

Heidi Fair Trade

Tue, Dec 20, 2022 11:51PM • 50:29

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mormon, community, mission, christ, missionary, people, point, teach, family, life, mtc, byu, hamer, dominican republic, utah, tragedy, students, person, religion, testimony

SPEAKERS

Josh Mangelson, Brittany Mangelson

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.

Brittany Mangelson 00:33

Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode of *Project Zion Podcast*. This is Brittany Mangelson and I am super excited for today's episode. This has been an episode several months in the making but really like longer than that, because I've been friends with this person for longer than just several months, and I've wanted to get her on the podcast ever since we met because her story is awesome. So, how's that for an introduction? My friend Heidi Ramirez is going to be on the podcast today as part of our "Fairtrade" series where we talk about faith transition. So, Heidi was recently baptized and confirmed a member of Community of Christ in kind of a unique way. And so, we'll get to that probably in a little bit. But first, Heidi, thank you for coming on and sharing your story. Why don't you just give us a quick introduction. I've already said your name, but where you're from, just anything that you briefly want to share with the folks.

Heidi Ramirez 01:30

Thank you, Brittany. So, like Brittany said, I'm Heidi Ramirez. I am from Orlando, Florida. I've lived here for 18 years, and I feel this is the longest time that we've lived in a particular place. And so even though I was born and raised in California, I do consider Orlando, Florida, my home. This is where my three children were raised. And, yeah. I am a, I teach English for academic purposes, which is basically for all the English learners that are coming from, most of my students are international students coming to the United States, and they want to, they were attorneys, or doctors, rocket scientists, in their home countries, come to United States looking for a new and a better life, and they need those English skills to be able to pass the NCLEX, to be able to pass the bar. And so, they come to me for English classes. So, and then, I am also very much, in the particular college that I work at, Valencia College, they have a Peace and Justice Institute, and I am also very engaged in the work with Peace and Justice Institute. So that's just a little bit about me.

Brittany Mangelson 02:41

Awesome. I'm so excited to dive into this. And usually, we just start at the beginning, whatever the beginning looks like for you. So not only are we going to be talking about you joining Community of Christ, but also just anything that you want to share about your faith transition. So, starting out, what did faith and religion look like for you growing up?

Heidi Ramirez 03:07

So, starting out, I was born and raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, so it wasn't, it was a choice for me. I was born into the religion. I come from what people would call pioneer stock. My great grandparents, great, great grandparents crossed the plains into the Utah Valley, and so, or the Salt Lake Valley. And so, Mormonism runs deep, deep, deep in my blood, in my genetics. I was always very, very devout, very, very orthodox. I did all the things you're supposed to do, plus even more. I was, I was in it to win it. I was all, all, all in. Now that I look at it, I was probably a little bit obnoxious about it. But I did all the things. So, you know, starting out in Young Women's, I was always like the beehive in Mia Maid, Laurel. I went through the ranks. I was the secretary. I was the counselor. I was the president. Did all those things. Attended early morning seminary four years, went to BYU. I only applied to one university. I didn't know, even back then, that you could apply to more than one university. Nobody taught me. Nobody guided me. So, I applied to Brigham Young University, which is now Brigham Young University Provo, got accepted there, went there, didn't know there were other choices to even go other places to school. And then I always, always wanted to go on a mission. I was that person who, there was always this rumor mill going around, that sister missionaries were going to be allowed to go on a mission earlier than the age of 21. And I remember being in second or third grade, writing a story about how I wanted to go on a mission, and I would be a missionary someday. So, this was something that was part of my life plan, serving a mission for the church. And so, I went in with these rumors going around. I was so excited for them to announce, during general conference, that yes, indeed, sisters would be able to go, and not at 21, but at 20, or 19, or what have you. So, I would go every single, it was the Saturday two o'clock pm session, when they would do all the big announcements. I would be there in person ready for that announcement. And it never came. It never came. Fast forward to the time when I was turning 21. I was dating someone. And, you know, that's what you do when you're at BYU, right? It was the old standard joke when I was there, that the girls weren't there to get a degree, they were there to get an Mrs. degree or basically to get married. And I hate to say it, but that was kind of my thing. I wasn't really into the school aspect of it. I was studying elementary education, but I really wasn't studying. My goal, my whole focus in life, was to find a husband and support him in whatever he would do for the rest of his life. So, I was dating this guy, I'll keep his name anonymous, and at the time, I was like, you know, I didn't really think that we would have a future-future. It was fun at the moment, but I couldn't see myself with him for time and all eternity. And when I went to go get my mission papers, my, I went to the bishop, I went to the stake president, and they knew I was dating someone, and basically, I had to go, I think it was four or five times until they finally gave me my mission papers, because I was told that my mission and my job was to get married. It didn't matter that I had received my own personal revelation that this was not going to be a long-term thing. But yeah, so that was, that was a story in and of itself, trying to finally, finally have someone listen to my voice that yes, I want to go on a mission. No, I was in the Japanese program. I use that term lightly. I wasn't officially accepted, but my intended minor was Japanese. Everyone in the Japanese program got their mission calls to Japan. I was the only person who got my mission call to

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. And at the time, I thought that was exactly what God had in mind for me, because back in the day also, taking it back to when I was eight years, nine years, 10 years old, we used to do these things when we would go get our picture taken as a family, stick our photos in the *Book of Mormon* and write like our little testimony. And every time we did that, we would send our *Book of Mormons* to Dominican Republic. And so, I thought, you know what, I'm gonna go to the Dominican Republic, and I am going to find my *Book of Mormon* with my family there. Never did, but we did find a missionary that would take our *Book of Mormons* and distribute them. We did, I did meet a family who had a *Book of Mormon* signed by that particular missionary. But I just figured the whole time that that was my, kind of my thing. And so, I was called. The first day I went to the Dominican, or excuse me, the first thing I entered into the MTC, that was an interesting experience. I still had my boyfriend and we had decided we would write each other, like every Mormon couple does, young couple does. And he took me to the MTC, and at the time, they would do their little welcome to the MTC and this is like the first day of the rest of your life and blah, blah, blah. And at that point, they said, "Missionaries out one door and then family members and friends out the other door." And at that point, my boyfriend followed me out the missionary door. That happened to be his very first day working as an instructor at the MTC, so that was super fabulous and fun. We basically, you know, I was a very, very, I was a rule follower, and I was not going to break any mission rules and run into my boyfriend at the MTC, even though every single day, we did our little walks around the campus and I would see my scooter in the parking lot of the MTC. My friends were in his classes and everything. And so, that was, you know, just, okay, am I going to make it? I would have dreams. I would have nightmares, I guess, that I would be packing up my suitcase and just running down 9th East, toward his apartment and like, "Okay, okay, I guess I'll marry you after all. I'm not meant to go on a mission. And that was like a recurring dream while I was in the MTC. I ended up making it out of the MTC and to Dominican Republic. I was called, my mission call was changed, the first, sort of the second week, that I was in the MTC, and I was called to be a welfare missionary. What exactly is that? It is, instead of proselyting, instead of the focus being on proselyting, knocking on doors, and bringing people to Christ, and teaching them all the things, we're looking more at the temporal welfare of people. And so, just like in the *Book of Mormon*, when Nephi broke his bow, and people were, you know, like his family members were super mad. They were actually ready to kill him, because he had broken their only way of getting food. Obviously, in that particular moment, Nephi's family was not ready to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ, because they had temporal needs that needed to be met. And so, this is kind of the premise of the welfare program. People can't be ready for the gospel of Jesus Christ, if they're hungry, if they don't have a job, if they don't know how to read the *Book of Mormon* to get a testimony of the *Book of Mormon*, etc. And so, we would spend a lot of our time going out into the little villages. We taught, we taught people how to read, and so, then, they would be able to, the first thing they would read was *The Book of Mormon*. First sentence they ever learned how to read was "Cristo me ama", which means Jesus loves me. We taught, there was this one village where people were dying left and right, just dead, dead, dead. And it was like what is going on in this little village? And so, we went in, and we found out that they were drinking from the little stream that would come down through their little village, and further up the stream, there was a dead and diseased cow. And so, they were drinking this water, and then they were getting sick and dying. So, we figured, you know, we need to teach them how to purify their water. And so, we would teach them how to either boil the water before they start cooking with it, or put a little bit of Clorox bleach in the water. We taught, what are some of the welfare things we did?

Heidi Ramirez 12:56

We taught people how to ride bikes. So instead of, people don't really have the time, you know, everybody, having a car was a complete luxury, almost unheard of. So, everybody would walk everywhere they went. I spent a lot of time serving out in the campo, out in the countryside, where there's not really public transportation, per se. And so, if we could teach people how to ride a bike, they could get from point A to point B a lot faster, as they're trying to even do their visits for church, instead of having to walk from point A to point B. And then we would teach future leaders how to do their leadership thing. I knew Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the time had a handbook of instructions that have all the things of how to do everything. I had that handbook of instructions memorized. I could tell you on page such and such this paragraph, this side of the page. I knew all the things. So, we would teach future branch presidents how to be a branch president, elders quorum president, how to be an elders quorum president, Relief Society presidents, how to be Relief Society presidents. We would do all the things. We would be like in a counselor position and they would then be put at the, the president position. Little bit trickier, like when it comes to elders quorum president and branch president, because of course women don't have the priesthood and we can't have those. So, we would just kind of work behind the scenes quietly telling them what they needed to do and how they needed to do their particular callings. Had a wonderful mission. It was, it was incredible experience, and got home from my mission, finished up BYU, graduated college, went back to California, had to figure out what am I going to do with the rest of my life, and I decided I would go into teaching. Now in California, teaching, you have to have a fifth year, which is basically your first year of graduate school. In order to be a teacher, you can't just have a four-year bachelor's degree. And so, I ended up going into teaching. Here I am about 25, now almost 25 and a half, which is pretty old for being a Mormon woman and not married. Let's just put it that's, there's a whole other story for whole other date. Just to make it quick and easy, I did end up going back to Dominican Republic on vacation, ended up crossing paths again with who is now my husband of almost 27 years, and we got married in California, in the open temple, and lived our happily ever after Mormon life. By this point, I had done all the things that you were supposed to do as a Mormon girl. I had gradu-, I didn't graduate seminary, so I guess that was one thing I was not supposed. Yeah, that's a whole, didn't graduate from seminary, but I attended four years of seminary, attended BYU, went on a mission, got married in the temple. So, I was on my fast track to Mormon heaven, continued on through my years. We were, we lived in California and then moved to Orlando. We were what was known, especially here, people outside of the Mormon belt call it the mission field, and we were the family that's known as, basically that we were part of the 10% doing 90% of the work in the congregations, or the 5% doing the 95% of the work. That was, that was me. That was my husband, and life was good. I just continued going through the motions doing all the things; early morning scripture study, going to the temple often, praying, doing all the Mormon things you're supposed to do, paying your 10% tithing, and just all the checklists. I was, I was doing everything, everything, everything, everything. I guess, probably around, well, it was around, it was around the November 2015, the Exclusion Policy, that was when my world kind of started to get rocked a little bit. There was a family in our branch that was directly affected and impacted by that Exclusion Policy. And I just remember thinking, wow, wow, is this really, really happening? This is not cool, not cool at all. I, I, it just feels icky. And is this the way that God would really have it? Or is this what, is this what? I just, I guess I was just speechless, and I didn't really know how to handle it. At the time, I was in the Young Women's presidency, and we had our young women who started asking a lot of questions, a lot of questions, a lot of questions dealing with the family proclamation and marriage

between a man and a woman, and, and I kind of, at that point, I think was when I started to kind of go off the chains a little bit, and not quite continue to go along with the script. And then fast forward a few more years to the Pulse tragedy. One of my students was a victim of the pulse tragedy. For those who don't know, the Pulse tragedy, it was a gay, LGBTQ+ nightclub here in Orlando, Florida, and a shooter entered the club and 49 victims died in that tragedy. That was life changing for me. It was life changing. At the time, you know I had, I had had, I had, I had had several students who had come out as gay, who had been kicked out of their homes and had just been going through struggles, and I started to see that. I was kind of more of a behind the scenes ally, but very, very much in allegiance with my religion, and I didn't know whether there was space for my allyship or advocacy journey within that realm, so I was very, very quiet about it.

Heidi Ramirez 20:006

Now, it was during the time of the Pulse tragedy, a couple of things happened. Number 1, my son went almost a month without leaving his bedroom. Just to get him to come outside to the kitchen table to eat dinner with us was a big feat. He would stay in his room and he would just hide under his blankets and just be in the fetal position. And at that point, I knew, I knew there was something more than just him being empathetic and compassionate towards those who were lost in the Pulse tragedy. The other thing that happened was my students. They knew I was Mormon, because every single part of the very beginning of every semester, I would let them know. It was part of who I was. It was very, very much part of my identity, and who I was. They would notice I would dress different. They would notice I wouldn't be drinking coffee. They wouldn't, I wouldn't go out and be partying, and there were certain things that were very, very specific to me and my identity. So, they knew who I was. And at the time of the tragedy, they were looking to me for comfort and for guidance, because they were mourning the loss of their classmate, of my student. I'm trying to be strong for them, trying to be that pillar of strength, and I was breaking inside. At the same time, they told me, "Aren't you Mormon? How can you be an ally if you're a Mormon?" And then the same thing goes through. How can you, so how can you be an ally if you're Mormon? And how can you be a Mormon if you're ally, an ally? I did not have the answers to those questions? I didn't know there could be space for both. That was the beginning, I think, of my kind of like, the unraveling, and this was not going to work for me anymore. The leaders could say things over the pulpit, command things over the pulpit, with that fear, with that doom, with that gloom, and you better believe I was a rule follower. I was ready to fall in line. But it came to a point that it was like, once again, this feels icky. This does not feel right. I can't support this.

Heidi Ramirez 23:09

I can't do this. We ended up moving to Utah, I got a job, I got a promotion, ended up moving to Utah. And I know that that was part of God's plan. I needed to move to Utah, because I needed to become affiliated with groups of support groups; Mama Dragons, Affirmation: LGBTQ+, LGBTQ Mormons, Families and Friends, Encircle, LOVELOUD. I needed to meet like-minded people, like-minded parents, like-minded souls, who were, who still wanted to have a religious, or a spiritual, or a faith-filled life, who still wanted to look good for good in the community, and for good in others, and not have this doom and gloom, and you are welcome in our church, but you are welcome except. That was just not going to work for me anymore. So that is kind of where my unraveling truly started.

Brittany Mangelson 24:35

So, Heidi, thank you so much for sharing all of that. That is a lot to unpack. I'm really, what stands out to me is how committed you were and how you had to, really, I mean, I don't want to say fight, but like fight for the ability to go on a mission and to use your voice and to push against those gender, strict gender norms. And then as you got older and had your family and all the things, like you were faced with, kind of, in a way, that same issue that that strict heteronormative model of what family and love should look like, and your expansive understanding of love, and of love of people, love of service, love of community, that that's ultimately what was your breaking point. And it's interesting because that, like, same impulse is what kept you committed to the LDS church. Like, the undercurrent of love is what I hear from, like, both ends of your story, right. And there was limitations on that love, limitations on how you could serve and love, and limitations on how the LGBTQIA+ community could serve and love, and recognizing that there was a big incongruence there. I just think it's, it just speaks, it just says a lot that ultimately, you love too big for the LDS church. And that's, that's what it comes down to. From my perspective, that's a good problem to have, right, like that your love is more inclusive, that your grace, that your understanding of God is more inclusive. So, thank you for sharing that. And I don't know if I realized that one of the victims of the Pulse shooting was one of your students. I actually just mentioned the Pulse shooting in my sermon just the day before yesterday, and looped it in with so many other massive tragedies here in the United States, because of our love for guns and our hatred towards one another. So, I'm really sorry to hear that it hit so close to home for you. So now, I guess, let's move on to finding Community of Christ. So, you were able to find like-minded Mormons, which I do have to say, you know, Utah gets a bad rap, but we do, really do here have this underground, kind of, subversive version of the LDS church, and they're, you know, wherever you'll find a lot of Mormons, there's going to be a lot of dissenting Mormons. So, I do think that that is really good that you were able to plug into that community. But what was the jump from there to then finding Community of Christ? And then what did you find in Community of Christ that got you interested?

Heidi Ramirez 27:35

Yes. So, and let me just, let me backtrack just a little bit. I kind of alluded to that fact, but let me just go ahead and say that, and why we did. So here I was finding my people in my community and during that time is when my son officially came out of the closet as gay. So, it all kind of just came together. I'm a firm believer that God was preparing my mind and my heart so the work that I was doing for my former student, Oska, and for my students, and out in the community, I think maybe my son needed to see that I was going to be okay and I was going to be a safe person, because he grew up in my household, and he knows how strict and how orthodox I was. So, let's fast forward then a few years. We had lived in Utah, and Utah was a horrible, horrible, horrible fit for my family. A couple of reasons. My family members had several incidents with racism, and then there was the homophobia and Utah, it's pretty safe to say that Utah was figuratively and literally killing us. Trigger warning; suicide, suicidal ideation. My son was suicidal for nearly one year and I use that as, that was his personality, that was his identity, that was him for an entire year. I didn't know when I would walk into his room, if I would find him alive, or if I would find him dead. And it started to take a toll on me as well. I finally had to get to the point and tell him, "We have done everything we can to let you know that we love you, and that you matter, and that you belong, and we want you to stay." In a last-ditch effort to save his life, we packed up all of our belongings and moved cross country back to Florida, back to home, in an attempt to save his life. There were many people that were, I guess, kind of skeptics, if you will. What if that doesn't work? You're spending so much money. You're moving on your dime. What if it doesn't work? And my response was,

but what if it does? But what if it does? And I can tell you, it did work. It did work. We moved back in Florida. And at this point, I'm definitely a changed person. I would be what was considered at the time, a nuanced Mormon or a progressive Mormon. I was that Mormon who was trying to stay, because I was going to be a change maker from within the organization. I was that person who sat on the front row of Sunday school Gospel doctrine and raised my hand when something racist or homophobic or transphobic was said, so I could say my piece and set things straight. I was that person who would do the same thing in Relief Society, or if something was said in the ward Facebook posts, same thing. I was going to be that spokesperson. I was going to speak up and speak out for those who didn't feel they had a voice. I felt that that was my mission. It was not last summer, but the summer before, the same Facebook community, they were doing a, they were kind of trying to do a, like, do themes and topics for each day. And so, they had asked for a testimony on the plan of salvation and families. Crickets, crickets. Nobody responded, nobody. And it's like, well, I'll do it. So, I volunteered to give my testimony of the plan of salvation and of families. Well, my testimony is a little bit different. My testimony is non-conventional. The day came that the testimony, that my testimony was to be posted on Facebook, so I spent hours, hours on this. I prayed. I meditated. I prayed some more. My mom was visiting at the time, and my mom hardly ever visits, so it's a big deal when she visits. But yet here I was. I had this pull that I needed to share my words and my story with someone in my ward.

Heidi Ramirez 33:33

It was never shared. I reached out to the social media person of the ward and she kind of skittishly said, "Oh, oh, oh, well, we're, it's waiting. It's on hold for a minute. It's, we're waiting. We're waiting." And then the stake, which is like a bunch of wards or a bunch of congregations, reached out to me and said that my testimony had been bubbled up to the stake presidency and to the mission presidency, and that parts of my testimony would be okay to share, but not all. My bishop had talked to me, then said that it was a great, beautiful story and testimony, but perhaps I should write it in a journal or only share it with very close family members and friends. That was my breaking point. That was my breaking point. This was my story. This was my testimony. This was my firm beliefs and someone was trying to rewrite my story. And that was at the point where I could no longer stay. I was done. And I was done forever. At that point, I had vowed to never, ever, ever step foot into a religious institution again. I was done. No more. And then, I had been following Sunstone, Sunstone community, and Lindsay was looking for volunteers for the Sunstone conference. And at this point, it was, the conference was virtual, most of it, and so, I volunteered to be a moderator for the conference. Sat in on several sessions, and it was amazing. Many different groups of those that started out in the Restoration tradition, and the tagline for Sunstone is "Many different ways to Mormon", I believe, and my heart started to break open. I thought maybe, well maybe I was just part of something that didn't quite fit for me, and maybe there is something that does fit for me, would be better. So, I, part of Sunstone, the very last day of the conference is a Sunday session, and it's traditionally, they do a worship service at Community of Christ, and so, I attended that virtual worship service. And also, part of Sunstone, I continually heard about John Hamer, John Hamer, Toronto Centre Place, Toronto Beyond the Walls, and I was like, what is this Beyond the Walls? What is this Toronto Centre Place? What is this? Who is John Hamer? This was when I started looking into it. So, on one Sunday I did the Sunstone service, the following Sunday I logged on for Beyond the Walls, though I didn't realize that they can see that you're seeing them. And so, when Leandro started saying, "Hello," and greeting everyone, I quickly logged off because I could not let anybody know that I was going to another congregation. I still had that Mormon fear, deeply,

deeply ingrained in me, and I thought for sure lightning was going to strike. And in the upcoming weeks, I had more and more confidence to stay on, and to even then start to interact with the different, like, they have kind of a chat going on in the YouTube channel and also Facebook. And that's kind of my beginning, and that is where it all started with Community of Christ. And then, in, it was like November, that I knew that this was my place. I knew it. Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it. And then probably in January was once again, I just received this very, very, no, it wasn't January, it would have been probably more like December, this very, very strong, strong feeling, intuition, whatever you want to call it, that, yes, I would eventually be baptized into Community of Christ and confirmed. And then of course, God has to send me a message of who is going to baptize me and who is going to confirm me. And I kind of laughed, because I didn't know Brittany Mangelson. I didn't know John Hamer. How would I get them to baptize me, confirmed me when they don't even know who I am? But yet once again, God is in the details of our lives, and I was able to meet you, Brittany. I was able to meet John. I was able to meet Leandro. And then that's when we fast forward to July 24, 2022, when I went to Salt Lake to do a pilgrimage, if you will, a pioneer journey back to where it all began with my pioneer ancestors, so I could be baptized, and confirmed a member of Community of Christ. And I looked at it not as, like, oh, I have to, like, be cleansed from my sins, and I'm such a sinner, and, oh, the Holy Ghost that I had before is no longer valid. I looked at it more of symbolism of, instead of me just working for me, which is kind of the mantra of the LDS Church, where you're in it for yourself, and hopefully everybody else, you're hopefully, the rest of your family will be on board as well and join you in Heaven, Mormon heaven. But for me, Community of Christ was more of a community. So, it was more of my commitment to not only myself, but to my community, my church community, my local community, just trying to make the world a better place, and my commitment to be more aligned with Jesus Christ, the peaceful one.

Brittany Mangelson 41:20

Ah, Heidi, my heart is like in my throat. I, just everything you said, I really, really appreciate. And again, it goes back to love. It's, you know, you choosing to be baptized and confirmed and join another religion wasn't about guilt, or shame, or sin, or anything like that. It was about commitment and love and recognizing that you could make a difference in this community, and this community could make a difference for you, and that collectively, we can make a difference in the world while still holding on to your heritage, while still holding on to, you know, the things, the things that you are actively choosing to take forward into this next phase of your faith. So, yeah, I'm, I just, it, it seems so interesting hearing this story from you from, like, this vantage point, because I feel like I've always known you, which is really, like, cliché and cheesy, but it's totally true. And you've been part of our Forward with Community classes and our worship services for what feels like forever. And I know that you've been an integral part of Beyond the Walls. And yeah, it just, it feels like it's always just been there. It feels like it's just always been our, our collective reality. And the fact that you chose to be baptized on July 24, which is Pioneer Day, it's a big day here in Utah, and in, you know, the collective Mormon Church, to do like that reversal trek, to do that reversal pilgrimage, to then go "back across the plains" and join the Reorganization. Like, I just, I think it was so poetic and beautiful, and I was just really glad to be part of it. So, thank you so much for sharing your story. And I think that it's going to be relatable to a lot of people and hopefully bring some healing and hope. I am curious, I usually like to ask, what are your hopes for Community of Christ? Or if you could talk to people who are seeking and maybe first learning about Community of Christ now, what would you say to them? And what are your hopes for the future in this faith community?

Heidi Ramirez 43:47

That's a good question. I don't know as I have an answer. It's funny because you know, you can take the Mormon out of Mormonism, and I am still like, I feel like I'm on a mission, and now my mission is to tell everybody about Community of Christ. And then I have to remind myself, oh, yeah, yeah, like, we don't really proselyte and we don't, that's one thing that one of my first friends that I had in Community of Christ pulled me aside and said, "Hey, you just need to let, you just need to know that Community of Christ is not going to proselyte. They're not going to try to convert you. You're gonna have to kind of do your own work for this because they're not going to be." And so, it seems like I talk to everybody about Community of Christ, everybody, everybody, everybody. I am an unofficial missionary for Community of Christ. I, my future, I don't know. I would love to just become more involved in the Community of Christ. I've been kind of on a, I used to always joke about this, that I, I remember that there was a point when I had four callings in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and I was burnt. I was reaching my burning out point, and then I was approached for a fifth calling, and I said, "No, no, no, no." And then I was given all that guilt for saying, "No" for, to that fifth calling. I was like, I figured, doing four different things, and I'm good. I'm good. So, I've been kind of like on church vacation, if you will, for a little over three years now, where I'm not working basically 'round the clock for church related things. I would love, I'm ready to get back to work. I'm ready to get back to doing something, anything. I don't know what that's going to look like, but I'm ready to serve. I, as I mentioned in the beginning, I do a lot with the Peace and Justice Institute here in Central Florida. I think there's a lot, a lot, a lot of good I'm thinking can be done with, I don't know, somehow maybe getting Peace and Justice Institute and Community of Christ together somehow? I don't know. I don't know. I don't have an answer yet, but I'm ready to do whatever I am called to do. I'm ready.

Brittany Mangelson 46:19

Heidi, I absolutely love that you seem really open to just whatever, whatever comes your way next. And your ministry absolutely is, again, grounded in love, and grounded in peace and justice, and always looking for the underdog, or the group, the community that religion and society at large tends to push out. And I think having a biracial family and a family with a gay son really puts you in the position to use your white, straight, privilege to be that advocate and be that bridge that so many, so many people in marginalized communities need, right? And it's, you know, it's, it's, it's the, it's the folks in power that are pushing people out, and so, we need more people to recognize that and to bring peace and justice into religious discord, because so much harm has been done by religion. So, I'm just saying I'm really glad that you did not give up on religion completely, although I absolutely understand that that's the right path for some folks. But I am really glad that you've been able to make it work. And you've been able to bring that advocacy and peace and justice into your local community as well as the larger Latter-day Seeker movement and within general Community of Christ. I think it's really, really awesome. So, is there anything else that, I always, you know, just like to make sure that you were able to get out whatever you wanted to say? I don't want to leave this if there's more. Is there anything else that you wanted to share with us?

Heidi Ramirez 48:13

Not that comes to mind right now. But you know, me, I always have more. So, if you ever have anything that you want to go into more, you let me know and we could delve deeper.

Brittany Mangelson 48:24

No, I love that open invitation. And I absolutely might take you up on that, because I really, like I said, I really do think that it takes folks who have walked down that path of, of having their entire worldview shift. I mean, there's a lot of parents of gay kids, who, whether they were Mormon or some other, in some other denomination that's not fully inclusive and affirming, that have not taken the path that you've taken, right, that do exclude, that do punish, that do, you know. And I, I just think it's really important that folks, parents, realize that there is a third way. There's a way to be a faithful Christian and also a fierce, loving, advocate for the queer community, and to also recognize and respond to white supremacy and racism, and how that is equally harmful, and it's all intertwined with each other, you know. So, I would personally love to unpack some of that, maybe in a future episode with you. So, I'm serious. I might take you up on that...

Heidi Ramirez 49:39

Absolutely, absolutely.

Brittany Mangelson 49:42

...invitation. But yeah, I just have all the love for you and your family, and thank you again for sharing your story. And I know that, again, it's going to be relatable and help a lot of people.

Heidi Ramirez 49:52

Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it.

Josh Mangelson 50:03

Thanks for listening to Project Zion Podcast. Project Zion Podcast is a Ministry 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 Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze