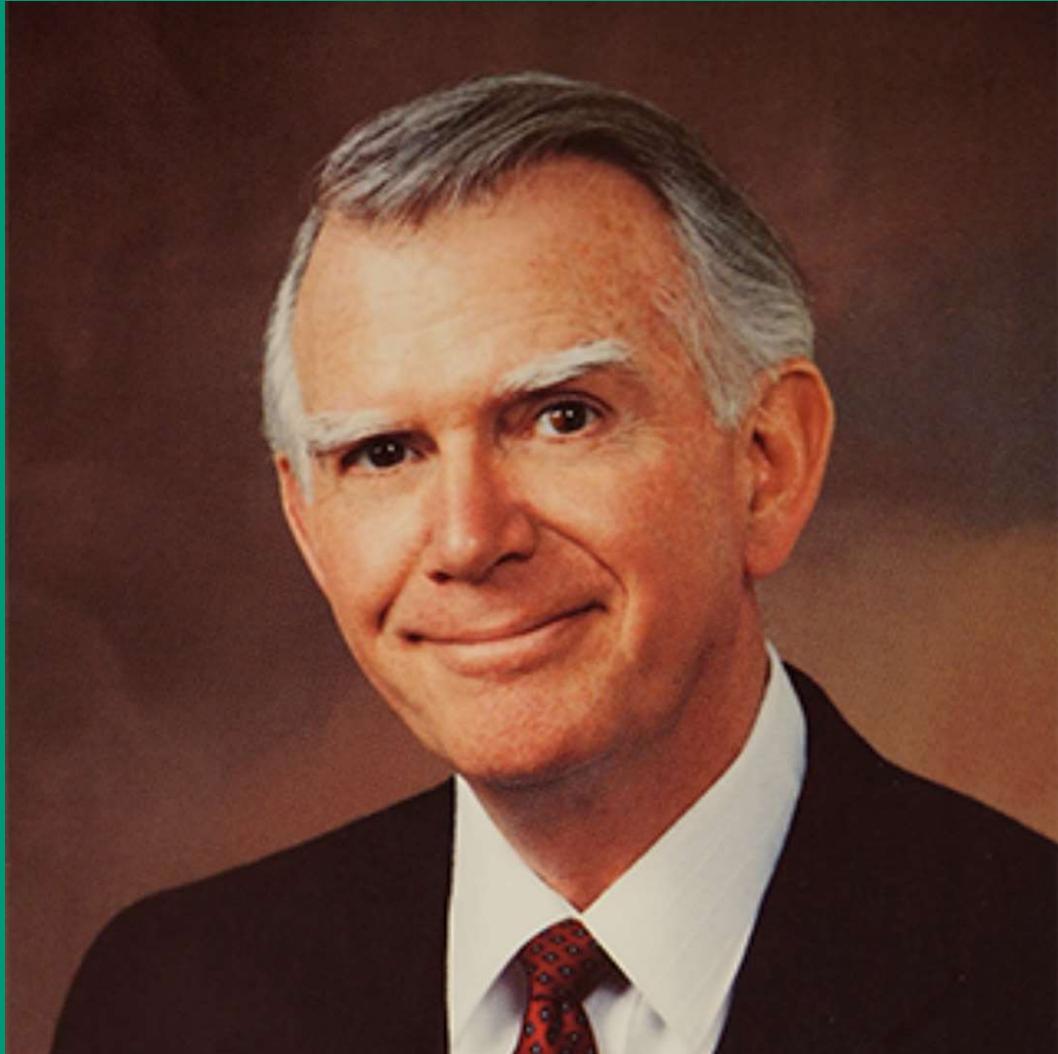


Wallace B. Smith Celebration of Life



*A celebration of life service will be held for Wallace B. Smith,
president emeritus of Community of Christ.*

Sunday, 8 October 2023
2:00 p.m. CST
(find your [time zone](#))
Doors open at 1:00 p.m. CST

Community of Christ Temple
201 South River Blvd.
Independence, Missouri, USA

Streamed live on [YouTube](#).

Wallace B. Smith, who served as prophet-president of Community of Christ from 1978-1998, died on 22 September in Lee's Summit, Missouri, USA. He was 94 years old.

Wallace Bunnell Smith was born 29 July 1929, in Independence, to W. Wallace and Rosamund (Bunnell) Smith. His older sister was Rosalee. The family moved to St. Joseph, Missouri, USA, and then to Portland, Oregon, USA, where he graduated from Grant High School in 1946. He earned an associate degree from Graceland College in 1948 and a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Kansas in 1950. After completing his Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Kansas School of Medicine in 1954, he served in the United States Navy Reserve and then in active duty as a lieutenant junior grade. By the time he left the Navy in 1958, he had completed the Aviation Medical Training Program and received his wings as a naval flight surgeon and lieutenant.

In 1958, he began practicing ophthalmology with his brother-in-law, Otto H. Elser. As a physician and eye surgeon, he was known to be empathetic, professional, and conscientious.

He became president-designate of the church in 1976 and was ordained as prophet-president in 1978.

As leader of Community of Christ, President Smith guided the church through an era of seismic change that included building a Temple dedicated to peace, welcoming women into the priesthood, and opening Communion to all Christians.

Stephen M. Veazey, current prophet-president, described President Smith in 2009 when presenting him with the Seminary Vision Award: "I believe that future historians of the church will conclude that President Smith not only capably fulfilled the responsibilities of prophet-president, he courageously provided leadership that transformed the church. Such transformational leadership is the essence of what it means to be a visionary, because it not only involves seeing the preferred future but also setting in motion the strategies that create that future."

Among the hallmarks of President Smith's legacy was construction of the Temple in Independence, Missouri, USA, near the existing Auditorium. Community of Christ broke ground in 1990. The unique nautilus design stands as a beacon of peace and provides space for headquarters offices, learning, and ministry.

"Generations yet to come will greatly appreciate the edifice as a place of worship, church administration, training, education, and a launching point for ministry into the world," said Mark Scherer, former World Church historian.

Said President Veazey, "President Smith and his contemporaries set the church on the path to becoming a faith community that emphasized peace and reconciliation as the heart of the gospel message. [The Temple is] a striking, living, revelatory symbol that calls the church to be dedicated to 'peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit' as the essence of the ministry of Jesus Christ."

Another of President Smith's major accomplishments was calling for women to become members of the priesthood, which he introduced in 1984. He encouraged the church to embrace women's leadership and ministry.

Women now hold offices throughout the priesthood structure and church leadership. Gail

Mengel and Linda Booth were the first women to serve in a leading quorum. They were ordained in 1998 as apostles and members of the Council of Twelve Apostles. Other women who are notable firsts include Becky Savage as counselor to the First Presidency, Stassi Cramm as presiding bishop, Linda Booth as president of the Council of Twelve Apostles, Jane Gardner as presiding evangelist, and Karin Peter as senior president of the Council of Presidents of Seventy. Currently there are ten women serving in the leading quorums of the church.

"President Emeritus Smith's prophetic leadership forever changed the course of my life," Cramm said. "His courage in leading the church to accept the ordination of women allowed me to serve God and support the church's mission in ways I never imagined as a young girl. I am forever grateful to him for the opportunity of priesthood ministry that his visionary leadership created for me and other women."

Scherer said the ordination of women was immediate, and thus somewhat controversial. "His prophetic courage demonstrated proactive leadership rather than reactive hesitance."

Another major change during President Smith's tenure was the opening of Communion to all Christians, regardless of denomination. Before 1994, only Community of Christ members could receive the sacrament. In addition to enabling more people to share the Lord's Supper, the change made Community of Christ more inviting to guests and seekers.

Former Presiding Evangelist David Brock said, "The decision to open our Communion practices to include all baptized Christians who wish to remember their covenant was a tangible expression of major shifts in our understandings of what God was doing in the world and of what role we as a faith movement were being called to fulfill." Brock explained that President Smith helped create the climate for conversations. "We now affirm deeper and broader truths as we kneel with Catholic and Protestant and Pentecostal to affirm each other's worth, well-being, and authority."

President Smith traveled extensively, visiting congregations throughout the United States as well as in many different countries. He said he enjoyed, "preaching, teaching, and benefitting from observing the myriad cultural differences that members of the church represent." His wife, Anne, accompanied him on many occasions.

"Whether it was to Africa to participate in the dedication of a small church at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in Kenya or to the outback of Australia to share lamb chops in Fern Tree Gully, we appreciated the warm hospitality and devoted service of church members across the world," said President Smith about his travels.

Beyond his church duties, President Smith's influence could be seen at the local, national, and international levels. Building healthy communities and alleviating hunger and poverty were just a few of his passions.

He served on the board of trustees of the American Lung Association of Western Missouri for more than twenty years, and he was a member of the association's national council. He served on the board of trustees for the Truman Heartland Community Foundation and Independence Regional Health Center. In addition, he was active in the Independence Rotary Club.

President Smith spent years working to eliminate hunger through Bread for the World, which

has fought hunger through education and advocacy for four decades. He also chaired the Community of Christ World Hunger Committee. Anne Smith served as Bread for the World board member. The Smiths actively supported Outreach International, an organization that works with communities to overcome the challenges of chronic poverty.

When President Smith indicated his intention to retire from the church and his tenure ended, so did a tradition that had stood since the church's founding by Joseph Smith Jr. in 1830. President Smith named Grant McMurray as his successor, expanding the eligibility for this position beyond the Smith family. It was yet another example of President Smith's courageous leadership.

After retirement, President Smith volunteered as a hospital chaplain and spent time with friends and family. He continued to be active in church events, services, and other activities beyond his home congregation of Good Shepherd. One was the Daily Prayer for Peace at the Temple. He included a challenge for disciples today and a yearning for peace in one of his prayers: "Refresh us when we grow weary of opposing injustice and oppression, terrorism and war, and send us forth from this experience of dialogue and worship strengthened to bind up the wounds that afflict our world. Grant us peace, O God—not the peace of slumber, but of quiet confidence in the triumph of your word. For the sake of all your creation, we pray. Amen."

At the time of his death, President Smith was living at John Knox Village in Lee's Summit, Missouri, USA. He is survived by his wife, Anne; daughters Carolyn (Hugh) Wells, Julie Smith, and Laurie (Rick) Monsees; grandchildren Jillian (Andrew) Barreto, Teppy Dimmitt, Melissa Dimmitt, Sabrina Monsees, Luke Monsees, and Collin Monsees.