

# Fair Trade | Jason Eyre, Chapter 2

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Christ, community, LDS, priesthood, temple, seekers

## SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Jason Eyre

### **Robin Linkhart 00:27**

Hello and welcome to Fair Trade, a Project Zion podcast series where courageous people share the candid stories of their faith journey and what brought them to Community of Christ. I'm your host, Robin Linkhart. I'm here today with Jason Eyre, who shared his faith transition story with us on Episode 164 in February 2019. Today we are doing a "Chapter 2" interview with Jason to hear more about his journey with Community of Christ and what it's been like stepping into various leadership roles including ordained ministry. Jason grew up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Today he is a member of Community of Christ. His home congregation is Salt Lake City, where he serves on the pastorate team. He holds the office of elder. Welcome, Jason. It's so good to have you with us today on Project Zion Podcast.

### **Jason Eyre 01:31**

Thank you, Robin. It's great to be back on the podcast again.

### **Robin Linkhart 01:36**

So, let's take a minute to get to know you for our listeners who may not know you. So, just introduce yourself like you met somebody on the elevator and tell us a little bit about you.

### **Jason Eyre 01:47**

Absolutely, so my name is Jason Eyre. I currently live in Saratoga Springs, Utah. As a profession, I work in K through 12 education. I work in technology. I run a technology department for a small school district in the Salt Lake Valley, Murray City school district. And I joined Community of Christ back in 2019, or wait, no, it was 2017. I received the priesthood just after the pandemic started and I'm a father of four. My wife, Kristen and I have four kids and they're starting to get older in life in their 20s and my youngest is 11. I definitely have a great life here right on the edge of Utah Lake connected with that a lot during the pandemic when I was stuck at the house and I'm so happy to be back into normal life and back into in-person church and so many other great things.

### **Robin Linkhart 02:48**

That is great and the place that you live has one of the most beautiful views I've ever seen in my time in Utah. Thank you for sharing all that about yourself, Jason. I also think it would be really helpful to our listeners if you could share a brief recap of your faith transition story and how you found Community of Christ.

### **Jason Eyre 03:11**

Sure. So, in the LDS church, I, being a guy, I held the priesthood there as well, and was an elder. I served as an LDS missionary in Oregon back in the 1990s and served in other leadership court positions and other things in the in the LDS church was fairly active there. I lived in mostly in southern Utah growing up, went to school in Cedar City at southern Utah University and then lived in St. George for a while. Work opportunities took me out to Nashville, Tennessee, where I probably had my most active time in the LDS church and really enjoyed being away from the Utah culture, so to speak. But out there, changes started happening in the church, in the way things were done, in the leadership. And there were just a lot of things that I really enjoyed about church that kind of changed. And that caused me to start questioning. We, while living in Tennessee, we had a strong feeling that it was important for our kids to know their grandparents. And at the time, their great grandparents as well. And so we made the decision to move back to Utah. And there's a few miracles that happened in our lives as a part of that. We sold our house to our neighbor for cash. And we, When we moved out to Utah, I had no job. Right as I was leaving Tennessee, a job became available where my wife's family lived, which who we're going to stay with. I literally got back to Utah from Tennessee on Sunday night, I interviewed on Monday and started working in education on Friday. Then the job came up in Murray that paid more and was more city life like I was used to and helped us transition. It was very interesting because I was living in Penguin, Utah at the time when my faith transition became, I'll call it, acute. There were some decisions made in the LDS Church, some decisions around the types of people and who they were calling to be apostles, and when I talk about a lack of diversity, these were people that weren't even BYU fans. These were all people strangely and insanely connected to the University of Utah. I could not figure out why three apostles passing away, which had never happened almost in my entire lifetime, having them replaced with white guys who all looked and talked alike, and weren't even from different, they didn't even have different views. It was really crazy. And then about a month later, the November policy came out, I was serving in a leadership position. And so, I went straight online to the policy manuals and read the policy, the November policy manual firsthand. And I had connected with Community of Christ, I definitely credit John Hamer, and some of the podcasts he had done. I remember listening to President Veazey on "Mormon Stories" while on vacation in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and, you know, so it had been a while that I had just kind of been lingering and trying to figure out faith-wise what was really happening, but what that ended up doing was acutely taking me out of my lifelong faith. And as I connected with Community of Christ, I found myself in the middle of Utah with, I feel like I was a man with a mission center to be quite honest. I think I even asked you, do I go north or south? What do I do? And I connected with Nancy Ross in St. George. And then Carla Long came up and took over House Church in Provo. And Carla held church a little bit a little bit earlier in the day, and if I drove up to House Church in Provo, I wouldn't have as many deer and other challenges living in a very rural part of Utah to deal with. And so I ended up connecting with House Church and Provo. Fortunately work brought me up here, and the hospitality that was extended to me from Blair White, from Penny Young, from Carla, and many others helped me transition, get my family moved up here, and I served in both house church and Salt Lake for quite a while. Of course, you and I had connected earlier with Forward with Community, which was one of the first online ministries specifically geared towards seekers, and that was amazing, the type of experience that provided both of us with doing online ministry. Project Zion podcast was a huge part as well. In fact, there was a time for probably eight months when PZP was my church. And I also listened to Gina Coven a lot, which I'll share how I connected with her at World Conferences, both of us members of Community of Christ, which is just kind of its own neat story as well. So I feel like the Restoration was bringing me in this. We

definitely have had an amazing time integrating and becoming a part of this wonderful community. So that's kind of in a nutshell.

**Robin Linkhart 08:30**

Well, thank you. Thank you, Jason, so much. And listeners, just a quick reminder that Jason's full story is available on Episode 164 on Project Zion Podcast. So now we are ready to launch into Chapter 2. We last chatted with you on your first interview in February of 2019. You were confirmed a member January 2018 at the Provo, Utah House Church. I believe Carla did that confirmation. And so much has happened since then.

**Jason Eyre 09:06**

Carla and my six-year-old daughter who snuck in and put her hands on my head and said a few words too,

**Robin Linkhart 09:14**

I love it, I love it.

**Jason Eyre 09:17**

Which in the LDS church would have stopped the ordinance and have been just an absolute terror, but in Community of Christ was just precious, was just another act of love.

**Robin Linkhart 09:28**

Oh golly, that is very, very special. So since then you've certainly, and actually you were already providing some leadership support before you were confirmed a member. But since you were confirmed, things really took off and you've taken on several leadership roles with the community of Christ. And I want to be able to give you plenty of time to talk about each of those and kind of weave in this chapter two story as we go along. So, let's start with camping events and campground leadership roles. So, tell us about that.

**Jason Eyre 10:08**

Well, one of the things I found was really neat about Community of Christ was the reunion experience. I learned about the reunion experience on Project Zion Podcast, and was really excited to live up north where I was a lot closer to the campground. But, what I did find was that they were in need of a financial officer at Camp Redcliffe. And also at that time, Camp Redcliffe was going through some challenges and some transitions. And so, I accepted that yes, that sacred yes to the role. I think Penny may have blackmailed me with having taken such good care of me when I was moving and letting me stay at her place for a month or two. You know, we got to be very close and good friends, but I knew that she was someone I could definitely lead with and she was leading the Campground Association at the time. And so I said yes to that. Redcliffe really gave me a stark reality of the church and its challenges. That the campground was aging. In Utah, everything gets complicated when water is involved and we ended up having some challenges where the state cramped down on us pretty hard or wanting improved water quality. They wanted us to chlorinate the water and do things that we'd never done to the water before we'd always just had a natural spring there. We had water rights, but we had a

fairly well politically connected neighbor that was really pushing on that and so what ended up happening was we did some pretty major water projects there and definitely as the financial officer, I was managing checks and things like that. Fortunately, Blair, the pastor in Salt Lake was project managing the project, but we ended up learning a lot about this campground, what it really needed and making sure that it would serve our people for many years to come. That, of course, as far as being the financial officer in things, it was quite a surprising experience. I had been a treasurer for other service clubs and things like that throughout my life. This turned out to be a little bit more than I had anticipated, but it was good. Working with good people, I was with a good cause. This was very mission driven. Some other challenges came up with that. Part of that was we had to reconcile with the neighbor. We had to do a lot of legal work and Penny did a great job of managing that side. But we ended up actually selling the campground and it was not one the church owned. It was a lease that the church had bought from the Girl Scouts and ended up transitioning that to a different faith community that still would allow us to choose our weeks and have all the privileges we had there. But someone who could spend a little bit more time and be a little bit more engaged with some of the aspects of bringing the camps online each year and offline and things like that. And so that was, I definitely had a financial officer experience, if you will, seeing a lot of challenges. we had to go through the houses of worship process and get a loan, and we were able to make that and fully pay that off. And I now Robin, you're aware of some of that because you being the Field Apostle had to sign off on everything we were doing and help us along the way. But as far as leadership goes, that was a pretty interesting experience. And it definitely taught me a lot about the good people inside of World Church's legal department about the campground culture, about insurance challenges, about many things it takes to make reunions happen on the backside. And I'm glad to say that we're still happy patrons of Camp Redcliffe. We were able to secure camper days well into the future and it's still serving the Mission Center very well, but not providing a huge potential liability if anything were to go wrong.

**Robin Linkhart 14:12**

Yeah you were really serving financial officer during a really challenging time and as a financial officer, you're part of the campground board which is the operations board and those are working boards so it's all those people together and you were in the thick of it.

**Jason Eyre 14:35**

That was the baptism of fire for sure. (laughing)

**Robin Linkhart 14:39**

So you also were directing some camps up there, weren't you?

**Jason Eyre 14:45**

Yeah, so I took over kid's camp. Some of the people who had done kid's camp for years had kind of aged out. It was probably the best way to say it. And health challenges were making it hard. And so, I offered to take and become the director. And that was interesting. Kid's Camp is very different than Reunion. And we tried to focus on having the kids spend more time having fun. And we took the curriculum and kept it. We had to back it off a notch. I think probably the most stressful experience I had was the swimming pool broke. And So here I am directing my first kid's camp. We have no swimming pool, which on a hundred degree day in the middle of the afternoon, that's pretty serious

stuff. And those kids came to go swimming. So fortunately, we knew the week before we were able to get a bunch of water guns, then we had the funnest water fight I have ever seen. Also, it was kind of neat. The Camp Redcliff is up Ogden Canyon and the true experts on Camp Redcliffe for those folks that had been in the Ogden Church their whole life and I knew them from going to reunion and serving on the board with them but I'd never kind of put on a camp with them. We ran into some trouble getting enough volunteers. We almost had to cancel and at the last minute I was able to check and see if we could have the cook come from there and if Bob and Doris could help as well and much to my surprise they were really happy to do it and, to be quite honest, what turned out to be one of the most potentially stressful parts of my life church-wise and service-wise turned into be one of the neatest most spiritual growth camping experiences we had. The kids were able to have a wonderful time. Bob's grandson, Zion, who was 16 at the time had 10 times the energy I had and the kids all the kids all went after him instead of me and they ran off a huge amount of energy and had a three-hour water fight. Everyone was having a great time. The water was safe and chlorinated. All those kinds of things but what looked like when it looked like everything was going to fall apart, when it looked like we were going to have challenges. It was amazing how everyone was there for each other and how we were able to build a new connection with Ogden. To be quite honest, now that we're all out here kind of doing indigenous leadership with local, former LDS people leading this all-day congregation, we lean on Ogden a lot to help understand what church was and that relationship we built at that camp has served us amazingly well and helped us all kind of get a new relationship with each other that really helped us and continues to help us today because we're able to help Ogden thrive now and we're doing a lot of seeker work in Ogden just as a result of the experiences of serving together at RedCliff.

**Robin Linkhart 17:55**

That is awesome. Those relationships are so, so important and they bear such fruit. Well, thanks for sharing your story. I'll tell you what, having the pool not functional for kid's camp is a big emergency. It reminds me of the first time I ever directed Reunion. It was out here in Colorado and we were renting from the Seventh Day Adventists. It's a beautiful campground, and we got up there and realized they don't have coffee. They had no coffee on the grounds. So I grabbed my good friend who had pastored before me. He was aged at this point, and I said, "Roland, we have to make an emergency run down to the church." So we took off. We got back by about 1a.m., but we were loaded with coffee makers and coffee. We did not have a riot, so. (laughs)

**Jason Eyre 18:49**

Well, in my desire to explore Community of Christ and reunion, I wanted to go to a reunion that was different than Redcliffe. One that was probably a little more traditionally Community of Christ. And also having served my mission in the Northwest, the Northwest had always been a very LDS experience for me. Our mission center, the Inland West, goes clear from Spokane to Salt Lake. So one of the reunions is up at Samish Island. So a couple years ago we decided to go up to Samish Island for camp. My two daughters and I drove up all the way to Seattle and it's an hour north of Seattle. And we drove up through just the fastest way we could get there and went and attended camp at Samish Island. And I have to tell you having a real Community of Christ camp and my volunteer role at the camp was to make coffee. 24 pots a day later and they had installed like this super big coffee maker and they had three of them and we literally from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m., because I am a morning person and I had the time zone advantage but I could tell you that the job of making coffee is what kept the camp going there. So,

I appreciate your Colorado story. And being in the Northwest, I definitely, it was just so funny. And of course, they made fun of me 'cause I put way too much creamer in my coffee. I wasn't quite into the club enough yet, but I've really grown to love Samish Island. The great thing is on that first trip, we drove home very purposely through Oregon and stayed at a couple of Airbnb's on the way. And I kind of took and reclaimed the Northwest for my new church life and was able to make a bunch of friends in that part of the country now from the Community of Christ. And so we are going to go back to Samish. I'll see you there this year. If we registered in time, I know we just registered. I hope we're not too late. We went last year for a few days. We didn't get to stay the whole time. We actually stayed in Eugene itself which is where my mission was, and it's just been very neat for me to have my new faith community be that part of the country for me too.

**Robin Linkhart 21:07**

That's wonderful, well I'll look forward to seeing you and your family for sure. Alrighty, so you were also called to serve in ordained ministry. And I just have to say, if someone were to just look at the priesthood structure of Community of Christ and compare it to that of the LDS church, it would look very similar. Most of the offices have the same name, but the entire process and how it works in each denomination is totally different. So, tell us about your experience in Community of Christ. And I actually imagined it was probably maybe challenging to figure out how all of this could work with so many...

**Jason Eyre 21:51**

Well, if I may start with the Aaronic Priesthood. [Sure.] In the LDS Church, and this is a very general statement, Priesthood is for the guys, for the boys, is pretty automatic. I was ordained a deacon at 12, a teacher at 14, a priest at 16. And then as a missionary at 19 at the time. It's gone down to 18 now. I was ordained an elder just prior to leaving on a mission. Those offices, Deacons serve the sacrament, Teachers prepare the sacrament. We call it communion. I know the word sacrament really, really, it'll stir the Community of Christ listeners up for sure, me saying it that way, but then priests bless it. And, what I honestly feel like was I compare and contrast priesthood in the Community of Christ and priesthood in the LDS church. The Aaronic priesthood is kind of marginalized in the LDS church. This is the kid's priesthood, so to speak. And one of the biggest realizations that I've had, Community of Christ is how important the real expanded scriptural roles, if you read the Doctrine and Covenants, of deacons, teachers, and priests, beyond just your weekly sacrament or communion or those kind of things, there's so many key roles as I've started to see Community of Christ's side of this priesthood. And I can tell you that I don't feel anyone coming in and being called out how this deacon, teacher or priest is in any marginalized place in this faith community. It's not something that's just for the kids. It's actually a very honed ministry in each of those offices and that is a contrast. The Melchizedek priesthood was interesting, by the way, to receive those ordinations, all I had to do was have a visit with the bishop and smile and tell, I think I told the truth. I don't know if I was worthy of any of those, as a kid, but anyway, the elders and the Melchizedek priesthood in the LDS church is a pretty serious thing. And if you're going on a mission, they have you go through the temple and do endowments and a whole complicated world of things as part of that. And so becoming an elder in the LDS Church was a big event for me and quite an experience. Before I could be ordained as Priesthood in Community of Christ, it was very interesting to see the change and difference in the way the call happened. When I received my call as Priesthood in Community of Christ, not only did people visit, Karin Peter came

down and visited who is visited, who's now the senior president of seventy. She's just a president of seventy at the time. Karin came down as part of her latter-day seeker ministry, and of course Carla and Roy were there and we went out to dinner and they presented the call to me. It was surprising to me though that the call was presented in written form as well. There was a letter from you as the apostle. There was a letter from President Veazey and then signed by the First Presidency, which very, very different. The only thing I ever received from the LDS church may have been my mission call to my two-year full-time mission that was signed by someone in the First Presidency or Quorum of Twelve, I couldn't even remember, tell you. And I don't think I've kept it. But it was amazing how different the call was. The call came right before the pandemic, that's what I remember. And so here, as part of receiving the priesthood all in Community of Christ, you need to attend, there's a prescription of classes, which I was very grateful for because I hadn't really had priesthood training in the LDS church, it was just more of what it was. The classes, I actually took some classes with people from Eugene, from the Pacific Northwest, because with the pandemic, I had to do it online. I enjoyed the Zoom classes more than maybe the self-led. So some of the classes I wasn't able to take with people on Zoom, I did use the temple classes, the self-led ones for some of them. And it was very interesting. I think one of the biggest shocks to me was that elders in Community of Christ can perform marriages. That was big because that doesn't happen in the LDS church. I think you have to be a bishop to do that. So that was pretty significant. The other thing is for things like administrations, which I had given quite a few administrations, both being a missionary and being fairly active in raising a family and so forth. I had to unlearn a lot because the way the Community of Christ approaches this type of ministry and these types of things, it's just a very different approach. In the LDS church, I probably, maybe in a two-faced way commanded things to happen and insisted on things and was very probably bold with the way I had led and done my priesthood and things like that whereas it's a much gentler ministry in the Community of Christ and a much gentler approach and so it was it's a very different experience most of the ministry of the elder, besides being able to perform marriages and especially being able to perform same sex marriages, I think that's huge. And that's something, it's hugely needed in our area and it's something that's hugely needed in our world right now as the Community of Christ has created a faith and ministry that's been able to help me do so much more for so many more people. And so I've found a lot of beauty in priesthood leadership. It is very freeing for me to use the modern language communion prayers. And I very much love the way that communion is served person by person versus passed up and down the rows. Pews might be a better word for that. I love the personalness of ministry here. And I am still trying to find my place and still trying to better understand those ordinances and things. I think one of the more interesting experiences for me, and this is probably unique to our solid congregation, but there are a lot of times where me being the guy who will participate in an ordinance I may be asked to do the application of the oil part of the administration because people really want women to do their ordinances because they haven't been able to have that before and to me it brings great joy to my heart that I get to stand there and that's to amazing women leaders and amazing people in my community and be able to share in those priesthood duties. And it's not something that's just for guys and things like that. I think that the expansion and the expanded role is beautiful. And I think it's super healthy and super empowering for everybody.

**Robin Linkhart 29:27**

That's good to hear. I know for a lot of men coming into Community of Christ from the Mormon church, It can be a real struggle and these are men that fully support women serving in priesthood but the lived experience of suddenly being side by side. I've seen it unsettle a lot of folks and I really appreciate how you've helped us understand Aaronic priesthood in the LDS church which is held by very young men, boys, even by virtue of that it just can't be the same thing as you see when adult males and females and transgender people are filling those roles. But I just think it's probably really steep learning curve, one of the steepest curves for a Community of Christ culture with men in particular would be my guess. What do you think?

**Jason Eyre 30:34**

I think that for me I felt it felt good to me. At first it was confusing. This was I mean it's just this whole world that I had grown up in all of my conditioning, all of my way of operating, my way of doing everything really, I mean it was almost a full 180, just the opposite with things. I do think that having caring leaders, having strong leaders, and having exemplary leaders, for lack of a way to say it, has really helped me be able to transition into that. The other thing that's important about it is it's been good for me to learn to make space and part of creating safe spaces and other things like that is making space is we don't have to break out or be defensive I guess is the way to say it. I'm trying to think this you know I'm trying to think emotionally which isn't always so crystal clear, but there's times when I could be very marginalized by some of the ways people approach and to be quite honest the huge excitement that men and women especially as they're just exploring our church and seeing what's happening and we have a woman pastor and we have women leading in all areas, and I'm not the token male. I'm very much a part of our leadership team and what we do. And I love it because I do think that we have a leadership path for everyone. Like you said, men, women, non -binary, transgender, all of it. There's a place for everybody to serve in Priesthood and you know trying to help understand that and make sure those opportunities are there for them and support them where they're at and those opportunities is hugely important.

**Robin Linkhart 32:48**

Yeah thank you for that Jason. I really appreciate it.

This is your host Robin Linkhart and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care. Bye -bye.

Hello, Project Zion Podcast listeners. This is Blake Smith, Project Manager for Project Zion Podcast. You've been listening to part one of a two -part interview between Apostle Robin Linkhart and Jason Eyre. Be sure and catch part two next Friday on ProjectZionPodcast.org.