



Community of Christ

Reflections on Counsel to the Church
By Apostle Ron Harmon

Continuing Revelation in Community of Christ

From a very young age, I have been intrigued and at times in awe of our understanding of continuing revelation. This enduring principle has deep personal meaning for me as a disciple and one who is seeking to partner with God in “expanding the church’s restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of persons, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering.”¹

God’s self-revealing nature is deeply and inseparably linked to God’s grace which flows freely and is available to all who will hear and respond. This has been my experience as one who has encountered new understandings and even mid-course corrections as a result of the Holy Spirit. I believe this is also true for our movement. In spite of ourselves at times, our willingness to struggle in the tension between our present understanding and God’s emerging future has been a blessing to the church as we seek to embody God’s mission in our world.

I have never suffered under the illusion I have everything figured out. Frankly, I have always been amazed at individuals who are so certain in their interpretations of various scripture passages or doctrinal propositions. As I have had opportunity to share with President Veazey personally and as a member of World Church Leadership Council I have gained an even deeper appreciation for the depth and breadth of God’s love and grace as expressed in continuing revelation. How can words adequately express that which is often just beyond human understanding? Would it truly be revelatory if we already fully comprehended that which is being conveyed?

In December of 2009, President Veazey met with World Church Leadership Council to pause and invite us into his process of discernment. The invitation to enter into a process of discernment was of course extended to the whole church and the request was sincere. It was grounded in President Veazey’s understanding of the nature of revelation and how it can function within the body of Christ. I know brother Steve prayerfully and thoughtfully read emails and letters expressing insights during our time of discernment together.

As we shared together in fellowship, prayer, and sacred moments of conversation, President Veazey shared concepts that had become clear to him in his study, prayer, reflection, and conversation in our community of faith. He also shared at this time questions that were still lingering on his heart and mind and invited us to prayerfully discern and reflect together.

¹ See 2010 Counsel to the Church – Paragraph 9c

We began our sharing with a scripture from Isaiah 55:6-12

⁶Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; ⁷let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

As this scripture was read, the Holy Spirit moved on my heart and mind confirming the message of this passage. I was reminded and even exhilarated with how wonderful, expansive, and transforming are the ways of God. I experienced the deepest humility and recognition of how much I still rely on my limited ability to fully understand God's purposes revealed in the living Christ. I then sensed a deep inner conviction to go deeper in my discipleship – to cultivate the practices necessary to more fully hear and respond to the living word as revealed around me in so many ways. In those moments I sensed a level of urgency not for my sake but for needless suffering occurring around me.

It is difficult to describe the intensity of feeling and thinking that occurred over the next several days as we shared together. The Holy Spirit was among us and there was a shared recognition and appreciation of the Spirit's presence. It was in these hours of listening to President Veazey's reflections, praying, and sharing together that this counsel was affirmed to me as representing God's will not only for our church but a world in need of healing and restoration.

I feel it is appropriate at this juncture to share my deep appreciation for President Veazey. Steve is just a man and yes he makes mistakes like the rest of us. I do want to convey however, my deeper understanding for the burden he carries and his yearning for God on our behalf. The Holy Spirit has not only affirmed the counsel but the person called at this time to express that which is difficult to find words to express. I have sensed Steve's deep desire and compassion for the church in this process and deeply appreciate his disciplined approach to the prophetic office. In this process it has been affirmed to me once again his call to serve as President/Prophet of the church.

We have all been blessed with the opportunity to share in the process of discernment together over the past year. I have been particularly blessed to share with my fellow servants in Christ in World Church Leadership Council through this process. I want bear witness that the one who walked the duty roads of Palestine, offered hope and healing, and called all who would hear into a new way of life, continues to the guide the church today.

Reflections on the Words of Counsel

I am still absorbing and reflecting on the full meaning of the words contained in Counsel to the Church. There is not one sentence of the document that has not impacted me in some way but I want to share some broader reflections that I am still working through in my heart and mind.

- What does it mean *live together* into a new understanding of the gospel of Christ as new creation? This is captured in the words “sacred community” and conveys something much deeper than a group of very different people who happen to show up at the same place at the same time each week. Have we truly become one in Christ? What does this look like and feel like in terms of our relationships and commitment to each other?
- How does our baptism and ongoing transformation change the way we see people and relationships? Is there a more fundamental identity that claims us which is different from the ways we are characterized in society? Does this more fundamental identity become the primary identity by which we relate to each other in sacred community? Is this the key to understanding what it means to become “a visible sign of the coming of God”².
- How can we deepen our understanding of the Lord’s Supper as a “true expression of the life, sacrifice, resurrection, and continuing presence of Christ”³? How are we challenged to embody reconciliation with each other and God in ways that enable us to become “a sacramental offering for the blessing, healing, and peace of creation”⁴? Specifically, how do we prepare for healing with God and others and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in mission?
- As we recognize the commitment others have made to Christ in baptism, how do we renew our commitment daily to clothe ourselves in Christ for the sake of others⁵? In recognition of the universal significance of baptism we also remember our commitment to live out that commitment in sacred and covenant community. How can the prayer for confirmation and confirmation service convey the full meaning of participating in covenant community?
- We face complex issues in the towns, villages, and cities where the church is located throughout the world. We live very different lives and yet we are called to be one in Christ. Will we allow ourselves to be divided over differences that have resulted in the fracture of so many organizations that bear the name of Christ? Or will we model a different path? Will our relationships take precedence over our personal convictions of how the gospel should be expressed in our culture and other cultures where Community of Christ is established? Can we get beneath the polarization of issues to the universal principles of the gospel that can guide behaviors and relationships in all cultures? Are we willing to let go of some control and trust in the slow work of God that brings transformation and healing in ways not always evident to us?

² 2010 Words of Counsel - Paragraph 5

³ 2010 Words of Counsel – Paragraph 4c

⁴ 2010 Words of Counsel – Paragraph 4c

⁵ 2010 Words of Counsel – First Preface (Galatians 3:27-29)

- Facing issues we don't fully understand or are even uncomfortable discussing is very difficult. Many choose the path of avoidance or worse demonization of those who have different points of view. This counsel call us to rise above our fears and tap into a more compelling vision that calls us into a new relationship with God and each other⁶. We could easily go the way of the world but we are being called to embody the peace we seek for our world in our relationships with one another.

I have to admit there have been times where the challenges seem so great and my capacities so limited that I have wanted to shrink away from the vision set before us. In those times, I have prayed for strength and guidance that God's vision for our future might not be overshadowed by the overwhelming challenges of the present. On several occasions over the past several months I have been blessed by the Holy Spirit and have become vulnerable to hope in the midst of my inadequacies.

I have been reminded again that the scriptures bear witness to the incredible story of ordinary people who in spite of the evidence to the contrary were willing to go on a journey with God. I will not remain hesitant in the midst of my "fears, insecurities, and competing loyalties"⁷. I have sensed the call once again to pursue Christ's mission for the blessing, healing, and peace of creation. I am ready to respond – are you?

⁶ 2010 Words of Counsel – Paragraph 9b

⁷ Words of Counsel – Paragraph 9e