

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.

Brittany : [00:33](#) Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of Project Zion podcast. This is Brittany and I will be your host for today and we will be bringing you another episode in our Fair Trade series, which is all about faith that transitions and faith journey and experiences of face with members of Community of Christ. So today I'm going to be talking with Dr Kris Black who lives in Oakland, California and attends the Walnut Creek congregation. And I must say that Chris and I first met in 2014 possibly.

Kris: [01:07](#) Yeah. You know, I, it was even before 13, maybe?

Brittany : [01:11](#) It was a little while ago, but a women's retreat in Salt Lake out of the Salt Lake congregation. Um, and Kris was a sociology major and I just felt like, um, you know, she had leaps and bounds of experience ahead of me where I wanted to be. It was like I was peering into my future meeting Kris. And so we just had such great conversations in that retreat and I've been silently stalking her on the Internet ever since. This was recently ordained an elder at the end of June in her congregation and she currently serves as a counselor to the pastor of the Walnut Creek congregation and she's in conversation with the pastor and with her congregation as a possible transition into the role of pastor next year. So we will see where that takes her. But Kris, I'm really glad that you, you said yes to joining us on Project Zion. So welcome!

Kris: [02:13](#) Oh, thank you. I'm so glad you asked me. I've been secretly stalking you too. So you know, when I, when I met you Brittany, you were just so enthusiastic about everything. I think you were kind of in the middle of your faith transition journey as well. And yeah, we just connected on somebody levels and I felt like I'd found a soul sister. So I think I, you know, and maybe I'm speaking out of turn, but I just think that we both kind of really helped each other through all of the bumps and, and journeys, you know, bumps that come along in this journey of faith and, and it's been nice to, to know that you're there with me. So yeah, it has to be able to chat with you about this.

Brittany : [02:54](#) Yeah, I feel the exact same way. And I think that in my, in my conversations with you, we see the world very similarly and I just felt like you brought such a wisdom to our conversations

that was helpful and a good perspective. So I'm excited to get to know you a little bit better in this conversation. It'll be good.

Kris: [03:13](#)

Thanks.

Brittany : [03:14](#)

So usually with our Fair Trade episodes, we kind of start at the beginning, wherever the beginning looks like for you. So I'm curious to know what faith and religion looks like for you when you were growing up and maybe into young adulthood and

Kris: [03:29](#)

Oh sure. Yeah.

Brittany : [03:31](#)

What did that look like in your family life and personal life?

Kris: [03:35](#)

Well, growing up in central Utah, Springville, little town, just south of Provo, it look very conservative. You know, I was born and raised as a Mormon. Um, so when I say born as a Mormon, um, ancestors on both sides were LDS. I had converts on my mother's side and my father's side were part of the pioneer group that came in and helped settle Utah specifically in the Blanding area. So long family history of Mormonism, um, polygamy, you know, in my great-grandfather. So I'm related to quite a bit, you know, pretty, pretty good chunk of southern Utah and, you know, just that whole kind of quintessential Mormon upbringing. So, yeah, go to church on Sundays, baptized, go to primary, uh, went through seminary as a young teen. Um, my family was really involved in the church on some levels, but not orthodox on other levels. So it's kind of an odd mix of being, um, gosh, I don't even know how to explain it. It was a, we didn't do the thing of observing the sabbath to the point of not going shopping or you know, like a lot of Utah County families did. Um, but we did go to church and we went camping a lot of Sundays rather than go to church as well. So, you know, was this kind of interesting mix of Mormonism and, and non-active type of lifestyle. Um, but I think in the end we were really, you know, pretty, pretty average, pretty average Mormon kid. One of the things that wasn't averaged though I started noticing about myself like, especially as a really young girl, instead of playing dress up as a bride, I would play, dress up as a nun. And so I had this really early attraction to religion. And I remember like one of my first boyfriends, uh, and eighth, seventh grade, you know, like, you know, really young, I can't really call him a boyfriend.

Kris: [05:57](#)

You know, this kid that I had a crush on gave me my first Catholic metal patron saint metal. And I fell in love with them. And I mean, not him, but the metals, the saints. And started wearing crosses and um, you know, and like I was told that

Mormon girls don't do that. And I wanted to go visit other churches and that really wasn't encouraged either. So it was this odd mix of feeling a pole in an area outside of Mormonism from a very early age. I tried my very best to conform to Mormonism and part of me could just never quite go there. So I spent the biggest part of the first 30 years of my life trying to be the, the good Mormon girl. Ultimately I failed and officially left the church, um, around age 30. And there's a lot of personal and family drama tied up in that, that I really not gonna talk about. but I just felt like my time was with the church was done. And so remember, this was in the time of, um, ERA and women's rights. And that was one of the biggest issues for me is the place of women in the church. And it just got to the point where it was, um, no longer sustainable for me to belong to a church that I couldn't fully support in ways and that I felt didn't fully support me. So I left and spent the next hh, 20 years or so going from everything between atheism to Wiccanism in fact, as, and I claimed being a none- n o n e for quite, quite a few years. Uh, but I still really loved religion. And it was when I, um, took a class in gosh, what was it, physics or something like that that I really under that changed my idea of God and turned God from this vindictive Old Testament type of person into more of an idea.

Kris:

[08:26](#)

So then I started exploring religion a little bit more again, more seriously. Um, kind of went through this phase of exploring, you know, church shopping. I fell in love with the Episcopalians. It felt like Catholic light. And you know, for awhile I claimed Episcopal Pagan because it was this mix of being empowered as a woman in paganism, but the ritual of Episcopalianism that I really loved. Um, and of course, bringing my saints in with things again and part of that journey was becoming a certified spiritual director. And I worked in ecumenical type of situations. Uh, although I did study with Benedictine nuns, they were so sweet. Uh, I remember they told me, I mean, you know, at first I told them, you know, my, my complicated relationship with religion and they would always check in with me. It's like, okay, is this too religious for you?

Kris:

[09:30](#)

You know, are we spending too much time on Bible, you know, old testament kinds of stuff. Uh, and they were just amazing. And so it really helped me kind of forward my own spiritual journey more. And it helped me kind of frame what, um, what you and I refer to a seekers kind of this journey of, you know, seeing what works for you and what doesn't and, and deciding, you know, being purposeful in how you pick and choose what you wanted to carry with you and what needs to be set aside. Um, my undergrad degree is in philosophy and I took

philosophy of religion and really I started to see where religion fit in with that and how, um, religion and how people live their religion is really how they live their personal philosophy and how, you know, philosophy kind of hits the road. So went on to do my graduate work in sociology of religion because I felt like that was really, you know, religion happens in community and being able to kind of frame that in that context made a lot of sense to me.

Kris: [10:40](#)

Um, and when it came time to do my dissertation, they told me to pick, uh, a religious group to focus on that I had some experience with. I did my master's on a black church and of course, being a white girl from Utah County, I didn't have a lot of experience with black church. Um, so they suggested I, you know, I do something a little closer to home. So I thought, well, you know, maybe I looked back into Mormonism. That seems like there's a lot of interesting things going on there. So I started attending, um, Mormon churches. And I don't remember that first time that I went back. It was in 2008 and I sat in the parking lot for about half an hour before I walked in. And I kept telling myself, I don't have to stay, I can leave at any time, but if I walked through those doors, I have to walk through with an open heart and an open mind.

Kris: [11:40](#)

And it was incredible. I found a community and this was in New Jersey. I found a community that wasn't anything like, what are you remembered Mormonism being? And I fell in love again with Mormons and, um, decided to do my dissertation on the idea of ward family. And, um, in that process, you know, I had to promise that I wouldn't convert to anything while I was doing my dissertation work and which was a wonderful space to be in, you know, so I did participant observation type of research. Fast forward, um, to, well, let me back up and just put in one little detail the missionaries that I had there when it, cause I thought, well, I want to make sure I get this right. So I agreed to visit some missionaries again and um, I saw lots of missionaries in New Jersey, went through a lot of out of companion pairs, but this one group, this, this, these two specific missionaries that came and visited me, they were incredible.

Kris: [12:54](#)

Elder Davis and Elder Ogwin. And I said, well, you know, if I ever do get baptized again, I'll, you know, I'll call you guys. And they said, no, when you, when you get baptized, no matter where you are, we will be there. We will come and we'll baptize you. I said, OK. So, um, fast forward to 2015 when I come to the Bay Area, still looking at where monism. By this time I had published my book, uh, had graduated with Phd and thought, well, maybe I haven't felt this connection to Mormonism because I haven't

rejoined. I, I'm still feel as an outsider. So, and the Mormon group here in Oakland was again, an incredible group. They were forward thinking. They had, um, there was a couple of gay members in the congregation. They had this open idea toward women. Um, and I thought, well, maybe if I was more active it would make sense to me again because in all of my looking around, um, I always felt like there's this bit of me, it's almost like in my DNA growing up Mormon, you can never really get rid of that and get rid of, maybe isn't the right term, but you know, it's always part of you.

Kris: [14:19](#) It becomes part of your identity and who you are and how you process things, how you make sense of the world. And so I thought, well, maybe I should give it another shot. Maybe I just, you know, jump to conclusions too quickly. Or maybe the church really has changed in the past 20 years. So I decided to get rebaptized and I call those two missionaries and they came, they came from Utah to baptize me in Oakland. It was incredible. It was this amazing experience. Sadly, my timing could not have been worse cause this wasn't 2015, I got baptized in May, in November is when they announced the policy, the dreaded policy about not being able to baptize children of gay members. It was, it was awful. And, and I just felt gutted. I just felt like so betrayed. And then in 2016, I got cancer and it just felt like, you know, life's just too short.

Kris: [15:29](#) I need to do something that really feeds my soul and I need to stop trying so hard to fit into something that it obviously just never gonna work. So it was at this point that I contacted, um, Robin Linkhart. So, and I had met you, you know, so in my church hopping, I had met you in Utah and I'd met Robin Linkhart and, and told her that I had moved to the bay area and she says, Oh, you need to contact on Walnut Creek. I think you would really enjoy visiting them. So I did. And uh, um, took me a little while, but I eventually contacted Gail Roennenberg, Ronneberg, I'm sorry. And she's the pastor there. And she welcomed me. And um, so I went to church and they were just really warm and welcoming and really easy to love. And after going there for awhile, I thought this is perfect because I felt like I don't have to give up my Mormon identity.

Kris: [16:35](#) I don't have to get up some of the things that I truly love about their religion, but it's like the best. They're living their best life. It's open and affirming. Women can be ordained into the priesthood. It's like everything I wanted Mormonism to be, they were, and they spoke that language of Mormon, you know what I mean? It's like, and so it felt home, it felt like home in so many ways and I just, I have just never been so happy and it's just like

coming home in a way, but to a home that better than when I left it, if that makes sense. And, and I just like dove in head first because it felt like, I mean, at my age, I really want to do as much as I can and be as active as I can. So, and, and having spent so much time looking and searching and all the research that I've done, it's like, well, I've already done the hard work, spiritual work, um, theologically looking as well as, you know, spiritual and praying and stuff.

Kris:

[17:52](#)

So I've felt like, you know, this really is what I want to do. So I just put my heart and soul into it and was ordained in June and, um, yeah, so ordained as an elder and it's just been, I mean, and there's, so the first time that I went to the church that you go to now in Salt Lake, that congregation, it was after Sunstone and I don't remember who blessed the sacrament that week, but it was a woman and I was just reduced to tears just hearing that prayer in a woman's voice. I mean, and I still get emotional when I think about it. And the very first Sunday that they asked me to do that, it's like, oh, I could barely get through the prayer. It's, Oh, it's just, yeah, it's still brings me to tears and it gives me goosebumps. Um, something that I thought I could never do. And it always felt like in the Mormon Church that I wanted, I was so hungry for God and it felt like God didn't want me because I was a woman and in Community to Christ, it feels like I could bring my whole self that everyone can bring their whole self, your past, your sexuality, your gender, your race, your address. I mean your economic status, everything, every single part of you is welcome. And that's just incredible.

Brittany :

[19:31](#)

What a story. Uh, I did not know most of those details. I must say like, you know, I, I got to give you Kudos for trying so hard to make it work in the Mormon church. I mean to leave at a young age and then to come back a couple decades later and just say this has changed and I'm going to give it another go to then only be let down in such a devastating way right around the corner. I mean that's rough, but I, I didn't realize that you are a spiritual director as well that you have that I think is really awesome. And it's interesting because when I think of my time in the LDS church, granted I was not an adult in the LDS church for very long. I left when I was 26, so it wasn't even a full decade really, that I had as far as like being a grown up in the church. Um, but as far as spiritual direction and spiritual practices go, I mean, those were things that I, I think that's what I was starving for. And so I think it's interesting because I've recently been in touch with a lot of people who are leaving the LDS church. Um, Gina Colvin has a group about Mormons, exMormons who are interested in spiritual formation. But I see such a growing, I don't know if I would say movement, but I'll say for lack of a

better word, movement of Mormons and former Mormons who are interested in spirituality and spiritual direction goes right along with that. So I think it's interesting that that was a, a stop on your journey.

Kris: [21:10](#) So kind of that goes along with that. I started this online group called Theo Thursday. It's theothursday.com and we meet via zoom the first Thursday of every month and anyone can join and, and it's just kind of this open conversation about spiritual issues. So yeah. Anyone who wants to join, go to the theothursday.com and sign up.

Brittany : [21:36](#) For sure. Yeah, we can leave that link in the description of this episode or can know where to get to it. Oh Man. I feel like I have a million questions now. Um, so I guess one question that I have is after it, it would seem like, and I don't mean to put a words or an emotion on your journey, like project it on there, but it seems like it, you would feel very betrayed after what you went through. You know, going through all these different, uh, churches and all these spiritual experiences and trainings and education and church hopping and then to try to settle back into the church of your childhood. Only then be devastated. I mean, I'm just impressed that you gave another church a second thought, really. I think that there's a lot of people who have been through a lot less who just feel so betrayed and jaded on faith communities. So I guess I'm wondering how you were able to trust a church again?

Kris: [22:43](#) Yeah. Well it was, you know, and I'm glad you asked that because just to kind of preface this, one of the things that I notice is that people expect them to be really angry with the church. And even now I'm not. Um, and to be quite honest with you, I'm not sure why. Hmm. Um, I think probably because all of the, the research and education that I have in religion, I know religion is perfect. Everyone has their flaws. Um, and I think for me, going back and giving them another chance had more to do with, I fell in love with the people and I felt like maybe they just need more, well, and, and I don't want to sound, um, egotistical, but I thought, well, maybe I can help change the church from the inside. Maybe the church just needs more people who thinks the same way I do.

Kris: [23:48](#) Um, and, and so I thought, well, you know, maybe leaving at age 30, like you said, you know, not really spending a lot of time as an adult in there. Maybe I just didn't give it as much of a fair chance as I should have and maybe I didn't, maybe the fault was mine. So I wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt. And I think part of that kind of comes from just life experience. You

know, that you realize you were part in something in any relationship, whether it's with another person or an institution. Um, so I just kind of realized, well, maybe I didn't give it my fair shot and maybe I just need, you know, not growing up super orthodox. I thought, well, maybe if I was orthodox, maybe it would work for me, you know, maybe let me just try it a different way.

Kris: [24:36](#) Um, so full self-disclosure, I, I'm, I have now been married three times. I'm married to my current husband, um, six years now, so I'm not wanting to give up easily, you know. Okay. I'm willing to try it again. You know, even though we've been hurting and you know, heart run through the ringer, I'm willing to give it another go. So maybe it's just part of my personal makeup. That's just the way that I am. Um, and you know, and I'm not angry at the church. I feel sadness that it's not what I would really like it to be. Cause I think it does a lot of good for a lot of people. Um, but I'm just not one of those people, you know, I needed to find something that was more true to who I am and, you know, and in both times that I left the church, the kind of like the line in the sand was actually temple, going through the temple.

Kris: [25:38](#) So this last time I went to the point where, you know, they said, well, you know, if you want to go through the temple, that's the next step. And I really had to stop and think about, well, as a woman married to a nonmember, what does that mean for me going through the temple? And started looking at that and, and I just thought, no, I just can't, I just, I just can't go there. I just can't, you know, in, in every sense of the word. And, and if I wasn't going to go through the temple my stake president asked me, well, what's the next step then on your spiritual journey? And I felt like there were no steps left with the LDS church.

Brittany : [26:19](#) Wow. That's really interesting. Uh, you may have said this and I may have missed it, but was this the first time or the second time? The second time. Okay. So were you endowed before or?

Kris: [26:31](#) No.

Brittany : [26:31](#) Okay.

Kris: [26:31](#) Yeah. So before the first time, you know, um, it was that point where we had had a couple of kids and I, and I, the marriage was not really super terrific, but it was okay. You know, and I, and two kids, they're amazing men and I, you know, wouldn't have traded, not having that first marriage, you know, to miss out on having those kids. But, um, so I thought, well, maybe the marriage would be better if we met through the temple. So I



kind of pushed my husband to go through the temple and he really drug his foot and said no, you know, he didn't want to. And then we ended up getting divorced and that was, that was not the issue, you know, going through. But I, but I thought, well that would fix it, you know, cause there's a Mormon girl, you know, going through, yeah that's gonna fix it. I just kind of thought it was interesting that both times the temple was kind of the, the temple doors were the ones that closed on me.

Brittany :

[27:25](#)

Yeah. That is really interesting. So I'm wondering then, what does your relationship with God look like through this whole time period when you were searching, seeking church, going back and forth? Uh, did you have, you did mention that through a college course, the idea of God's shifted from maybe a man or a physical being to just a, uh, a concept. I can't remember what word you said. Yeah, yeah. But yeah, it's something different. So did that heal your relationship with God at all? Um, what did, what did your relationship look like through all of that?

Kris:

[28:02](#)

Yeah, what a great question. That's awesome. Yeah. So it is changed a lot over the years and, and I would actually, um, you know, when I, when I work with spiritual direction and I, and I work with people and, and their idea of God hasn't changed or worry about them, I feel like they're not pushing themselves enough. So my idea of God has changed quite drastically as it went from being, you know, the old white man in white robes to an idea and a concept and a force. And then back to being kind of this mystery, um, has been a complicated relationship. And, you know, I joke to people that I fired God on many occasions because He hasn't shown up to work. Like, um, and I still use male gender terms to talk about God because, you know, and even though I don't really think of God in that way, that's just, again, part of your religious DNA and just so, yeah, it's kind of, it's a complicated issue. And I think, you know, my, my relationship with the Trinity itself is interesting because growing up Mormon, you think of the trinity as three individual personages and um, embodied, you know, two of them actually being embodied. Um, and now it's, I still have this kind of push and pull relationship with that. Like sometimes it's easier for me to see them as this, you know, mysterious trinity Oh three in one type of thing. And then other times I still kind of tear them apart into three different ideas or three different personages. Um, so talking about God is more complicated than just one relationship for me. It's still kind of this three-way three being type of idea. Um, sometimes I feel like God has been more invested in relationship than I have and there has been incredible things, unexplainable things that have happened to me throughout my life that, um, make me believe that God has

always been there and always pulling me in one direction. Um, you know, some would call that magical thinking. Um, but I think that's part of my Mormon heritage that I really love though, is that it really, the relationship with God really is a personal relationship and it really can be real in ways that like you and I's relationship is. Um, so it's been, it's still fluid. I think it's still one of those things that I work on every day. It's like, you know, so who am I in this moment and who is God in this moment?

- Brittany : [31:04](#) That's really beautiful. I like that. You know, so many of us who grew up with a very specific image of God and maybe God was in a box and you could only think about God in a certain way and God could only interact with you in a certain way. But this idea of who is God in this moment kind of bust through all of those walls and constraints that we put on God. So yeah. Yeah, I really appreciate that. And I must say, I think it's okay to use male pronouns for God. I kind of have gone through an angry, feminist phase.
- Kris: [31:38](#) We've all been there, yep!
- Brittany : [31:38](#) My hesitancy in saying that! I feel like the pendulum for me kind of swung really hard in the opposite direction and I had the only focus on the feminine aspects of God kind of break apart that too, because I have a complicated relationship with the idea of mother. So this
- Kris: [32:00](#) Oh, right!
- Brittany : [32:01](#) The mother or whatever, you know, it just, it's complicated. So yeah, so I feel like I'm chilling out a little bit and I'm Kinda down in, uh, like yeah. God, Male, female, both and non binary, you know, I'm, I'm more relaxed about it now is what I'm trying to say.
- Kris: [32:19](#) Yeah. I, I've had those same struggles and it really is hard I think, especially from both of our upbringing. That is so like that's our initial idea of /god and it's hard to let that go. And then we know God is bigger than that.
- Speaker 3: [32:32](#) Yeah, yeah. And on one level, you know, you can, you can know that and you can understand that. And then every once a while, I mean, it's much less now, but everyone's smile. I would just get sucked back into the old way of thinking. And then I would get angry. So then the pendulum would really swing the other way.

Kris: [32:51](#) (laughter) Oh yeah.

Brittany : [32:53](#) The journey. It's called the journey for a reason, I guess

Kris: [32:57](#) It is. Yeah.

Brittany : [32:59](#) So, uh, you mentioned the book. I'm interested to know more about that.

Kris: [33:05](#) Oh, it's, um, the Sociology of, well, let's see. It's called a Sociology of Mormon Kinship, The Place of Family Within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Brittany : [33:18](#) Wow. That, that's not a small book either. I mean, you're holding it up right now.

Kris: [33:23](#) Yeah. It's, um, 542 pages.

Brittany : [33:30](#) Would you mind giving us an elevator version of, I mean, you don't need to explain the whole book to us.

Kris: [33:36](#) And so, yeah. Oh, thank you. It's not often people ask me about my book. I love to talk about it. Elevator version. Um, when I started looking into Mormons, the first thing that they say is, well, my ward family, and I wondered as a sociologist, wow, that's really interesting. What do you mean by ward family? Do you really mean family? And so this book looks at what they mean by family. How that gets perpetuated and teachings and ideas and ideology and actual physical ritual and ritual of things like making funeral potatoes and the recipe for funeral potatoes is in the appendix and for Mormons that is ritual.

Brittany : [34:25](#) Yeah.

Kris: [34:26](#) Funeral ritual. So, um, when you know the, my question of do they really mean family and Eh, you know, is it a kinship network and spoiler alert, yes, it is. Really is. And they treat each other as family. In fact, sometimes ward members are treated better than family.

Brittany : [34:50](#) Yeah. I think you're right. And actually now I want to just do a whole episode on this topic because it speaks a lot to why it's difficult to leave the LDS church.

Kris: [35:00](#) Oh absolutely.

Brittany : [35:01](#) Especially when you're in a heavily populated area, whether that's in Utah or outside, right.

Speaker 4: [35:06](#) Utah, there's a lot of support with that. Yeah.

Brittany : [35:11](#) Yeah. And so when you, when you leave that you're leaving your social structure, you're leaving your support group.

Kris: [35:20](#) Right.

Brittany : [35:20](#) I remember in one of Rachel Held Evans books and she did not grow up LDS but evangelical. She laments after she has her baby, um, of who will now, who will bring us the casseroles cause right left her evangelical congregation. And I remember reading that for the first time and I was in the midst of my own faith journey of transition as well. And I just thought it's the same thing. I mean, I live in Utah County. Um, and so yeah, when you leave your ward, when you leave the LDS church, you really are leaving a family. So yeah, I'm now super interested to get your book and read it.

Kris: [36:01](#) Yes. And Oh, what a loss too for that, we've lost Dr. Evans.

Brittany : [36:07](#) I know, I know. I still get sad and even angry over it.

Kris: [36:12](#) I know.

Brittany : [36:13](#) It's devastating. Absolutely devastating. Oh, okay. So Kris, you, it sounds like you dove head first into your congregation and just getting involved right away. It also sounds like you and I kind of have had similar, I don't, I don't know how to word this, but you and I had similar desires where I just wanted to be more involved in church in ways that fed me. And so in Community of Christ, I could kind of navigate where I wanted to be engaged with as far as ministry goes in my congregation. And so I feel like I really dove headfirst as well. Um, so I'm wondering what kinds of things you started doing when you first started attending and then, you know, what does your church involvement look like on a congregational level now?

Kris: [37:04](#) Hmm. Okay. Um, when I first started going, it happened to be kind of during the whole, I guess it was a retreat cycle, maybe Embody and Live retreat cycle. And I think with the second time I went to church that the pastor asked me if I wanted to go to the retreat with her and she says, I usually don't ask newcomers if they want to, you know, do this. Um, but I was like, yes. So anything like that that I was invited to or I found an opportunity

for, I just took advantage of. And yes. You know? And, um, so just kind of as an interesting side note, um, the Sunday that it got ordained, the, um, the theme was, um, Act Without Hesitation or something like that, you know, so it's like, that's Kinda been the theme of my involvement in community price. So anything that there was an opening for, you know, that like, oh, I can, there's a chance for me to be on the pastor leadership team. Like, yes, I'll do that. Is there a way that I, you know, can I be the historian? Can I come to priesthood meetings? Anything that I could do, I just really took advantage of. And the more that I got involved, the more I loved it and the more opportunities I looked for. So things like, um, even the Theo Thursday, I took the idea, um, the Sierra Pacific conference leaders and said, you know, is this something that, you know, I'd like to be able to do. And I'd like to see if it works with the church and you know, maybe we can work to, you know, work together on this as a way for seekers, um, to reach out and, uh, also kind of a spirituality for members, you know, spiritual practice that they can do. Um, so, you know, besides being involved in what was already offered, finding opportunities for myself and saying, here's something I'd like to do and working with leaders on that.

Kris:

[39:13](#)

Um, and then you know, so you might kind of just might resonate with you a little bit that in the LDS church you almost have to be, it's, you're called to do something, you know, and, and you don't just, I mean, you can volunteer for stuff, but it's like, you know, there are certain jobs and things. And um, so I remember one Sunday kind of looking forward to my ordination, and they said, oh, well, we need to prepare the emblems for a sacrament. And I said, oh, well, can I watch, you know, so this is the mindset. And then they'd looked at me and were like, watch. Well, yeah, you can help. And, and they handed me, you know, the, the sacramental trays and, and the grape juice. And I just started crying and they said, well, but you don't have to if you don't want to. No, no, you don't understand! Just being able to, to physically handle those kinds of things just meant so much. So I was always looking for opportunities to do that kind of thing. And right now I think it's the same way, you know, being, feeling a calling to pastorship. Um, I just really want to, to serve in every capacity that I can. And I really feel like this is the way that I can put my, um, education and experience and personal journey altogether and, and maybe help a congregation help, you know, serve God.

Brittany :

[40:50](#)

That's really beautiful, really, really beautiful. And I must say that we, we have similar experiences I've opened up, or I mean, not even opened up, but when we've invited others to help

prepare the emblems, when people are like, wait, we can do this, I can, I can, I can pour the juice? Like, I can set it on the alter and for, yeah, yeah. It's a big deal. And I mean it is, it's really meaningful to have something that was so barred for so long and it's heresy to even question or think just because of your gender, right. Just be invited and it's, it's just like a normal average thing to Community of Christ people, but to seekers, it's huge.

Kris: [41:38](#) It is. Yeah. Really meaningful. Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

Brittany : [41:45](#) So, Kris, I'm, I'm also curious, um, I usually like to ask people that I interview, you know, what are their hopes for Community of Christ? Where do they see the church heading? And I think that this question is especially important because, you know, churches everywhere are shrinking in and out of Community of Christ and, but I do think that there's a lot of reason to hope for the future and I especially think that being a sociologist and studying the sociology of religion maybe you have an interesting insight on spirituality and faith communities and their longevity and just what gives you hope.

Kris: [42:24](#) Yeah. Well done. Another great question. I do have a lot of hope for this denomination. And I really feel like if we've survived this long, we're in it for the long haul. You know? And I think we're going through a phase right now where a lot of our members are elderly. You know, they've grown up in the church, their children have moved away from both physically and spiritually. Um, but I also feel like in general, we're at the edge of another great awakening. That spirituality is coming back in ways that are going to be surprising and powerful. And I think society in general, the shift that it's taking, is pushing that forward even more. So I think people are really, really hungry for that spiritual element in their life. And I think it's just gonna take a little while for people to rediscover religion.

Kris: [43:30](#) And, and I think right now, community of Christ is one of the best well kept secrets and religion because we are so well, we're just so flexible in ways being a prophetic people, not just a people with a prophet, but a prophetic people that we really can grow and serve the spiritual needs that people needs that they're searching for. And I think really it is this spiritual need rather than a religious focus that we specifically are, are really, um, in the right place at the right time. Um, the, the hardest part for us, I think right now is just waiting out another 20 years. Um, and, and I, if this is a very, it's a very slow process in some ways, but, um, because the reality of finances and people aging it's a little bit rough right now. But I think, uh, you know, people

like you to give me great hope and your family. And I think that having that kind of energy, you know, we're, we're gathering it, but it is, it's just going to take some time. So, you know, I think, you know, I'm especially grateful for you and the work that you do and really feel like, um, your energy and, and your focus is helping people discover us in ways that is really going to be important.

- Brittany : [45:15](#) Well thank you. I don't know if those compliments are deserved, but I appreciate them.
- Kris: [45:20](#) I think they are.
- Brittany : [45:22](#) I agree with you though in that Community of Christ is one of the world's best kept secrets. And you know, for me when I talk to people who are post religious or post Mormon or whatever you want to call it, when, when we get down to it, the core values that we have are the same there. I hear the Enduring Principles through stations and I'm like okay the you where we're on the same page, you know? Yeah, same thing. And they're really on board with the idea of being a prophetic people and having a voice in their community that's really important for people. So I feel like all the dots are there to grow the church, it's just a matter of connecting those dots and not even like a rebranding or a repackaging, cause I think what we have is good enough. It's just like you said, kind of writing this transition and then seeing what it looks like in the future. Yeah, it's exciting. It's, it's a little bit daunting.
- Kris: [46:20](#) Yeah, it is. Yeah. Yeah. But I, I really am excited for, um, what the possibilities are and I think the it's just wide open and I think that we really are gonna see some incredible things.
- Brittany : [46:36](#) Yeah. I agree. So, Chris, I have one last question for you. And this is kind of coming because I feel like, I mean, earlier I did say, I felt like you gave me so much wisdom, uh, my early years of being what we call a Latter-day Seeker, but I'm wondering what advice you have for spiritual seekers, no matter where they're coming from or what step they are on their journey. Uh, what would you want people who are seeking to remember, I guess, whether that's remember about God or themselves or just what advice you have?
- Kris: [47:10](#) Oh wow. Um, so I think it would probably be a mixture of things. So I think, I think, you know, that women's camp that we went to, that women's retreat where I met you, the theme was Learning to Walk in the Dark. And that book has been incredible for me. Um, and I think in spiritual journeys we find ourselves

stumbling through the dark so often. And I would remind people that, um, God, that's where God always is. So even in the, the book of Genesis, when God is creating things, God was there before he created light. God is the only constant in the dark. We always carry God with us. So remembering that even when it seems like God is absent, um, is just another opportunity for us to expand our idea of God. So it's okay to change your mind about God, who God is, what God is, your relationship with God. You're always changing. And so with God. So, you know, just kind of find new ways to connect. Um, and then the other thing I think would be to not give up. Um, it's OK to be angry. It's okay to have questions and doubts because you're never, if you're certain about something, then that's usually when growth stops. So I always question. Uncertainty and asking questions is, I was good. And, and like, you know, when that first time when I stepped back into the church, doing it with an open heart and an open mind, you know, that's the essential, whether you're looking at Buddhism or atheism or Community of Christ, you know, anything that you're looking at, even if you're looking at yourself like, you know, who am I today? You got to do that with an open heart and an open mind.

- Kris: [49:31](#) Um, and find a community that encourages you to do that. And that challenges do that will pick you up when you fall. That will be there. Um, you know, we mourn with those who mourn and realize that when you do leave your family, you know, like we've talked about leaving a ward family, there is a morning you've lost your entire family. It's okay to mourn that and realize that there are some wounds that never heal and that's okay. Just be open to what comes next and, and that's never going to look like what you think it will.
- Speaker 3: [50:13](#) That's really profound. I know that listeners can't see me right now, but I have this huge grin on my face and I'm just nodding. Oh, Kris, thank you so much. This was exactly, I was hoping this conversation would be.
- Kris: [50:29](#) Well, thank you. It's delightful to talk to you. Thank you.
- Brittany : [50:32](#) Thank you. Thank you. And congratulations on all of the work that you're doing in the Oakland area. Um, I mean, I know that there's a pretty good group up there that is spiritually hungry and thirsty. I mean, I know there's a lot of Mormon feminists up there. I hear the ward up there is really great. So it sounds like a good community.



Kris: [50:55](#) And the ward sent me this beautiful, the Oakridge first ward sent me this beautiful, huge flower arrangement when I got ordained.

Brittany : [51:02](#) I love that!

Kris: [51:03](#) Totally supporting me. I know. It was. It was incredible. Yeah.

Brittany : [51:08](#) They're doing Mormonism right. They should do seminars for all of the wards in Utah.

New Speaker: [51:13](#) (laughter)

New Speaker: [51:19](#) Kris thank you. Thank you so much for sharing with us.

Speaker 1: [51:29](#) Thank you, Brittany

Speaker 2: [51:31](#) Thanks for listening to Project Zion podcast. Subscribe to our podcast on apple podcast, stitcher, or whatever podcast 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 or Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze.

Speaker 1: [52:32](#) [inaudible] [inaudible]

Speaker 5: [52:38](#) [inaudible].