

Swarm with Niko Farrell_final_1-4-23

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SPEAKERS

Niko Farrell, Josh Mangelson, Julie Wheaton, Mike Hoffman

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.

Mike Hoffman 00:33

Welcome to Coffee in the Swarm - a Project Zion Podcast production coming to you from the Lamoni Iowa campus of Graceland University. The Swarm is our on campus restaurant in the Newcom Student Union. This year we are being co-hosted by student Chaplain Julie Wheaton. And this is Mike Hoffman, Campus Minister. It's where we interview students at Graceland who are connected to the Community of Christ. So Julie, how are you today?

Julie Wheaton 00:59

Doing good! Finished all my finals!

Mike Hoffman 01:00

Hey, that's right. It's final's big day. So, what can you tell us about our guest today?

Julie Wheaton 01:05

Today we have Niko Farrell with us. He is a sophomore. He's on Cheville. He is an allied health major. He's planning on going into physical therapy.

Mike Hoffman 01:15

All right. Nikko. Welcome.

Niko Farrell 01:17

Thank you. It's nice to be here.

Mike Hoffman 01:18

So tell us a little bit about yourself. I mean, anything else that Julie hasn't added yet?

Niko Farrell 01:27

Like you said, PT major.

Mike Hoffman 01:28

So you want to go into physical therapy? Yes. Why is that?

Niko Farrell 01:31

The generic answer would be my mom's a PT.

Mike Hoffman 01:33

Oh, okay.

Niko Farrell 01:35

But I've gotten to shadow. I know what the field does. I think it's something that I can go into and truly enjoy. Because I've always enjoyed helping people in that way. I've seen what you can accomplish in that field of study, which is pretty cool. And then what else? Oh, afterglow coordinator? Yeah.

Mike Hoffman 01:56

So yeah. So just for those of you listening that might not be familiar, Afterglow has been our Sunday night worship up until this semester when we moved it to Wednesday nights. And something miraculous has happened with Niko was one of the Co-leaders of that. So afterglow is now a Wednesday night worship service. So Niko is one of two students in charge of that. Yeah, so pretty good. And that is a student employment position with the campus ministry.

Julie Wheaton 02:24

Any extracurriculars here?

Niko Farrell 02:25

I'm actually the president of the Pickleball Club. We started last year. But that was kind of because my family's acquired an addiction to it. And they play it every single day. I love it just as much as they

Mike Hoffman 02:40

So when you see your family, who is the mom and dad,

Niko Farrell 02:43

My mom, dad and sister, they all play pickleball pickleball actually are planning on building a court in our backyard. Just keeps growing and growing. But it's actually like the fastest growing sport in the world right now. could become a collegiate sport. So I'm hoping to host an invitational for other colleges in the area. Hope to grow it but the custom stuff from the work. Kelly Everett used to be a project manager here. And he's actually gotten a quote, to build a pickleball court, and he's finding a donor to help pay for it.

Mike Hoffman 03:17

Excellent!

Julie Wheaton 03:19

That's awesome. All right.

Niko Farrell 03:21

Got some big things in the works. Yeah. Well, that's really cool. Before I came to Graceland, I was out in Arizona. Pickleball was exploding all over out there. In fact, one of the previous campus ministers is Dave Hines, and he was out there. And we dubbed him the pastor of pickleball. Because he played pickleball. So much, so. Yeah, so that's really cool. So it must be really popular. Where are you from originally? San Antonio, Texas.

Mike Hoffman 03:45

So, it's popular down in San Antonio?

Niko Farrell 03:47

It's funny that you said Arizona because that was where I was introduced to pickleball Yeah. We went to a retirement community to go visit my aunt and uncle and they had courts up there and embraced us and they're like, oh, you know, you get balls that I don't get. And they're really excited to have us there. Um, so it hadn't really grown in San Antonio at the time I love pickleball in Arizona and then I'd say maybe about two years ago we started playing as a family, and oh, it just exploded you be able to build a Chicken and Pickle in San Antonio and uh.

Mike Hoffman 04:19

Wait a minute, you build what?

Niko Farrell 04:20

A Chicken and Pickle.

Mike Hoffman 04:22

So what is that?

Niko Farrell 04:23

the chicken pickleball slash restaurant slash bar slash ... and I actually spent most of my summer there.

Mike Hoffman 04:33

Okay, I had not heard of the chicken and pickle so Okay. All right. Very good. Where are you born in San Antonio?

Niko Farrell 04:39

I was born in Florida. But I'm also an intermural rep. And I that's one of the great things of Graceland that I enjoy...have enjoyed, and it's been a pretty, pretty interesting experience this year. We've gotten a lot done. I'm a very, very competitive person.

Mike Hoffman 04:56

And you are sports wise or you know,

Niko Farrell 04:59

In almost everything.

Julie Wheaton 05:02

Speaking of intermurals, do you think that we could possibly get pickleball to be an intermural?

Niko Farrell 05:08

That's the plan for it.

Mike Hoffman 05:10

You haven't done it yet?

Niko Farrell 05:11

We've done I am one event with items. Okay, but not like a full blown season. Right, right.

Mike Hoffman 05:17

Okay. And for those of you that are listening, when Niko says he's the rep, so you're on Cheville house here at Graceland, which if you've been at alum you would know totally what that means. So it's, um, he lives in a house and it's called Cheville and you're the rep for IM since they elected you to rep. Yep. So very cool.

Niko Farrell 05:36

Like only being a rep being on House Counsel is kind of a different ballgame, it's the leadership of the hall. And I love being the Intermural rep, but I love to be on House Council more, because being involved in something like that has been so so good. I mean, just the student life for Graceland has treated me very well, especially bouncing back from COVID. So it's been a good time.

Mike Hoffman 06:01

Did you have COVID? Are you talking about?

Niko Farrell 06:03

No, actually, you have never had COVID

Mike Hoffman 06:05

Good for you.

Julie Wheaton 06:06

What? I'm jealous.

Niko Farrell 06:08

I had the flu about a week ago and kicked my butt.

Mike Hoffman 06:11

But you got tested. No, my last bout was at the end of October. So yeah, I'm glad you. I do have managed. Yeah. Obviously, we're interviewing you for Project Zion Podcast, which is Community of Christ. So you went to church growing up in the San Antonio area? What was that like?

Niko Farrell 06:30

It was good. Shenandoah congregation has been my foundation. But a lot of my faith really came from church camp, Camp Sionito in Texas, and that was kind of like my refresh button for the year. Yeah. It's always been something that I would look forward to for the entire year and you know, one of the best weeks.

Mike Hoffman 06:52

Did you grow up going into like Junior camp? Is there a junior camp there and then junior high camp and then senior I camp?

Niko Farrell 06:58

Started off in diapers going to reunion.

Mike Hoffman 07:00

Oh, yeah. Okay. Okay. So reunion. I forgot about reunion. So

Niko Farrell 07:03

My first, my first Junior camp and junior high. And I'm actually going back to staff this summer?

Mike Hoffman 07:08

Is that the first time you get to be staff?

Niko Farrell 07:10

Yes, actually.

Mike Hoffman 07:11

Oh my gosh,

Niko Farrell 07:12

I haven't been able to for the past couple of years. But yeah, very, very excited.

Mike Hoffman 07:15

That's cool. For senior high camp.

Niko Farrell 07:17

Yes.

Julie Wheaton 07:18

And you went to spectacular,

Niko Farrell 07:19

I want to say yes, that was also one of the best weeks of the year. So so disappointed that COVID had to take that away from us.

Mike Hoffman 07:27

Yeah. Cuz you would have fallen into that time when there was no Spec for a couple of years anyway, so

Niko Farrell 07:32

I'm just hope that it's gonna come back better than ever.

Mike Hoffman 07:35

Well, it came back last year, a little bit smaller than we had anticipated. But that's sort of probably where it needs to go with COVID still sort of around. So yeah,

Julie Wheaton 07:46

So speaking of spec, obviously, we have a year of Graceland so. But was there any other reason why you decided to go to Graceland like, what exactly brought you here.

Niko Farrell 07:54

So my grandparents actually met here in the library. We've got a brick on the pathway that says Karen Hence was studying in the library, and Myron Willard was studying her.

Mike Hoffman 08:06

That's a brick out here on the walkway?

Niko Farrell 08:08

Yep, right at the front.

Mike Hoffman 08:09

I've really I have not seen that brick

Niko Farrell 08:11

But it says "the legacy continues" and then all of their children went here so my mom, my aunts, my uncles. And then my cousin was the most recent I think she graduated in 2017.

Mike Hoffman 08:22

Who was your cousin? Now? Did your mom and dad meet at Graceland?

Niko Farrell 08:26

No, they met way later. Very, very happy that I could continue that legacy. Yeah, I kind of see why they enjoyed this school so much. So that's cool.

Mike Hoffman 08:37

Picking up off of that, how else would you describe your Graceland experience? We know that one of the things that that we've talked to students about is this Graceland experience and a lot of people will refer to it. But it's somewhat unique for every individual. How would you describe? Or how would you talk about your Graceland experience?

Niko Farrell 08:56

It's kind of tough to put into words. The community here is is very, very welcoming. And when I think of, you know, forming new relationships, it's just easier. And I think of Spec, you attack making new friends because you don't have much time. Yeah. And so you're bouncing all over the place. I kind of get the people say that I bounced all over the place, talking to people and that type of stuff. But when it comes to meeting friends at school like this, I mean, you know, everybody so quickly, I felt at home, probably within three days of when I got here, and I had Spec, but coming to Graceland, I didn't quite know anybody. And I was like, Alright, this is the restart button. This is a fresh start. I am going to do this the right way. So I attacked relationships with a different approach, and really focused on creating good, strong friendships and I can safely say now that I have some of the best friends that I've ever had in my entire life. That's really cool. Whether that's on Cheville or otherwise, yeah, it's been an amazing experience so far. And I think that Spec was kind of a precursor to that. Because making friends there is very, very similar to how it is really. Yes. Okay.

Mike Hoffman 10:14

That's interesting. I also know that some students go to Spec and then they expect Graceland to be more like Spec. But it can't be completely because it's just a different thing. But that's really good to know that you've made the connection there between spec at Graceland. So

Julie Wheaton 10:31

We know that you're the Afterglow coordinator and everything. So what has it been like? Because Afterglow technically, is like a little church service, like a worship service. So what would you say has your experience with church here at Graceland?

Niko Farrell 10:45

You know, last year, I kind of pulled away and Afterglow kind of reeled me back in and provide a ministry like that has been very refreshing for my faith. And it's also been enlightening, because you seeing it from a different side of it. And it's been super cool, because I know what works and what doesn't work for myself whenever I'm going to a church service. And I've gauged young people, and we've kind of figured out what people are interested in. It's been a very, very good experience, getting to know what reaches people. And I think Danny and I have been a good dynamic duo this year.

Mike Hoffman 11:24

So Danny Dennis is is your Yes, co-leader with afterglow. He's also one your Cheville house, right? Okay. And the two of you and God have done an amazing thing almost immediately, Afterglow went from like, last year where we didn't get too many people out for it to 50 to 75 students have been

attending this year. So how would you describe how that happened? I mean, besides knowing students and thinking about what they needed and wanted,

Niko Farrell 11:53

I think it was just convenience, I don't want to say that they have the prior Afterglow, their musical ability was anything, I think they were just, but I think we've done a really, really good job of advertising it. And once we get people going, they see what we can accomplish. And they're like, Oh, I'm gonna come back next week, I'm going to share what I've experienced with other people. And I think we've just done a really, really good job of advertising it.

Mike Hoffman 12:18

When you say advertising, do you also mean just like inviting people, as well as that? I mean, what I've noticed is there's a lot more people involved in the band itself and leading worship itself. So what possessed you and Danny to do that?

Niko Farrell 12:33

We wanted to make it as accessible as possible. Okay. And so we put out different signup geniuses for people, like they want to sign up, and then they'd come and they'd have...

Mike Hoffman 12:44

What is a signup genius?

Niko Farrell 12:47

Yeah, you put like a QR code out and people scan it and say, "What are the themes for these days? And then what is something that I want to speak about? And then okay, I'll do it." Yeah. And then, you know, it takes away the "Oh, do you want to speak this week?" Yeah. Going out and fine. And you might get somebody that you never expected? Yeah. And those have been some of the best speakers. So

Mike Hoffman 13:08

What about the additional musicians in the band? Over the course of my seven years here? We've had lots of different instruments. But last semester, you've included like, like, violin, saxophone.

Niko Farrell 13:22

We had two people, Danny's in the choir, and I'm in the band. Okay. And I have prior experience with different types of ensembles. You can make different types of music with different arrangements of instruments, and you can kind of

Mike Hoffman 13:34

so you knew that? Yes. Okay. Okay. And Danny knows that as well?

Niko Farrell 13:40

And then we know different people in regards to choir, we had Ollie Gaskens as a drummer. But we got people signed up at the clubs and fair club and organizations, we would go out and ask people, you

know, is this something that you'd be interested in? And we make it clear that it's not extremely religious. Yeah. And we're not gonna force it down your throat or anything like that. We're making good music, trying to reach some people. Yeah. And

Mike Hoffman 14:04

well, and it's not just the music that's reach people either. But the obviously when when other students stand up and share their stories and share whatever they want to talk about a theme, you know, I know it's usually around a theme, but it's very relatable to other students and that kind of thing.

Julie Wheaton 14:18

Yeah. So we I know we had kind of already talked about it a little bit, but you want to be a physical therapist, right? Are you wanting to do like rehab is that the kind of physical therapy that you're looking to go into, like, people who have sports injuries, your

Niko Farrell 14:34

sport injuries will be one of my number one priorities. But my main focus, I think, I want to do spinal, because I have scoliosis. I mean, it's not near as bad as it could be, but I think it could have been handled a little bit better. Okay. And so I don't think it's 100% preventable, but I want to look into possibly doing some sort of preventative medicine for scoliosis and maybe some other genetic stuff that could possibly be prevented? Yeah. But that's something that is is that

Mike Hoffman 15:06

You mentioned your mom earlier. Is she in the spinal area too?

Niko Farrell 15:11

She does balance in the stimulator. Okay. Which isn't a lot of assisted living. Okay. Older.

Mike Hoffman 15:17

Gotcha. So you're talking maybe even younger people then too. Okay. Does that require graduate school? I guess it would then wouldn't it? So

Niko Farrell 15:26

I plan on going to PT school, either UT Health San Antonio or the army Baylor program. Okay. But I think it's about three years and that's for a doctorate in physical therapy.

Mike Hoffman 15:37

And you said, Baylor, the army program, so that would put you in the United States Army.

Niko Farrell 15:43

I would enlist. And it seems like a pretty neat deal. Because you're going in as an officer going to school, and then I get to work on stuff like the Wounded Warrior Project. Okay. Which would be super cool. I think that working on soldiers, they're so used to functioning at such a high level, yeah, that they'll do whatever it takes to get back. And so you'll see results that you wouldn't see in civilians.

Mike Hoffman 16:07

Interesting. Does your family have a history of military service?

Niko Farrell 16:11

My grandfather was in the military. But that's just about it.

Mike Hoffman 16:16

Let's shift gears a little bit and think about the future of the church, do you have any hopes for the Community of Christ in the future? Obviously, you're having a pretty cool experience with the church here at Graceland. But when you leave here, what's your hope for the future?

Niko Farrell 16:32

The abundance of Community of Christ churches that I've been to, tend to have an older crowd. Yeah, well, yeah. And my one hope for the church is that we can find a way to appeal to younger people, and get them into the church. And I don't know how we're going to do that quite yet. Yeah. But if there's one goal that you can set sights on, it would be that.

Mike Hoffman 16:59

Yeah, I know, one of the observations I have about working with campus ministry is the fact that we've adapted Afterglow, and many ways to be where students are not just physically because obviously, we're here on campus. So but you know, it meets more like where they are. And I think that's probably one of the biggest challenges for the church. What I hear you saying is like, how do you adapt the church to be where students, well, where younger adults are.

Julie Wheaton 17:27

I know that you're saying that you wish that we could connect to the younger generation more. So if you had the chance to sit down with the President? What do you think you would say,

Mike Hoffman 17:39

if you sat down with President Veazey, or the leadership team at the church?

Julie Wheaton 17:44

what do you want them to know?

Niko Farrell 17:45

I want them to know that experiences like Spec and all the camps need to be but everybody needs to be able to go to that and experience it. Because I think that's a really good way of getting people to come here. I think that's a really good way of getting them involved in the church. But it's those types of experiences that's going to get somebody to be like, Oh, maybe this church thing is not too bad. You know?

Mike Hoffman 18:12

Yeah, I just I sorry, I sort of snickered. But it was a retreat that I first went to so I understand what you're getting at. I mean, it's like Yeah, is there anything else you'd like to share? Graceland the church, your future?

Niko Farrell 18:25

I want to say after this semester, I'm extremely grateful for all that you've done for providing me with the opportunity to help with Afterglow has been such a good experience. And I'm just extremely grateful for that brought me closer to a lot of people brought me closer to God. But

Julie Wheaton 18:41

I said, exciting. Love. Making me go. Oh, goodness.

Mike Hoffman 18:50

Is there anything you'd like to share about your future here at Graceland? So you're a sophomore, you have two more years.

Niko Farrell 18:55

Next year is going to be a good time. I'm planning on running for house president.

Mike Hoffman 19:02

And so you hope to serve that way?

Niko Farrell 19:03

I hope to Yeah, absolutely. It's going to provide some obstacles, but it's their obstacles that I'm excited to approach. Sure. And it's something that I have wanted to do for a long time. It took a lot of convincing but ready to go all in on that type of thing. So very excited for that.

Mike Hoffman 19:21

That's good. And that's one of the exciting things I think about students at Graceland, regardless of Community of Christ affiliation, but is the ability to take on leadership roles and you know, the whole leadership program that is a possibility for students. So I'm really glad to hear that you're interested in pursuing that. I think that's great. All right. So that wraps things up for this episode of Coffee in the Swarm. Thanks for listening. This is Julie and Mike signing off. Until next time, thank you. Thanks, Niko.

Niko Farrell 19:52

Of course.

Josh Mangelson 20:01

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