

Intro Music:	00:10	[inaudible].
Josh Mangelson:	00:17	Welcome to the Project Zion podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.
Intro Music:	00:30	[inaudible]
Karin Peter:	00:33	Welcome to Project Zion podcast. I'm your host, Karin Peter. Today I'm visiting with Julie Smith from Independence, Missouri. Julie grew up in Independence where her grandfather and then her father served as president of the RLDS church, which later became Community of Christ. Hi Julie.
Julie Smith:	00:55	Hi Karin!
Karin Peter:	00:56	Thank you so much for joining us today. I know this wasn't your chosen kind of way to share your story, but I appreciate you making an exception and talking with Project Zion.
Julie Smith:	01:08	Well, thank you for asking me.
Karin Peter:	01:10	Absolutely. So we're just going to kind of jump into this because Julie it had to be really interesting growing up in independence, Missouri, which is the kind of headquarters of the church and a largest community, I think, in a single city of Community of Christ folks in the US so we've got a couple of questions about that and then we'll kind of move on to some other areas of interest. So first, how old were you when you first realized your grandfather, for our listeners would be W Wallace Smith, when you realized your grandfather was serving as Prophet President of this faith community of what you were apart?
Julie Smith:	01:53	I wish I remember like the exact moment, like it was some big Aha moment, but I don't remember how old I was. It was just a part of our family. I mean it was, it seemed like just like any other family. I didn't know what my grandpa did, particularly anymore than most kids know what their grandpa's do. When I was maybe eight or nine. I remember going to communion during conference and seeing grandpa up on the stage, but I don't know that I understood exactly what all that meant. Being President or Prophet of a faith community, what that meant or what all that entailed. So the short answer is, I don't remember how old I was, but it was just growing up and in my family it was just a normal part of our family. So to me it didn't seem like anything different than, you know, other kids did their families probably.

- Karin Peter: [03:02](#) So I would imagine that when your father became Prophet President of the church, by that time you would have been a little bit older. What did that mean to you or what did he tell you when he was going to become Prophet President? Did he have a conversation with your family?
- Julie Smith: [03:22](#) Yes, that I do remember. I was 14 at that time and I remember my dad sitting down with me and my younger sister, um, my older sister was already in college, so he must've talked to her at some other time. And I remember my younger sister and I, she was two years younger than me. It was probably in March of 1976, he was set apart as president designate that year at conference. And I think we were kind of shocked. And I know that sounds weird, but we, like I said, it didn't occur to me that that was kind of a, a legacy of our family. And I know I sound really dumb because you're thinking, well Duh, it's very obvious where this is going, but my dad was an eye doctor. I mean, he was an ophthalmologist and that's what my dad did when someone asked me, what'd your dad do?
- Julie Smith: [04:26](#) He's an ophthalmologist. And so I didn't see the handwriting on the wall very at a very early age or even then I guess. So it was a little bit shocking and I think I had questions like, well what does this mean? And like, what are you going to do? You mean you're not going to be a doctor now? And you know, those kind of just more logistical questions like how does this work? You know, I didn't go to the office every day. Um, I think it was more being sort of a, you know, has teenagers are pretty self centered. How is this going to affect me? How, how's this gonna wreck my life or you know, change things for me and our family? And we were a close family so I wasn't used to my dad being away for long periods of time. But he said that, you know, he was going to have to travel and he was going to be going to Africa and Australia places far, far away. And so I could see that that was gonna have an impact on our family. But I think I, I knew that, I don't know, somewhere maybe deep down that that was something that he needed to do. I mean, it, I don't even know how much of a choice it would have her to give up something that he loved and to go, you know, completely different direction. I think that would've had been really hard.
- Karin Peter: [06:15](#) Yeah. So how did it begin to impact you? You said teenagers are kind of, we're self centered when we're teenagers and so of course you would wonder, what does this mean for me and for the family? When did you first notice that it did begin to impact you? What, what began to happen? Did people treat you differently? Did you feel there were expectations placed on you?

- Julie Smith: [06:39](#) Well, the first thing immediately was, like I said, there would be times that he was gone for a long time and mom would go with him sometimes. And so we would be left with a babysitter and two of them, very nice woman. I mean, I, she was an older woman, although she's probably only like 50 at the time, which is not old. I just want to emphasize that, but at the time it seemed like this little lady was taking care of us and she was perfectly nice. Her name was Mrs. Moore and she would make the same chicken, we call it Mrs. Moore's Chicken. She would make it all the time, you know, eight. And I remember one time that they went to Australia because Australia, they have the reunions at Christmas time. And so they were gone at Christmas and that was the worst Christmas ever, at least for me.
- Julie Smith: [07:29](#) And they said that it wasn't good for them. I mean, you know, being at the reunion, I'm sure that was nice and all that. But being away from the family at that time was, is just, you know, it didn't seem like Christmas at all. And so there were things like that. But as a kid we, we went to a really supportive congregation in the Independence area that I had gone to since probably fifth or sixth grade. And the people there didn't make us feel weird. I mean it, we were just the Smith family that went to church with them. Um, and if they did feel weird, they didn't make it seem so obvious to us. So we would just be involved in the congregation like most families would, except dad wouldn't be there a lot, but my mom would always take us, you know, and we, we'd go to church.
- Julie Smith: [08:31](#) When we, when he was first set apart, his president designate, we went on this, I call it the European tour. He was just trying to get exposed to the church and to the church people. And so my younger sister and I went, I don't know, well, my older was sister with doing all this time. I don't know how she got out of it. But anyway, we had to go on this trip with mom and dad and it was to England and France and Germany and the Netherlands. And so we would meet up with church people and they drive us around and we'd have to go to your church at a thing. And then we'd have to go to another church and there's a lot of going to church. And we, we went to Dunfield House, which is, you know, that were the reunions happen in England.
- Julie Smith: [09:25](#) It was really cool. I liked it, but we, they served hot tea and like the hottest day ever. And so that was some culture shock.
- Karin Peter: [09:37](#) From Independence, Missouri where tea is cold.
- Julie Smith: [09:40](#) I know! Tea is served cold and they had steak and kidney pie, which thank God my mom said we didn't have to eat it. Um, so

there was some things like that that, you know, uh, really missed home.

Karin Peter: [09:56](#) I'm hoping we don't get letters from our British listeners who reflect on kidney pie.

Julie Smith: [09:59](#) Oh yes, all the lovely cuisine!

Julie Smith: [10:04](#) Um, and, and I think that people were kind of curious about what kind of family is this? So I think there was some, it wasn't, I don't think it was overt, but you kind of felt like you were little bit in a, in the limelight and under a microscope a little bit. So I think we felt like we really needed to behave, you know, no Kemper tantrums, you know, like I don't to have steak and kidney pie!

Julie Smith: [10:39](#) And so you, you kind of felt like you needed to be on your best behavior. But we, I mean we, we met lots of people. We went to Berlin in Germany and we stayed with, um, a family that had two kids and they were listening to the Fleetwood Mac album then. And you know, we listened to Fleetwood Mac they didn't speak much English and I spoke zero German. So, you know, we just connected in ways like through music. And so that was cool and different places that we went, we would find places to connect with people. You know, just, there seemed to be always some something we can connect about. When we went to France, we stayed in this really small hotel and there was a bathroom in the hall. You had to go into the shared bathroom and it had a couple stalls in it. And I was in there and I heard someone come in and it was a man. And I freaked out. I mean, that was not anything that would ever been on my radar screen. You share a bathroom with someone of the opposite sex. So I sat in there as quiet as I could until they left, and you know, I'm running out yelling, there's a man in the bathroom, there's a man in the bathroom!

Julie Smith: [12:06](#) So I was fairly sheltered, we'll say, growing up here in Independence, Missouri. So it definitely broaden my, um, perspective on the world and culture. So I really look back on that trip. I mean, I have lots of stories on that trip. I did a, a testimony in a church in Germany and Johnny Stebno interpreted for me. I had never done anything like that before. I fell down the steps at one of the congregations in Germany that had this really wining the wooden staircase and I just went, thumb, thumb, thumb, down the steps.

Karin Peter: [12:49](#) Oh my God! We broke the daughter of the prophet!

- Julie Smith: [12:52](#) I know! Um, so luckily I wasn't too damaged, but, um, you know, they kinda saw just us as have a regular family and I hope that's what they saw. I don't know what they were thinking, but we, we didn't, you know, have halos or any special powers or anything like that.
- Julie Smith: [13:18](#) So they just, uh, kinda us, just regular kids now. I hope they weren't too disappointed, but my dad always has this stateliness I don't know how else to describe it about him. That gives you the sense that he really took, he took his position very seriously. Um, and he wanted to be a good leader and he wanted to, you know, really embrace what that was going to mean for him. Um, even though I can't imagine he had any idea what it would really be like. So even with us just being a regular family, I think people could sense that dad did have a calling. I mean, and I, and I think they appreciated getting to know him a little bit and to kind of realize that.
- Karin Peter: [14:22](#) So Julia, I want to talk a little bit about, about one of the things that became a kind of a, a historical marker of your dad's tenure as Prophet President of the church. But before I do that, another question came to mind and that is, at what point did you begin to sense or, uh, realize kind of the historical legacy that is your family?
- Julie Smith: [14:52](#) I think as part of Sunday school, um, we had some, we talked about the book of Mormon and we talked about Joseph Smith.
- Julie Smith: [15:07](#) And so I remember hearing about that. Um, and, but maybe still not really getting it. I mean, I don't know. It was probably, you know, I was in junior high at the, at the time that dad became president. And, um, I, I don't remember thinking that this is, it's going to be something that is just too weird or, you know, I don't know. I didn't feel like it was weird at all. Um, and I don't know if I should have been more, um, I dunno, awed by it, but it, I, I was kinda hearing it maybe like other people did. And just trying to, um, figure out for myself what, what this story meant and, and how is that, is that going to be part of something that I believe or not believe? And I just, I went through it probably like a lot of people do when, when they're trying to discover their own theology and their own belief system.
- Karin Peter: [16:26](#) It's wonderful that that's the way that you were able to go about that. That it wasn't something that was told to you as you have to believe a certain way or you have to think a certain way, but that you are allowed to struggle with it like everyone else does.

- Julie Smith: [16:41](#) I remember going to, we were preparing for witnessing weekend, I dunno if you remember those, that the church would have like youth groups go to a particular area and like go door to door and handout flyers that they were having a church service, um, and supposed to kind of witness to the people that we were going to in the neighborhoods being a 70, you may have experienced,
- Karin Peter: [17:10](#) I have experienced those!
- Julie Smith: [17:13](#) But in preparation for that, which I really give our youth leaders a lot of credit for making us think ahead of time what we would say to people than just throwing us in and saying, go, you know, talk to these people without ever having thought of it. But I remember thinking, and in our church even back when I was in junior high and high school, we still far ahead that one true church bent.
- Julie Smith: [17:43](#) Um, and so it started to kind of bothered me that we were I'll even say arrogant enough to say that we were the one true church and go to someone else that maybe was involved in a church or you know, their life experience had brought him to a particular place for me to come in and say, no, whatever experience you've had is invalid. And now what I am telling you is the only valid thing. Um, so I had a real hard time with that and I think we struggled with that as a church generally at some point. But just personally I started to wonder what made us so special that we thought we had all the answers or that only way to find Jesus was through this church. And so I remember kind of starting down the path where I really wanted to explore that and think how, how can I be a part of something that is, is important to me, but in a way that I don't feel like it's, it's being that one true churchy kind of way. So I remember starting to think about that and as I was a young adult, became involved in, um, what we call the young adult seminar at that time, which really started exploring theology and history and all different things to try to open up. Um, just some other avenues that I hadn't previously thought of. And I appreciate that experience a lot and it has, has brought me to, uh, a better understanding or at least a more open understanding of what religion can and, and can't be for people.
- Karin Peter: [19:54](#) So, um, thank you for sharing. Yeah, that's, um, a wonderful insight into how, how you experience, um, what many people experienced in kind of growing up and coming of age and, and I'm beginning to reflect theologically, especially as the church transition from one perspective to another. Right. So I want to talk a little bit about the, uh, the bringing forth of what we call

Section 156 of the Doctrine and Covenants. But I want to, to talk about it kind of through your lens. So as you grew up, you did so with the knowledge that being female you would not serve, um, in a priesthood office. So many of us grew up with that perspective. So as the church began to have dialog about women, um, in priesthood, which happened extensively even before Section 156, people were talking about it and submitting priesthood calls to their jurisdictions for women. So what, um, what did you think about this and the conversations that the church was having?

Julie Smith: [21:14](#) Well, I want to comment a little bit about when I realized about who could and could not be in priesthood. In the congregation where I grew up, it seemed that almost every boy when they became like in high school would get called to the priesthood, like as a deacon. Like it was almost automatic. And I knew these boys and I didn't think that they were good candidates. I mean, they were mean and they said really nasty things. And I was thinking, now wait a minute. If this really is what priesthood is what, I don't understand why these boys are getting called to this? And when I'm not able to be called to it, I mean, I felt like that something was wrong with this system. Um, but that's just from, you know, kids' perspective. I didn't think about, oh, there's potential and they're going to grow into it and it or whatever.

Julie Smith: [22:21](#) Um, at the time I was just thinking, man, the, these don't seem like what I would think would be candidates for priesthood. And of course, again, well I could do way better than that.

Karin Peter: [22:35](#) And the feminist began to come out.

Julie Smith: [22:37](#) Right. Um, so, and that was like in high school. And then I went to college and I got married very early when I was 19 and we moved away from the area and we moved to North Carolina. And in North Carolina, they were not having this dialogue that you speak of. And I was not really aware of it. I didn't know that women had been called to the priesthood and in other areas or that, you know, there might be this, there's kind of rumbling in the church. The people in North Carolina were really great group of people. Um, they, they had been an integrated congregation for decades.

Julie Smith: [23:32](#) They had black and white families going to church together for a long time and didn't think anything about it. And this is, you know, in the south. And so in that way, it was quite a progressive congregation and also it was so small that, you know, they had almost everyone being in charge of a service,

you know, if you could plan it, great. We'd love you to. Um, and so it, it didn't seem so formal on who could do what in that congregation. And I think I'm thankful for that because I felt like I could do lots of things and with no one's saying, oh no, no, you can't do that. Although, you know, of course there weren't any women that were in the priesthood there, but I was not all that, I don't know. I wasn't, didn't feel like I was an activist saying, you know, holding placards and marching or anything saying we want priesthood or anything like that.

Julie Smith: [24:41](#)

So I was kind of living in my own world. I was going to school there, um, in North Carolina at Chapel Hill and kind of far removed from Independence and I think were maybe a lot of that was going on. Um, so I, I can't say that I was a part of the dialogue. So I remember in 1984 when, when that section came, well, it wasn't a section then, but whenever that was brought to the church, my dad called me ahead of time because he knew it was gonna be a big deal. He knew that there was gonna be some backlash. He knew that it was probably going to wind up in some way on the news, however, however that might come out. And he called me and we were living in North Carolina at that time, um, to tell me what he was planning to do. And I think there was a letter that he prepared for the church ahead of time or maybe was after, I don't know.

Julie Smith: [25:59](#)

But there was some letter and he had said what he was planning to do. And when he called to tell me that again, being so dumb, I was shocked. You know, I'm like, oh, this is happening? And I, I didn't really expect it at that time. I didn't know what's happening. And believe it or not, we didn't sit around the dinner table discussing what revelations were coming on the church or frankly, issues in the church at all. And looking back, I think that was intentional on my parents' part to try to keep our family as normal as could be. And so it wasn't, it, it wasn't weird that he would wait and tell him. I mean, he told me ahead of time, but you know, not tell me like two years in advance this was going to be coming or anything like that. Plus he probably didn't trust me that I'd keep my mouth shut. So I, I was, I was really shocked and surprised. But look back, I, I can't even imagine how that must've felt for him. Um, knowing that it was going to be so divisive and knowing that he was, he was going to have a very hard, um, time with the church in the wake of that. But it was pivotal. It was pivotal for me. It was pivotal for the church. It was pivotal for women. And I think I shared with you that my dad turned 90 in July and we wrote letters to him. My sisters and I wrote letters to him and I reminded him of that when he called me to tell me about that and how much

that impacted me and that I was so proud of him and respected him so much, sorry, and was very emotional.

- Julie Smith: [28:36](#) Um, that he was willing to do that and to, really bring the church to a place where it needed to go. And as hard as it was for him to take that step, it really meant a lot to me personally. And it meant I know a lot to other women and there's probably women that have expressed that to him. But it was, it was something that had to happen in order, I think for me and many people to even want to be a part of this faith community, to continue to be a part of this faith community. And I know there's other issues that people feel the same way about. Um, but for me that so important and it's, it's still is impactful and I am so, so thankful that I am a part of a faith community where that is a honored.
- Karin Peter: [29:59](#) You said it still is impactful. It is in ways. Um, I don't think anybody realized at the time many of our listeners come from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and many of them are women who are astounded at the way community of Christ has been able to address the ordination of women. And though it was painful to work through that and to move on a journey, it continues to impact their lives as well. And I'm not sure anybody would have seen that coming.
- Julie Smith: [30:42](#) Right. I don't think so.
- Karin Peter: [30:44](#) So it was a difficult time. Um, we don't need to go into, um, into that other than to ask, um, what was it like for you to watch your dad kind of weather this storm?
- Julie Smith: [31:03](#) I often was angry. I, I couldn't understand why people didn't get it, how they could still say no women are not worthy or are not called or are not good enough or however you they want to say. Um, I couldn't accept that. Um, and it was really difficult for me to be around people that felt that way. And I, I know it's Cliche, but I was very intolerant of intolerance and I wanted to be able to help dad in some way, but I don't know that there was anything really that I could do only to say that I am in full support and are many that are in full support and that will continue to be advocates for that change to, to happen.
- Karin Peter: [32:16](#) So when you look back at that time, um, 156 was pivotal in so many lives, what do you think is the biggest legacy of that when you look at the Church today?

- Julie Smith: [32:28](#) I think that it's able to stand up as a church and for me as a member and say that we believe in the worth of all persons and be able to back it up. And we still have a long way to go in that and there are some issues that I don't feel that we're there yet, but I want to be part of a faith movement that honors women and allows them to express their giftedness and um, in many ways, but also that includes priesthood and it was a game changer for me and, and a deal breaker. So I think as you say, that is now a legacy that the church has and can offer to people who have not been able to have that experience. And so I, I think that it's really important and I'm sure you know better than anyone in, in the position that you're in how impactful that it can be.
- Karin Peter: [33:44](#) Absolutely. So we talk a lot about section 156 when we're talking about, um, the ordination of women, but there were some other pivotal things that happened from that section. You're sitting right now, I'm in a building that did not exist when 156 was brought to the church because it was one 56 that started us with building the Temple in Independence. And it was also a section one 56 that began, um, a new, the conversation, which we would now call probably priesthood faithfulness or accountable priesthood accountability with 156. And so we don't want to forget that section 156 was pivotal in many areas in the life of the church. Did you come back to Independence when the temple was being built?
- Julie Smith: [34:41](#) I, well just to visit. Um, like I say when I, I got married and went to North Carolina and from there we moved about every two years in different place. And so I came back to visit, um, I came to the women's conference. I would come for different activities but wasn't really, um, there for the day to day things that were happening when it was being built and all the, all those things. And I somewhat regret that, although, you know, in my life, at that time I was, I was a mom of two kids and my husband had a really good job, but it made us move a lot. Um, and so I was, you know, a part of family and I, you know, and we came back and visited, but it wasn't on a regular basis. So I kinda missed out on a lot of that.
- Karin Peter: [35:49](#) So you have the women's conference, that was the first big event held in the temple. So what was it like for you to walk around the building with the historical significance of what,
- Julie Smith: [36:00](#) It was a really amazing, that was a really, really powerful experience. And I, I was amazed, um, at, uh, just the, the architecture, just the whole thing, the whole complex of, of the Temple and thought that it could also be impactful in not only in

the church but in this community. Um, and I don't know that we've done a super good job of, um, doing all we can to let this building kind of be an Ensign of peace. So we, we still have a ways to go there, but I, I thought that, you know, had such potential and I'm, I was still glad that I was apart of that conference. And since then, I've been back to World Conferences, you know, fairly regularly.

Julie Smith: [37:00](#) But when, um, I was, I was divorced and I was felt like I really needed to move back here. Um, so about seven and a half years ago, I just decided that I was going to move back here and here I am. And, and then at that time I would still have said I would never work for the church just because I don't know, I'd seen a lots of my, you know, my dad's generation and some of my friends did actually start working for the church and it seemed like there was a lot of stress associated with it. I'm sure it doesn't happen for you,

Karin Peter: [37:52](#) Of course not. None whatsoever.

Julie Smith: [37:56](#) And so I was just gonna steer clear of that. But then this opportunity came up to, you know, and, and I decided to take it and I don't regret that I did. Um, but saying that, I also see, aside of the church that a lot of people don't see, and some of it is stressful and it's, it's hard to see sometimes.

Julie Smith: [38:29](#) And I have a lot of respect for the people in leadership positions because I know how hard it is to be in that position. Not Personally, but seeing my dad in it and seeing them actually on a day to day basis, they take it very seriously and they, they really want the church to thrive and, and sometimes it's an uphill battle. Um, and I, I do not envy their positions, but I, I respect them and know how, how much, how do I have to be wise and careful and thoughtful and it's really hard. It's really hard for them.

Karin Peter: [39:22](#) So Julie, I wanna thank you for being willing to share with us today. You've been very candid and insightful and we appreciate that. It helps our listeners get, uh, a broader picture of the church and the people in it. Is there anything then you last comments you'd like to share with our listeners that are made up of people from different faith backgrounds, but who have an interest in the restoration tradition what has become Community of Christ?

Julie Smith: [40:00](#) Well, I, I was hesitant to do this podcast just because I didn't feel like I had really anything profound or inspiring to say. But if I could, I don't know, leave a thought. Um, it would be to just

seek out places and organizations and people that inspire you and challenge you and give you opportunities to be authentic and where you feel accepted for who you are. There's a quote from Norman Vincent Peale that I saw recently, and it said, no person at any age needs to remain on an uninspiring level of accomplishment. We do lots of stuff. We're really busy. But if those things are not inspiring you in some way, then maybe, and I say this for myself, we need to rethink some things that are uninspiring and we have those things in our lives. I know we do and they're not necessarily bad, but I really like thinking of that, that we maybe accomplish things, but, uh, on an uninspiring level. And I would just like to leave that with, with you and with the listeners that I, I think everyone's journey is important and there's not a right journey or wrong journey. It's just your journey and you just, you just stay on it and, and find places where you can thrive and thank you for this opportunity to talk and, and to hopefully just give you a little different perspective on some things.

- Karin Peter: [42:11](#) Well, for someone who didn't think that they, um, had a lot to share in a podcast, I think you've done an amazing job of giving us a window into not only a different perspective of what it was like to live through a really profound period in the life of the church, but to be connected with it and also to be very upfront about what that meant to you and what it means to others. So again, thank you
- Julie Smith: [42:40](#) You're welcome.
- Karin Peter: [42:42](#) for being willing to share with us. So as we close this episode of the Project Zion podcast, I want to again thank Julie Smith for visiting with us today. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks for listening.
- Outro Music: [43:01](#) [inaudible]
- Josh Mangelson: [43:02](#) Thanks for listening to Project Zion podcast. Subscribe to our podcast on apple podcast, stitcher, or whatever podcast is streaming service you use. And while you are there, give us a five star rating. Project Zion podcast is sponsored by Latter-day Seekers Ministries of Community of Christ. The views and opinions expressed in this episode are of those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Latter-day Seekers Ministries of Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinz
- Outro Music: [43:41](#) [inaudible].

