

## **Annual Theme: Prophetic Courage for a Just Transition**

### **Webinar Title: At the Crossroads: Igniting Faith and Justice in a Time of Change**

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**[Please Note: This is her DRAFT version. There may be some differences from the transcript of the actual presentation]**

#### **Introduction:**

It is an honor to be online with you today. I have had the privilege of benefiting from the work of this team. Their resources and webinars are a gift to all of us

that inform, guide, and challenge our role in healing and protecting the world for the sake of not only ourselves but future generations.

Thank you for taking the time to be present. I know there are numerous needs and opportunities vying for your time, so it speaks volumes that you chose to be present here. I want to honor and respect your choice and do my best to provide you with a good return on your investment.

Through this webinar, we kick-off the annual series focused on: “Prophetic Courage for a Just Transition.” In this webinar, we will unpack what this annual theme means and explore how the choices we make today will shape our collective future.

I want to caveat that I am not an environmental or climate scientist. Like many of you, I try to seek out well-researched ideas about what is happening in our world and how we can best respond. I am dependent on the work and expertise of others in seeking practical solutions. I am saddened when conversations about possible approaches to climate change are turned into partisan politics.

If you hear partisan politics in my comments, then I have not communicated well. My goal is to acknowledge some difficult realities that I believe are well supported by credible and reliable data and then talk about the call of disciples, both individually and collectively, to put their faith into action by making responsible choices today that can help shape a more just and sustainable future for the earth and its inhabitants.

So with that introduction, let’s dive in...

I’ve titled this session "**At the Crossroads: Igniting Faith and Justice in a Time of Change.**" For me, this carries several layers of meaning:

1. "**At the Crossroads**" suggests a critical moment of decision or transition. It implies that we are in a place where different paths

converge, representing an opportunity to choose a direction that will shape the future. It highlights the urgency of making intentional and impactful choices, especially in the face of significant societal and environmental challenges.

2. **"Igniting Faith and Justice"** suggests a call to action, where faith becomes a catalyst for pursuing justice. "Igniting" conveys the idea of sparking energy, passion, and commitment. It emphasizes that faith should not be passive but should be lived out in pursuit of justice, particularly in addressing issues like climate change, inequality, and the well-being of creation.
3. **"In a Time of Change"** indicates the context in which these decisions are taking place—a period marked by rapid, complex changes. It points to the challenges and uncertainties of our current moment in time, calling for responses rooted in both faith and a pursuit of justice to navigate these changes effectively.

Overall, I believe we are in a moment of critical choices with the need for an active, faith-driven response to foster justice as we navigate times of significant change. I hope that our time together calls us both individually and collectively into actions that shape a just and sustainable future.

### **A climate emergency:**

**(Share SLIDE 1)** On 25 April 2023, the World Conference adopted Resolution 1325 Climate Emergency. In response, on 5 May 2023 Community of Christ declared a climate emergency joining with 2,329 jurisdictions in forty countries who had made climate emergency declarations as of that date. Declaring a climate emergency is a significant spiritual and practical first step for Community of Christ as a declaration of our Enduring Principles such as the Sacredness of Creation and Worth of All Persons. It signifies the church's dedication to addressing climate change, aligning with the teachings of our faith, and actively working towards a more sustainable and just world for all.

**(End SLIDE 1)**

The collective action also led to the theme and material Community of Christ explored at reunions this year with the focus on the Restoration Imperative to Heal the Earth.

Declaring an emergency is only the first step. While declarations are important expressions of intent, it's crucial that we complement them with tangible actions to give them substance and impact. Declarations, without meaningful follow-through, can risk being perceived as symbolic gestures rather than concrete commitments that effect positive change.

Now we as a community must live into what it means to actively engage in our calling as earth stewards making responsible choices not only for ourselves and families but for all people and the earth which is our collective home. World Church leaders are not trying to oversee or mandate meaningful actions at local and global levels in response to the climate emergency declaration. Instead, we are relying on the leadings of the Spirit at local and global levels to stir in the heart of faithful disciples who recognize the challenge and create avenues for responding. Then we are trying to support and magnify these grassroots efforts. That's why I'm here today. To emphasize how important the topics of this series is to us as individual disciples and as a faith movement.

### **Steward as entrusted by God:**

Let me pause here to say that when I use the word "steward," it does NOT mean domination, control, or entitlement to resources. Stewardship is not a position of privilege granted by God where one takes full advantage of what one has for personal comfort at the demise of others or the planet.

Stewardship is a position of trust granted by God where one is responsible for serving as God's hands, feet, and wisdom in managing the gifts received for the benefit of all creation.

As we are reminded in Luke 12:48 (NRSV), “...From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”

As adapted from *Choose Generosity: Discovering Whole-Life Stewardship*, (Herald House, 2019, p. 108):

**(Share SLIDE 2)** Community of Christ believes that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, and called them ‘good’ as an expression of divine love. Everything belongs to God and should be cherished and used justly according to divine purposes.

God sees creation as a whole without separation of spirit and element. God calls people of every generation to join with God as stewards in the loving care of creation: (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 34). Individually and collectively we have a responsibility to care for the Earth including natural resources and all creation. This is part of whole life stewardship. **(End SLIDE 2)**

One of the nine Enduring Principles of Community of Christ is the Sacredness of Creation. This Enduring Principle reminds us that we are continuing to affect creation, and change is occurring. We are part of that change. Just as creation has the power to create or destroy, we have the power to affect creation [in healthy ways and in damaging ways]. Part of our whole-life stewardship is to use our power for good.

Our challenge, both as individuals and as a faith community, is to find and practice ways to embody stewardship in our daily lives that support, heal, and improve God’s creation, rather than dominate it.

### **The complexity of the topic:**

So that brings me back to our need as a faith community to have honest and sometimes difficult conversations about what it means to actively engage in

our calling as earth stewards making responsible choices for the good of all creation.

And, of course, like any conversation that is important and worth having, there are no easy answers. The climate emergency being faced by the world has multiple dimensions that I would conclude ultimately impact all aspects of life.

Katharine Hayhoe is an atmospheric scientist and the spouse of a pastor. She has taken on the challenge to try and rally people of faith around the understanding of how the world is changing. With facts and compassion, she emphatically declares, (Share SLIDE 3) the challenge confronting humanity extends far beyond mere environmental concerns manifested in our changing climate. At the core of this climate crisis lies a multitude of pressing issues such as poverty, hunger, water scarcity, and disease. It's an economic quandary, a geopolitical puzzle, and a matter of national security.

Perhaps you agree with Katharine's perspective. Perhaps you do not. That is what makes this conversation so complex. (End SLIDE 3)

What I have learned is that often when we engage in complex conversations where there are a variety of strongly held perspectives, we often become so focused on establishing and defending our own position and perspective that we miss the opportunity to find common ground. It is only when we find common ground that we can collectively make positive movement in responding to our call as earth stewards to uphold the sacredness of creation and worth of all persons.

### **Finding common ground:**

In my experience, we don't have to agree on all aspects of every topic to find common ground that can guide us in making decisions today that will create a better tomorrow. In fact, we should not get distracted by our disagreements. Let me say that again, we should not or dare I say, we cannot get distracted by

our disagreements or we will miss our opportunity to make the choices we need to make today to create a more just and sustainable future.

**(Share SLIDE 4)** Applying the principles of Faithful Disagreement, help us with this process. And the Center for Innovation and Ministry offers classes on participating in Difficult Conversations. **(End SLIDE 4)**

We must focus and build on the beliefs and perspectives that we hold in common. This allows us to gain momentum in working towards positive solutions to the climate emergency we are facing.

This is especially important in Community of Christ as we prepare for the 2025 World Conference. 14 resolutions have been submitted for consideration.

**(Share SLIDE 5)** These resolutions are posted on the World Conference page of CofChrist.org. From now until the end of 2024, mission centers around the world will be providing input for prioritizing the legislative agenda. There will likely not be adequate time to consider all the resolutions so the priority input is crucial in deciding what the body will consider together. Of the 14 resolutions, 3 of them are focused on affirmations and actions related to climate change. **(End SLIDE 5)**

I'm not going to discuss these 3 climate change resolutions since there will be other opportunities to explore those together. What I want to uphold is the importance of being open to the leading of the Spirit as you participate in prioritizing the legislative agenda for the 2025 World Conference. This is using our prophetic voice as a people to discern together what matters most for our time during World Conference next June.

Our deliberations at World Conference will be an opportunity for us to look for places of common ground where we can push forward ideas and actions with the full support of the worldwide church.

**Q&A:**

I think this is a good place to pause and hear some reactions to what I've shared so far or respond to some questions. Dean, you want to take the lead?

## **QUESTIONS**

### **Exercising prophetic courage:**

Thanks for your feedback and questions...

Let's turn our attention to what it means to exercise prophetic courage. The prophetic part is about being open to listen to different perspectives and collectively seek how we can best align our hearts, minds, and souls with God's purpose on and for the earth. The courage comes when we are willing to make changes as needed to commit our resources of time, talents, treasures, and testimony or advocacy to pursue the pathway from where we are to where we need to be without hesitation.

It takes boldness and strength to speak and act according to one's deeply held values and convictions, but it takes even more courage to listen to the perspectives of others and remain open to where God is leading us to respond in situations of injustice and wrong doings. None of us like admitting we are wrong and sometimes changing our perspective can be really hard. But dare I say, I don't think any of us has all the answers to climate change and we must be open to continued growth and adaptation as we learn and listen to the Spirit.

Prophetic courage is a willingness to challenge the status quo, advocate for marginalized communities, and pursue transformative change even when it is difficult or unpopular. It is also a readiness to challenge our own tightly held perspectives and understandings when the Spirit is trying to guide us in new ways.

Jesus invited disciples to pick up their cross and follow him. This is not easy work. The good news is, I believe this is the work of prophetic people.



Think about the example of prophets in the scriptures. Their first step was to honestly assess their current context and why it was not aligned with God's purposes. Against all odds and often with no support, they had to speak hard truths to their peers and the power brokers of their day. Then they had to try and help people imagine how they might change their ways to create a different future more aligned with God's vision. They had to guide people, often noncooperative people, toward an alternative future.

This seems like exactly the type of blessings we need to be bringing into the world today related to the climate emergency and other injustices that are woven together with the climate emergency.

### **What is a just transition:**

So let's talk about just transition. As reported by the United Nations:

Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, communities and countries dearly today and even more tomorrow.

People are experiencing the significant impacts of climate change, which include changing weather patterns, rising sea level, and more extreme weather events. The greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are driving climate change and continue to rise. They are now at their highest levels in history. Without action, the world's average surface temperature is projected to rise over the 21st century ... The poorest and most vulnerable people are being affected the most.

Community of Christ is called to stand in solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable. It is a restoration imperative that we are in the forefront of working for climate justice as part of our faithfully living of Christ's mission which includes abolishing poverty, ending suffering, and pursuing peace on and for the earth.

As we face decisions on what is needed and how we get involved, the question will continue to come up as to what needs are most important and how do we transition from where we are to where we need to be in a way that reflects our identity, mission, message, and beliefs as a people. That brings us to the concept of just transition.

**(Share SLIDE 6)** In general, a **just transition** refers to a framework for addressing the climate emergency that seeks to shift from fossil fuels to sustainable energy sources in a way that is fair and equitable for all communities, especially those most affected by the transition. As described by the European Bank for transition and development, this concept emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the social, economic, and environmental impacts of transitioning to a low-carbon economy are managed in a way that protects the rights and livelihoods of workers, communities, and marginalized groups. (<https://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/just-transition#>). **(End SLIDE 6)**

How do you balance everyone's needs and make choices that are just and equitable? That is one of the many challenges before us. Prayer, education, respectful dialogue, seeking expert advice are just some of the ways we can work to ensure that our actions toward a just transition are truly equitable, especially when there might be conflicting needs and priorities between communities.

I don't know if there are any Star Trek fans online but this reminds me of Spoc's pronouncement in the second Star Trek movie, *Wrath of Khan*. When faced with an impossible situation, Spoc declares that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one. However, in the third movie, *The Search for Spoc*, Captain Kirk flips this logic upside down stating, the needs of the one outweighs the needs of the many. How can both be true?

**A network of mutuality:**

For me, both can be true because we are all interconnected with each other and the rest of creation. We must look at the whole of creation as a system where even parts that seem disconnected really are not. This is often called the butterfly effect which rests on the notion that the world is deeply interconnected, such that one small occurrence can influence a much larger complex system.

This idea is not new.

**(Share SLIDE 7)** In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Jeremiah (29:7) challenged those who had been taken captive to care for the welfare of the city and their captors because "... for in its welfare, you will find your welfare." This biblical foundation calls us to prioritize the needs of others alongside our own, recognizing that our well-being is interconnected with the well-being of our communities and the world. **(End SLIDE 7)**

**(Share SLIDE 8)** We hear a similar reminder from the modern-day prophet, Martin Luther King, Jr. In his 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," he wrote, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." **(End SLIDE 8)**

**(Share SLIDE 9)** In 2007, the prophetic people of Community of Christ adopted Section 163 into our Doctrine and Covenants with two important reminders about our interconnectedness with other people and creation:

163:4 a. God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God's will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

163:4b. The earth, lovingly created as an environment for life to flourish, shudders in distress because creation's natural and living systems are becoming exhausted from carrying the burden of human greed and conflict. Humankind must awaken from its illusion of independence and unrestrained consumption without lasting consequences. (End SLIDE 9)

Through the years, our African brothers and sisters have shared about the concept of Ubuntu which is another way to understand this network of mutuality we are exploring.

Ubuntu is a term from the Nguni Bantu languages of Southern Africa, including Zulu. (Remember the campfire song about the Zulu warrior?) Ubuntu embodies the philosophy of shared humanity and interconnectedness, emphasizing that a person's humanity is deeply connected to the humanity of others. (Share SLIDE 10) Ubuntu, often translated as "I am because we are," underscores the belief that our humanity is tied to the well-being of others just like we are told in Jeremiah and the Doctrine and Covenants.

According to Nelson Mandela, the late president of South Africa, Ubuntu means people should not look out only for themselves. Rather, the accompanying questions to their motives should be: "Am I going to do this to enable the community around me to improve? Will my goals and motives help create an economically and environmentally sustainable future in my village?" (End SLIDE 10)

It is easy to acknowledge this network of mutuality until this worldview requires us to sacrifice something for the benefit of others.

### **Imitating God's love and generosity requires sacrifice:**

In Community of Christ, we are called to imitate God's love and generosity. The sacrificial nature of God's love and generosity are demonstrated in the

most quoted scripture in the New Testament, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...

I use the term sacrificial intentionally because after having children, I realized that I could imagine sacrificing myself if I thought I could save the world or at least a big part of it but I was not sure I could sacrifice one of my children. Now that I’ve had grandchildren, I’m even more overwhelmed by the unconditional, unlimited, sacrificial nature of God’s love and generosity.

I’ve also become even more aware that choices and actions that we are making today may very well impact my grandchildren and their children much more than they impact me today.

We are all called and challenged to imitate God’s love and generosity through sacrifice for the greater good not just for today but for future generations as well.

Practically, this means getting out of our comfort zone and being willing to be inconvenienced at times. We need to use our voice and vote to advocate for and support policies that ensure fair resource allocation, supporting communities that rely on fossil fuels, and promoting sustainable practices. It involves both individual actions and collective efforts within our congregations and wider communities. The whole world can’t stop using fossil fuels immediately. That’s why we speak of transitioning.

One example might be prioritizing resources for the poor. This might involve redirecting funds or resources to support those who are most affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

Another example might be supporting communities dependent on fossil fuels, such as farmers, truckers, and villages in developing countries. Providing assistance and advocating for fair transition policies ensures that these communities are not left behind as we move toward greener energy sources.

One last example might be making sure that those whose livelihoods depend on fossil fuels are given opportunities to re-train and adapt their skills to other employment opportunities.

### **Q&A:**

I think this is another good place to pause and hear some reactions to what I've said and respond to some questions. Dean, you want to take the lead?

### **QUESTIONS**

#### **Transforming hearts:**

Thanks for your feedback and questions...

The need for climate justice is one of the most perplexing and urgent matters of our time.

As reported by the United Nations:

Affordable, scalable solutions are now available to enable countries to leapfrog to cleaner, more resilient economies. The pace of change is quickening as more people are turning to renewable energy and a range of other measures that will reduce emissions and increase adaptation efforts.

But climate change is a global challenge that does not respect national borders. Emissions anywhere affect people everywhere. It is an issue that requires solutions that need to be coordinated at the international level and it requires international cooperation to help developing countries move toward a low-carbon economy.

This could easily lead you to throw up your hands and say: "That is WAY above my pay grade. There's nothing I can do. I'm just going to press on and live my life." That would be a mistake.

Community of Christ is well positioned to help transform hearts and focus people on an integrated approach to life and discipleship.

In 2000, Community of Christ adopted Doctrine and Covenants section 161 and were reminded about the nature of transformation:

**(Share SLIDE 11)** 161:3d. Understand that the road to transformation travels both inward and outward. The road to transformation is the path of the disciple.

The inward focus is about transforming hearts through spiritual, emotional, and physical preparation. **(End SLIDE 11)**

Spiritual preparation is about staying connected with God cultivating faith which leads to resilience. Staying focused on Christ's mission and God's vision for the world gives us hope. Through prayer, scripture study, spiritual practices, and worship, we are reminded of God's love and generosity. This helps us grow in our ability to imitate God's love and generosity.

Emotional preparation is about strengthening our community, building our network of family, friends, and partners. It is about seeing "the other" as neighbor. As our network grows, we can find things we have in common so our actions are no longer just individual actions but can grow into community actions.

That leads to another African term we've learned. Harambe is a term from Swahili, a Bantu language spoken in many countries in East Africa, including Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The word means "all pull together" and is often used to signify collective effort and community collaboration.

Both our spiritual and emotional preparation equip us to navigate times of anxiety and fear about the future. Through open conversations and spiritual guidance, we can find peace and purpose. Together we gain the courage to

begin to imagine a future that is better because of the choices we will have courage to make.

This leads to physical preparation, where we can work together implementing practical steps toward sustainability in a just and equitable way. This includes adopting sustainable practices in our daily lives, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and supporting local, sustainable agriculture. It also involves integrating all aspects of our lives including personal, professional, civic, and discipleship such that all our choices are guided by our faithful response to what we discern through our spiritual preparation.

This moves us into the outward focus where our congregations, mission centers, and other faith-groups can be a catalyst for helping people see the connection between faithful discipleship and working for climate justice. The church can help create opportunities for spiritual, emotional, and physical preparation. The church can encourage the kind of transformation that leads to changed hearts focused on God's will for creation.

I've already mentioned other paragraphs from Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants Section 163 but I need to share one more:

**(Share SLIDE 12)** 163:4c. Let the educational and community development endeavors of the church equip people of all ages to carry the ethics of Christ's peace into all arenas of life. Prepare new generations of disciples to bring fresh vision to bear on the perplexing problems of poverty, disease, war, and environmental deterioration. Their contributions will be multiplied if their hearts are focused on God's will for creation. **(End SLIDE 12)**

This prophetic counsel was shared 17 years ago, and we are just now beginning to live into it.



I realize Community of Christ is a small faith movement, but we can be the salt or yeast that helps bring about change. And we are a worldwide movement so we can learn from each other.

We stand at the crossroads of what is and what can be. We get to choose what we will do next. Making specific choices about what faithful step to take next requires contextualization. Each of us needs to get engaged in what is possible to work towards climate justice in the contexts where we live and serve.

I recently started reading a book by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson titled “What if we get it right? Visions of Climate Futures.”

The title caught my attention because of my educational background in positive organizational science. Positive organization science encourages people to approach situations with hope seeing the positive possibilities as opposed to being overcome by the fear of what could be.

As we go deeper in our exploration of how we need to respond to the climate emergency, the news could be overwhelming. We might be immobilized by fear.

But our hope for the future resides in our opportunity and responsibility to make faithful responsible choices for the benefit of all creation.

Imagine what the future might look like if we truly embrace the sacredness of creation and work with others to pursue climate justice.

Let us step out in faith motivated by imagining what if we get it right.

### **Next faithful steps:**

So how might each of us choose our next faithful steps. Let me wrap up by offering 7 questions for your prayerful consideration as you ponder the actions you can take individually and in partnership with others.

1. (Share SLIDE 13) I've provided an overview of why it is imperative for people of faith to get involved. With that challenge, what are specific, practical steps can we incorporate into our daily lives that we as individuals, congregations, or the church can take right now to prepare spiritually, emotionally, and physically for the climate emergency?
2. It's important we hear Diverse Voices and Perspectives. How can we connect with our worldwide community to hear the perspectives and testimonies of those directly impacted by climate change, especially vulnerable communities, to deepen our understanding of the global nature of this issue and how we might most appropriately seek climate justice for all? (End SLIDE 13)
3. (Share SLIDE 14) I shared a perspective from Katharine Hayhoe about Intersectionality. In what ways can our climate action also contribute to broader systemic change for a just and equitable future in a way aligned with Community of Christ enduring principles because of how climate change intersects with other forms of injustice, such as racial, gender, and economic inequalities?
4. One way to multiply your efforts is through Partnerships, Community Engagement, and Advocacy. How can our congregations and faith communities become more actively engaged in climate justice advocacy at local, national, and global levels including partnerships or community events that will strengthen our collective efforts? (End SLIDE 14)
5. (Share SLIDE 15) Whole-life stewardship includes economic justice. How might people of faith contribute to economic solutions, like promoting green job training or supporting sustainable economic initiatives in vulnerable communities and supporting a just transition for workers dependent on fossil fuels?
6. We are a people who find hope through stories. How can the church help share stories about successful climate justice initiatives or transitions that motivate and encourage our communities to have hope and believe that meaningful change is possible?

7. Change always begins with ourselves. What personal commitments can each of us make today to engage in deeper learning about climate justice, take specific actions, and get involved in local initiatives? (End SLIDE 15)

## **Q&A:**

I think we have time for one last round of questions and comments. Dean, you want to take the lead?

## **QUESTIONS**

### **Closing statement:**

Thank you all for your attention and engagement today. I hope you have found the experience worth your investment of time. As we leave here, may we carry the spirit of prophetic courage with us, committed to fostering a just transition that honors our faith, our communities, and our planet. As I said at the beginning, I believe we are in a moment of critical choices with the need for an active, faith-driven response to foster justice as we navigate times of significant change. I hope that our time together helped you make the connection between faith and the gospel imperative to individually and collectively engage in actions that shape a just and sustainable future. Remember, the choices we make today have a direct impact on the nature of our collective future for generations to come. Continue to draw hope, courage, and strength from the prophetic imagination of what the world is like when we get it right...