of the larger society, rather than impacting society with a vision of the gospel and the values of the Restoration, such as the worth and giftedness of all people."¹⁰⁰ This message, a renewal of the much-cherished Zionite vision, was enthusiastically received by the membership.

What are the implications of President Veazey's ordination for the future of the succession process in the Community of Christ? Two and a half months after he resigned and four months before Veazey was selected, Grant McMurray told a newspaper reporter, "I don't think the present situation necessarily establishes a precedent for the future at all. Churches live in the moment, and at this moment the very best step . . . is for a very good-sized group of leaders to reflect on the needs of the church and to discern through prayer and reflection the best way to respond."¹⁰¹

Certainly future presidents could revert to early tradition and name their successor before they retire. But I don't think it will happen for three reasons.

First, many rank-and-file members will not approve of going back to choice by one person. I think many Church people are happy to see the appointing power broadened as it was in the 2005 selection of Veazey. Second, Veazey is known as a humble man, so I doubt that he will want to reclaim that power for the prophet. Third, it seems likely that the Twelve, having chosen the new president in 2005, will not yield that power back to the Church president without a struggle. So I disagree with McMurray on this point. What happened in 2005 *will* be seen as a precedent in the future, just as the 1912 "Letter of Instruction" became a precedent in 1946, 1996, and 2005, even though neither the Twelve nor the conference endorsed it at the time. As in any democracy, there will be pressure to expand the number of people involved in the selection. That might be the hard part, as the Twelve might resist giving up their central role to a larger group of decision-makers.

McMurray's achievements as leader of the Community of Christ were considerable. His resignation further reflects our perception that all prophets are human and fallible, as Joseph Smith Jr. demonstrated so well. McMurray may have chosen not to designate his successor merely because of his "inappropriate choices." However, I think it is more likely that he believes it is not a good idea for one person to choose the president, just as he feels that the prophetic role is not exclusive to one person. In resigning, McMurray forced the Community of Christ to come to terms with an inadequate tradition that expected one person to name the next leader of the Church. In that sense, his resignation was a blessing.

Notes

1. Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Head of Former RLDS Church Unexpectedly Steps Down," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 3, 2004, A-1, A-9; Carrie A. Moore, "Leader Resigns Presidency of Ex-RLDS Church," *Deseret Morning News*, December 3, 2004, B-1, B-2; David Tanner, "McMurray Resigns Church Presidency," *Independence Examiner*, December 3, 2005, A-1; Mara Rose Williams, "McMurray Resigns as Church President," *Kansas City Star*, December 3, 2004, E-2.

2. W. Grant McMurray, "Dear Peter and Ken" (official letter of resignation), *Herald*, January 2005, 6.

3. Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants 43:2a. Unless otherwise noted, all D&C citations are to this edition. The parallel quotation is LDS D&C 43:4.

4. Lavina Fielding Anderson, email to William D. Russell, December 3, 2004.

5. W. Grant McMurray, "'True Son of a True Father': Joseph Smith III and the Succession Question," A in *Restoration Studies, Vol. 1*, edited by Maurice L. Draper and Clare D. Vlahos (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1980), 131.

6. *Ibid.*, 132.

7. Valeen Tippetts Avery, *From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 31.

8. Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 186–87.

9. David Hyrum Smith, the youngest child born to Emma and Joseph Smith Jr., was in the First Presidency from 1873 until 1885; his older brother Alexander was in the First Presidency from 1897 until 1902. The other son, Frederick, died in 1862 without having joined the Reorganization.

10. For the standard RLDS understanding of succession in the Church presidency, see Elbert A. Smith, *Restoration: A Study in Prophecy* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1925), chap. 5; Russell F. Ralston, *Fundamental Differences between the LDS and RLDS Churches* (1960; rpt. Independence, Mo.: Price Publishing Company, 1998), chap. 1; and Aleah G. Koury, *The Truth and the Evidence: A Comparison between Doctrine of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1965), chap. 5. For a scholarly understanding of the succession of Joseph Smith III, see McMurray, "'True Son of a True Father,'" 131–45.

11. The title *True Latter Day Saints Herald* clearly contains the implication that there are some false Latter Day Saints out there somewhere.

12. McMurray, "'True Son of a True Father,'" 140.

13. Many years ago, I made this argument in, "Needed: A New Method of Succession," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action* 2, no. 1 (September 1971): 326–27.

14. Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 31.

15. "Conference Minutes: Decatur District," *Saints' Herald* 44 (June 22, 1897): 401–2, qtd. in Roger D. Launius, "R. C. Evans: Boy Orator of the Reorganization," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 3 (1983): 50 note 28.

16. The revelatory document calling these two as counselors to President Joseph Smith III is in D&C 126:8, April 18, 1902.

17. Launius, "R. C. Evans," 40–50, and his *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet*, chaps. 14–15. After Evans's disaffection, he wrote *Why I Left the Latter Day Saint Church: Reasons by Bishop R. C. Evans* (Toronto: n.pub., 1918).

18. Joseph Smith III, "Letter of Instruction," *Saints' Herald*, March 13, 1912, 241–48; also published in Joseph Smith III and Heman Hale Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1805–1890*, 4 vols.; continued by F. Henry Edwards, Vols. 5–8, 1903–15 (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1970), 6:575.

19. Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 349. Indeed, Launius notes that the letter "was not binding on the church, and the Quorum of Twelve responded to it by resolving that 'we do not commit ourselves to the terminology nor all the conclusions contained in the "Letter of Instruction."'" Council of Twelve Minutes, 1865–1928, April 12, 1912. McMurray, "True Son of a True Father," 131, also notes that the letter "never did receive official conference approval."

20. Quoted in the Official Minutes of General Conference 1946, Business Session, Saturday, April 6, 1946, 2:00 P.M., *Saints' Herald*, April 27, 1946, 473.

21. *Ibid.*

22. D&C 144:1. W. Wallace Smith was ordained an apostle in 1947. In the third and last paragraph of the letter, which became Section 144, Israel A. Smith erred by dating the "Letter of Instruction" as having been published in the *Saints' Herald* for March 12, 1913; it was actually published in the March 13, 1912, issue.

23. The 1958 general conference was delayed from April until October so that the Auditorium could first be completed. Because of Israel's death in June 1958, there was only a four-month interim before the next conference; if the conference had been held in April, twenty-two months would have passed before the next scheduled conference. This 1958 conference was the last designated "general conference." From 1960 on, they have been called "world conferences."

24. W. Wallace Smith was the third son of Joseph Smith III to serve as Church president. His son, Wallace B. Smith, succeeded him. W. Wallace Smith lived in retirement for eleven years before his death in 1989; Wallace B. Smith is still alive and active in the Church. He chairs the Church's World Hunger Committee, and he serves as a volunteer chaplain at the Independ-

ence Regional Health Center. He and his wife, Anne, attend the Pleasant Heights Congregation in Independence.

25. Richard Ostling and Joan Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 342.

26. The 1954 general conference reported William McMurray's assignment as being "Unorganized Ontario, Ottawa objective." At the next (1956) conference, McMurray was no longer on the appointee list.

27. W. Grant McMurray, interviewed by William D. Russell, Lamoni, Iowa, July 31, 2003, 1.

28. The religion and philosophy faculty—Lloyd Young, Leland Negaard, Robert Speaks, and Paul M. Edwards—were very involved in this effort, as were the two historians—Robert B. Flanders and Alma Blair. Flanders's *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965) was a blockbuster that humanized Joseph Smith. Flanders's conclusion that Joseph Smith Jr. was a polygamist shocked RLDS members. Lloyd Young's article on the virgin birth in the February 1, 1964, *Saints' Herald* was disturbing to many members of the Church, as was Leland Negaard's study of the problem of Second Isaiah and the Book of Mormon, published in the Church's magazine for college and university students. Negaard, "Literary Issues and the Latter Day Saint," *University Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1966): 21–24.

29. McMurray, interview. Landon was a Church appointee on loan to Graceland for 1965–66.

30. For student protest at Graceland during these years, see David Anthony Tyeme Clark, "This Side of the Cornfield: Reform Activism at Graceland College, 1965–1973," *Annals of Iowa* 59, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 35–69. This article was originally Clark's Senior Seminar in History project at Graceland College.

31. During the 1966–67 academic year, my two colleagues in the religion department were R. Robert Speaks, then in the last of his seven years teaching religion at Graceland, and Harold N. Schneebeck, who was teaching on a one-year internship as part of his program at Union Theological Seminar in New York City.

32. I previously told this story in my presidential address for the Mormon History Association in 1983: "History and the Mormon Scriptures," *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 60. I got the impression that some of my LDS colleagues were quite surprised that none of the three religion professors then at Graceland had read the Book of Mormon and that I would volunteer to begin teaching it without having read it completely.

33. *Ibid.* I also presented some of my conclusions in my 1977 presiden-

tial address to the John Whitmer Historical Association meeting in North Kansas City, which was combined with a 1982 paper at the Mormon History Association meeting in Ogden and published as a "A Further Inquiry into the Historicity of the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* 7, no. 5 (September-October 1982): 20-27.

34. Kathy Olson, "A Reappraisal of Canonization in the Doctrine and Covenants," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1972): 345-52.

35. In addition to McMurray, who became Church president, his counselor Peter A. Judd, who previously served as an apostle, and three other apostles—Paul W. Booth, Lloyd B. Hurshman, and Geoffrey Spencer—graduated from Saint Paul. The earliest RLDS graduates were Richard B. Lancaster and Clifford P. Buck in 1965. Both had served as the director of the Church's Department of Religious Education. In 1967 I became the third RLDS graduate of Saint Paul.

36. McMurray, interview, 1.

37. RLDS members have always had the option of choosing which congregation they attend, irrespective of their proximity to the congregation chosen.

38. In addition to Grant and Joyce McMurray, others attending the Presence Mission were future apostles Joe Serig, Geoffrey Spencer, Jim Cable, and Peter Judd (who also served in the First Presidency), and other prominent Church people such as Richard and Barbara Howard, Bruce and Carol Lindgren, Lyman and Nancy Edwards, Joe and Helen Pearson, Larry and Carol Cavin, Anita and Arthur Butler, and Bob and Carol Smith.

39. Among the well-known Church leaders who attended Walnut Gardens, in addition to the McMurrays, were past or present First Presidency members Maurice L. Draper, Alan D. Tyree, and Peter Judd, Apostle Geoffrey Spencer, Church Historian Richard P. Howard and his wife, Barbara (she was editor of Herald House), and Paul M. Edwards, president of the High Priests' Quorum.

40. McMurray, interview, 2.

41. W. Grant McMurray, "Closed Communion in the Restoration," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action* 2, no. 1 (September 1971): 277-84.

42. World Conference Resolution 1240 (April 15, 1994); 1994 *World Conference Bulletin*, 437-38. A current issue in the Community of Christ is the related matter of whether Christians should be allowed to join the Com-

munity of Christ on the basis of their baptism in another Christian denomination.

43. Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1969). A revised and enlarged edition was published by Herald House in 1995.

44. The RLDS people have traditionally referred to Joseph Smith's "New Translation of the Bible" as the "Inspired Version."

45. One reviewer, a conservative Church leader fairly well-read in biblical scholarship, wrote a very negative review of Howard's book, focusing his attack almost entirely on Howard's first chapter. Alfred H. Yale, Review of Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development*, in *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action*, pilot issue (April 1970): 59–60. For a favorable review, see my "Somewhat Revisionist," *Christian Century*, April 17, 1970, 454, which called Howard's book "the most scholarly work ever published" by the RLDS Church.

46. William D. Russell, "A Brief History of the John Whitmer Historical Association," *John Whitmer Historical Association 2002 Nauvoo Special Edition*, 147–52.

47. W. Grant McMurray, "History and Mission in Tension: A View from Both Sides," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 20 (2000): 34–47, and reprinted in *Restoration Studies VIII*, edited by Paul M. Edwards and Joni Wilson (Independence, Mo.: Temple School, Herald Publishing House, 2000): 17–25; and in *Religion and the Challenge of Modernity: The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the United States Today*, edited by Danny L. Jorgensen and Joni Wilson (Binghamton, N.Y.: Global Publications, 2001).

48. W. Grant McMurray, "The Reorganization in Nineteenth-Century America: Identity Crisis or Historiographical Problem?" *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 2 (1982): 3–11.

49. McMurray, "True Son of a True Father," 131–45. Two additional articles that McMurray published in the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* prior to becoming a member of the First Presidency were "As Historians and Not as Partisans': The Writing of Official History in the RLDS Church," 6 (1986): 43–52, and "American Values for a New Jerusalem: Formations of the First United Order of Enoch, 1860–1871," 8 (1988): 30–44.

50. McMurray, interview, 3.

51. *Ibid.*

52. During the ten and a half years between the first ordinations of women on November 17, 1985, and Wallace B. Smith's retirement in April

1996, women were ordained to every office from deacon to high priest, with the exception of the three top administrative quorums: the First Presidency, the Council of Twelve Apostles, and the three-member Presiding Bishopric.

53. Both of these ideas were contained in Doctrine and Covenants 156, approved at the 1984 world conference, with approximately 20 percent of the delegates voting against accepting the document as revelation. Fifteen years later, McMurray recalled his response after typing up what became Section 156 from Wallace's hand-written notes. He told President Smith: "But Wally, I truly believe that in the long term the most important phrase in this inspired counsel is the one that says, 'The temple is dedicated to the pursuit of peace.' That sentence will transform the church." W. Grant McMurray, "Envisioning Our Future: A Call to Transformation," *Saints' Herald*, August 1997, 314.

54. World Conference Resolution 1240 (April 15, 1994).

55. Richard P. Howard, "The Changing RLDS Response to Mormon Polygamy: A Preliminary Analysis," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 3 (1983): 14–29. Some later writers have cited the republication of Howard's article in *Restoration Studies III*, edited by Maurice L. Draper and Debra Combs (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1986), rather than the original 1983 publication. Howard had been assigned to write the article by the First Presidency. McMurray, then Church secretary, later commented that Howard's article was "thoroughly sanitized by the First Presidency, mainly by Alan [Tyree]." McMurray, interview, 3. I summarize the history of this article in my "A Brief History of the John Whitmer Historical Association," 147–52.

56. Wallace B. Smith, "A Pastoral Letter," *Saints' Herald*, November 1995, 456.

57. Gustav Niebuhr, "New Leader for Church with Mormon Roots," *New York Times*, May 12, 1996, 16.

58. Jan Shippy, "Nonprophet Organization," *Christian Century*, August 14–21, 1996, 787.

59. Prior to 1984 I had thought that President Smith would begin women's ordination by naming a prominent woman like Barbara Higdon, then president of Graceland College, to become an apostle. Then calls for women to other priesthood offices would follow after the ground had been broken at the top. Needless to say, I was wrong.

60. W. Grant McMurray, "Envisioning Our Future: A Call to Transformation," *Saints' Herald*, August 1997, 313–20.

61. W. Grant McMurray, "A Statement from President McMurray," *Herald*, February 2003, 5.

62. William D. Russell, "Reorganized Mormons Beset by Controversy," *Christian Century*, June 18, 1970, 770.

63. The seminary prepares people for full-time paid ministerial positions in the Church. Full-time ministers are expected to have a graduate degree in religion, although it does not have to be from the seminary. Many members also attend the seminary to enhance their skills as nonpaid, parttime ministers.

64. One response on the Church's webboard the day after the announcement of McMurray's resignation was: "I am glad he is stepping down. He once said he didn't consider himself to be a prophet—amen to that. When a new leader is chosen they should automatically disqualify anyone who has attended the St. Paul School of Theology or any other liberal seminary." The same day another respondent wrote: "Certainly, the failure to name a successor has scuppered any possibility of claiming correct succession procedures. . . . The Lord does not expect his prophets to be selected by a committee." Webboard quotations provided courtesy of Richard K. Lindgren.

65. McMurray, "History and Mission in Tension."

66. See these items in *World Conference Resolutions* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 2003), cited by resolution number and date: "Peace in El Salvador," 1234, April 11, 1992; "World Peace Committee," 1267, April 5, 2000; "Our Pursuit of Peace," 1227, April 10, 1992; "Participation in Military Service," 1249, April 19, 1996; "International Ban on Land Mines," 1258, April 1, 1998; "Earth Stewardship," 1224, April 9, 1992; "Globalization," 1284, April 3, 2004; "Children's Advocacy," 1235, April 11, 1992; "Practical Peace and Justice for Youth and Young Adults," 1272, April 8, 2000; "Outreach to the Developmentally Disabled," 1220, April 7, 1992; "Sexual Abuse of Children," 1276, April 12, 2002; "Dialogue on Homosexuality," 1279, April 1, 2004; "Human Diversity," 1226, April 10, 1992; "Personal Use of Firearms," 1270, April 8, 2000; "Healing Ministry and Capital Punishment," 1273, April 8, 2000; "Organ and Tissue Donation—The Gift of Life," 1281, April 2, 2004.

67. W. Grant McMurray, "The Vision Transforms Us," *Saints' Herald*, June 1998, 227–34; W. Grant McMurray, "Called to Discipleship: Coming Home in Search of the Path," *Herald*, June 2002, 8–21. In April 2001, accompanying the name change of the Church to Community of Christ, *Saints* was dropped from the title of the magazine.

68. W. Grant McMurray, "They 'Shall Blossom as the Rose': Native Americans and the Dream of Zion," *Herald*, May 2001, 14.

69. W. Grant McMurray, "Faith Overcoming Fear: Pastoral Reflections on the Events of September 11," *Herald*, November 2001, 13.

70. W. Grant McMurray, "'A Goodly Heritage' in a Time of Transformation: History and Identity in the Community of Christ," *Journal of Mormon History* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 65–66.

71. Jim Hannah, "Called to Discernment: Interview with Kenneth Robinson, Peter Judd, and Steve Veazey," *Herald*, March 2005, 18–19.

72. The leaders of other quorums involved in these meetings were the three members of the Presiding Bishopric, the seven Presidents of Seventy, the Presiding Evangelist, and the president of the High Priests' Quorum.

73. Joseph Smith III, "Letter of Instruction," *Saints' Herald*, March 13, 1912, 241–48; also published in Edwards, *The History of the Reorganized Church*, 6:560–75.

74. First Presidency, "Official: Selection of New Church President," December 16, 2004, *Herald*, February 2005, 6.

75. James E. Slaughter et al., "Official," *Herald*, April 2005, 6. See also "Report of the Council of Twelve to the Special World Conference of June 2–5 in the Matter of the Selection of a New Prophet-President for the Community of Christ," *2005 World Conference Bulletin*, 43–46, a historical survey of succession issues, read to the conference by Apostle Leonard M. Young.

76. This estimate of the negative votes is based on observations by Church Archivist Ronald E. Romig, New York lawyer Don Allen, and me. We were sitting in the first row of the balcony, near the front of the Auditorium chamber.

77. W. Grant McMurray, "A Prophetic People," *Saints' Herald*, June 1996, 226.

78. McMurray, "A Goodly Heritage' in a Time of Transformation," 66.

79. McMurray, "A Prophetic People," 226.

80. William D. Russell, personal notes. At the 2005 world conference, I had press credentials because I was preparing this article for the *Dialogue*-sponsored session of the 2005 Salt Lake City Sunstone symposium. Although I am an elder, I attended the High Priests' Quorum because I thought it might be where the action would be. Hence, I was present to take notes on Don Compier's prayer. Friends informed me of the proceedings in the elders' quorum, which I later verified by consulting the participants themselves.

81. W. Grant McMurray, "A Letter of Counsel Regarding the Presiding Quorums," *Saints' Herald*, June 1996, 233-34.

82. Mara Rose Williams, "McMurray Resigns as Church President," *Kansas City Star*, December 3, 2004, E-2.

83. For major differences between the LDS Church and the Community of Christ, in the early years as well as the new differences that have emerged in the past generation, see my "The LDS and the Community of Christ: Clearer Differences, Closer Friends," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 177-90, an expansion of a paper of the same title read at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, August 14, 2003 (audiocassette SL03-163).

84. Thomas G. Alexander, email to William D. Russell, June 9, 2005. Alexander is the author of *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993).

85. The delegates' caucus is for nonpriesthood members who are elected delegates at the conference.

86. Several years prior to the ordination of women in 1985, the leadership became sensitive to the fact that many women are elected delegates to the conferences but are not eligible to attend any of the priesthood quorums, which consider inspired documents for possible inclusion in the canon of scripture. A delegates' caucus was added to meet this need. It was very large at first but shrank when women began to be ordained. Similarly, in time a sensitivity developed to the need for children and young people to be heard. There was also a recognition that those who speak other languages would be better served by attending a same-language caucus rather than the caucus of their particular priesthood group.

87. Russell, personal notes, 2005 world conference.

88. Delegates to the world conference are allocated to each jurisdiction based on its population of members. Nonpriesthood members are just as eligible as those in the priesthood for election as delegates, although those in the priesthood probably have a greater chance of being elected.

89. Slaughter et al., "Official," 6.

90. Dale E. Luffman, email to William D. Russell, June 28, 2005.

91. Helen T. Gray, "Community of Christ Quickly Selects New Leader," *Kansas City Star*, June 4, 2005, B-1, B-4.

92. The new apostles were Stassie D. Cramm, Ronald D. Harmon Jr., Rick W. Maupin, and Susan D. Skoor. Skoor is assigned to the Western United States. Her territory includes the Utah congregations in Ogden, Salt

Lake City, St. George, and Orem. She attended and presented at the Sunstone Symposium, August 2006, Salt Lake City.

93. The international representation in the presiding quorums was reduced when Presiding Evangelist Danny A. Belrose retired in the spring of 2006. In addition, Kenneth N. Robinson is nearing retirement age.

94. Kenneth L. McLaughlin, June 4, 2005, Statement to the World Conference. At my request, McLaughlin gave me a copy of his statement.

95. "Council Oversees Work Done around the World," *Independence Examiner*, June 1, 2005, 10.

96. Stephen M. Veazey, "A Letter of Counsel Regarding the Presiding Quorums," *2005 World Conference Bulletin*, June 4, 2005, 70-71.

97. Stephen M. Veazey, "Share the Peace of Jesus Christ," 2005 World Conference Sermon, *World Conference Bulletin 2005*, 86, also published in the *Herald*, July 2005, 11-21.

98. *Ibid.*, 87.

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*

101. Associated Press, "Church Breaks New Holy Ground," *Columbia (Missouri) Daily Tribune*, February 13, 2005.