

# Community of Christ

## **Counsel to the Church: Questions and Answers**

This is the second article in a series that answers questions about the counsel to the church presented by President Stephen M. Veazey on January 17, 2010.

### WORLD CONFERENCE PROCESS

**1. Is the text of the counsel released January 17 the final version the World Conference will consider?**

President Veazey will release a final version of the counsel at World Conference. That version will be considered formally by the councils, quorums, orders, mass meetings, and delegates. It will have corrections of any typographical errors and minor changes—if needed—to help with translation into multiple languages.

**2. Will each section of the counsel be considered individually, or will the document be considered as a whole?**

While each numbered section first will be considered individually, the final discussion and vote will be on the document as a whole. This is the normal procedure for considering inspired counsel for inclusion in the Doctrine and Covenants.

**3. Is it proper for people in local jurisdictions to pressure or try to bind delegates to vote a certain way?**

No. The church has a long-standing position that delegates should not be pressured or bound by others to vote a certain way at World Conference. Delegates are elected by jurisdictions to engage in all World Conference discussions, worships, spiritual formation, and decision-making. Often delegates receive more information, helpful perspective, and inspiration at World Conference that benefit their decisions. All delegates are expected to prepare for World Conference by engaging in spiritual-discernment practices. They should come open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP

**4. The counsel speaks of receiving previously baptized Christians into membership through confirmation. What types of baptisms would be acceptable?**

The World Church Leadership Council (WCLC) will review and approve a policy statement on baptism and confirmation in March. The Presidency will release the statement to the church by

the end of March. The policy statement also will be presented at World Conference before the counsel is considered.

**5. How would the church view Community of Christ priesthood authority under the counsel?**

The counsel would not lessen the authority of Community of Christ priesthood members to function in their offices. In fact, it clearly affirms that the redemptive action of God in Christ is expressed “**uniquely and authoritatively**” through the church. It also recognizes that God’s grace can’t be limited or confined solely to the church’s ministries.

The Doctrine and Covenants focuses on the role of Community of Christ priesthood to bring blessings and salvation through ministry and sacraments. Doctrine and Covenants 156:7a states:

**Hear, O my people, regarding my holy priesthood. The power of this priesthood was placed in your midst from the earliest days of the rise of this work for the blessing and salvation of humanity.**

Doctrine and Covenants 163:6b states:

**Truly authoritative priesthood ministry emerges from a growing capacity to bring blessing to others.**

Priesthood authority is more than being called and ordained. True authority is realized in effective ministry given in response to the needs of people, congregations, the larger community, and the world.

*The Priesthood Manual* (2004 edition) explores all the dimensions of authority that work together for truly authoritative ministry to be offered:

- **Legal authority:** Formal right to act for the church that is granted by the church through calling and ordination.
- **Moral authority:** Obvious goodness or moral quality of one’s life and relationships.
- **Spiritual authority:** Sensitivity and openness to the guidance of the Spirit in ministry.
- **Authority of competence:** Gaining skills, understandings, and insights to be as effective as possible in ministry.

Fully authoritative ministry occurs when all of these dimensions of authority function in the lives of priesthood members.

**6. How would revised policies and procedures for becoming a church member be carried out if the counsel is approved?**

- Before the end of March, the Presidency will provide a policy statement on baptism and confirmation that will become official church policy if the counsel is approved.
- The Presidency also will present a timeline for implementation and information about helpful educational materials that will be provided to the church.
- After a specified time for education of priesthood, members, and prospective members, the revised policies and procedures would go into effect.

**7. Would rebaptism be available for current members?**

Rebaptism would not be available for current church members. Community of Christ theology identifies the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Communion) as the proper occasion to affirm or renew one's baptismal covenant. The only provision for a member's rebaptism is the extremely rare case of someone officially "expelled" from membership who wants to become a member again.

**8. Would we confirm people who were confirmed in another church?**

Yes. The counsel says confirmation should follow a time of preparation that includes exploring the church's mission, beliefs, and understanding of discipleship in covenant with God and others. Therefore, previous confirmations—while meaningful to individuals—would not meet this expectation. All people must be confirmed by Community of Christ priesthood to become church members.

**9. Would long-term church participants who want to be confirmed have to complete the time of preparation?**

Yes. The counsel offers some added guidance about what it means to be a member of Community of Christ. Materials that reflect these emerging understandings would be provided to prepare people for confirmation. All those preparing for confirmation—even if they have been long-term church participants—should engage in the preparation and study.

**10. Would we be lowering expectations for baptism and membership?**

No. The counsel, when read as a whole, raises expectations. Baptism, confirmation, and church membership involve committed discipleship expressed through lifelong covenant with God and others in sacred community. The counsel challenges disciples to live the meaning of baptism daily as a call to be part of a new creation in Christ that involves transformed attitudes, behaviors, and relationships.

**11. Would the counsel change our understanding and practice of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper?**

- The counsel confirms the decision made by the 1994 World Conference to serve the sacrament to all committed Christians.
  - The current "Guidelines for Administration of the Lord's Supper" issued by the First Presidency in 1994 are found in the *Church Administrator's Handbook* (2005 edition).
  - The counsel also directs the church to highlight dimensions of Communion that spiritually shape the church as a "true and living expression of the life, sacrifice, resurrection, and continuing presence of Christ." It challenges the church to deepen its experience in the Lord's Supper by recognizing the inherent call to "be a sacramental offering for the blessing, healing, and peace of creation."
  - If the counsel is approved, more commentary about the meaning of the Lord's Supper would be provided in the *Herald* and on the church's website.

MORAL ISSUES AND CHURCH POLICY
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**12. How would the direction in the counsel about moral behavior and relationships be implemented if it is approved?**

Before the counsel is considered, the Presidency will discuss steps the church will take in response to the guidance about moral behavior and relationships. One of the first steps would be for the Presidency to consult with field apostles to decide which issues should be addressed first in various nations or fields that contain several nations. The Presidency also would work with the apostles to decide how to handle national or multinational field conferences to address specific issues; how policy proposals would come to those conferences; and how decisions would be made. All current policies will remain in place unless any revised policies are approved.

**13. What is the difference between principles and specific policies in terms of what the World Conference should properly consider?**

Principles are more-universal or fundamental statements, laws, values, or assumptions. Principles serve as standards that can be applied across the whole church. Examples of principles include the church's "Enduring Principles." (See the "We Share" document at [www.CofChrist.org/discernment/weshare](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/weshare).) The principles of moral behavior and relationships presented in the counsel are other examples. These principles include:

- The worth and giftedness of all people
- Protection of the most vulnerable
- Christ-like love
- Mutual respect
- Responsibility
- Justice
- Covenant
- Faithfulness

Policies define how principles are expressed in particular church settings throughout the world. Policies also describe administrative actions to be taken in response to specific situations or issues. Policies in different areas may vary because of national laws, cultural traditions, and the level of church organization.

**14. The counsel states that "proper World Church officers (should) act in their callings—as already provided in church law—to create and interpret church policies to meet the needs of the church in different nations..." Who are these World Church officers?**

The specific reference in the counsel is to the First Presidency and the Council of Twelve as indicated in Doctrine and Covenants 148:10 and 150:11. The other officers of the church, such as pastors and mission center presidents, are responsible for implementing the church's official policies under direction of the Presidency and the field apostles. The Presidency is free to call on the World Church Leadership Council, the Expanded World Church Leadership Council, the Standing High Council, or other gatherings of church leaders for advice and perspective.

**15. Does the counsel mean mission centers or apostolic fields within a nation could have different policies and procedures to deal with issues related to moral behavior and relationships?**

No. Mission centers and fields within a nation would need to follow the church policies and procedures established for that nation.

**16. How would approval of the counsel affect legislation that has been submitted to World Conference?**

At an appropriate time, the Presidency will share a statement about the status of each piece of legislation that could be affected by approval of the counsel. The Presidency will use the following questions to evaluate the legislation:

- Is this legislation in order according to our parliamentary rules?
- Does this legislation propose action contrary to the clear direction of the counsel?
- Does this legislation ask the World Conference to decide for the whole church what likely would be harmful in parts of the church if it is adopted as an official World Church position?
- Does this legislation propose action that would best be considered by a national or field (multinational) conference?

NATIONAL/FIELD CONFERENCES
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**17. Will there be opportunity in apostolic field meetings at World Conference to discuss and decide on specific policies on moral issues?**

No. The agendas of the meetings will vary according to the needs of the fields and will focus mainly on strategic planning for mission. Because of time constraints, the field meetings will not try to resolve policy issues related to moral behavior and relationships. The national and field conferences the counsel refers to would occur following the 2010 World Conference.

**Note:** The World Conference schedule provides for apostolic field meetings Friday, April 16, from 8:00 a.m. to noon. United States apostolic fields will meet together under the leadership of the US team of apostles.

**18. What would national or field conferences be like, and what authority would they have?**

- National or field conferences would be established by the approval of the field apostle(s) and the First Presidency.
- National conferences would include the apostolic fields and mission centers within a nation.
- Field conferences would occur in apostolic fields that include several nations.
- Nations and fields have different needs and would require various approaches to discussion and decision-making.
- All national and field conferences would be “special conferences.” This means the agenda would be set before the conference, and considerations would be limited to the announced agenda.

- A major purpose of national and field conferences would be to allow members to work together toward greater understanding and consent on challenging issues they face in their particular setting.
- The national or field conferences' authority to decide on issues would vary according to several factors, such as the types of issues being addressed and the level of church organization.
- No conference would form a new field organization administrative level, and no conference would be able to legislate for World Conference or the worldwide church.

OTHER QUESTIONS
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**19. What is the intent of the counsel regarding the number and roles of the quorums of seventy, presidents of seventy, and their relationship to the Council of Twelve Apostles?**

The counsel provides added instruction that would build on Doctrine and Covenants 163:5b–c. The number of quorums of seventy and presidents of seventy could be adjusted to align better geographically with apostolic fields and missionary strategies.

*(To Be Continued)*