

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 the Project Zion podcast. I am Brittany Mangelson and I will be your host for today and we are talking with Maggie Fout who is in Portsmouth, Ohio and we are going to be bringing you a Fair Trade episode, which is our conversations about faith transitions. So Maggie is a new member of Community of Christ. She was just recently ordained and she is working with the Portsmouth Ohio congregation who we've featured before with Justin Delong. Uh, it's a What's Brewing episode. We'll be sure to link that in the show notes in case you want to get a little more background on her congregation. So Maggie, I'm so excited to have you on today. Thanks for joining us!

Maggie: [01:20](#) And I am so excited to be here with you because I have listened to like every single Project Zion podcast that has been released because I'm a little obsessed.

Brittany : [01:31](#) I'm so glad to hear that I sometimes, and this is going to sound weird, but sometimes I forget that people actually listened to the podcast. So then when people are so excited to beyond and you know, they are almost super fans and they've listened to basically everything, I'm like, oh good. This is good. So yeah, I'm really glad that you are going to be contributing to the library of stories that we have.

Maggie: [01:54](#) Yes!

Brittany : [01:56](#) Okay. So let's just dive right on into this. Uh, like I said, this is a fair trade episode, so we're going to be talking about your faith transition and just your history with faith and as you've moved into Community of Christ. So let's start at the beginning. Wherever you want to pick up in your life. I'm curious to know what faith looks like for you. Growing up, were you engaged in church life, in religion, and were you a member of any sort of church? What did your concept of God and spirituality and faith look like as a kid?

Maggie: [02:28](#) Oh my goodness. Well, I like to say that I took a very zig-zaggy path to get here and I have worn a bajillion hats, but from the beginning, um, my parents are very nondenominational Christian. However, they, my father had like a Church of Christ

background and my mother had a Southern Baptist background and I started going to Bible School when I was probably four years old and I went religiously until I was about 15. However, almost every year my mother would get a phone call because I was a troublemaker and I ask way too many questions and they did not like that. So I was just a very curious child and every I wanted everything explained to me and every question, like every biblical story I wanted it explained and why was it this way instead of that way. And the particular VBS that I went to was very Bible literalist and very scary. They were very fear based and like Hellfire and brimstone and it didn't make a lot of sense to me because I felt like they were talking out of both sides of their mouth. On one hand they were saying, God is this loving person who is your Creator and you're his children. And at the same time they're saying, well, if you barely slip up, you're going to burn to death and die.

Maggie:

[04:18](#)

And there was, I even knew children that would go to sleep at night, scared to death that they were going to be struck down in their sleep. Um, because maybe they had a bad thought during the day or they'd said something wrong to a friend, so they would like cry themselves to sleep because they thought that God was on a strike them dead. And none of that really made a lot of sense to me. Um, and I would talk to my parents and they were kind of like, well, you know, that's just how some people are, but you don't have to believe that way. And my parents luckily were very encouraging for me to look outside of the box and allowed me to research other spiritualities from a very young age. I was the kind of kid that loved the library. You could find me in the library after school, like even like third and fourth grade.

Maggie:

[05:18](#)

And I loved mythology and ancient history. And so I would spend hours pouring over like Greek mythology and Roman mythology, Egyptian mythology, this stuff that was pre-christian. And it was really fascinating. Um, archeology was one of my, my biggest things and I felt like we had all this, but then the, we had the Bible and the way that the Bible was being presented to me was just like awful and scary and terrible. So that was very hard. And then as I got older, any friends that I had, I would say, "Hey, take me to church with you." Because I wanted to see what their churches were like. And sadly enough, most of their churches were not very much different. And then I had a friend who was of a particular denomination that is extremely strict and they even got up in my face. I was probably 13 and my hair was short.

- Maggie: [06:25](#) So they got up in my face and screamed at me about my hair. And the fact that I had lip gloss on and told me I was going to hell. And so that kind of cemented it in place that okay, this is not what I'm going to do. So I started really focusing on other things and looking into like Buddhism and Taoist and I finally kind of settled into deciding that I was going to go pre-christian and really started looking into Paganism and I found a home in eclectic Paganism like nature-based and do it like Earth, um, earth and nature-based with like a Celtic background and some like Native American teachings kind of. I went with whatever felt right with my heart and then I married that with Jesus because Jesus was the only part of the Bible that makes sense. So I had like all these different learnings and traditions from mythology and Jesus, which is an odd combination, but it was perfect.
- Maggie: [07:40](#) Like he was by my side holding my hand, walking me through it, and I kind of was able to find how all these different paths ultimately were super similar and they basically converged and everybody was kind of trying to get to the same place. And so it kind of just made sense. So I stuck with Eclectic Pagan for about 20 years. And the other biggest thing that I want to point out was the, um, LGBTQIA+ community is a big part of my life. I did not realize until I was probably about sixth grade that it was an issue for people because I had a great uncle who was gay and he had a partner that I always just assumed they were married because my family never said any different. And then when I got to about sixth grade, people started picking on each other and calling each other gay.
- Maggie: [08:45](#) And I'm using it as an insult. And that's when I kind of found out that there was people out there that didn't approve. And then that was really hard for me because all these churches that I had went to were constantly saying, well, those people are going to hell. And it didn't, again, didn't make sense to me. There's this God, he loves everybody. You're his child. But if you're, you know, if you're gay then he doesn't love you, you're screwed. So with the pagan community, they tend to be very accepting, very diverse and very inclusive of everybody. So like I said, I did that for about 20 years.
- Brittany : [09:30](#) So Maggie, I'm wondering, um, one thing that you said, you mentioned the very beginning of the, your parents were really supportive of you asking questions and exploring other religions. Did you find that that was unique among your friends?
- Maggie: [09:50](#) Oh absolutely! Um, I come from an extremely small, very conservative town. Um, it's not even a town. It's actually a

village. Um, and it's, it's itty bitty and it's really, everyone is kind of put in a box and if you look outside that box, you're kind of singled out. I was absolutely the weird kid because I was so interested in looking outside of the box and I'm really thankful that my parents were so, um, supportive in letting me do, you know, do my own research and whatever. Like I would be like, oh, there's this holiday that these people do, and my parents would be like, cool, let's go get the stuff so that we can celebrate it if that's what you want to do. Um, and I, I really also, you know, my father had been in the air force and they had moved outside of this, the tiny little town that they grew up in. So I think that helped a lot because when they were living in another state, they were exposed to all these different people from different cultures. So the place that I grew up in, it was just not a very inclusive community whatsoever and very hard to step out of that. So I'm just very thankful besides my parents that we had really excellent librarians who became some of my best friends and they were all kind of like extra mamas.

- Brittany : [11:36](#) Yeah. I think that's really important to be able to find a support system when you're trying to deconstruct a culture and maybe break out of that, but to be able to have people who can support you on that journey wherever it takes you.
- Maggie: [11:52](#) Right. We didn't have Google then.
- Brittany : [11:54](#) Yes. That is an important thing to note!
- Maggie: [11:59](#) That was in the days before I had a computer, so we just relied on the nice smell of books.
- Brittany : [12:08](#) Yeah, that's important. And I didn't have Google growing up either, but I also was not, I had books obviously, but I was not exposed to a lot of different worldviews through my selection of reading. So I commend you, especially because, I mean it seems like you, it would have been easy for you to fit into that mold and that community and that culture and that structure, you know, even if you, um, didn't, I mean if you didn't question as much like you fit the part, you look the part, you come from that background. So to choose to recognize that there's other thoughts out there. There's other ways of life. There's other cultures, there's other understandings of how the world works. And then to choose to actually do something about that and maybe not even physically leave, but then to own where you're at with God and culture and community, I think is a really brave thing to do.

- Maggie: [13:08](#) So, yeah, I want to say probably the best advice that I ever received was from my grandfather. He was a deacon in a southern Baptist Church. And regardless of that, where you would think maybe he would be extremely conservative, I will always remember that. He told me you could find God just as easily out in the woods underneath the tree as you could in a church building.
- Brittany : [13:40](#) That sound advice. Very sound advice. So Maggie, I'm curious to know as you were entering into adulthood and you started dating and got married and started having your family, uh, how important was God or faith community to you? I mean, you said that you spent a couple decades, is that right?
- Maggie: [14:01](#) In 20 years.
- Maggie: [14:04](#) So as far as timeline of your life, where does that fall into place? Um, okay. So probably, oh wow. Well until I found Community of Christ. So honestly it kind of was in different chunks like because there was a couple times within that 20 year span that I did try to mend, um, myself with with Christianity. And so I would try really, really hard. Like I would pick out say five churches and I would go to those and see if it would, if I could find a good fit.
- Maggie: [14:52](#) But it all kind of came right back down to the LGBT issues because my senior year of high school, one of my good friends who was gay had been constantly bullied and had been beat up. And then he committed suicide that year. And because of that, I really found myself needing a way to speak out and in our community, it just didn't happen. Like there was no other kids and our school that were part of the queer community because they were so afraid to come out and be themselves. And every time I would go to a church, that's exactly when that would start. And we were talking, um, my friend passed away in 2003, so even though that was the beginning of the 2000's, our small community was still kind of stuck back in the 90s and it's like there was still that HIV aids fear and a lot of the pastors and preachers would throw that up as a reason why they could not allow people, "those homosexuals" as they would put it in their congregations because they had this looming fear of HIV and aids and that that was the damnation of the world pretty much.
- Maggie: [16:37](#) So every time I would go and try to find a new congregation, it seemed like Before the sermon was over, one of those hot button issues that I felt so strongly about would pop up and I'd end up leaving the service. So like I said, that happened several times during that 20 year span. I did within myself, however,

have a very strong, I guess I would consider myself spiritual versus religious. And I know that's kind of the thing with the gen x/millennials that when, especially I think our age when we're kind of stuck in that middle frame there, it's just the spirituality is what I kind of kept coming back to the ways that you could find God in every single little thing. And I felt like putting God in a box is what organized religion was doing. So I just kinda just kept straying away from that. But I would definitely still consider myself very spiritual. I was really into yoga and meditation and different ways that I could still connect with the spiritual and be able to feel that I was still in that interconnected balance with divinity. And again, I still always felt that presence of Christ with me because again, he was the only part that made sense.

- Brittany : [18:18](#) I think a lot of people can relate to that. This idea that when you grow up in a religion that is very, or with a framework of religion that is very boxed in, very rigid, very dogmatic, uh, separating the spirituality side of that is really important. And something that we often will carry with us. And then to try to marry that again with an organized religion is, is kind of a big deal. I mean it's scary, especially, I mean for me I was always worried that there was going to be some bait and switch because I had felt so betrayed by religion and so I had a lot of hesitations and distrust with organized religion. So I'm curious, you have a couple of kids, right?
- Maggie: [19:04](#) Yes, I have three.
- Brittany : [19:05](#) Okay. Three kids. So as you're going through all of this exploration and trying to make religion work or maybe not trying to make religion work, what were the main things that you were teaching your kids? Were you able to carry some of those values over into your parenting?
- Maggie: [19:25](#) Okay. Now with, with that, I had this idea in my mind that I absolutely wanted my children to be as inclusive as possible because growing up I dealt with so many bullies and then just dealing with adults in everyday life, I actually worked, um, most of my working years has been with the public. I worked in insurance and retail and I came across so many people that were very hateful. And then besides that, I was in 11th grade when 9/11 happened. And one of my very best friends in the whole world, her, her father, um, his family was Muslim. And so she and her brothers are very dark complected and you know, Kinda looked in a way that was suspicious to this itty bitty, super conservative, 90% white town. And they got a lot of flack because people were like, oh, well they're terrorist.

Maggie: [20:49](#) And again, just because of a religion and nobody could understand that this, you know, that there's extremists in every religion. So with my children, I really wanted them to understand that there are a huge variety of religions and that I love them no matter what spiritual path that they wanted to take. And I really wanted them to explore those spiritual paths and be exposed to them so that they could make a decision on their own as to what felt right to them and what felt right to their hearts. And so that they also, when they were coming in contact with people as they go out into the world, that they would have a little better understanding of a variety of people. And you know, whether it means they could understand somebody where somebody was coming from and nobody else could or you know, there's someone picking on somebody and they can kind of step in and be like, Hey, wait a second.

Maggie: [21:55](#) You know? So that was super, super important to me. And actually the catalyst for finding community of Christ was because of my children as well. Because my, I kind of shied away from a whole lot of Christianity because all the Christianity had based on this hellfire and brimstone and fear based. And I did not really want my children to have that fear based. And so I really had kind of shied away from Christianity and my husband said, you know, Maggie, we've taught them all this stuff and we've been exposed them to all these things and this variety of, of human cultures. And we haven't really talked to them a lot about Christianity and maybe we should, my, my kids at the time were, let's see, 3, 6, and 11. And so he's like, you know, you know, we audit, we ought to do this. So I decided I would start looking and right at that time, like two or three days later, it's so happened that I was on Facebook and saw an advertisement for Portsmouth Pride.

Maggie: [23:19](#) And when I clicked on the event link and started looking at it, it said it was sponsored by a church. And I was like, what? Like I was completely shocked and dumbfounded and I'm like, okay, well I'm going to have to check into this because if there's a church that's willing to do this, maybe it's, it's a place that I would feel comfortable. Like they would have the same kind of values that I would, but I was still kind of afraid because that whole bait and switch kind of thing, like you said, you know, because it's like kind of too good to be true. Um, so that was kind of how my very first introduction to the Portsmouth Welcoming Community was that Facebook event and my, because of my children.

Brittany : [24:17](#) So I'm just curious what those conversations were like? I mean, when you're introducing Christianity to your kids and you say, I

mean, I don't know if your kids attend church with you or not, but at the very least they know that now mom's going to go to this new church. What do those conversations look like?

Maggie:

[24:35](#)

Okay, well first thing was I had to decide exactly if I was gonna go through with even exposing them to a church kind of before I wanted to see what I was gonna do. So I, I bought a children's Bible story book and I read it first to make sure that it wasn't too ridiculous and scary. And then we started like every single night we would read two or three Bible stories out of it. And the one that I had found had kind of a mix between like children's language and adult language because I didn't want it like dumbed way down. And because I tend to talk to my children, like their little adults instead of, um, kind of babying them. And so we read through and as we would read them, we would discuss them and kind of discuss like, what, you know, this, could this actually have happened or is this, is there a moral to this story?

Maggie:

[25:56](#)

What can we see that is interesting or ethical about the story that you can learn from it even if it didn't happen. And we kind of approached it like that, how we could find value and each story regardless to whether or not it was a hundred percent true. And we kind of went like that. So that was kind of how I introduced them, um, to that. And then when we went, so like Jesus, you know, we talked about again, like I start sharing with them that, you know, this is the part that really moved my heart and this is the part that I felt comforted by and I shared with them, um, my favorite Bible passage and how it kinda got me through some of my dark times and I made sure that it was in language that they felt like this God was a loving God and an accepting God and kind of shied away from the idea of the, the hellfire and brimstone that I had been taught as a child that had really turned me away from it because I decided that if I, if they happen to want to follow Christianity, that I wanted to make sure I didn't give them a bad taste for it from the get go.

Brittany :

[27:30](#)

Yeah. Thanks for answering that. And I mean, the reason why I asked is because in my ministry context, most people aren't teaching or introducing Christianity. There's here in Utah there's a common understanding of what that means. And so it might be reworking what Christianity is or re-tweaking it or re-imagining it, but it's not necessarily a start from the ground up and introduce this man named Jesus or, uh, trying to differentiate between inclusive Christian churches and the more hellfire and brimstone churches. Um, so yeah, I, I haven't had a lot of experience with parents introducing Christianity to their



school age kids, so I'm, yeah, I was curious to see how that had gone for you. So thank you for that.

Maggie: [28:19](#) Oh, you're welcome. Um, one of the things that I felt it was really important is because like my oldest people started saying things like, he would come across like a very, a child that went to like a very fundamentalist church and they would be like, oh, well so-and-so's going to hell. And then he started coming and asking questions like, okay, well what is hell and does the devil make people do things? And stuff like that. So it was kind of important at that time that, hey, listen, I do need to talk about these things so that he has a firm understanding. And because he was starting to kind of worry about these things because of that.

Brittany : [29:02](#) Yeah, that makes sense. And I've run into that with my own kids and the religious climate here where they just come home and ask a million questions based on what they've heard at school. And so then we have to sit down and have a conversation about it. And it's, it's interesting to be responsive to inquisitive kids because it really kind of puts you on the spot of like, okay, I've got to figure out how to explain who we are without causing more damage or being anti whatever. But also being very firm and clear about where your personal theology is at and Oh, parenting is fun.

Maggie: [29:40](#) Yes. Yes it is. And to answer your question from earlier, yes, my kids attend with me.

Brittany : [29:47](#) Okay, cool! Yeah, let's talk about that. So you saw the Facebook ad, which I love that you saw it via a Facebook ad as a social media minister, I'm like, Yay, somebody saw an ad and it was good! And yeah, it's exciting to know when outreach on social media, is actually impactful. So thanks for that. So you attended Pride and then from there did you start attending the congregation immediately or what was your transition into Community of Christ like?

Maggie: [30:22](#) Okay, so I am a skeptic by nature. So before I even attended pride, I actually, my whole pathway to community of Christ was social media based actually because besides the Facebook presence, I went online to look at Community of Christ website. I searched through that. Then I went on Youtube and started looking at um, some John Dehlin videos and watch some of those with, actually I watched the one where John Hamer went through and discuss the kind of the differences between Mormonism and Community of Christ because the very first thing I had done was got on Wikipedia to find out what kind of

church it was. And I saw the history and that there was a connection between the LDS church and Community of Christ. And I was like, oh, well that's interesting. So then I had kinda like looked through that too and was kind of looking at the history.

Maggie: [31:35](#) And like I said, then I went and I found some different youtube videos and I found some excellent videos where Steve Vezey was talking about how he viewed Divinity and they were incredible. Like they were really, really inspiring. So that kind of solidified that I was gonna look into this. So then I went to Pride that weekend and it was probably the most insane, amazing, humbling, emotional, fantastic event that I have ever been to. And my entire life there was right around 500 people there. And there were people that talked to me that said it was the first time they'd ever walked out in public the way that they felt, um, their authentic selves, like people that were transgender, there were people that talked about how were able to walk hand in hand with their significant other and nick belts say for the first time there were children and elderly folks and just this really rich, diverse, amazing group of people.

Maggie: [32:56](#) And the energy and the love was just insanity. And I had never been to a Pride event that I had seen like on TV or whatever. And I kinda had an idea of what I was expecting, but this was completely different. This was completely family friendly and I just can't even describe the emotion. Like the energy was insane. It was just so beautiful. Just so, so beautiful. Um, so I went into that and I, I met Justin and I talked to Justin and I told him my background and I'm like, now listen, you know, I'm a pagan. I've been pegging for 20 years. Would I still be welcome? And he's like, Oh yeah, absolutely. That's fine. You can, we don't care. You know, come and join us. Come and hang out and see what we're like and what we're about. And so then I did, and I walked in to this incredibly amazing group of people.

Maggie: [33:55](#) And I was still scared though, because I had had such a bad experience that I had even told my husband when I left the house, they said, well, don't be surprised if I don't come back in like 15 minutes. And instead I stayed the whole time and I had such meaningful conversations and was given a copy of Sharing in Community of Christ and was able to look through that on top of all the research online on social media and stuff that I was able to do. I just fell in love. Like I absolutely fell in love with the denomination with the people and I really felt at home and it was really insane that I felt at home in a place with Christians when I had felt so, you know, just pushed aside before and the fact that everybody was so accepting of a diverse community

and I never experienced that before and, and it was very humbling to, it really was. And it was so interesting to be able to see that the, the morals were so close to mine and that they aligned with the same views that I had. And I could feel comfortable having my children exposed to that because I wanted them exposed to Christianity, but I didn't want them exposed to something that wouldn't fit with my own different views about how the world working.

- Brittany : [35:39](#) Again, I relate to that a lot. I know that when I was first encountering Community of Christ, I read and listened to everything I could find online and I felt like I knew who the church was. And I think this is a standard, uh, experience of seekers is a lot of times we know who the church is to some extent because of the Internet. And so those podcasts that you said that you listened to or maybe watched cause I, I think they are, well they are on youtube as well. Those are resources that I send out constantly. I just sent the John Hamer one, a two a seeker, I dunno, the day before yesterday. So, you know, it's, it's really awesome that you're able to actually learn who Community of Christ is to some degree before you even encounter the church. So I just wanted to highlight that again because I think it's a really, really important part of how we present ourselves online. And so, and then, yeah, so you go to Pride, you, uh, start attending the congregation. Um, and at that point it was because, was this the first year that they did pride or did you hop on at the second year? How long ago was this?
- Maggie: [36:54](#) Uh, this was the very first pride.
- Brittany : [36:57](#) Okay. That's what I was thinking. So if I remember right, the congregation was still really, really small, was still just a handful of people?
- Maggie: [37:06](#) We didn't have our own building. We were just in the basement of, um, of another congregation that was gracious enough to let us use that space. And Yeah, just very itty-bitty. And at that time, I don't think we even knew what we were, we were in this transition of not knowing where we were on, you know, the social activists/congregation line. Like it was just a budding little itty bitty flower budding trying to figure out where it was going to go.
- Brittany : [37:41](#) So I want to ask you a couple of questions about that because I know that for some people that can be kind of a deterrent. Um, they, they want an established congregation. So when they see just, you know, four or five people who are trying to figure out what this is going to look like. Some people don't necessarily

want to be part of that process of becoming. But my guess is that you were okay with that. So did, were you able to see potential and the need and you wanted to get involved? I mean, is that kind of what your thought process was, or were you concerned that it wasn't a full fledged functioning congregation? Was that something that made you step back a little bit or what were your thoughts on that?

Maggie:

[38:23](#)

Um, honestly I really didn't think about it a whole lot in the very, very beginning. I was so just taken with the fact that there was such inclusivity and the fact that they had put together this mission statement that blew my mind. And you have established congregations in, you know, all the denominations that I had been witness to and they don't even have a mission statement. And this congregation had put together this mission statement about being fully inclusive and that just won my heart. So that was kind of part of it. And from moment one they made you feel included. And as soon as I made it known that I was, I was in it to win it. You know, and for the long haul you were your, your voice always mattered even when you're not actually a part of the congregation. Every single person's voice matters. We, instead of having your traditional Sunday morning sermons, all our services frame around conversation and dialogue and the fact that everybody's unique experience is very valid and important and everybody's spiritual experiences valuable and important and that no one person's experience is greater than somebody else's.

Maggie:

[40:10](#)

So that really drew me in and I saw such a huge need in the community because there's so many people like myself that felt hurt by religion, had felt hurt by Christianity. We're afraid to step into Christianity because of this trauma or pain or trauma and pain that they'd seen other people experience. So they were afraid that that would happen to them. And to find a place that wanted to be like a soothing balm to those hurt people. I absolutely wanted to be a part of that. And I knew that I wanted to see that grow. And I actually had kind of your epiphany Aha moment driving in the car and was like, wow, this image I've always had of Jesus, these people are actually being the hands and the feet of Jesus. I'd never found that before. And that's what I wanted to do.

Maggie:

[41:17](#)

And I, it was, I realized that I could take all my paganism kind of celebrated the past, the ancient past. And so I was able to kind of move that into more of a, okay, I love history and that's still important. That is still important to share with other people. And that background is going to help me when I deal with other people and be able to kind of move that Christianity more to

the forefront and be able to look at it. Not through this fire and brimstone that I had been taught. But instead the Welcoming Community helped me learn how to look at it through the eyes to through the lens of Jesus. And to be able to look at scripture in that different way really helped me so much because I was able to go back and reread things that I thought I understood and be able to see it with new eyes and be able to see the beauty in it instead of just being able to see the darkness. And once I had that, I wanted to share that with other people cause I knew there's so many other broken people that could benefit from that.

Brittany :

[42:40](#)

That was articulated so beautifully. Thank you so much. I think it's, it's so interesting because our stories are so different but they, there's so much overlap and then the stories that seekers from all over the place, from all different backgrounds or they, they come to Community of Christ with different histories and different baggage and understanding that they bring with them. And yet, even in the midst of how unique all of our stories are, there still is this common thread that I hear over and over again of this re-imagining Jesus and seeing a community, like you said, actually live out and being the hands and feet of Jesus and then how does that change our world view on what religion is and what Christianity is and then that spark of realizing, hey, I actually like this and I want to be part of it. I think that's just kind of the universal message that I have picked up when I hear stories of seekers and new members that come from a wide variety of backgrounds. So thank you. That was, that was really beautiful. So again, like I said earlier, we do have a whole episode on your congregation and the development of it and the growth of it, which has been really exciting to watch on social media. But I'm wondering how that's been for you. Um, you know, you got involved basically from the very beginning and uh, you were just recently ordained to the office of priest. So what has that transition and that growth and that evolution looked like for you in the life of your congregation and community?

Maggie:

[44:21](#)

It has been an incredible wild ride. Um, wow. So once, once we started kind of having, realizing that we were outgrowing where we were at and we were able to get a building and kind of get stable, I was asked to be on the leadership team. And of course I was very honored to be able to do that. And we were able to kind of start putting together the foundation and the, and the building blocks of what we actually were going to turn into. And from there we kind of were able to be like, okay, this is definitely going to be a congregation. And we were able to figure out how we were going to straddle the line to be this new

beautiful hybrid of spirituality and social justice platform and how we were going to be able to, to use what we were learning to help people.

Maggie:

[45:33](#)

And I think so often when people think about Jesus, they tend to not think about the fact that Jesus was a radical reformer. He really did take everything that was static in his culture and flip it upside down on its head and be this super inclusive person and he was saying, hey, let's welcome everybody. And he was, he was loved by all these people that were the least of these that other people were looking down on and just completely challenging the status quo. So that is really a lot of our ideal as we've moved forward, is to really truly try to embody that and show other people how they can embody that. We've went through, we've started some support groups, which has been amazing. Right now we've got a peer led, LGBT support group, and then I help lead a transgender support group right now, which is really incredible.

Maggie:

[46:48](#)

We just really need resources for a lot of these people and we're able to just bring a lot of people in the community together and we're able to bring a lot of allies in because there is a lot of people that want to help but they don't know how. So they're able to come for that. Because of having such a hybrid, we are also able to help the people that are not quite ready for spirituality. And we ha when we have our Thursdays we have coffee and conversation and that is non religious and we're able to, people come in that are kind of frightened and they're welcomed into a space where they can learn about community and they can be together. We can talk about social issues and what's going on. And then once a month we're doing like a interfaith discussion that um, Bennie Blevins and I are running to try to also bring like what I was trying to show my children, how different fates can interact just to help us with the people that come in.

Maggie:

[48:03](#)

Because we do have a lot of people come in that are of different faiths and every way that we can find common ground is gonna make us better people, better friends, better family members, more able to help in our community. So we have people that come in that way too. And it's just been a total process. It's been really amazing. And I, I don't know, it's hard to articulate I guess, cause there's just so much that went on so fast. But yeah, I was able to decided to get baptized and I somehow found that I was led to start doing some e-learning and start taking some classes and the spirit just moved me to start learning that way. And then before I knew it, I was handed a priesthood call and I

was kind of shocked because it's not where I ever would have imagined that I would have been 10 years ago.

Brittany : [49:19](#) Yeah. Going from being pagan, happily pagan. And then to a Christian minister is just a short amount of time because of a Facebook ad. That's, that's wild. That's really, really wild. But I, like I said, I've just loved watching the story of your congregation unfold and then getting to know you a little bit online and seeing that transformation has been really exciting. Maggie, I'm, I'm wondering now with your ordination and with the growth of your community, uh, what are your hopes and dreams for Community of Christ, whether that be on a local level or a World church, Global church wide level?

Maggie: [50:07](#) Well, we are currently looking into expanding into another new building because we've already outgrew our building. We again did not imagine when we moved in here last October-ish that we would outgrow our building, that when we have everybody here, we're like sardines. So we've grown to, to that kind of proportions, which has been crazy. We, we've had some really incredible services. My actually the day of my ordination, there was also my, my, my friend Bennie, he was, he was ordained and then as soon as I was ordained I did a baptism and another baptism and then we had three confirmations. So we have definitely been expanding at a really fast rate. So I hope that we can continue that growth. When we had pride this year, we ended up instead of having 500 ish people to about 900 so I would love to, to hit a thousand that would be incredible.

Maggie: [51:26](#) That's kind of my hope for 2020 and I just, I hope that more people can find community of Christ. I think that community of Christ is so unique in structure and is so incredibly progressive versus a lot of the denominations that I was exposed to growing up or even as an adult as far as Christian denominations go. And I really think that there are a huge amount of people that could benefit from discovering that there's just such a need right now. I think within, especially the younger people like the Gen X/millennials where we see so many Christian denominations are just losing people and the churches are emptying out and it just seems like it's happening at kind of an alarming rate. And I think when you have a denomination like Community of Christ that really encourages the youth and really tries to help the youth and you know, the older people really do like continuing education and to continue learning. I think that in itself is one of the biggest important things to me. I find a lot of other denominations aren't so big on exploration and I feel like Community of Christ once you know, allows us to step out of that box and we have the Doctrine and Covenants, which is

incredible. I, I fell in love with the Doctrine and Covenants. Like that was one of just, Oh, it just blew me away. And I feel like, like on my Facebook, I'm constantly sharing different passages from the Doctrine and Covenants because I want other people out there to know that such a thing exists because what we have doesn't exist anywhere else. It really doesn't. And I think it would apply to so many people's lives, especially these people that have that god-sized hole in their heart and they're desperately seeking spirituality.

Maggie:

[54:04](#)

I've come across so many people that have walked through our doors and are like, I really want to want a faith but I'm afraid or I'm hurt. And we have especially like 165 a 165 3d where we talk about being not consumed about the variety of human types and characteristics and being passionately concerned about forming inclusive communities of love, oneness and equality that reveal divine nature. Like all my goodness that is mind blowing that can help heal so many people that are broken. I have used that scripture for so many people and it has brought them to tears because that's the first time they've ever felt that maybe there is a god and that God loves them. That reassurance, that little bit of reassurance right there can completely show a broken heart that it can be amended.

Brittany :

[55:23](#)

I think that's so beautiful and such a good reminder that what we do and what we say and who we are really matters and it actually impacts real lives and every time I use a passage from the Doctrine and Covenants, especially the more contemporary sections, I'm just, I almost have to pinch myself because these are words that we as a community have deemed of God and that we have wrestled with we've studied with, we've voted on and we've covenanted to use them and to live up to them, to do our best, to live up to them and to have them be our guiding force of how we interact with the world. So I always love when I hear the enthusiasm of new members and I would consider myself in that camp as well. Uh that the enthusiasm that these words really do mean something and that that's what is bringing to a new understanding of God and of religion and specifically Christianity. So, yeah. Thank you for that. Well, Maggie, I guess is there anything else that you want to leave us with? I feel like we've covered a lot of really good terrain as far as timeline and development and theological growth and inclusive community. But is there anything that we missed? Is there anything that you want to leave as your final departing words?

Maggie:

[56:55](#)

Um, I would just like to say that if there is anybody out there listening to this podcast that is a seeker that has looking at the possibility of attending Community of Christ or learning about it



a little bit more, that you do seek out some information, check out Project Zion podcasts, check out some youtube videos, the Community of Christ website. There is just a plethora of information out there and I really think that you won't be, you won't be saddened by it. There is just, it's incredible and I think it's worth a shot if you're scared. And this is a community where people really do try to be the hands and the feet and speak the words of Jesus and you don't find that everywhere. So it's amazing. And if you're ever in Portsmouth, Ohio and you want to find a tribe of, of misfits and broken toys, we're definitely your people.

- Brittany : [58:11](#) Thank you so much Maggie. I agree and relate to everything you said and I think that your story is unique and yet universal and will help people. So thank you so much for sharing so openly and so deeply today.
- Maggie: [58:26](#) Thank you.
- Outro Music: [58:33](#) [inaudible].
- Josh Mangelson: [58:34](#) 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 Seeker 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 Seeker Ministries or Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze.
- Outro Music: [59:21](#) [inaudible].