

Speaker 1: [00:00:16](#) [inaudible].

Speaker 2: [00:00:17](#) Welcome to the Project Zion podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Speaker 1: [00:00:33](#) [inaudible]

Brittany: [00:00:33](#) Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the Project Zion podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson and I will be your host for today's episode and we are going to be doing a Fair Trade episode, which is all about faith transitions. And this is actually the first Fair Trade I think that I have done face to face in real life. Normally I record these interviews, will all of my interviews really on Zoom. So I'm, I'm looking forward to this. I'm with my good friend Laura, which is really exciting, but I just have to say that normally when the other person is talking, I'll push my, put myself on mute and then I can take a drink or I can cough or I can whatever. I mean I'm engaged in the conversation, but now I feel like I have to be on my best behavior because I can't mute myself in real life.

Brittany: [00:01:23](#) So this will be fun, but yeah, so I have Laura Pennock on and she is a member of the Salt Lake city pastorate leadership team. She and I serve together in the Salt Lake congregation. And I have to admit, I've been a little bit hesitant to ask too many people from my congregation to be on Project Zion cause I don't want to be that person. And I don't want to make this podcast Salt Lake centric because it's not about Salt Lake City. So, but Laura's story I think is unique and it's one that I've wanted to share for quite a while now. And so we are finally face to face and we're gonna do this. So Laura, why don't you just give us your elevator pitch of who you are.

Laura Pennock: [00:02:05](#) Okay. So I grew up in a place called Paradox Colorado. And if you don't know where that is, well is right next to bedrock Colorado. So that's orienting us in space. In time it was, my parents might father grew up. There is a very small isolated Valley about 50 miles or so from Moab. So if you know where Moab is and where Telluride, Colorado is and Grand Junction Colorado, its kind of in that area. So we grew up there, my dad grew up there, my grandpa had been, um, brought there as a child, so he grew, kinda grew up there too. And there were about 200 people there when we lived there. And so if you saw a dog walking down the road, you know his name and who it belonged to, and if somebody got a new car, you knew it was like, Oh, whose car is that?

Laura Pennock: [00:03:10](#) You know, you just kind of knew everything about everybody. Well, my parents are very devout, believing completely unquestioning Mormons and they always have been. And so I grew up in that kind of a household, but I never, I never really felt enfolded in a congregation even though it, that seems kind of weird coming from something someplace so small and isolated. But my mom is a convert to the church and she also came from Texas. And the way my parents met is my dad was doing work for the telephone company when they were in switching over from, from that you the operator where you had to go through an operator to the rotary, to the rotary dial. So they were changing like the, they had to put up new wires and all that kind of stuff. So he got transferred down to the Houston area, which is on the Gulf coast in Texas and was set up with my mom on a blind date down there.

Laura Pennock: [00:04:16](#) So they ended up getting married and then they, after a little while they ended up moving back to Paradox because I really think that they were sort of running from the world. They were a little afraid of what was going on. This was the late sixties. And so there was a lot of racial unrest that, you know, my mom had lived through and witnessed and, and it was just, there was just a lot of things. I think they felt like that it wasn't safe. The world was no longer safe. And so they sort of had this hideaway, this hiding place. And it was, it was gonna, you know, when my dad grew up there in the 30s and it was a, you know, it just seemed like a very safe sort of place for, to, to a great place to raise kids. Well, it's not, or it was when he was growing up, but it was not when I was growing up because, first of all, my parents were both college educated and they were, I think the only people that I knew, I think that my family was the only kids that I knew that, whose parents were both college graduates.

Laura Pennock: [00:05:30](#) There were some kids whose, who had one parent who was a college graduate, but it was kind of, it was kind of where it was farming and uranium mining was the big, the big thing that people did their for a living. And so it was con, it was really, it was a rough, it was a rough, sort of crowd I guess. And Mormons as Mormons, we were a minority there. And my, my mom is, my parents are both real big doers and my mom loves to organize parties and activities and stuff like that. And so she came down there, they're both school teachers and so they came down there and essentially just sort of took over the school and took over the church and that did not sit well with the people who were already there and felt like they were the ones who were in charge of everything.

Laura Pennock: [00:06:25](#) So it was a really isolating experience because the kids would go home and their parents would talk bad about my parents and about how, you know, they have been thought, they thought that they were so much better than everybody else and stuff like that. So we were really marginalized and it was just really tough. And so I left at, I left at 18, went to Snow college where I was enrolled and that's pretty much it because my, I mean if you've ever read Educated by Tara Westover,

Brittany: [00:07:02](#) As you were talking, I was thinking of that book.

Laura Pennock: [00:07:05](#) Yeah, the struggle is real. I totally get it. I pretty much the, the school system down there was what would be called now a failing school district. And I really pretty much left there with about a third grade education and thought I was stupid and you know, and was incapable and, you know, and I didn't, I had no job skills.

Laura Pennock: [00:07:29](#) I had no, I have no idea what I could or couldn't do or what was even available in the world.

Brittany: [00:07:37](#) Have you been, I mean, I want to say this delicately, but had you just been, uh, pushed into this idea that marriage and motherhood and like that was your only path? I mean, did you even have any concept that you should have more of an education or more of an opportunity to pursue?

Laura Pennock: [00:07:56](#) I was going to college to get my mrs degree.

Brittany: [00:08:00](#) Yes. It's a Mrs. Degree.

Laura Pennock: [00:08:03](#) Yes. So I left Snow College at the end of that year with a 0.89 GPA. Obviously I had no business being there. And then I spent a few months at home. Just kind of in those few months are just kind of a blank to me. I don't really remember. I was kind of, I mean I would, I was just completely a draft. I had no idea.

Laura Pennock: [00:08:30](#) And my mom said, well, why don't you go to beauty school? And I'm like, okay. So I did, I still have an active cosmetology license because I have kept that up for 130 years. Every few years they say pay us money. So I pay them money and they give me a license. But I did do hair for awhile. But it was a long time after that. And it was shortly I got my cosmetology license that my parents did a Colorado history field trip for their fourth, fifth and sixth graders every year. And one of the places they went is Silverton, Colorado. And that is the end of the line of the Durango Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. So it's this little tiny,

you know, and so they were up there and saw a help wanted sign in one of the places up there.

Laura Pennock: [00:09:25](#) So me and my sister went up there for the summer and I met this guy from Boston. He had been hitchhiking across the country, headed for California and ran out of money there and he picked me and that, you know, that was, that was all that mattered. He picked me, well a year and a half or so later, he said, well, do you, we were living together for awhile and he said, so do you want to, you want to move? Go, you know, go back to Boston with me. And I'm like, okay, you know, I am this totally, you know, just completely clueless, uneducated, unformed, timid little dust bunny, you know? Okay. I thought,

Brittany: [00:10:18](#) Oh my goodness. She's literally hopping across the table.

Laura Pennock: [00:10:24](#) Yeah. I had no clue. No clue what I was about to get myself into. Well, Boston is a foreign country if you have been raised in that sort of way. And in the Western United States because everything is different. The climate is different, the culture is different, the architecture is different and they do not speak English there. So here I was trying to make my way, I'm trying to just figure it out and turns out his mother was a falling down drunk. His parents were a divorcing at the time that we sort of landed back there. They should have been divorced before Jonathan, that was his name was born. His father was this, this slightly had some older man who was completely shallow, utterly self-absorbed. And Jonathan craved his approval. Well, Jonathan turns out like I didn't like, I didn't know this. Okay. He had been drinking since he was 13 years old. He had been in a car accident at 17 drinking and driving and killed someone. So, but the time that I met him, his license had been revoked for 10 years and I knew all of that and I knew he was an alcoholic. I mean, hello. It was pretty darn obvious. But okay. When you are raised in a picture of perfect religion, one of the things that you are told is a could a woman can save a man, you can change him. You can, you can have such influence.

Laura Pennock: [00:12:04](#) Oh, I had, I was deep in my Messiah complex. I was going to fix this. We ended up getting married and thank you God. I did not have any children with him. So when the time came I was able to just leave and I did. But leaving was, there was this huge journey. I was out one night walking his dog, paying nothing, no mind. And God spoke to me and said to me in a way that I could not misunderstand "you are not stupid". And that blew my world wide open. I was still an uneducated on formed timid little dust bunny. But I had a mind and I started like that very day. Just it was like, okay, everything, everything is possible

now. All of a sudden everything was possible. And it was a couple of years later when I did leave him and the reason why, you know, I knew I was leaving and I was looking for a roommate and we had a rather difficult evening one night.

Laura Pennock:

[00:13:25](#)

And I was just, I called in at work and they kind of knew what that my marriage was falling apart and I said, I had a tough evening last night and I'm just going to stay home. And they're like, okay, well we'll see you tomorrow. And I was sitting on the couch in my apartment completely alone. Again, a completely empty mind, just staring at the walls and God again spoke to me, go home and go to school. And it was so right that I called up the airlines. I bought a plane ticket. I went in the next day and gave my notice. I went and I left. It was like two weeks later I was on a plane heading back home. I, so I was going back to college and I was really, really nervous about this. I was like, okay, I am going to do this and it's going to be hard and I'm just going to, I'm just going to, I'm just going to get through it because I need this degree, you know, it's sort of thing. Well, two weeks into college and I was like, Oh, okay. I'm just fine. Thank you very much. This is a lot of fun!

Laura Pennock:

[00:14:31](#)

I loved it. My second time through college I was ready and it was, it was a fabulous experience. And so I started out at what was called Mesa State and it's now something else is in Grand junction, Colorado. And transferred from there. After two years I transferred up to the University of Utah. And so that's where I met my current husband. He's in the chemistry department or in the he was taking, getting a bachelor's degree in chemistry and I was like getting a bachelor's degree in English. And we met at this little research lab that was connected to the university and it was a nuclear chemistry lab. They were doing some sort of things, well they had this obscure conference and they had a whole bunch of papers from all over the world that they needed to have made ready for publication.

Laura Pennock:

[00:15:23](#)

So they were looking for a work study student to be an editor. And so I walked in, you know, I thought, Oh, they probably have a million candidates, but that, well, no they didn't. I walked in and they're like, yes, we can you start? So that was a really fun job and I edited copy, edited those papers that, for that conference. And for the next one. And that's where Kelly was working. And we, so we met there and we ended up getting married and I was inactive at this point. And so was he, because he was inactive because he didn't like, as were Benson, he thought that he was like this crazy, you know, and he was, he was this crazy wacko, this really right-wing, you know, I mean, he was, he was off the wall and so, but I was inactive because I

had drifted away after I left home. There was nothing to hold me there and there was nothing to anchor me there and you know, and I was, you know, dealing with life and you know, this, this family that I found myself in in Boston was, they were not interested in religion at all. And you know, and I wasn't, I really wasn't either. There was just, there was nothing really there. Although I had never shed my sort of Mormon identity and my Mormon sort of convictions was just like in the background.

Brittany: [00:16:45](#) So I have a quick question about that because you said that you know, you had at least two very distinct moments where you felt like God was directly just putting something into your mind and, and you, you acted on it. Yeah. And that changed the trajectory of your life. So, but because you weren't quote unquote active or worthy in, and I'm doing air quotes in the eyes of the LDS church, did that, I mean, how did you reconcile that? Because a lot of times you think that if you're not living correctly, then God won't talk to you. You can't feel the spirit, etc. So yeah. Was that,

Laura Pennock: [00:17:19](#) That was something that surprised me, but I took it and later when I did go back, I was teaching a Relief Society lesson and we were, I think we were talking about the Holy Spirit and somebody said, Oh well, you know, but the Holy Spirit will leave you if you're not living the way you shouldn't. And I said, I'm going to push back on that. There was a time when I was not in any way living like you, you guys would consider a righteously. And the Spirit not only dwelt with me but spoke very, very clearly to me. So you know, and it just kind of, when she was like, Oh well, well, you know, and other people spoke up as well and said, that's been my experience too. That's, you know, so I was like, Oh well no, but I was not going to let that slide because I knew that that was not, that was not the way it works.

Laura Pennock: [00:18:17](#) Yeah. And I didn't really have any, I didn't really, it wasn't really something that, that sort of, I, that I connected at the time that it happened, but later I was like, you know what? No, I was, yeah. You know, no, I was living in sin and you know, and had been and had been, you know, experimented with some drugs with this guy and it was, you know, I should have had, if that was the case, if that's how it really worked, I would not have had the Spirit with me at all. And it was perfectly clear to me that I did. So we, anyway, so, okay. Kelly and I got married and his family is also very TBM, very true believing Mormon or true blue Mormon, which is, that's what TBM is. And his mother is kind of, I, you know, I always thought that she was sort of the

perfect Mormon woman and I still kind of do because she is, she has absolutely no doubts.

Laura Pennock:

[00:19:28](#)

And it's not that she even, I mean she does, it wouldn't occur to her to have doubts even even with family members who are, you know, not always faithful and it just wouldn't occur to her to have any doubts at all that, you know, this is, this is the way it is. And the prophet is the prophet and the prophet. What the prophet says is the, you know, is the voice of God speaking straight to us and for the whole world, you know, all of this stuff, she just completely, it's hook, line and sinker. It's, it's just, she's completely all in. And you know, my mom is kind of like that too. But I always thought my mom was a little more nuanced and thoughtful and I, she has gotten less so as she's gotten to older, Fox News and all that. So w so we had, we had our first kid and, and Kelly said, well, and okay, back up, before I married Kelly, I did something.

Laura Pennock:

[00:20:30](#)

I was like, I was pissed at God because I, when I came back to, to back home to go to school, I also went back to the church in a big way. And that's where, you know, I ended up, I went and got to get my endowments. I was going to make this work and, and I had an experience that made it very clear to me that women and evil were two sides of the same coin in the, the eyes of the church. And I, I, that blew my faith up completely. I was, I was really in a bad way there. And so that's why I was inactive when I met Kelly. But I saw also during this time period, I saw a in Carolyn Pearson. Do mother Wolf the morning. I almost didn't go because I'm like, she's a Mormon poet. This is all I knew of her. She's a Mormon poet. Do I really want to, you know, know any, I don't really want to hear from a Mormon. It was like, you know, okay, I'll go. Because I really liked her and stuff. Well, Oh my gosh. You know, I ended up sitting in the car after, after I left there, I couldn't even drive. I was crying so hard for like half an hour. And so that introduced me to the real Carolyn Pearson.

Laura Pennock:

[00:21:47](#)

And so I was kind of in this place where it's like, okay, well God, if you exist and I don't know if you do and if you do, I don't know what an appropriate place in my life for you is, but you know where to find me is what I said. You know where to find me. And so when Kelly said, Oh, I think we should start going back to church, I was like, maybe I shouldn't have said that. So we did. We went back and started going to church and I took my doubts with me and it was, you know, after that period that I spoke back to this relief society, you know, this relief society thing about, no, you know, the Spirit will leave you if you're not living in the right way. And I'm like, that's not true. So I, I gave a couple of, I was always called it as a Relief society.

Laura Pennock: [00:22:45](#) I released this how you teach her and I loved it. I loved that calling and, but I was always skating the edges of orthodoxy and sometimes I sort of fall, fell off the edge and on at least one occasion I was told by the Relief Society presidency that yeah, you know, stick to the script sort of thing.

Brittany: [00:23:08](#) I got told that too, but I quoted Sheri Dew and that's what got me in trouble.

Laura Pennock: [00:23:13](#) Yeah, no, I, I knew I was going off script with that particular time because I was like, we were talking about creation the fall. We're talking about the fall and I was like, you know, talking about, I'm not going to stand here and tell you that you are created in the image of a male God is how I started that, you know, in front of Relief Society.

Laura Pennock: [00:23:35](#) And I just felt really inspired, like really pressed to, to speak the way I did. And there was a woman I found out after I was told that, you know, that really probably that was, you know, I'd follow up the line falling off the edge. I found out that there was a woman who was a, who was a recent convert and she, she did not last very long in the church, but she was a recent convert, she was actually there that day and she had been prompted to come that day, you know, she was like, I don't really want to go, you know, no, you need to, you need to go today. And so I was speaking directly to her, I found out. So anyway, you know, just inspired to go with it because somebody needs to hear it.

Brittany: [00:24:21](#) Even if it gets you in trouble.

Laura Pennock: [00:24:22](#) Yeah. So anyway we moved through several wards. Let's see, we were in a ward in Ogden when we started going back, so we were living there and then we went to Dugway. We were living there for five years. So I was in a ward there and then we were in Tooele for a couple of years and then we moved from there to Ohio. And so we were in Ohio for five years with, it was a job relocation and I, they called me, they're to the relief society presidency and I was like, you want me? I mean, you know, you want my mother-in-law, you don't, not me, you know, sort of thing. So I, I served there for a few years until I until that job fell through and we ended up back, Kelly was working back at Dugway and there was no way I was moving back to Dugway and I said, this is the last move I'm making, so this is it.

Laura Pennock: [00:25:29](#) So we ended up in Bountiful where I am now and where they're going to have to take me out feet first and probably burn the place behind me because of all of my stuff and my kids don't want to deal with it. But the, of course, the ward house is right



across the street and I was so exhausted. It had been a really grueling five years. Our marriage was really, really rocky. And, um, I was, I was contemplating divorcing him and I, you know, but I didn't, I thought, you know, we're all, we're, we're not fighting openly or anything like that and there's no violence in the house or anything like that. And, but if I, if I divorced him, then he's going to have time with the kids where I won't be able to be there and to take them out of situations where, because he was being emotionally abusive to them.

Laura Pennock: [00:26:23](#) And so anyway, it was just a really, really difficult period there. And so we came back here and I was completely exhausted and Sundays were for sleeping. And it's like, I don't, I don't want to go to church because first of all, I am kind of like, uh, and, and I'm tired. And it was a big ward and, and there were people who had been there. I've lived in the neighborhood all of their lives, I mean their whole lives. And they were, you know, they were married and had grown kids and grandkids and stuff. And then there with the, we had this apartment complex of some sort that, so we had these young, very young transient group that kind of came and went. And so then at one point, my, my daughter, my youngest daughter did get into get enrolled in the young women's program there.

Laura Pennock: [00:27:21](#) They took her in and they treated her really well and, and she just really, really loved it. And she was actually considering if she was preparing to go on a mission when the exclusion policy happened and that blew her violently out of the church because she has LGBT friends and she's, so, she's still very angry about that. And during that time of course ordain women, 2013 just sort of burst on the scene. And I was like, yeah, Ordain Women.

Brittany: [00:27:59](#) I think that's how I was truly contacted with you. I think we met at the counterpoint conference in, I dunno, 2015 but I had been secretly stalking you online with your stuff, with Ordain Women before that.

Laura Pennock: [00:28:12](#) So I did not, I think that the first time we met was at women's retreat. That first one was retreat.

Brittany: [00:28:17](#) Well, okay. So yes, you officially, but I think that I, again, I just feel like I was a fan girl of yours for a while because you spoke at counter point.

Laura Pennock: [00:28:29](#) Right. I did Counter Point.

Brittany: [00:28:32](#) I don't remember if counterpoint was before, after that women's retreat, but it was all kind of at the same time.

Laura Pennock: [00:28:37](#) Yeah. So I kind of got wind of this Ordain Women, launch them, you know, meeting and I'm like, Oh, that sounds interesting. That sounds, you know, yeah, I think I can get on board with that sort of thing. So I went and I was the first one there. So I walked into this room with the University of Utah and there were these four women up at the front, and then there was me and we were kind of standing, looking at each other going, is this going to be it, you know, sort of thing. And the room did fill up and I was like, these are my people. I can stay in the church with these people. I can, I, I have a home here.

Laura Pennock: [00:29:18](#) So I participated in both of the priesthood actions, all the priesthood actions that we did. And I participated in all of it. It was, it was just really good. And I had really high hopes that first, especially that first action, I thought, you know, there's no way they're just, they can't, I mean, you know, they're, they're going to hear us and it's gonna change everything. And we're gonna, you know, it may take three or four years, but they're gonna, you know, they're gonna see the error of their ways and what didn't happen. So I ended up, I ended up pretty much leaving the church especially after Kate was excommunicated. I was just like this, this is not a place for me. There's not going to be, there's just, there's just no way. And so I started shopping around, well my daughter also was like, I will, you don't want to go look at some different churches.

Laura Pennock: [00:30:17](#) And, and so we started church hopping and, and I found the United church of Christ has a, has a congregation in bountiful and I was, I started kind of settling. I sort of settled in there for a bit and I was, I was going back and forth between there and Community of Christ here in salt Lake. But during that time I was in, I still am in this little choir, this little community choir as LGBT community choir and, and Robin was in the choir and she happened to say one day, well, you know, we're, we're having this women's retreat and I think you might really like it. And I'm like, okay, you know, it just gave you the information. And I signed up and, and then I loaded up and, and started driving up there and I got, it was a camp Red Cliffe. So you turn off of the sort of highway through Huntsville, you turn off onto this road, go up the Canyon a little bit, you turn off of that into the camp grounds, you turn off of that onto a little dirt road.

Laura Pennock: [00:31:19](#) I was on the dirt road and I was just like, what am I, I can't find this place. Oh my gosh. And I don't know anybody. I barely know Robin. I'm gonna spend the weekend with these people?

What am I thinking? I almost turned around this was yard of the campground, you know, within yards of the campground there. And I almost turned around and but I didn't, I ended up going up there and going in and it was this fabulous spiritual weekend that, that, you know, just, I, Oh, I needed it so bad. I, I cried the whole weekend and I met Monica and I met Brittany and so, and that kind of brought me to coming to Community of Christ occasionally. And so the Salt Lake congregation, I was kinda going back and forth between the two and not really sure where I was going to end up or what I wanted to do or anything like that.

Laura Pennock: [00:32:20](#) And, and then of course I did. I did the Any Opposed thing.

Brittany: [00:32:28](#) I was gonna bring it up!

Laura Pennock: [00:32:30](#) There was a really so, well first of all, yeah, I, I did, I made myself persona non grata in my congregation. My LDS congregation first by they asked my daughter to give a talk and she's in sacrament meeting and she said, well I will if you will ask my mom. And I had gone in and told my Bishop that I was involved in Ordained Women. I felt like that they had fair warning. So they asked me and I said, well sure. So they, you know, gave me a copy of this talk. This is what we want you to, this is the top essentially, you know, a general authority talk, you know, and it was entitled to come onto me and that's, I started at, come onto me and let the rest of it behind.

Laura Pennock: [00:33:18](#) And I got up there and I spoke the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it did not go over well. So anyway, so I was like, well, I'm done here. I guess it's like, yeah, cause I knew that, you know, this was, yeah, this was not going to go well and, and, but I let them do what they were going to do and I, you know, I sort of assumed that they were going to, you know, that they were gonna call it a disciplinary council and they didn't, they just, you know, I think that I was informally disfellowshipped because I was released, I was a visiting teacher at the time and they released me from that. They, they sent the relief society president to tell me that I could no longer be at the visiting teacher.

Brittany: [00:34:12](#) That happens?

Laura Pennock: [00:34:13](#) Yeah.

Brittany: [00:34:14](#) Wow. Yeah. Was this before any opposed or was it just,

Laura Pennock: [00:34:19](#) That was, that was before, because Any Opposed was shortly after that. I was like, so I caught, we did this thing, you know, where they were gonna oppose a general conference. And I mean, it was like a blip on social media. It would just like sort of happened and then disappeared. And you know, you're supposed to write to this.

Brittany: [00:34:36](#) Well, so because there's no actual voting at an LDS conference, it's just all sustaining. So there's, there's nothing that you actually vote on. You're just voting to sustain the leaders. So nobody opposes out of like thousands and thousands. Tens of thousands of people that attend conference, nobody opposes.

Laura Pennock: [00:34:55](#) They do is they say they present the names and then they say any all all in favor until everybody of course raises their hand and then they say, yeah, and then they say any opposed? And of course there's never, you know, anybody opposed? So, you know, it's like, okay, well it's unanimous, you know, sort of thing. And, and it's just kind of this, this sort of, they just sort of go through the motions. So it's very different from Community of Christ because like, yeah, you just don't do that sort of thing. And so I saw this little thing, you know, just contact this right to this website and we will tell you sort of where we're going to meet and what's going to happen and stuff like that. So I had no idea who these people were. And I thought about it for quite quite a while before, you know, because I knew that this is going to be a serious thing.

Laura Pennock: [00:35:43](#) And so I, I, I decided, okay, I'm going to do it. And I told my family, I think I said, this may actually get me excommunicated and I am prepared. I am prepared to be excommunicated over this because I believe that the brother and are completely wrong. They are, you know, they are just, they are not prophets and seers and revelators and they are, they're just, they're just wrong in so many ways. And so, I went and I, cause I didn't know who it was. I showed up that day. It was so Saturday session of conference and I didn't have a ticket to get into the conference center. And so I just, they said, if you don't have a ticket, just go into to the tabernacle. So I did, I went into the tabernacle and I sat right in the middle of the floor there.

Laura Pennock: [00:36:37](#) And for anybody who has not been in the tabernacle, it's that historic building with the Oregon and where the tabernacle choir, U S you know, it performs and, and has their sort of home and the acoustics in this building are phenomenal. There's a main floor and then there's this sort of a balcony that sort of is around three probably two thirds of the building, you know, just up a little bit higher and you can stand in at the, at the rostrum

and have somebody standing in the back of that building and you can speak to them in a normal speaking voice and they can hear you clearly, perfectly clearly. If you drop a needle or a pin on there, you can hear it. If drop a pencil on there, it is loud. So the acoustics there is like, no, I mean, yeah, you don't have to speak very loudly in there to be heard throughout the whole thing.

Laura Pennock: [00:37:33](#) So I'm sitting there, I didn't know who else was involved. I didn't know if anybody else was there. I didn't know. I didn't know anything. And so we're, you know, they started coming to the sustaining and I was sitting there going, Oh, it's the moment I w you know, I thought I sort of had this vision of, you know, a hundred people standing up in the tabernacle, you know, and I was like, Oh my gosh, I go throw up. Oh, you know, I don't want to have to do this, I don't have to do this. But then I knew as soon as I thought that, that if I didn't do it, I would read it for the rest of my life. And so they, they ask for the sustaining vote of the first presidency and I stood up and said, I oppose and nobody else stood up or said anythings.

Laura Pennock: [00:38:19](#) And I sat back down and I was kind of waiting for somebody to come. And you know, like yank me out of my seat and, and you know, fling me out the doors or something and nothing happened. So I had of, of course I had to sit there through the rest of the session, not having any idea, you know, sort of if anybody else said anything. Well it turns out there were seven of us and the other six had gotten tickets to the conference center and they were sitting together in there and they actually did oppose that. But I was just and there were I, Oh I have to say there was two guys who were sitting down. It is on the stand down there when I was behind the roster and I couldn't see them, but the other one responded as if I had walked up and slapped him in the face.

Laura Pennock: [00:39:14](#) I was just so that made me smile. But I just sitting there and so, and I walked down and nobody said a peep to me. Nobody. And so I went up to, we have to City Creek where we were supposed to meet afterwards and it was this one guy who was talking to the media. Nobody else wanted to be seen on camera or anything like that. And so I, I walked over and I said, Oh, this has Any opposed? And said, yeah, at this he says, yeah, I said, I was in the tabernacle, so you know, and then, yeah, so, but nobody said anything to me and my stake president didn't say anything and my Bishop didn't say anything. And of course elder roof door after fumbling around, like completely gobsmacked that somebody had stood up and opposed it did not know what to do about that stood up and said, well, well if you ha, you know,

you need to, if you have those who have concerns, need to go and speak to their stake presidents. Excuse me, I was not going to go speak to my state president because I knew that first of all that was not going to go anywhere. And secondly is like, whatever you want to excommunicate me, come, come find me. You know, sort of things.

Brittany: [00:40:29](#)

So I'm trying to keep my composure and this is where if we were doing Zoom, I would totally just be laughing hysterically. And I'm laughing because it seems so ridiculous now to where we're at. You know, I mean, I just did a Facebook post not too long ago about a woman who openly opposed words of counsel at world conference and it was normal and natural and fine and everyone was okay with it. And we let her have her space. So I celebrate that. Yeah. I just look how far we've come.

Laura Pennock: [00:41:02](#)

I, yeah, it was not long after that I think that I ended up, you know, to sitting down and going, okay, I need to know where I belong. I remember my, am I supposed to be here at, at UCC or am I supposed to be at Community of Christ? And, and it was very clear to me that I needed to be a community of Christ. So I ended up joining a Community of Christ was two and a half or so years ago. And, um, then Carla has for me to be a member of the pastorate. And I went, Whoa, you want me? Are you sure I'm not one to really, you know, be respectful of rules and stuff like that. So, well maybe you better think about this. And she's, Oh no. Oh no, it's good.

Laura Pennock: [00:41:51](#)

I want you, I think you'd be great. So I'm a member of the the pastorate and it has been great. It has been really fun. It's been, it's been a real trip. So yeah, so this is Thursday night and on Sunday we will have a business meeting where they will where my call to priest will be presented to the congregation. So that's the next big thing in my spiritual journey. I guess so. And okay. I got, I have to say, I have to say this because I know if there are any of you who are family and friends listening to this and are hearing about my, my upcoming, my, about my priesthood call or there are people who are saying, Oh, well you are a member of ordain women. So, wow. Good for you. You finally got what you wanted. I am here to disabuse you right this minute.

Laura Pennock: [00:42:49](#)

I have not by any means gotten what I wanted. What I want with ordain women is I want all of my sisters in the LDS church to have full citizenship in their spiritual community. That is what I want. And I have not gotten that. I'm not, it's not even close. So yeah, I have accepted a call to priesthood here in Community of Christ because this is my spiritual journey. And, um, but it does not mean that I came here looking for this or that. I

decided I needed to join a congregation where, or a denomination where I could have the opportunity to have the priesthood. And if you do not want the priesthood, if you're one of these women who is simpering around going, Oh, I just don't really want the responsibility. No is a word.

Brittany: [00:43:54](#)

Oh my friend. So good. I think it's good that you, you bring that up though, because I know for me, and this is, I mean, I want to ask you some questions about this because yeah. Uh, I know for me when I was first called, I was worried about how it would look to everyone. I was like, Oh, Brittany got upset when Kate Kelly was excommunicated. And then she just went and joined this church that immediately scooped her up and ordained her, and not, I had this serious,

Brittany: [00:44:25](#)

I dunno, cloud of shame cloud of I was then proving everybody. Right. I took me a while to, I mean, I said yes to my call relatively quickly within just a few weeks, but it took me months and months to really feel okay about it. And really like years. And every, every step that I've taken in community of Christ, every uh, thing that I've said yes to, I still kind of have to shove that out of my mind of like, you're not just proving everyone right that thinks you left because you were this feminist that just needed more power because the reality is as ministry is pretty crappy sometimes that, yeah, it's tough! I mean it's not if, if, if everyone's life was perfect, we wouldn't need ministers right here in Salt Lake. We're dealing with such a population that has been marginalized, that have left the predominant religion. And so the culture is really thick. The family shamings really thick. I mean it's, it's a tough gig. So I'm wondering as you were saying yes to not only membership but then being on the pastorate and then ordination and all the things, uh, how have you kind of broken through that shame? Like the cloud of shame that I still feel like kind of follows me sometimes.

Laura Pennock: [00:45:51](#)

Yeah. Part of my discerning this path where, where was I going to be? Was I being called to the United church of Christ and the bountiful congregation or was I being called to community of Christ? Part of that was a call to priesthood. I knew that if I was going to be good at, if I was going to join Community of Christ, that a priesthood call was PO was going to be part of that. I knew that from the beginning. So that's something that I had, you know, a couple of years to really kind of think about and to, to watch. And one of the things that I have to say, my friend, Brittany's behalf here, I was delighted to see her finally start saying, I am an ordained minister, I am an ordained minister in another congregation. And it's like, you know, owning that online. I'm like, Oh, you go Brittany.

- Brittany: [00:46:47](#) It definitely took a while, like two years after my ordination and now I'm like, no, you're saying something false about my church. I know the thing, you know. Yeah. It's taken me a while to get there.
- Laura Pennock: [00:46:57](#) Yeah. So, yeah. But yeah, it was this, you know, I mean, I did have some baggage to work through and I have not told my parents, I have not told my husband's family about this, this priesthood call. And I've not, I will not be inviting them to my ordination and because it won't mean anything to them. Yeah. And if it does what it would possibly mean to them would be negative. And it's like, I, you don't need to be here. You, you're not a part of this. You don't understand this, you accept this. So, you know, I am doing this because God has asked me to do this and so I don't need you here even though, you know, it would be nice for them to be able to be here and to celebrate that, but they, they would not be celebrating it.
- Laura Pennock: [00:47:43](#) They would, it would be this, well you finally got what you wanted sort of thing. And you know, so yeah, I did have to think about it a lot. What does priesthood mean? What does it mean to be called to priesthood? And you know, and when I first sort of came to it, it was like this, you know, I just had this, I had to break down the hierarchy really sort of thing of being chosen and up being special and being selected in a being, you know, one of the elect or you know, whatever. All of those sorts of notions were all swirling around. They said I had to take them each and, and look at them and turn them over and examine them. And, and before I could set them aside and come to understand that priesthood really is, it is servant leadership. It is truly servant leadership.
- Laura Pennock: [00:48:38](#) You are here to help, to, to offer yourself in hopes of helping someone to, to move along in their journey. And you know, wherever it may take them, you know, they come into the doors and you know, we welcomed them and we give them materials and we tell them we have these certain resources available and stuff, but, and you can take it or you can leave it and you can, you can come and go as you please there is, you know, we're not out to, to scoop you up, you know, and keep you as ours or whatever because that may not be their journey. And that's the, you know, you have to be open to that sort of meeting people where they are and, and facilitating their, their path and their journey and helping them discover who they are and what Gods calling them to and things like that.
- Laura Pennock: [00:49:32](#) So yeah, there's this and I really like that so much better than, you know, being elitist in chosen. And, you know, I mean, those



sorts of things that, Oh, you know, you're so like, you know, I just, I just really resonate so much better with that. Just, you know, being, being someone who can offer you can offer myself and the things that I have experienced and say, this is what, this is what happened to me and this is how I handled it and this is what I've struggled with. And, and to be able to sit and listen to their stories and, and you know, people, people really want to be, people need to be heard. That's, that's the first step in healing is to be heard without being judged or without somebody telling you, well, you should do this or you should think that, or you should, should, should, should, should, should, should. So, yeah.

- Brittany: [00:50:25](#) Yeah. And I love that the office of priest, that's what the focus is, is focused on friendship, on relationship, on shared stories, on just being with people, partaking of bread and wine and just being present with the person in the moment. So, yeah, I'm really excited for you. I think you're gonna make a great,
- Laura Pennock: [00:50:45](#) And it was like when they, when I, I, you know, started taking the classes, I accepted the call and then I was like, yeah, that, that, I think that's right. And then I started taking the ministry of the priest classes and I was like, Oh yeah, okay. Yeah. So fit. I just, I, yesterday, Wednesday, I was sworn in as a licensed paralegal practitioner.
- Brittany: [00:51:12](#) Yes. Yeah, let's talk about that.
- Laura Pennock: [00:51:14](#) I am one of four. It's a new legal profession in Utah and oddly enough, I'm going to be practicing in family law. It fits right in there with priest. It's like, it's like dovetails perfectly in there. So it's all just, you know, I, I'm starting my own practice and I, I just feel like I'm just a little bit, you know, I'm going to have to sit down sometimes and say, OK, negative voices. You can have 15 minutes go and then, okay, and then you're done. You're done. You're done. Sit down, be quiet. I'll give you 10 minutes, maybe next time.
- Brittany: [00:51:54](#) I love this about you because just thinking of your whole story and how you graduated from high school with you said I think a third grade. Yeah. Yeah. Education. Then to going from navigating through difficult relationships and parenting and all these church dramatic moments, dramatic moments with church, to then making a decision for yourself. That then sparked a lot of other decisions as far as faith goes. But then you also, we're going back to school at the same time and now you're starting your own practice. So I don't know, I just felt like

you are the poster child of the poster woman for hashtag made it. It's just, I love it.

- Laura Pennock: [00:52:38](#) Wait til I'm actually making, you know, us. I'm actually making you know, a steady amount of money before we say you've made it.
- Brittany: [00:52:45](#) Yeah. Starting your own business. I know. That's gotta be rough.
- Laura Pennock: [00:52:49](#) Yeah. It's, it's so scary because you know, I mean, I started thinking, these are the voices I sit down and let them, let them have their, have their moments. You're an idiot. You're going to fail. You're, you're, you're just going to humiliate yourself. What makes you think you could do, you know, it's like, Oh, so.
- Brittany: [00:53:10](#) You're going to do great though. Oh, so Laura, just a couple of more questions. I, I'm interested to know what drew you to Community of Christ. So when you were talking about United church of Christ, which by the way, I've said multiple times that that might be the only con or the only nomination that I would, could see myself going to outside of Community of Christ. And I know that their congregational is, so it varies widely, but I hear the ones in Utah are really good, but I'm wondering what was it that drew you to Community of Christ over UCC? It was probably a priesthood call. I was, you know, it was like I could,
- Laura Pennock: [00:53:52](#) you know, I could be a part of like the altar Guild in sort of a limited, lay ministry, but I really felt this on it. Was this just call to ministry the, that didn't have any shape or particular focus or anything like that. And in order to, to be a minister in the United Church of Christ, I would, would've had to have gone to a seminary program that they approved of be ordained and you know, and they'd be a pastor. And I'm like, I'm not, I'm not a pastor, but I don't know what I am. But there was this call to sort of this amphoras call to ministry that it was sort of out there and, and you know, it didn't have any shaped, didn't have any forum, didn't have any direction or anything like that. And so Community of Christ, I knew they were deigned women. And so that was something that I thought about a lot in conjunction with my deciding to join is, you know, is this, is this where that sort of that call sort of fits in, can it, is there a place for it here? And, and there is, so, yeah,
- Brittany: [00:55:11](#) I love that. I love that, you know, it was, it sounds like it was obviously an intentional decision that the intentionality behind it was kind of this mystery and this, this, this image that didn't have an image, this idea that didn't have a form, like you said,

and yet you kind of jumped off the cliff and dove right in, which I think takes an enormous amount of bravery. So

Laura Pennock: [00:55:37](#) yeah, it was, and the UCC congregation at Bountiful was very open and affirming and you know, their thing that they said every, every Sunday was no matter where you are on your journey, you are welcome here. And they meant it. They lived that out. So it was so, it was really, you know, it was a good, it was a good place and I could have, I could have, you know, sort of rested there. And I did rest there for about three years. And as I sort of figured out what I was going to do and sort of all of these other challenges that I was sort of, uh, dealing with in the background too. So, yeah. Yeah.

Brittany: [00:56:18](#) So one more question and then I'll just ask you, is there anything else?

Brittany: [00:56:23](#) Okay. Maybe I have two more questions. Okay. The first one was what gives you hope about Community of Christ?

Laura Pennock: [00:56:28](#) Oh, what gives me everything gives me hope. Your open. Leadership is, there's, there's a maturity to community of Christ moved past some really difficult issues and difficult, you know, sort of broken out of some, some really rigid boxes and, and I didn't just shatter, you know, and the outside moved toward a, a bigger, a bigger, more beautiful, I think just theology and, and in an embrace of the world as you know, a place where we could have effectiveness. It's not, you know, that you are in the world but not love the world, you know, and you kind of avoided and you ran away from it and you hide from it and you keep your children's shielded from it. No, you go in there and you, you take your self and your theology and your passion for the, you know, for God and you take it out into the world and you give it away and you, you know, so that's what we're, um, I feel like that we're called to in Community of Christ and I think that that's, that's an ongoing process.

Laura Pennock: [00:57:40](#) I, I totally get that I think one of the things, I'm just going to say this, this is the gospel according to Lara here. Priesthood still has higher, has a hierarchy and I'm not sure, I'm just gonna throw this out here. Leadership, priesthood has got this sort of hierarchy thing going on and there's room for improvement there. Love ya. Work on that. So the Mormon feminist community, I would say to all of my more in Mormon feminists come and rest in Community of Christ. You don't have to join. You don't have to get, you don't have to get involved. Just come and sit in the pews and let it wash over you and, and heal you and give you, give you hope for the world. Because, you know,

but if you're, if you have a call, if you feel like that you have some sort of ministerial call come here and they will help you give it shape and focus and, and a place to, to sort of step off from that and support you in your, in your growth in that.

- Laura Pennock: [00:58:48](#) And it doesn't matter what you believe. I might, theology is way out in the weeds and there are people here in the congregation who find me a little alarming. But you know, I love ya. I love, anyway, we'll agree to disagree and I will, you know, listen to you and try to understand where you're coming from and not tell.
- Brittany: [00:59:11](#) Faithful disagreement. That's what we're all about.
- Laura Pennock: [00:59:13](#) That's right. And I will not try to tell you that you're wrong. Or that I'm right because I don't know that, you know, I don't know. And I don't care about being right or wrong. This is, you know, how I've experienced God and this is kinda how this experience has formed a, an image or a vision or a way of sort of trying to understand God in my experience and if so, your experience is different than that's, you know, that's wonderful.
- Laura Pennock: [00:59:40](#) That's your experience. Experience. God, take it in. But yeah, Mormon feminists. There is a place for you here and we would love to have you, but I understand that there are a lot of you out there who are still soldiering on in the Brighamite community and bless you. I bless, I bless you a thousand times for every little tiny time that you speak up and feel like that, you know, even though nobody heard you, it's like speaking up is, is everything. And I don't see the Brighamites changing. I do not see them say changing for several generations, but you know, if you feel like you're making a difference in your congregation, then definitely as long as you feel like you're doing something there and that you have a call to be there than be there and, and be bold.
- Brittany: [01:00:30](#) So thank you friend. Anything else? Anything else that I didn't say or?
- Laura Pennock: [01:00:37](#) I don't know this, I feel like, you know, I just sort of sat here and just talked and I know that's exactly what I wanted, so, okay. Well, Oh, I got to tell you what, what Brittany I said at that counterpoint conference, I just like, it just sort of blurted it out. I have started a, I'd started a new of spiritual practice of going out into the, desert in central Utah and creating these this sacred circle. That's where I would take my big questions and burdens. That's where I take my rejoicing. And I just do that periodically as a replacement as the temple. As being a place

that is a time outside of time and in a space between the worlds where it's sort of there.

Laura Pennock: [01:01:38](#) And then I can create that temple experience and then I can take it down and I have a special box where all stuff is and I just put it in there. I take it with me anywhere that I want to and it's sort of always available to me. But it's kind of like this sort of ritual of stepping outside of the normal day to day things and, and stepping into this different sort of dimension. And so I said that, and I guess that caught Brittany's attention.

Brittany: [01:02:05](#) It did. And the reason why it caught my attention is because I had never up until that point, even considered that you could take that sort of spiritual experience or that sort of spiritual power or that you could rework prayer and make it what you need it to be like. And that sounds so ridiculous now. And now that I'm five years into this, five plus years in, uh, it seems totally normal to do something like that and to just kind of create a little alter for yourself to create a sacred space. I mean, we do that literally every single week in our communications in one way or another, all the time at women's retreats, things like that. But at the time, that was the first time that I've ever even heard of anybody say something like that and it kind of blew my mind and I thought, wow, no lightning strikes, knocked her dead? Yeah. She's still, yeah, this is great. Yeah.

Laura Pennock: [01:03:03](#) So yeah, it was still a really new practice to me and I was still kind of developing it and evolving it. And I felt a little weird about talking about it because I thought, you know, people are just going to think that I am just like this completely weird, whatever, you know, she go, you know, hang your crystals and do your mumbo jumbo and do your, you know, whatever. But yeah, it's become a really meaningful sort of part of my routine of spiritual practices. So.

Brittany: [01:03:33](#) I love it.

Laura Pennock: [01:03:34](#) I was so glad that not everybody in the room thought, Oh my God, this Lauren, it's just,

Brittany: [01:03:42](#) no, I was super intrigued and felt like such a baby, like along my journey. It was like, wow, I have a long way to go for it, and I still do so. Well, thank you. Again, this is everything I hoped it would be and uh, thank you.

Laura Pennock: [01:04:00](#) Okay, you're welcome.

Speaker 1: [01:04:08](#) [inaudible]

Speaker 2: [01:04:10](#) 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 projects. I am 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 of Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze.

Speaker 1: [01:05:03](#) [inaudible]

Speaker 2: [01:05:08](#) [inaudible]

Speaker 6: [01:05:12](#) [inaudible].

Brittany: [01:05:16](#) That's done.