

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

Josh: [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 and I am really excited about the conversation that we are going to have. But I'm here with Laurie Due and Laurie and I think we've only met once at this last World Conference. Maybe we met in 2016 I can't quite remember, but Laurie's been on my list of people to have on PZP for a while now and she recently presented at John Whitmer Historical Association. And when I, when we were talking about her paper, I knew that I wanted to have a further conversation about it. So I'm really, really excited and we are just going to dive into it. So Laurie, thank you for being on. And why don't you introduce yourself a little bit to our listeners?

Laurie: [00:01:25](#) Well as you said, I'm Laurie. Hi people who are listening. So I've lived a relatively stressful life and it's all resulted in me enjoying talking about theology and religion. I spent most of my life moving around and didn't really have a solid place of living. We lived in Ohio for like 12 years, but constantly different places. So I'm settled in Lamoni now it's nice, but it was funny. I started going to Graceland about three years ago and I told my friends I would never study religion and I was very, very, very wrong because now it's my absolute favorite topic. And so I only, I only really got invested into my faith as a Community of Christ member about three years ago. So it's all still kind of new to me. Now I'm working in the campus ministries program, coordinating the safe ride program, which is rideshare on campus. I'm working on my undergrad in psychology and I was accepted into seminary as a CEU student prior to my graduation. Uh, so I just finished my first course in that and I'm going blind. So that's fun. That is, that's always the fun part.

Brittany: [00:02:34](#) It's a lot to juggle. And, uh, I was not aware that you were not in seminary. In my mind, I thought that you were a seminary student. So when I heard or realized that you were an undergrad juggling all of these things, my, my impression of you just went up that much more. So

Laurie: [00:02:51](#) Yeah, I, uh, I actually found seminary, my, the one course that I have taken so far to be really useful and keeping me focused an

undergrad because I'm a senior right now. I have to make it to graduation without getting bored because after taking a grad class, everything else is like a walk in the park on a sunny day. It's so easy.

Brittany: [00:03:14](#) Well, I, uh, I really appreciate your enthusiasm because I know that by the time that I was finished with seminary, I'm like, Oh my gosh. And it was just like trudging through mud. I mean a very, a very great happy mud. But still the workload was a lot, so,

Laurie: [00:03:32](#) Oh, that's true.

Brittany: [00:03:35](#) Oh, okay. So let's, let's dive into your paper a little bit and I actually, I have our notes pulled up, but I don't actually have your paper pulled up. So can you tell us the title of your paper?

Laurie: [00:03:49](#) So the title of my paper is expanding understanding of the community of Zion. Yes,

Brittany: [00:03:57](#) I was intrigued by at the very beginning, you know, on Project Zion and we always talk about Zion obviously and the peaceable kingdom and what it takes to build that. And so I feel, well we have been intentional with all of our series to connect different elements of Zion and what does it take to build a peaceable kingdom. And so when I read your paper and when we were talking about your paper, the angle that you took was really, really interesting. And I always love when people tie in the Enduring Principles and the concept of common consent. And those were two big themes that you drew through your paper. So that's kind of what we are going to be talking about today. So, Laurie, I am curious on how you chose the topic for this paper. What sparks your interest in exploring what Zion is and how we create as ionic community.

Laurie: [00:04:53](#) So when I wrote the paper, I was taking a class taught by Tony and Charmaine Chavla Smith. It was the theology of Community of Christ. And we had a final research paper that we were supposed to pick two topics. I ended up with like three or four in the paper cause I'm really extra when I write. The thing that really got me was the process of change that we undergo. And so there was this one author this stuck out to me. His name was, his last name was Spencer. I don't remember the first name cause he only ever cite the last name. But he talked about Zion as an action symbol and process. And I absolutely love that because as someone who is disabled and has, who has seen all kinds of suffering in life, both on my own end and with what other people are going through, I know that adapting to that

and building a sustainable system is about being able to change and being able to move forward. And so I absolutely loved this idea that, that we could look at Zion in terms of how it adapts this process of recognizing that we know how to do something and then using that in new situations.

Brittany:

[00:06:04](#)

I absolutely love that because, and we'll get into this a little bit, but I know that Zion has historically been, you know, a physical place and we've moved into an understanding of it being a concept and it can be anywhere that we are. And so when you talk about being marginalized, being disabled, and being able to create a community that is inclusive, that is adaptable, that uplifts the worth and value of the most marginalized that's something that really resonates with me. And honestly that shift and understanding was a big part of what drew me to community of Christ. So thank you. I'm really excited to have this conversation. So let's, let's, I guess start with this definition of Zion. What would you say the definition is and then can you give us a little bit of information on maybe how it's historically been used and viewed and then how it's viewed today?

Laurie:

[00:07:03](#)

So Zion is, the reason I love Zion is because it has evolved beautifully speaking from the perspective of Community of Christ, because that's what I was, I was looking specifically at their theology. Our theology when I wrote the paper, it's from LDS to RLDS is started out as a gathering tradition focused on the location of Christ's return. And so it affected the theology, um, the understanding of how you were supposed to exist in this kingdom of God by making it a very concrete institutional view. So there's a specific place you're supposed to be in, there's a specific way you're supposed to act. And that was how it was understood. And so that's how we ended up with locations like Kirtland and Nauvoo and Independence. Now, uh, we have ended up in this understanding of Zion as a process and an action rather than a place.

Laurie:

[00:07:54](#)

And so it's, it's more about the world we're building rather than the place we're building. So if we're focused so much on say, the perfect building, a perfect city Independence, you can only do so much with things like infrastructure and what buildings we have, this, that and the other. But if we're focused on the world, it allows us to look at the different religions of other people and how we interact with those, the different cultural understandings of things, of concepts such as gender and race. Um, and so Zion has become more about adapting to the existence of people rather than adapting the existence of people to the world.

Brittany: [00:08:34](#) So I love Laurie that you outlined how is how's ion has been viewed historically and then how it has been viewed today. And again, I really love that you earlier brought in how's ion impacts this concept of Zion impacts the most marginalized. And so going along with that, let's talk a little bit more about how this concept of Zion is related to the worth of all persons. In your paper, you, and I'll pull up the quote directly. You say "In the worth of all persons, Zion has become a mission of selflessness, changing perspectives and open-mindedness, which allows new voices to be heard." And when I read that, as I was reading through your paper, when I read that, I highlighted it and underlined it because I wanted to make sure that we lifted that up. But this idea that Zion cannot be created unless perspectives change, we have a sense of a selflessness and that we are open minded to having other voices heard. So can you expand on that a little bit more?

Laurie: [00:09:38](#) So when I was doing the research and in the course of a class, I came across this thing that occurred in the 1960s called the statement on objectives for the church. And it was a way of looking at globalization and how to approach you knew situations culturally. And there was this concept of indigenous worship which focused very heavily on seeing the people of a place and a culture as they are. And that was my favorite thing from that because it requires us to work with unusual cultures and lifestyles and it makes us move beyond prejudices about race, sexual orientation, gender, all these things that we've built walls up because we don't understand them or they're threatening to our understanding of power. It makes us work past them because we have to integrate new understandings of these things. And so one of the, one of the things that I like about that is because it, it made me think of tithing, oddly enough, because I always thought of tithing is something far beyond money.

Laurie: [00:10:42](#) It's about giving your talents to new situations and your heart to new people. So when you're work, when you're talking about worth of all persons and Zion, you have to talk about how you interact with new people. Um, and so you have to give a piece of yourself to them to make them a part of you. And my painting, it's 100% this exchange. And that is how you accept them or at least begin to accept what you can understand about them. And so one of the things I was thinking is that ultimately we're all looking for some kind of peace. This place to belong, a place in which belonging means matter, which is where the, uh, worth of all persons comes into Zion. Because our ultimate value as an individual is a key component of building Zion. We can't build it if we don't exist honestly.

Brittany: [00:11:32](#) So I absolutely love everything you just said. And I am reminded of the phrase from the Doctrine and Covenants, "within their welfare resides your welfare." And I love that you connected it to tidying as well because this, this idea of generosity and this idea of giving because we have been given it all inner ties with each other and to be able to recognize the innate value and worth and worthiness in another person directly impacts our relationships with not only them, but with God as well. And so I really think that, you know, on one level, I think it's easy to say, well of course if you live in a Zion community, you would uphold the worth of all people. But when you actually get down to it, how often is, is that the motivating, the motivating drive in creating a peaceable kingdom, I don't know the way that you have phrased it and the way that you have pulled out so many other elements and veins of church speak, if you will, in Community of Christ to connect all these dots. It was really, really eye opening for me and I, yeah, I really appreciate it.

Laurie: [00:12:49](#) I just wanted to add something to the end of that. I have this belief about ministry and tithing in that they have to be linked together because people always talk about them as separate concepts. And I imagine that if I said this to some people on campus, they would heavily disagree with me. But I feel that ministry is a form of tithing. So when you're dealing with people who are in new situations that you're not used to, you have to give up yourself. The um, the time and the brainpower and the sense of love and acceptance. And those are not easy things to give. And so when I'm thinking about building the kingdom of God, building Zion worth of all persons, to me it's all interlinked just in the same way that ministry and tithing are linked.

Brittany: [00:13:36](#) Well, and I think that that's a really important thing to again, lift up because so often we think of generosity in one vein. It's just putting money in the offering or it's setting up tithing and, uh, we don't necessarily think of the human impact that those choices make. And yes, giving, but then also the ministry that we bring our ministry of presence, our ministry of friendship. And you know, when I look at the various priesthood offices and their roles and function, those focused points of ministry really can be linked back to generosity. And so I appreciate the way that you kind of married the two. That tithing and generosity and giving doesn't necessarily always mean putting money in the envelope, but it's, it is how we give of our time and of our testimony and of our talents. And, you know, I'll say that, that that is a difficult and vulnerable thing to do, especially because usually the people that we are administering to, including ourselves have some sense of brokenness.

Brittany: [00:14:42](#) And so being able to step into that place and reminding everyone of God's unconditional love can be life giving, but then it can just be challenging. So I appreciate the way that you've, you've highlighted that as well. So not only did you bring up the worth of all persons in this concept of Zion, but you talked a fair bit about common consent. So I think that common consent is one of those, again, kind of church speaky things that we throw around a lot. And I don't know if people really stop and pause and understand what we are talking about when we talk about common consent. So if you could give your basic definition of what common consent is, what would it be?

Laurie: [00:15:29](#) Uh, so the way I think about common consent is I think about it as the process by which communities which are represented by a delegation. So a community will pick a group of people they think adequately sum up the essence of a community and they'll come together to decide on legislation sharing their unique views about situations, um, and their unique understandings about different types of suffering or successes in communities. And these can vary between race, socioeconomic status, things like that.

Brittany: [00:16:03](#) So I should mention that a couple of days ago I posted on Facebook that we are going to be recording this conversation and several people wanted us to expound a little bit more uncommon consent. I don't know if I am fully qualified to be able to do that, especially when it comes to what other church communities or I guess communities in general do as far as the decision making process goes. But I will say that I think that the process that Community of Christ goes through is unique. And not only is it unique that the body has a voice and a vote, but that there is a, an understanding of communal discernment and that for a lot of our decisions that we make, we can go through a period of this discernment together and hear a variety of perspectives. And again, you know it's, it's my understanding that in a lot of other religions or just different movements or communities that there might be a group of leadership up top that makes a lot of the decisions and then it kind of trickles down to members of that community. But in Community of Christ, and we've talked about this a lot on project sign that we really are striving to be a prophetic people, so to have the decisions and the movement and the rumble coming from the body and then having that be the way that the, the, that'd be the driving force that the church moves in is something that is, is really important. So I don't want to get into it too much, but I just wanted to throw that out there that I do think that our process of common consent is pretty unique.

Laurie: [00:17:41](#) It does this amazing thing where it, eh, when I describe it, it sounds, you know, like your standard democracy, which we are, we are democracy. Our guidelines essentially come down from God, but it is our job to interpret them to the best of our ability and to work through them within our own capacity. And the beauty of this process is that if we're not ready to do something, we can take this time or if we are ready to do something, but we need to work through it with the language of people from another country because they have a unique representation or understanding of it. We have that opportunity. And so our legislation, because of this process becomes universal in a sense. Not that it's vague or ambiguous, but that you can see how it would apply to new situations that you hadn't thought of that, that are very, very relevant.

Brittany: [00:18:34](#) Exactly. And that's a, I think, well what that concept is what sparked the quote that I took from your paper and posted on Facebook because it was this idea that we have a common understanding that Christ mission is our mission. And so we define that mission through our mission initiatives. And then from there we make decisions based on that mission. And so the decisions that we make, it looks differently in Europe than it does in the United States and in Canada than it does in South America and in Asia and in Africa. And in all these different places in the world, that's lived out differently. And we also like to say that mission is conceptual, like the, the, um, the way that we live out, the mission initiatives looks different in our different local areas. And yet that mission of Christ mission being our mission is what ties it all together. So I really appreciated how you lifted that up because that in and of itself is, is a celebration of diversity. How would you say that that process of common consent fosters diversity? And then do you see it being used or have you seen it being used in the life of the church?

Laurie: [00:19:56](#) So on a very base level, the process of common consent allows the greater community being our worldwide church to build the kingdom of God, Zion, heaven. Some people use different words because of the various connotations with the words. I use them interchangeably and will proceed to do so. But they use, uh, they use this process to build the kingdom of God by allowing the church to be shaped by the people within it. So when we're looking at this last World Conference, we looked at the issue of violence. Whatever we come to decide on in the future isn't going to just be shaped by the leadership itself and how they see the issue in the church. It's going to be shaped by the people that live in the military heavy areas that live in areas that are, uh, known for domestic abuse or gang violence. It's going to

be, it's going to be approached by people who do not live in areas with a of violence, people who might live in areas with a higher socioeconomic status and where they're not really affected by it, but they want to make sure that they approach this in a way that is beneficial to people who are affected by different kinds of violence.

Laurie:

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So when we approach this, we're approaching it from the perspective of not knowing the whole situation. And so it takes into account all these different types of community that are found in the church. It allows different struggles and forms of inequality to be made known through personal testimony and also through things like amendments, which you know then can be voted on. And then the biggest thing is that it allows the church to move at own pace. So even if they can't decide on something or they can still work through it within their own communities and they can decide where they stand at least a little bit, they can decide, say on the issue of violence that in one area it's 100% not okay because they're dealing with like gang violence and they have to be able to say this isn't okay. We know that you're being hurt and we want you to feel safe here. In other areas where people have to consider self-defense as a major issue such as in areas where violent crimes are an issue like assaults, robberies, domestic abuse, they would say that self-defense might be an important thing to consider in this legislation. All of these different issues come from different perspectives, which makes the concept of diversity very necessary and allows it to exist.

Brittany:

[00:22:23](#)

As you were talking, I was reminded at world conference when Tiona Horning walked up to the restroom and she spoke against violence for LGBTQ people. And we are having this conversation on nonviolence and it was mostly around, you know, our, our framework was working with different cultural understandings of what violence looks like in different nations of our world. And it just took a little girl to get up there. She took maybe 15 seconds, maybe not even that long. And, and, uh, I was watching the whole thing from the press booth at the side of the auditorium and I couldn't contain my excitement for what she said because it took one little girl to draw the conference into the reality that, that there are marginalized people that we're missing in this conversation. And so, yeah, when I think of common consent and when I think of the process that we go through to make decisions and to make sure that everyone has a voice, um, I think that it's, it's important because sometimes it takes a child to, to remind us that we're not including everyone in our conversation. So it's, it's powerful.



Laurie: [00:23:41](#) And that was, that had to easily be my favorite part of the entire conference. For that in that moment right there, I had the opportunity to realize that no matter how well our delegations might represent our communities, we're not there solely for our own communities. We're not even there primarily for our communities. The Community of Christ main mission is outreach. It is bringing this understanding of community that we have to other people in a way that is okay for them, that speaks to their language and their understanding of the world. And she, I think she brought that back to us because not everyone could be there to say that we're not represented or that there are these people that aren't in the church that could be impacted by this and that. It was just amazing to me.

Brittany: [00:24:29](#) Yeah, exactly. I feel the exact same way and it almost was a reality check for me because I am very privileged in a lot of different ways and that's not to say that I haven't had violence perpetuated against me in various ways, but comparatively speaking, I've lived a very safe and privileged life. And so, uh, to, to kind of have that reality check from a child was something that I needed to hear. And again, you know, on one level, intellectually I understand and I, I totally could have brought that point up myself and yet my own privilege was blinding me and, and I wasn't even verbalizing anything in this conversation. But to have that reality check from a child was very, very powerful for me. So we've been talking about a very recent situation where common consent was practiced. You do highlight two specific situations in the life of the church and the history of the church specifically when section 156 was presented and then into national conferences. So do you want to just discuss that a little bit and how common consent was used in those situations?

Laurie: [00:25:42](#) Yes. So one of the things that I highlighted that I think really brings home the magnitude of the situations I discussed was one of the other situations I discussed with LGBT leadership and presence in the membership of the church. And so one of the things I mentioned was the vast difference in how they were approached in terms of common consent. Section 156 of the doctrine and covenants was a really interesting occurrence because it's, it was not gradual and I'm not even a hundred percent certain that the membership was totally cool with it. And I have, I have a few reasons for this. So when women were first looked at as being part of the membership, it was super early on, men wanted ministers wives to be able to do what they did, if not on the same level with some of the same privileges as priesthood members, even if they weren't technically priesthood members.

Laurie: [00:26:41](#) That was shut down super early on. So were given secondary roles. They were the Sunday school teachers and they were like personal counselors without actually being given the role of teacher, things like that. They were very much in the role of ministry without being recognized for it. So when 156 came around and there had been a few surveys done where people talked about how okay they were with women being in the ministry in the priesthood or to what level do they want women ordained. And there was not a lot of agreement on much of anything. Nobody could seem to get on the same page because of the vast difference in how we viewed men and women throughout the history of the church. And so when 156 came around, it was, I find it a little funny because it kind of snuck in the ordination of women, if I remember correctly, one 56 they did the ordination of women and the building of the Temple.

Laurie: [00:27:37](#) So the idea was that they would say we're going to ordain women and we're going to build the Temple and if the Temple is good and from God and so must the ordination of women be. And so this idea was that people were kind of just going to have to accept it and I get that people had to vote on it, but it was very controversial because they didn't feel as if it was the right time or the right move. And there was this huge schism in the church. So many people left. So many people tried to block the ordination of women. It took a really long time for women to be able to actually get through the process without people showing up and protesting or just not being there at all. And so the reason I compared the ordination of women to the LGBT community and their presence in the membership and leadership is because that process was actually modeled after the failings of the process through at 156 was brought into, was brought into the scripture or the doctrine, and what they did was they went through a much more gradual process and more conversational process that allowed the a that allowed discussion on the topic of how do we feel about gay people being in the priesthood?

Laurie: [00:28:54](#) How do we feel about them being in relationships? While they're in the priesthood, can they be in the membership at all or is that okay? Just not the priesthood. There were all kinds of levels and this was because a, the presidency didn't want a repeat of the split that happened after women were allowed to be ordained. And so the process of common consent itself has been evolving throughout this entire struggle to understand what's okay and what's not okay. So as we evolve in terms of our prejudices, we evolve how we approach legislation.

Brittany: [00:29:43](#) And I think that that's really important because, because through the process of becoming a prophetic people, I think that we have recognized that it takes a change of heart, not necessarily just a policy change that comes from a revelation that we vote on, that it takes a full change of heart. And I know that the transition for LGBTQ inclusion has not been without bumps in the road, but I do think that the, by the time we got to the process of actually voting, I think that more hearts had changed. And I think that, that the Spirit, that God's Spirit is able to move in us easier because we recognize that even if we don't agree on everything, that again, that, that driving center that is holding us together is Christ mission. And I, I, I've read some of the minutes from the 1984 conference when I was in the temple library for seminary and it, it just broke my heart because you could, I mean, you could read men and women standing up in front of their entire church saying how brokenhearted they were and maybe some of them left, maybe some of them ended up coming around.

Brittany: [00:30:56](#) I mean, I don't know. But, and really it was a, it was a mix of everything. But just seeing, seeing that dramatic revelation drop and I fully know that it was a conversation that had been going for a while. And we've done several interviews with Wallace B Smith and Becky Savage on that whole process, but I do think that the intentionality of national conferences, I think our hearts were in the right place. And again, even though that it hasn't been without bumps in the road, I think that we, we did take some of those lessons from section 156 and we tried to be more understanding of a different perspective and not necessarily just say, okay, here's the revelation that we're going to plop down and you're going to vote on it and just a couple of days and it's going to rock your world no matter what direction you fall. So yeah, I really appreciate that growth and deepened journey with God that the church took with, with national conferences and, and I, I've said a lot, but I feel like that's one of my biggest regrets is finding Community for Christ post national conference, because I would have loved to actually see that process play out, but yeah.

Laurie: [00:32:19](#) And there was a, there was one other thing I was thinking about concerning how these two different legislations played out and it's, I was thinking of the aftermath when after women were ordained. It took a very long time for people to be able to come around with this as an acceptable concept, despite the fact that it's in the doctrine and covenants. Whereas with the LGBT community in the membership and priesthood, people were more quickly once it was, you know, once everything was put into legislation or became just a, any kind of policy, people were

more quick to accept it just because they had had the opportunity to work through it. Uh, and I was thinking about this because when I was little, I was a baby at the time in 1996 or seven when this happened, my great grandmother was ordained and my family had no idea until the night of, because until that night, my immediate family was extremely against the ordination of women, despite the fact that there are almost no men in our family and they're all women.

Laurie: [00:33:24](#) Um, somehow they were still against the ordination of women until my great grandma, my grandmother, she was being ordained. So they raced over to where it was happening. And, and I remember this cause this was my first memory and I was telling my mom about this and she said that it took until it was a family member that they knew personally, they knew the character of, and they knew what she did for other people. It took until that moment for it to suddenly be okay. It was some 11, 12 years later and that was what it took. Whereas now people are going, okay, this is, this isn't such a huge deal that we have to worry about the sexual orientation of a person as long as they're promoting good life, uh, life lessons and good habits. There's such a difference in how we approach it in the aftermath.

Brittany: [00:34:17](#) Yeah, that's a really important thing to lift up. And I think that, one of the reasons why the transition was a little bit easier is because we heard a lot of those stories beforehand. And you know, I have to throw a big bone to the LGBTQ community in Community of Christ because they were really vulnerable and published two books and uh, were able to share their story of how they had been marginalized in the church and how they've been able to say we walked away from the church because you wouldn't accept us. And we felt rejected by not only you but God, and it was your teachings that made us feel rejected and the bravery and to be able to name that and then the humility to be able to receive that and hear that and repent of that attitude. And again, I want to make it abundantly clear that I get that it hasn't been smooth sailing all the time, but I do think that there is a lot of, I don't know, communal maturity, I guess, in the process that we have grown into because we are able to listen to each other and we are able to stand up and say, you have hurt me.

Brittany: [00:35:32](#) And it's, it's not just an individual that's hurt me, it's, it's the church. The Church has not had my back or the church has not recognized my relationship or my ministry. And so I think being able to name that and be heard is key in this conversation about common consent and the worth of all persons and building

Zion. Because if you can't state your perspective and if you can't be heard, then there's very, very little chance that, that you'll be able to, to be able to shape policy or culture that is going to benefit people like you. So,

Laurie: [00:36:10](#)

Yeah. Yeah.

Brittany: [00:36:13](#)

So Laurie, you have a lot of really good quotes that you are the author of in your paper. Uh, and at one point you end up quoting President Veazey and you say, "The cause of Zion is the ultimate call to repentance from self worship. It is about growing in righteousness, love and purity of heart. It is about learning to share generously to meet the needs of others. It is about opening hearts and minds to new insights and understandings about others." And I love that quote again. That was another thing that I highlighted and underlined. And then the only thing I put in the outline is this quote! Let's talk about it. Because I think, I think that the idea of the cause of Zion being the ultimate call to repentance of self worship is such a challenging and provocative statement. So I'm curious to know what your thoughts on this quote were and then how you implemented it into your paper and what it, how you were able to tie it in.

Laurie: [00:37:16](#)

So I absolutely, I love this quote, which is why it's in the paper. And the reason that I liked this quote is because it moved the process of building Zion, so when we, when we were building Zion as a place, our process was a very much, here, let's serve the community that we have. Then we started looking at Zion as an outward movement. And I think this really reflects that because instead of thinking about self worship, instead of being about building the community that exists, it's about learning to share generously to meet the needs of others. Which was one of my favorite parts about this. It's about opening our hearts and our minds, and about insight and understanding and those are outward moving things. These are things that make us look at how we represent the community that we exist in so that when other people look at it, they see a community that wants to grow, that wants to evolve and wants to be better.

Laurie: [00:38:20](#)

And I had the opportunity to meet Steve Veazey and it was, it was so amazing because I read this quote first before meeting him and I met him and I, my thought was this is definitely the man that said this quote because when he talks about building the kingdom of God or Zion, or talks about ministry to others. It is such a, it is such a selfless process and it's, I'm trying to find the word, the concern is not for what you have, it's for what you can give. There is always a, do I have the capacity to give this

because if I do, I want to. There is a am I is, are my gifts applicable here? And it's just, it's about the still understanding of self that has to happen. You have to know yourself personally. But knowing yourself personally isn't about being able to meet your needs. Knowing your self personally is about knowing how you can give to others and in what capacity, how can you begin understanding their situations, their struggles and needs and it's about knowing how you can then meet at least start to meet them halfway if you're not able to go all the way and some people aren't, you can only start to meet them halfway and it really is, it's just a beautiful process of being able to move outward. It's, it's not stagnant, it is constantly evolving and adapting to new situations.

Brittany: [00:39:58](#) Well and I think the beauty about that is that God somehow fills in the cracks. I know that when I have been doing ministry in a variety of different settings and I feel like I'm just giving, giving, giving somebody who's always around the corner to scoop me up and to recognize my worth and to help me along the journey. And so I love that this call to repentance from self self worship. Because I know that in my, I don't know if I'd say worst moments, but in some of my more worst moments, I fall into that trap. And I think that's when I start to think, why me? Why is this happening to me? Why is no one helping me? Yada, yada, yada. And I have this whole laundry list of, I mean, I don't want to call them excuses, but they're really, they're, they're excuses of why things aren't fair and why my relationships aren't working or whatever it may be. But that's usually when I am easily, that's usually when I'm able to see the face of God in other people. And when I step back and realize how much I'm being blessed by what I am giving out, it's kind of this, this web of relationship that ministry brings that is, that continually surprises me.

Brittany: [00:41:18](#) The last thing that I pulled out, particularly specifically from your paper is this, this call to speak for those who have no voice. And knowing a bit about your background, I was specifically intrigued by this because you are part of a marginalized population yourself and I, I come from privilege. And so knowing when to speak up for those who have no voice and then recognizing when it's time to uplift others so they can speak for themselves is something that I struggle with. I'll be honest in that. I, I struggle with that, uh, especially in how much do I want to get into this.

Brittany: [00:42:21](#) It's, it's been hard for me to know when to let certain communities speak for themselves and then when to interject myself into the conversation. But I do think that it's important

to have that underlining understanding that we should be uplifting the voice of others and then when they have no voice then for us to step in and speak. So I'm curious to know if you have any thoughts on how do we walk that line of recognizing cultural norms around the world while at the same time challenging unjust systems. Because something that I struggle with is again, knowing when to speak up and then when knowing Brittany, you are not necessarily being culturally sensitive because what can seem as a grave injustice to me might just be the norm somewhere else. And I struggle with this in my local context of ministry and then also on a global context in ministry. So I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on that.

Laurie:

[00:43:20](#)

So I, I also struggle with this. Anyone who knows me or anyone who's read my papers where I reference Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I know that when I get fired up about something, I go for the throat. I have, I have no chill when it comes to speaking out about how messed up something is. I'm more than willing to speak up for a group that I think isn't able to represent themselves. Not because they lack the capacity, but because they just aren't allowed. And because in my opinion, no one has a greater capacity to represent themselves and the person suffering. But sometimes the systems we exist in don't allow them to represent themselves. And that's, that is the point where I think is the defining line because yes, there are, there are times when assistant, when a group doesn't realize how messed up the situation is. But like the common, like common consent where we evolve to understand situations, these groups also have to walk into the readiness for change on our own.

Laurie:

[00:44:23](#)

We can't force them into anything. And so it's, it's, um, to give an example, I play, I play Magic The Gathering, I don't know if you know what that is, but it's a, it's a trading card game and people, sometimes they collect the cards. Mostly we play against each other with very strange themes and it's just generally fun. But the font in the cards is very small. So it's hard for me to read. I like to use my magnifier. I'm very independent. I don't typically like asking for help, but I will if I know I need it. My roommate is still adapting to understanding whether or not I need help with something. And so without thinking sometimes he'll just grab the card and read it to me even though I'm holding it and high magnifier ready to read it myself. And I think that's a good example of this because sometimes we go into situations speaking for people who have way better language than we have to talk about their situation.

Laurie:

[00:45:20](#)

And in other situations they're not ready to talk about it. We can, we can talk about it on our own side. All we want, we can talk about say the oppression of women in cultures where they ask women to cover their bodies for the sake of modesty or whatever reasons they have. And on our side we can talk about why do they do that? Why would we do that? Are we shaming women or do we have some certain beliefs about inner and external beauty. But we can't force a group to talk about something they're not ready to talk about. And, and we can't speak on their struggles better than they can. And so there's, I seem to be jumping around, but there's a quote that I want to use, uh, that I used in my paper that I think brings it together and it's from Doctrine and Covenants is 163, three seat. Uh, there are subtle yet powerful influences in the world, some even cleaning to represent Christ, the seek to divide people and nations to accomplish their destructive aims. That which seeks to harden one human heart against another by constructing walls of fear and prejudice is not of God. So when we're looking at whether or not it's our time to speak for a group, the best way to evaluate that is if we don't, if we don't give them the opportunity to do so, is the product of that fear and hatred. And I think that's one of the best ways to look at it because if we don't speak up for a group, uh, that we think we needed to speak up for, or if we don't allow them the opportunity, but they're okay with that, they're in a system where not only are they happy, but the group is thriving and healthy, then it, even if it may be not necessarily the best situation, then it's not time to deal with whatever it is.

Laurie:

[00:47:12](#)

It may not even need to be dealt with at all. But if they're in the situation of women being considered less than men, if women are being treated so subserviently that beating them is normal. That is a time when we have to talk about something because people are being hurt because of this. Women are considered less than human in those situations. So it's, it's about whether or not people are getting hurt. It's about whether or not we're fostering fear and hatred and whether the value of someone's life, which we have no right to assign to them because only God can assign the value of life. It's about whether or not we've seen someone's life is less valuable than our own.

Brittany:

[00:47:59](#)

I think that's really important and a good thing to keep in mind when we are considering our motivation for speaking or not speaking against something or for something. And I know that I have not always gotten it right and I can have, you know what I would consider a righteous outrage over certain things. And then I have to check back and circle back and see what the actual community is thinking about this. And sometimes my



outrage is misplaced. Or sometimes I don't feel like I have enough outrage about things and then it takes a member of that community to say, wait a second, this isn't as great as you think it is. And kind of bring me back into that reality check. So Laurie, I'm wondering if you have seen the church, if you have examples of the church when we as a body have spoken out for people who have no voice or have you seen us continue to try to create this concept of Zion in the modern day?

Laurie:

[00:48:58](#)

so I'm, I mentioned earlier that I'm still relatively new to my spiritual life in the church. I was baptized at eight, like everybody else who was born into a Community of Christ family. But I didn't really get into what Community of Christ was until I was 20 when I started at Graceland. You know, cause when you're eight, you just care about the Communion bread. But I started getting into it when I, uh, when I started going into Graceland and going to the church services, meeting the people, I have friends that had been ordained as elders. I felt like I know like five people that were ordained as elders in my freshman year alone. And we, we've talked a lot, we've talked a little bit about talking, speaking for people who aren't able to speak for themselves. And we talked about Tiona, which was such a cool moment. But I think one of the things that I, I want to focus on is modern ministry because modern ministry is so awesome. And I say that because I'm in Inspire, which is the Graceland. Uh, it's the missional ministry leadership practicum. I have to carefully say those words, so I get them. All right. And the idea is that we come together as a group once a week.

Laurie:

[00:50:10](#)

We talk about how we can benefit the Graceland community or the Lamoni community in some way through our own personal gifts. And we're not doing this necessarily as a group. We're doing this as individuals are everyone has one assignment the entire semester. Do your ministry. My ministry is safe ride. I have, I spent my summer building a rebuilding the safe rides policies from the ground up because in past years, safe rides credibility as a safe and anonymous. I chair service on weekends has, it has just been destroyed because of the way that some people have acted within safe ride. And so I've, I've rebuilt that to make it safer and more comfortable for people on campus to use. That's my ministry. Some people are doing other kinds of ministry and I can't even keep track of what everyone's doing, but everyone does something so unique to them and it's beautiful.

Laurie:

[00:51:07](#)

There was, um, there was somebody who was ordained because of his understanding of how to reach younger people. And I don't mean like kids or teenagers, although this does

apply to them, but mostly college students. How to bring them back into church life and he, his name is Dylan, he's a really cool guy and he ran the Afterglow band for awhile on campus, which is the band that plays the band that plays at the Afterglow service and the afterglow service is a 7:00 PM service on Sunday nights. It's very informal and it's really nice and if I did not have sensitive hearing I would be there every single week because it is such a beautiful thing. It's your Sunday service is your Sunday service. Everyone knows that feeling and it's comfortable for us. But the Afterglow service is different because it appeals to students who aren't ready for the normal Sunday service vibe and appeals to students who want some kind of cross between a, between sitting down with friends and hanging out around a fire side like it's, it's almost kind of like being back at church camp and he did, he did the most amazing thing with the band because he brought in normal music. You don't, it wasn't normal, it wasn't hymns or gospel music. It was a bit the show. Arthur, the kids show him the ones played the theme song as one of them as one of the pieces I've, if I, if I went more, I could give you more examples, but there's lots of modern music periodically there's a little bit of swearing because they don't like to change the words of the song when the nature of the song is what's important. Um, but it's like some congregations do ministry of music. This whole thing is ministry of music and it's amazing and students love it and it has really changed how we approach college students.

Laurie:

[00:53:06](#)

Um, and so like that kind of ministry that's, that is an a, that's a really good way to reach the group that's moving away from the church because right now you've got people who are my age who aren't sure they trust an institution that believes in a higher power. They can't see, not everybody's okay with that because they've got questions about suffering and about injustices and about how can be in the situations they're in that they don't think that God is an appropriate answer to. But when you bring them about, when you bring them towards it through the unique kinds of community that they're used to, that's when things change. It's, it's like another ministry is, um, I lead a Dungeons and Dragons group, and this is, this is real weird cause most people don't think of this as ministry, but if you find a group of people who don't like being near other people and you tell them you want to play a game where they can be someone else entirely, they will build the community themselves.

Laurie:

[00:54:00](#)

And they will, they will build these amazing connections that exist beyond their characters. And they'll, we'll get to the room before the dungeon master does and they'll set the room up.

They'll bring their own food. I didn't even have to bring the food. Most of the time it was like a potluck, but with nerds and it's these kinds of ministries, these are very much the ministries of a, of a community that's, you know, relatively okay financially and has a moderate amount of diversity. But if you can imagine this kind of unique ministry being applied to communities that are different from ours, I couldn't even fathom what they would come up with. I can't even imagine how they would reach out to groups that aren't comfortable being with other people or who aren't comfortable talking about the situations they're in because it would be so unique to their social circumstances. And that is my, that's what I love about modern ministry.

Brittany: [00:54:55](#) I had a really big smile on my face the whole time you were talking. And then, because it's relatable. I mean my congregation, we have a Dungeon and Dragons group as well and they have a lot of fun. I'm, I don't take part in that, but I know that it is really meaningful and life giving for those who do participate. And uh, I think that they find God in those moments and those situations. And I think that when we say mission is contextual and it can take so many different shapes and forms according to your life circumstances, your community, the culture, etc. This is what we're talking about. And I just, I loved this paper. And your thoughts of just intersecting all of these, these themes that are some of my favorite parts of Community of Christ. And then just showing how they all intertwine. This concept of Zion, worth of all persons, common consent and speaking up for the marginalized. So I think you nailed it. I hope Tony gave you an a.

Laurie: [00:56:01](#) I got a 98%.

Brittany: [00:56:02](#) Perfect. Perfect. Oh man. For Tony, I don't know if I've ever gotten that good of a grade. Congratulations on that. I'm wondering though, and this isn't something that I put in the outline, but I'm wondering how it was to present this at the John Whitmer Association?

Laurie: [00:56:23](#) So I will start out by saying I was absolutely terrified. Because I at first of all, I'd never been to the conference before. That was my first time being there. I'd never been to any conference. I didn't know what to wear. I didn't know how to act. I didn't know who I was going to be around. And so that's, that's the basis of me going up there to present. And by the second day in when I presented, I, they know some people, I saw some people I recognize and it got a little easier, but I was still terrified because I didn't know how many people would be there. I made the mistake of drinking coffee before I got up there. So I'm

practically vibrating, standing there trying to give my paper. And there was this moment I was trying not to read off my paper and I have 100% read off the paper the entire time.

Laurie:

[00:57:08](#)

But there is this moment when I was standing there, when despite all of that, I was so into what I was talking about and I was so I actually, there was a moment where I really wished I could turn this into a conversation with the audience, but I didn't know how to do. So in my time limit so I was like, okay, another presentation another day. But I was just so excited to be talking about it and I, it had an amazing impact. I still periodically get responses about it from people because they say they heard what they were there or they got the um, they got the recording and they'll bring up little bits about it and it made the terror and the jitteriness and the total a feeling that I was kind of a fraud because I thought I shouldn't be there. I didn't know if I was really supposed to be there. But hearing the responses from people and how it impacted them, it made absolutely every emotion worth it because people were talking about different ways of addressing new issues or how to have conversations about these things. Who do we talk to? When do we let them talk or when do we need to speak up? And even this, this makes me so happy because it's sparking the kind of conversation that I want people to be having and it was just so cool to be there and then to find out that this was the result.

Brittany:

[00:58:34](#)

Yeah, I, I saw rumblings of it on the internet and I saw lots of pictures of the conference and of the weekend in general. Everyone was taking pictures by Susan B Anthony's grave, which we're jealous about. But I think, yeah, when, when we started talking about your, your paper and the topic and I just realized how, how this is a conversation that I've wanted to get out there in a variety of ways because again, you highlighted so many of my favorite elements of Community of Christ and you wove them together in a way that is very peace oriented, nonviolent oriented, social justice minded, just inclusive and, and uh, a true reflection of what I believe God's ultimate dream for the world is. And you just named it in a way that was so succinct and so plain and simple and like we have all the pieces right in front of us. Let's just do the thing, people. And it just was so just so motivating. So yeah, I just knew, I'm like, okay, we need to turn this into a Project Zion podcast episode and I can relate to being scared out of your mind at a conference. We won't go into my blunder. The one and only time I've presented. Oh. But it was a, yeah, it's always nervewracking to be around academics and historians and people that know more about the topic than you do when you're speaking. At least that's how I have felt. Uh, so I can relate, but I heard that it went great and

that, well, I know that the material that you brought was very meaningful and I think that that's what matters most.

Brittany: [01:00:25](#) So is there anything else? This has been a really great conversation, but I always like to leave our guests with the opportunity to just say any final words if I didn't ask a question or anything else that you would like to leave us with.

Laurie: [01:00:39](#) So are there, there is one thing I do want to add and that is when we talk about design or the city of God, whatever language you use, do you think of you think of this place, even if it's not the gathering place that it used to be, you still think of a place where people are and they exist together. Even if the places proverbial, and I want to note that if you're going to think of it in terms of a place, then the most important part of building the city of God is building a threshold that people can cross. Because for people to enter it, we have to be ready to accept the people outside of our community. And we have to be willing to represent the language of life and a faith that they speak, which means being willing to recognize that other faiths are also building the kingdom of God even if they're not calling it that.

Laurie: [01:01:29](#) So when we make our mission about building for the people outside of this city, then we find ourselves with new brothers and sisters who want to do the same thing for other people. Our mission is more about the people outside of the city than inside of it. And I know I said this earlier, but it's because there will always be people outside of it. We're never going to be done. And so it, I was thinking about this quote, I'm a huge star Trek fan and uh, and in next generation there's a character data who's an Android who seeks to be human. And he says something in one episode that I have been keeping on my phone for like three weeks for the perfect opportunity. And it says, he said, we must strive to be more than we are. It does not matter that we will never reach our ultimate goal. The effort yields its own rewards. And so when I was thinking, when I think about that, I think that building the kingdom of God here on earth as a process and not a place, even if we still use city language, is an endeavor that's never going to end. It'll never be fully built, but that's okay because we're still going to be successful as long as we keep our threshold one that can be crossed by anyone looking to build a peaceful world using their unique tools and capabilities, their language, their faith, everything at their disposal.

Brittany: [01:02:54](#) Laurie, I absolutely loved that. Thank you so much. And I think that that is something that as we go forward in ministry as a

community, that that's a message that's really important to keep in mind that we are never done and that whatever we can do to create open borders, open walls, tear down barriers that block people from God's love, God's unconditional grace filled boundless love, that that should be the the ultimate goal that we have as ministers. So again, the way you articulated that is just so profound and poignant and just good. So thank you. Thank you. Thank you. This was a great conversation and exactly what I was hoping it would be. So thanks.

Laurie: [01:03:40](#) I, I liked getting to have the opportunity to talk about it. I love talking about theology and religion and things like that. It's my favorite conversation topic.

Brittany: [01:03:54](#) It sounds like that road is just beginning for you and I am really looking forward to seeing where it takes you and what other conversations spark from your ministry and from your studies and all of that. I think you're just getting started, which is really exciting. Yeah.

Speaker 1: [01:04:16](#) [inaudible] [inaudible]

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Speaker 1: [01:05:14](#) [inaudible].