

# Mareva Arnaud Tchong final JOK 8-28-24

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## SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Mareva Arnaud Tchong

00:20

Music.

### **Robin Linkhart** 00:31

Welcome to Nice to Matcha, a Project, Zion Podcast series where we meet new people, leaders, movers and shakers, or all of the above. I'm your host, Robin Linkhart, and today I'm here with Apostle Mareva Arnaud Tchong who has been called to serve as the presiding evangelist for Community of Christ. If that call is sustained in legislative session at the 2025 World Conference, Mareva will be ordained to presiding evangelist during a worship service at that same conference. It is a joy to have you with us today, my dear sister, Mareva.

### **Mareva Arnaud Tchong** 01:17

Thank you, Robin and Bonjour. Hello, everyone. It's so nice to Matcha with you all today, and I'm blessed to share this time together.

### **Robin Linkhart** 01:30

Oh, thank you. Such a joy to have you with us. Mareva was ordained an apostle and member of the Council of 12 Apostles at the 2013 World Conference. She currently serves as the president of the Council of 12. She supports the Pacific Asia Mission Field, which includes the Australia Mission Center, East Asia Mission Center, French Polynesia Mission Center, Pacific islands Mission Center and the Philippines Mission Center. Her previous assignments in French Polynesia include conflict resolution ministry, serving as director for pastoral school, or temple school, as some call it, and counselor to the Mission Center President Mareva also has served as financial officer and President of the French Polynesia Mission Center, and was counselor to the president of the Quorum of High Priest. Mareva is a native of Tahiti, French Polynesia, and has traveled extensively across the globe. Oh, my goodness, Mareva, that is a lot. So Mareva, please tell us about your family and the things that you love to do when you aren't engaged in ministry and mission.

### **Mareva Arnaud Tchong** 02:54

So, I am, like you said, originally from Tahiti, French Polynesia where I grew up, surrounded by rich culture and deep traditions. And in addition to my Polynesian roots, my father also has a Chinese ancestry. As a result, my upbringing, values and worldview have been shaped by both of these cultures and my family in my life is my rock. They have always supported me through every blessings and challenges too. But recently, my husband and I, we moved to the nearby island of Moorea which brings us closer to nature, because our children have their own family now. In my free time, I love connecting with nature, principally through gardening, water sports, I am really connecting with ocean and outdoor adventures, that's what I like to do. These activities help me to recharge and find inspiration. I also enjoy expressing my creativity through hands on projects like sewing, jewelry making or garden landscaping. Reading is another passion of mine, especially when it involves exploring different cultures and their spiritualities. This allows me to delve into the diversity of humanity and to understand how beliefs are expressed, gain new perspectives for me and deepen my faith and reach my imagination. I'm not much of a cook, but I do enjoy discovering new flavors and dishes, which adds a bit of excitement to my life. So here is a kind of a little summary of my interest, my life and hobbies.

**Robin Linkhart** 05:08

That's fascinating. Can you give us an example of an outdoor adventure that you might have?

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong** 05:16

I am someone who likes to walk in different places. In mountain, for example, or in landscape where we never went in the past. So it's really adventure going to discover new places I like that, and ocean to the same my husband and I, we are doing. I don't know if the people know the Fin Board, we have a fin board. It's kind of a sport on the ocean, and that's something we really like to do. And you can go everywhere, you can go far, but you have that board helping you not to be tired. So it's pretty good.

**Robin Linkhart** 06:01

Oh, that sounds lovely. And tell us what some of your favorite foods are.

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong** 06:06

The favorite for me is the raw fish. I can eat fish every day, every day. The other one will be something I found in South Korea is all these vegetables and the beef, and you wrap the beef in the salad, and that's something I like. These are my favorite ones. But if we can find something with a fish, that will be super great.

**Robin Linkhart** 06:38

Oh, that sounds wonderful. And I know when you come to independence for meetings, you are hard pressed to find any fish of good quality. Oh, my goodness. Okay, so thanks for sharing about yourself. That's always fascinating. Tell us now about your call to the Office of presiding evangelist. When did that happen and when you were presented that call, how did you process that call and come to a decision?

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong** 07:10

My call to the role of residing evangelist was both surprising and deeply moving. It came during a time when I was reflecting and praying way more than I used to. Why? Because I had been questioning for a

while before I received the call my role as an apostle, not because I did not want to continue, not at all. It's just I was having ongoing conversation with myself, with God, and I tell you, sometimes a dialog, sometimes just me asking questions with God. And it was a time when I was reflecting on what I did and what can I do better? I think the people have these kinds of questions, but I just share my experience that I was at that time, at that moment. I was also exploring my discipleship, my ministry, and what was best for the church, what was best for God's kingdom on Earth. So when this call came, it was both unexpected but also clear. It's strange, but it's unexpected and clear at the same time. Even though I often feel connected to the spiritual needs of our people and sensed a call to serve in a way that nourishes the soul, and as an apostle, that's what we are doing, too. But being asked to consider this role was something I needed to carefully think about. Think about the decision I will have to take, because the decision will involve many changes in the future. And I was thinking also about the past. I was just one year the President of the Council of 12. I was thinking, "Oh, maybe I was not doing good." You know, all these kind of human questions, and I think it's fair that I had all these questions, good or disturbing, so the decision involved many conversations, first with my family, of course, mentors and trusted friends, and I spent a lot of time praying and thinking. Trying to understand if this was truly where God wanted me to go. And with all the doubts and all the confidence in my mind and my heart. At first, the idea of serving in this role felt overwhelming. Let me explain. I questioned if I was ready and if I could fulfill God's will and serve the church well. You know, all these thoughts, but after a lot of back and forth between the feeling confident and doubting, I eventually found peace, and I felt called to accept. So I want to high(light) that I feel really connected to the C 12, and I think God is calling everyone of us to go in adventure with God. And so, yeah, let's go and do something new and risk something new. And I'm sure that the community and God will always be at my side. A key moment in my discernment was reconnecting with my cultural and spiritual roots too, reflecting on my experiences and vision for our faith and community. I realized that these unique perspectives would allow me to bring a diverse and inclusive approach to this role, the teachings and values from my cultural heritage, from all the experiences around the world from all what I received from the people I visited and individually or in community, the teachings and values from the church helped me see that this scroll was not just for me, it is not mine, but for serving a larger purpose and community. So in the end, I felt that God was indeed calling me to take on this role, not because I was fully ready, knowing that I will also walk on the path to become presiding for the evangelist, but also because I could share the testimonies, experiences and faith I have gained from the people all around the world. It has been a journey of faith and trust, and I am deeply touched by the Spirit, and deeply touched to be called to this mystery. I talk too much.

**Robin Linkhart 12:44**

No, you are incredibly articulate. Mareva, as you describe this journey, truly a journey of trust. I love how you describe receiving the call as unexpected and clear at the same time, which, I think that tension between two different feelings is familiar to many people as they struggle with next steps in life, and ultimately in the midst of confident and doubting, of receiving that spirit of peace, that affirmation, And as you say, a call that is not because you're fully ready, but because you're being called to embark on this journey of becoming bringing all of who you are. What a beautiful testimony of your experience about receiving that call and the journey of making a decision. You've talked a little bit about this, but how do you anticipate this new role changing your ministry, and also, traditionally, for many years, the presiding evangelist has resided in the independence area. I'm assuming that will no longer be the

case. So what will this new role look like for you? And what changes do you anticipate? I'm realizing that you haven't fully launched into it yet.

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong 14:08**

I believe this new role will offer fresh opportunities for our ministry to continue to grow. And like you said, although the presiding evangelist has traditionally lived in Independence. Being based on a little island somewhere in the middle of Pacific Ocean, provides a chance to serve in a new way and bring a broader perspective. Living far from the traditional center allows us to show that our ministry is not limited by geography, and we know that, because we already live that situation in different council committees. It's about connecting with understanding the diverse cultures and experiences for our world church. There are also already dedicated people at the church headquarters and in the United States who will support the role of assisting while I'm not there. So I trust the expertise of all and believe that working in groups, in teams together and staying in touch will be the key. Teamwork will help us continue to fulfill our mission effectively. And I think also that I will need to explore differently—how can we be linked evangelist with our goal, but linked as we are many, but we are one. I think that's what we are living already today, but being someone from another culture, I hope I will be able to find another way to deepen the ministry, what I did, what I'm doing now. I'm having classes. I am meeting a few people around me at the headquarters. I am consulting. I am reading a lot about evangelist role, the blessing, and I discovered that what I knew is really a little compared to what blessing can offer. And I'm really grateful with all the people who accompany me, like Jane Gardner and Susan Oxley and others. I don't want to name them because I am afraid to forget, but the way to anticipate this new role is also journeying with the ones who was there previously and the ones who are currently in that role. And and we will see where God is pushing or is guiding me?

**Robin Linkhart 17:03**

Yeah, I think sometimes with some of these new calls, depending on what the call is, we sometimes forget that a person has to also learn all about that office. So you have to hold the office of evangelist to be a presiding evangelist, which is a new priesthood office for you. And so as you're talking, I was struck by the magnitude of preparation that you're taking on between now and World Conference to prepare for that role. And what a blessing that Jane and Susan Oxley and others can walk with you, and I know you know both of them very well. And Susan Oxley was apostle for French Polynesia for a while, wasn't she?

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong 17:47**

Yes, (yeah), yes. So she had that experience to be an apostle, and I think she was already an evangelist when she came in the council, she took the role of Apostle and High Priest and go back to the evangelist call. All these people around me and all these conversations and prayers together were really helpful. It's something to teach, because I talked in the past about evangelist role and Evangelist call, but you know, it's really something different when you hear. I was in a class and crying and say (oh mon jour) it's so nice, it's so wow, that voila I have to to be well. more present in that mindset and and being an administrator, spiritual or not apostle or not only administrator, they are also missionary and spiritual people. But being in that mindset and not being in the administration anymore could be a challenge, too, and being involved in all the situations and being aware of everything in the field and suddenly not automatically being aware of everything and situation in the field, it's a challenge to live to

put that aside when you meet the people who had that experience, when you hear even the testimonies of people who are in need, and who journey, and they have their kind of adventure. These are huge classes for me to move forward. And I saw having a good vision is helpful. A good vision, let me explain. I know that we are on a new era. In a new era, there will be plans and all these things, but being connected with God in this new era will be really, really, really essential. In the past, it was the case, but I think that we are living a lot of new things, and so the blessing has to be not only in the church, but also outside, has to be strong and deep in this world, who is evolving with all the nice things, but also all the struggles we are facing every day we see that. So I think blessings is needed. Love is needed. Peace is needed. Reconciliation is needed.

**Robin Linkhart 20:25**

Absolutely and all of the ministry of the evangelist has so much application, not just with members of the church, but with friends and seekers, people on spiritual journeys. And we know in today's world, at least in the Western world, there are people who would self identify as spiritual, but not religious. They've lost a connection or concept of God, maybe been harmed by a certain way of expressing God, but they've got this deep spiritual longing and hunger and Community of Christ in the office of evangelist, and in other offices as well. But profoundly, evangelists are equipped to meet people in the midst of that spiritual hunger and longing. So they're just so many different directions that that ministry can connect in ways that are transforming. And as you say, we're being called to go on an adventure with God, which is not new. We are a people who are always on an adventure with God, but in a changing world, in the context that we're on. And now it feels like we're learning how to fly all over again, and being equipped and knowing how to have a really strong relationship with God in a way that meets us in our context and culture is like you say, so critically important. And as you're sharing what you bring to the office, even though I feel like I know you well, every time you share about your journey, it just bears witness to the depth and breadth of experience and cultural sensitivity that you have, that I think just uniquely equips you in this new role in life giving ways. So we know you will be the second woman to serve in the office of presiding evangelist, but you are the first in many categories. You'll be the first non US born, the first one to serve whose native language is not English, the first person of color, you bring a uniquely diverse life experience, as you have touched on of culture and language and heritage and vision of who we are as a people, and also an understanding of how human beings experience spirituality in very different ways across the globe. And I would say, admittedly, that our previous presiding evangelists have been hugely impacted by a Western worldview and Western Christian thought, I would say our journey of deepening and understanding and appreciation for the entire Christian tradition, which was a journey for Community of Christ and is fairly recent. That journey has also impacted the types of spiritual practices we now use in various aspects of our faith and our discipleship and our ministry, and again, classical Western Christian thought, likely informed by the Ignatian tradition, was all wound into that. And while all of that has been a blessing, and everyone who has served in this role previously has been a blessing to the church, I think God is doing a new thing. So tell us how you anticipate all that you bring to this new ministry, and you've touched on this a little bit already, how that will expand and enrich this breadth and depth of how we as a people understand spirituality and the human condition as spiritual beings in a very diverse world.

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong 24:24**

So first of all, I am honored. And I was not aware of this first. And so when I read the question, I realized, Oh, I am the first non U.S. all this. And so I put a little bit of pressure on me. But I am aware of the unique perspectives now that I can bring the background and my experiences with the people around the world, I hope it allows me to approach the spirituality from a different angle. I hope that I could enrich our understanding by sharing diverse way to live spirituality. Because in one culture, in it's in a way we are doing in a special way. I know it's different. There are so many way to do, but there is kind of an understanding, different understanding in a place, but in other place, it's different. And so I hope that this diversity will be a box of treasure we can share between evangelists and being adapted to the people in need. I think we are not we can't force people to receive what we have to give, but we have to listen of what they need and to bless them in all situation. I believe that the diversity and my experiences can maybe complement and broaden our perspective. Also. I see this role as a chance to highlight the richness of different practices and traditions from all around the world. I won't be the person involved. I think I will involve all the people around the world to be part of that journey and to explore how to share one another. It's not coming only from one or me, but from all of us incorporating diverse viewpoints and help to explore new dimensions of human experience in spirituality, my hope is that we can better appreciate how various cultures express their way, to share their blessings, their faith, and how these expressions can deepen our collective and individual spiritual journey. And I believe that embracing this diversity will help us understand and connect with each other, like I said, in a more profound level, and this connection with God in a different way. I'm not saying that we will do differently than what we are doing currently, not at all, but I think there are other things we can explore, develop and and use so because I believe that we are connected one another. I'm not the only one believing that and that we don't have one answer, but so many answers, and there are so many different needs, and even in one country, so many different people. And so having all these ways to share the blessings will be great, super great. I'm not saying we will save the world with that, but we will do the best to be God's heart. Maybe it's it's selfish, or maybe it's too arrogant, but we will be the best. We will do the best to be God's hands and feet in the life of people.

**Robin Linkhart 27:59**

That's beautiful. I was thinking, as you were speaking, the Spiritual Formation and Companionship Program was launched in the USA, and I think they're on...are they on their fourth cohort? At least the third I know of doing it. And I'm wondering if you taking this new role, and as you say, expanding and deepening and broadening the diversity of spiritual experiences and working with people all around the globe to be part of that "adding to" if having a program like Spiritual Formation and Companionship Program potentially might be offered In other nations and other languages at some point?

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong 28:43**

Oui, you are right. And I cannot forget. It's just I have to learn more about the Spiritual Formation and Companionship that. And I really impressed by all what is doing by the formation team and all the classes given to the people. And yes, at this time, this program is only for the USA and Canada and Australia, for the ones not from these countries, lucky are they if they heard about, but most of them, they don't know about that program. So that's exactly something we will have to explore how can we adapt for all evangelists and people who are in need of that program around the world, and being kind of an exchange. We used to receive from one side, and we are just sitting and will discern, and we say, okay, okay, let's do and we are invited to adapt. Okay, let's adapt. And it's good, however, I hope that



we will be able to do this in a way of putting all what we have. All the knowledge, or all the tricks, or all the things in the middle. And everyone is working together and everyone is sharing. Of course, we need order, so there will be a kind of in a new way, that we can express, we can share, but we can also receive and come back and talk together to see how it works. That's kind of an image I hope we will be able to do in the future.

**Robin Linkhart 30:29**

So you have already shared some about your hopes for the ministry of evangelist as Community of Christ endeavors to become the church that God is calling us to be even Community of Christ of the future, and you've given a poignant articulation to where we are on that journey of launching in to the unknown. So what are some of your other hopes for the ministry of evangelists on that journey of becoming?

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong 30:58**

Another hope it's for the ministry of evangelist sees that it continues to evolve and deepen as we strive to become the church God is calling us to be. Because as a Community of Christ moves into the future, I envision a ministry that fully embraces and celebrates you will hear the diversity within our global community, and I hope we can create together an environment where people from all backgrounds feel valued, loved, and their unique experiences enrich our collective faith. That's what is happening today, yes. It is already in place, but by fostering more inclusivity and understanding, because the world is...there's a lot of division between nations, and we can see that even in our small islands, between people, between families. And so we can strengthen our connection and expand our reach. And as evangelist, our role, of course, is to be ministers of blessing and spiritual companions, but guiding, supporting each other. That's what we did, what we are doing beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. So there are things I think we did and are doing in my hope we don't have to forget and we have to continue. There are things we have to continue, because these things, these actions, that are really the basic we have to stress on yes. But I am excited also one of the hope is that to live the opportunity to live alongside other evangelists, to explore innovative ways of serving, connecting with others. I believe we can nurture a vibrant and compassionate ministry that reflects the many ways people experience and express spirituality around the world. I am thinking about a verse which says, "Just as a body, has many parts, but as its all its many parts from one body. So it is with Christ." So that's how my hope is for the world and for the ministry of evangelist. We all have something to give and to receive, and inviting the maximum of people to be involved in that mission will be a huge change and help for humanity. I think.

**Robin Linkhart 33:35**

That sounds very, very exciting, and I love the way you paint this image. It's not a cutting off of the past and moving into a new future. It's a growing from the roots of the past and where we are in the moment and expanding into the future. And I have in my mind's eye, this image of the evangelist fully growing into this diverse, beautiful mosaic of ministers, diverse, many, but one that's really beautiful. Mariva. Is there anything else you would like to share with us today that I haven't asked you about?

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong 34:15**

I just want to say that I'm deeply grateful for this opportunity and for the support I received from the church community, from the family, from the friends and from God. This journey is as much about, I think, our collective growth and mission as it is about individual contributions. And last word, I feel really blessed to have such dedicated spiritual companions on this path. I am excited about the possibilities ahead and the chance to learn to learn to learn to learn and serve and serve and serve together. I believe we can truly continue to make a difference. I really believe that sometimes I have conversation with God. No, I'm not a crazy person, but I have conversation with God and and I'm always amazed how God is guiding, is creating, is already before and and also in the present of what we are doing. There are so many things unclear and so what, in life. But I think we can be confident that we'll be guided, and all together, really, we can make a difference.

**Robin Linkhart** 35:44

Thank you Mareva, and thank you for saying yes to this new call. And thank you so much for being with us today and sharing a little bit about this journey and all that you bring with you into this. Thank you so much for being with us today.

**Mareva Arnaud Tchong** 36:02

Thank you for having me today,

**Robin Linkhart** 36:05

If you would like to hear more from Mareva, check out Project Zion Podcast, episode 611, on the topic of spiritual formation and how Mareva integrates spiritual practices into her life. Or episode 658, to hear Mareva share about her role as president of the Council of 12 Apostles and the firsts associated with that historic moment in Community of Christ. So always, a very special thanks to you, our listeners for spending a portion of your day with us. 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.