

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

Josh : [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: [00:33](#) [inaudible].

Robin: [00:34](#) Hello and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And today we are bringing you another addition in our series, What's Brewing?, Where we explore how God is showing up in the neighborhood and how people of faith are living out mission in transforming ways. Today we are here with Joelle Wight, a young adult 70 in Community of Christ who recently accepted the role of Latter-day Seeker minister supporting ministry across the Wasatch front and beyond in Utah. Welcome Joelle. It's great to have you with us today on Project Zion Podcast.

Joelle: [01:19](#) I'm excited to be here. Thanks for having me.

Robin: [01:23](#) Let's just take some time to get to know you Joelle. So tell us a little bit about you, how you became connected with Community of Christ and what brought you to a life devoted to full-time ministry.

Joelle: [01:41](#) So just a little bit about me. I am 27 years old. When I first graduated from college, I taught for two years at fourth grade and then I went back and I got my master's in social work and now, as Robin said, I have accepted this position with Community of Christ. As far as how I became connected with Community of Christ. It was kind of just who I was. I was born into it. So I was born and raised in Community of Christ. Both of my grandfathers were appointee ministers and my father has worked for Community of Christ most of my life. So I've been connected from day one. Both of my parents instilled in me the importance of servant ministry, which I kind of credit with how I came to this place where I've devoted my life to full-time ministry regardless of whether they were employed by the church, which as I mentioned, my dad has been for a lot of my life.

Joelle: [02:34](#) Or not, which my mom has been working in the credit union movement for pretty much my whole life as well. So, regardless of whether they were working for the church or another entity, they always viewed their work as an opportunity for ministry. And so I've tried to live my life in the same way. So when I was

teaching that was my ministry. And then when I was in the school of social work, the work I was doing there was my ministry and I've tried to respond and be faithful to God's call. And so ultimately that has led me here to this role.

Robin: [03:06](#) So it sounds like you have a rich heritage in Community of Christ, going way back to, gosh early, early times in the church. Joelle, what was it like for you growing up in the church? What was your congregation like? How were you connected with the Community of Christ camping tradition?

Joelle: [03:30](#) Yeah, so I have wonderful memories of growing up in the church. I attended a congregation with my paternal grandparents and my brothers and sisters. And so every time I went to church, I was surrounded by my family. And I remember, you know, all kinds of stuff growing up there. When I was little, I remember singing in cherub choir. We'd put on little angel outfits and sing at Christmas time. And I remember eating fruit by the foot in Sunday school, which I just thought was the coolest thing. But mostly I remember a community of people who unconditionally loved me. When I said my very first prayer, I, you know, I was probably five or six years old and I said my very first prayer in front of the congregation, a woman named Mary Jo Manuel knew I would be nervous. And she came and she stood beside me while I prayed up in front of everybody.

Joelle: [04:17](#) A woman named Virginia Gorriger very patiently taught me piano lessons, even though I rarely practiced and preferred playing with her dogs rather than playing with the piano. There was a woman named Donna Sheehy who spent hours cutting out, felt butterflies for people to write notes of love and support. When I got baptized. And, and you know, the examples could go on and on. I was surrounded by a community that extended even beyond that congregation into the worldwide church. And so I really felt truly blessed to have the opportunity to grow up in Community of Christ. You mentioned the camping program, which is a big part of life in Community of Christ. And I was involved in the camping program, so I started to go to camp before I was even old enough to be a camper. My dad was on staff at one of the camps and my mom volunteered to be like the camp counselor for all the kids that were either too young or too old to be there for the week of camp.

Joelle: [05:10](#) And so from that point on, I was involved in camping. I went to junior camp, I went to middle school camp. So I went to the camping program all the way until the time I was in high school. And then when I was in high school, I went to something that

Community of Christ has. It's like a sport, arts, music, leadership camp called Spectacular. And so I did that all four years of high school and loved it. Um, and so, you know, my whole life I had some involvement with the camp program. What I've enjoyed most about the camping program is coming back as a staff member. So I attended Graceland University, which has strong connections to Community of Christ. And one of the programs that you can be a part of when you are at Graceland is called the Graceland Summer Rep program. And what you do as a Rep is you travel all around the country and even into Canada and you go to different camps and reunions or family camps and you're there to represent Graceland. But more than that you also have the role of minister when you're there and you try to help enhance the campers experiences. And so my favorite camp memories actually didn't come until the last five or six years when I got to do that and when I got to come back and be a staff at various camps.

Robin: [06:26](#) That sounds really exciting. I think something that might be helpful for our listeners to understand is that, um, I believe you lived close to independence from the time you were born. Were you born in Blue Springs?

Joelle: [06:42](#) Yeah, I was born in Blue Springs and I've only lived in two houses my entire life and both are in Blue Springs. So,

Robin: [06:49](#) And for those listeners who aren't aware, Independence is our world, the location of our world headquarters for Community of Christ and we have the highest number of congregations in and around the independence area, which has been, I would say Joelle, that's been a unique part of your experience in the church.

Joelle: [07:10](#) Definitely. Yeah. Um, I was actually talking with somebody yesterday here in Utah and they were kind of sharing with me what it was like to be kind of the majority religion. And I realized that I had a unique experience where I wasn't, you know, all alone, nobody else who had the same religion around me. There were enough of us that I got to experience what it was like to have other people of the same faith. But we also were not the majority religion. So like you mentioned, there were a lot of Community of Christ people in my area. But it was a really nice and unique balance. I think.

Robin: [07:44](#) You have talked about your dad. So tell us what it was like growing up with a father who was so closely connected with the life of the church and much of that time, um, your father John

Wight, has served in the Council of Presidents of Seventy and is now the Senior President of 70. What was that like?

Joelle: [08:05](#) Well, it's funny that you asked that because I'm not even sure that I know for how much of my life he's been on the Council of Presidents of 70. I was trying to remember and I was very young when that happened. And so honestly, most of the time I'm like, I don't really think about it. It's, it was just kind of the norm for me. A lot of times it just meant having to be at events early to set them up and stay late to, to clean them up. But I didn't really mind that and we always had fun. I remember when he was first called to the Council though, however old I was, he, he called all of the kids into the family room there. I have five brothers and sisters. So all six of us were in there. And he just kind of talked about how his call to this position was not about power or authority or anything like that.

Joelle: [08:53](#) And he wanted to make sure that we knew that just because he had this role in the church, it didn't make us any more important than anybody else. And so he really wanted us to be aware that the position was about service and that we as a family would have to make some sacrifices in order to serve. And that conversation from the time I was very young, instilled in me the knowledge that priesthood isn't really about hierarchy. It's an opportunity to serve in accordance with your unique gifts. And his unique gifts just happened to have led him to that position.

Robin: [09:26](#) Wow. That's, that sounds, uh, that's so in alignment with Community of Christ understanding and of ordained ministry as servant ministry. And certainly your father has exemplified that throughout his whole entire ministry. Well, Joelle let's talk about you a little bit. When were you first called to ordained ministry and you know, what was that like, kind of step us through your first call and then bring us up to today in the office of 70?

Joelle: [09:58](#) Yeah, so, my first call to ordained ministry was when I was a freshman in college. I think it was the first semester that I got there. So I kinda hit the ground running and that call was to priest. And then about a year after I graduated college, uh, I was called to elder. And about a year after that, or a year and a half after that, I was called to 70, which is the role that, as you mentioned, I now serve in. I think for me, each call has kind of clarified what work I'm supposed to be doing. I've always kind of like felt a tug before receiving a call. And then when the call comes, I'm kind of like, Oh, that's, that's what that was about. It's interesting how each call has challenged me to learn and

grow. So for example, I remember when I was called to priest during college, I was very confused because priests are largely family ministers.

Joelle: [10:51](#) And here I was at a place where you, you've just left your family. Everybody's away from their family. And so I struggled for a long time figuring out what that looks like in the college residence hall. And then my junior year at Graceland, I worked at something called a house president, which for those of you who have not attended Graceland, it's very similar to like a residence assistant. And so through that role I was able to recognize how as a priest. I could help create loving, supportive community—or family—in a variety of situations. And so, you know, just like that experience, each call I've had has offered wonderful opportunities for learning growth and service.

Robin: [11:32](#) What are some of the biggest lessons that you've learned in office? Each of the offices? You've talked a little bit about, your journey as priest.

Joelle: [11:42](#) Yeah. so let's see. So priest I've mentioned, you know, the biggest learning curve there was that ministry takes a lot of different forms and you're not necessarily limited by the call, but I think that it's something that can be used to inspire the ministry you do and the way your ministry takes shape. So from priest I kind of learned that. Elder. I wasn't a elder very long before I started my 70 classes. And so that was kind of a quick learning experience for me. Um, what was really cool about that one is that I was surrounded by a lot of other elders in my congregation and in the mission center. So as you mentioned, I lived very near Independence and so there were a lot of church members around and there just happened to be a lot of elders around as well. And so from that position, I would say that I learned about the importance of learning from others who've had ministerial experience around you, and using that to kind of shape and inspire your ministry as well. And then I was 70. I was just ordained a week ago. So I don't know if I have a learning experience from it yet, but I'll get back to you.

Robin: [12:49](#) Yeah. We'll definitely have to put something on our calendar for a follow up on that.

Robin: [12:55](#) One question that I hear a lot, especially from people who are exploring Community of Christ has to do with the role of women in the life of the church. Of course, we are a generation apart—you and I. My youngest daughter is 31 and you're 28. My experience growing up in Community of Christ as a female is very different, I'm sure than yours. But we would love to hear

what it was like for you growing up as a female in Community of Christ. And then also how do you sense that your ministry has been received as a woman in the church?

Joelle:

[13:37](#)

So I think that this response is a hard one for me to articulate because I'm still forming and figuring out what it means to be female in Community of Christ and how that differs from, I would say, the larger experience of females in Christian or religious life. So I don't think I recognized that it was a blessing when I was younger because I just took female ministry for granted growing up. I have never lived through a time in Community of Christ where women were not ordained, which I know is not the majority experience. I know a lot of people went through that process of woman, of women gaining the right to be ordained. My grandmother performed my baby blessing and my mom baptized my sister. And so I always had female role models performing public ministry. I've never had anyone tell me that I shouldn't pray or preach or do something because I was female.

Joelle:

[14:32](#)

And so it was never on my radar that a woman wouldn't be able to do that. Um, but I kind of started to come to appreciate this role more because within the last five years I've been exposed to the extent of inequality between genders, still prevalent in much of our society. When I was in college, one of my best friends and my roommate was from another faith. Her father was a pastor in this faith. And she's one of the most intelligent, independent and capable people I know. But I've had to watch because of the understandings of her faith tradition that she's unconsciously limited herself to fit into those understandings. And it just broke my heart. And so that was kind of my first, I guess, encounter with that. And my first realization that in other movements, women don't have the same opportunities that I have had or the same experiences that I've had.

Joelle:

[15:28](#)

And then additionally, in my social work education, we've spent a lot of time, you know, I had a lot of opportunity for consciousness raising about institutional discrimination and how it means we unwittingly perpetuate systems of inequality, including those that diminish the worth of females. And so again, it was kind of brought to my attention in a way that it hadn't been when I was growing up and this list could go on and on of kind of my, consciousness raising experiences that led me to be more aware of it. Ultimately, I know that Community of Christ still has work to do and areas for growth, but I'm incredibly grateful for the space it created for me to not only learn from female ministers, but also to become a female minister as well.

- Robin: [16:13](#) Have you ever, in your ministry to date, experienced a nuance of discrimination as a woman in ministry? Has that changed at all in regards to office? For example, when you served as a priest, a lot of that ministry was on a campus in contrast to when you were ordained an elder, you were graduated from your undergrad, um, perhaps —were you in grad school when that call to elder came or were you teaching fourth grade?
- Joelle: [16:46](#) I think I was just finishing up my second year of teaching fourth grade, if I remember correctly. And then I was ordained the January of my first year of grad school. So there was, uh, maybe like eight months in between when that call came and when I was ordained. So, um, I don't know, that's a really tricky question. I definitely did not experience any, um, any like, you know, you were talking about nuances and in ministry as a female when I was a priest at Graceland because everybody was my age, we'd all kind of grown up with the same experience of always having women around. And you know, we had great campus ministers who were, were female. And so I, I mean that wasn't even a thought that crossed my mind when I was at Graceland. I guess there have maybe been experiences. So in Community of Christ we practice something called faithful disagreement, which I think is so important to who we are and to the example that we're trying to set for how we can continue in community even when we disagree.
- Joelle: [17:51](#) And so with that being said, living where I live, there are, as Robin mentioned, a lot of congregations and some of those congregations are not open to women holding priesthood. And so, um, I guess, you know, I've, I've been aware, I was on the mission center council when I was in central mission center and I knew that I would never be invited to speak at those congregations. And so I guess maybe indirectly I've had some of those experiences, but I've never had somebody come up to me after I've spoken or after I've taught a class and let me know that I shouldn't be up there because of my gender. So, I don't know that I have specific experiences, but I felt it in small ways, I guess.
- Robin: [18:27](#) That's very interesting. Thanks for sharing that with us. Okay, we're going to move on now to the heart of this particular series, "What's Brewing?", Which is about mission and living out our discipleship and discovering how it is God is inviting us to participate in mission around us, both in and out of the church. What I'd like you to do is just tell us about your discipleship and your ministry and how both of those as a disciple, which is the foundational office in Community of Christ as well as ordained ministry, have connected with mission in ways that have not

only brought transformation into the lives of others but has also touched you in transforming ways.

Joelle: [19:26](#) So this is kind of a tough question for me to answer because I don't want to presume anything. I'm kind of like you were saying—transformation. If it's true transformation, I don't think it's ever one way. I think that transformation is always natural and I believe that anytime we engage in mission we are changed and better able to understand God's ultimate vision for creation. And I believe we are better able to understand what it takes to create Zion. And so that transformation definitely goes both ways. For me, opportunities to engage in mission have taken a variety of forms, oftentimes surprising forms, you know, things that I wouldn't initially classify as participation in mission. I've come to realize, you know, we're really God at work in the world and so I'll try to use a couple of Community of Christ mission initiatives because I think that they clarify, um, you know, all of the different forms that mission can take.

Joelle: [20:22](#) And so in Community of Christ, we have these mission initiatives that are inspired by the mission of Jesus and represent the work that we are called to do. And so there are a couple that I think I'm really able to point to and say, yeah, that's, that's a time when, when God was partnered with me in mission and helping make that happen. So one of the mission initiatives is Invite People to Christ. You're not supposed to have favorites, but I think seventy's favorite is supposed to this one. When I was in college, I worked with campus ministries as a Sunday morning worship coordinator, which just meant that I was in charge of planning the weekly worship every Sunday. So essentially like the same thing as presiding, I would do every single week. And I would often invite the women who lived on my residence hall to the services.

Joelle: [21:09](#) And there were a couple that came, pardon the pun, religiously, every single week. Two of them were members of Community of Christ because Graceland does have quite a few people who are connected to Community of Christ. But the third had been raised Catholic and she didn't really attend church very often. And then she continued to come to worship. She had more questions for me and eventually she wanted to be baptized. And I had the wonderful opportunity to baptize her. And the following year she joined campus ministries and her unique perspective and insight would have been missing and our program would not have been as strong without her. And so to see her going from somebody who just kind of casually attends worship services to somebody who's shaping the ministry that campus ministries provides was very cool. She gave the disciples

generous response at our baccalaureate and it was just a wonderful, you know, capstone to her college experience and, and kind of the transformation she'd been through.

Joelle:

[22:07](#)

And it was very exciting to see her share her gifts after the invitation had been issued. So after she knew she was welcome in the community, to then turn around and just enhance the community in an amazing way. Um, another experience that I've had with mission, more recently within the last three years kind of falls under the category of Abolish Poverty and End Suffering. So when I was in graduate school for social work, we had practicums that we would complete. And so you kind of get paired with an organization, you had a little bit of say into which organization it was, but you also were given a fairly short list to choose from. And so the first place that I was connected with was a place called Reconciliation Services. And they're situated on Troost, which if any of you are listening from Kansas city, you know, that Troost is frequently called the dividing line.

Joelle:

[22:57](#)

It has a horrible history of kind of racially segregating the city, but also economically segregating the city. People, you know, try to stay away from East of Troost and they prefer to be on the West side of Troost. And so the goal of Reconciliation Services was very intentional being placed on that quote unquote dividing line, because what they wanted to become was a gathering place instead of a dividing line. And they wanted to do that while providing essential services for members of the community. And the reason that I chose to partner with this organization and to do my practicum there is because they did this by intentionally treating each person that entered the center—the building—the way they would treat Christ. So right on their website it says, you know, every person that comes in here will be treated the same way we would treat Christ.

Joelle:

[23:43](#)

And so, you know, you think to the scripture that talks about, you know, just as you've done it to the least of these, you've done it to me. And I don't have any miraculous stories from this time about how people who came in were no longer homeless and they went from rags to riches. But they do have stories about people who realize their worth and who suffering was eased because they became aware of their worth and their value. And it's amazing what can happen in people's lives when they are valued, named and loved. And then the final example that I kind of have about how discipleship and ministry have connected with mission to lead to transformation actually occurred in my fourth grade classroom. So one year in particular I had an incredibly challenging class. It was all, it was the perfect

storm. All of the factors had come together and it was just everybody everywhere.

Joelle: [24:35](#) And, and you know, just completely out of control. In fact, I remember one time before we went to lunch, they were supposed to be lining up and they were not doing any of that. And I just realized I feel completely out of control. And it was a bit overwhelming. And I had no idea what to do because typical classroom management techniques were failing miserably. And so one day, it wasn't a school day, I sat in the Temple sanctuary during the Prayer for Peace and I realized that what we needed as a classroom community was a goal. Specifically we needed a goal to become a signal community. So single communities are something we talk about in Community of Christ. Often to me, they're kind of the communities that show alternative ways of living, um, that you know, don't give into the violence or the isolationism or, or some of the things in our society.

Joelle: [25:24](#) They're really challenging and hard, and so they offer an alternative way of living that leads to peace and joy and hope and love. And so they're kind of like these little mini Zions. And so from then on I invited my students to participate in this goal. The language of course had to change slightly for the secular setting, but the ultimate objective was the same. We would have a peace time mostly. So I could feel like my thoughts, but we would have peace time where we sent thoughts of peace out into the world after lunch each day. Around the same time that Community of Christ headquarters has their prayer for peace in the Temple. And we had a peace bulletin board that students could consult to solve their problems peacefully. We challenged ourselves to live and learn as one and to push the right envelopes in order to bring about more justice in the world.

Joelle: [26:11](#) I wish I could tell you that the class never had issues again and that every kid behaved exactly how I wanted, but of course that didn't happen. However, by the end of the year, I saw kids who were making a true effort to be kinder to one another and find alternatives to fighting. I saw kids who knew how to find inner peace through quiet and meditation, and I had kids who were empowered to make their world a more peaceful place and that was really more important to me than any perfectly well behaved class. Ultimately, I think that, you know, when I look back on my discipleship and ministry and just the topics of discipleship and ministry in general, I think it's important for a member of quote by Gandhi. He talks about how it's the action, not the fruit of the action. That's important. You have to do the right thing.

Joelle: [27:02](#) It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, but that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know the results that come from your actions, but if you do nothing, there'll be no results. And so we may not see the transformation that occurs in people's lives and then the world. We may not even recognize the transformation in our own selves, but it's important that we partner with Christ and mission anyway because if we do nothing, there will be no results.

Robin: [27:28](#) Listening to your stories and your descriptions of mission and how you've participated in that in ways that have touched both inside and outside the church, I'm hearing these really strong statements that reflect, um, the journey of Community of Christ. And our understanding of the nature of God, our sense of being part of that with God, talking about God's alternate vision for creation. Zion is a word we use for that, the peaceable kingdom. Uh, I love the way that lived into some of your interface, um, with the, uh, community group on that road. That's this border between, uh, the good side and the bad side of, of the community. And how there was that choice to, uh, as a institution, as an organization to treat each one who walked in, like they would treat Christ. And this sense of the powerful ministry even in the secular world—maybe even especially in the secular world—of inviting people into a sense of understanding their worth, that they are valued and named and loved and, and how a classroom can become a signal community.

Robin: [29:04](#) And, you know, as you're talking and just these, these themes threading through, of when we choose an alternative way of living, that's a reflection of how Christ lived, that we become a signal to the whole world in ways. And you're talking about, uh, seeing things transform both in individual lives as well as community lives. I especially appreciate your quote from Gandhi that the action, the focus is on the action, not the fruit of the action. And it is the action indeed that changes the world. Even something as simple as valuing the other and sharing, sharing the fact that they are valued, they are named, they are loved, very powerful. And so basic. Sometimes when we think about mission, I think we feel overwhelmed because we self impose that it must be this complicated thing and it has to result in some monumental miracle when in fact the strongest powers of mission are in the everyday and the context of who we already are and where we already live. Tell us a little bit about how you see the Holy Spirit working in the lives of people in this part of the world. And, uh, actually before we get into that, you're gonna need to tell us about your new assignment.

So we, we've heard some stories of how Holy Spirit has worked where you've worked and lived, um, before you came to Utah. So get us up to date on your new assignment and then tell us about how that spirit is working.

- Joelle: [30:54](#) Well, I better get the description of my new assignment correct. Cause I'm talking to my boss. So I hope I, I hope I get the right answer here. Um, so I learn more about my new assignment each day as I kind of interact with people and as I see the work that church has already engaged in, as well as the opportunity for further work and further growth. So I am a Latter-day Seeker Minister with the Utah Mission Ministries Team. And my role has a lot of different layers. I'd say kind of the ones that stand out the most to me at this point are, first of all, my role is to journey with Latter-day Seekers who, you know, maybe have intention to join the Community of Christ maybe, or just visiting whatever their story is, to just kind of be there as a companion on the journey. Um, on their faith journey. And then another big aspect of my role is to connect with the larger community both through interfaith groups, um, or you know, maybe not necessarily faith based groups but the other groups who are doing work in the community as I explore where the spirit is leading us at this time, kind of where we're called to go moving forward.
- Robin: [32:03](#) So you've been on the job so to speak since...?
- Joelle: [32:07](#) Okay, so technically I started on October 1st a lot of that was educational work. I, you know, there was a huge learning curve moving to a new place with a new group of people. And so I spent a lot of time kind of familiarizing myself with what that was going to be like. And then I think tomorrow is my one month in Utah anniversary, or at least when my stuff arrived here in Utah. So I think I've been on the job in Utah for about a month.
- Robin: [32:36](#) So we'll date time this because we know this goes in an archive where people hopefully will be listening for years to come. So it's 2019. It's November 22nd, 2019. And as Joelle said, her official start date was October one, but she had time to get all of her worldly belongings, moved out to Utah. And it has been a just kind of a wild four weeks, Joelle, since all your stuff landed and we have asked you to just kind of plunge into the deep end with folks like Carla Long who have been providing ministry and walking with people in Utah for several years now. You've had a front row seat to a lot of things. Tell us how you see the Holy Spirit working in that part of the world.

Joelle:

[33:29](#)

Yeah. So, um, you know, as we've talked about, I've only been here a month and even in that short amount of time I've definitely seen how the Holy Spirit is working in people's lives in this part of the world. So I think that, one way is, first of all, it's all very inspiring to me as somebody who's kind of coming in from the outside, coming from a completely different state and moving here, I've been very inspired with how the Holy Spirit is working with people. Um, a lot of people that I've met here have been hurt very deeply and this hurt, a lot of times has been caused under "the name of God," or as a direct result of something that "God has said" is kind of how it's been presented. And so to me, if I had had that experience, I can understand how it would be very easy after experiencing that kind of hurt to reject all forms of organized religion.

Joelle:

[34:23](#)

But I kind of see these individuals have sensed a call to community rooted in Christ and have answered that call. And so even though, you know, they've had this experience with organized religion, they still see some value in the community, which I think is really important and really inspiring. And I think that that's where we better understand who we are and who God is. When we were able to experience it together in community, um, they've welcomed me and they've made our community richer by making this decision. And so I'm very, very grateful for them. Uh, another way, kind of as an extension of that, that I see the Holy Spirit working is, you know, as I mentioned, a lot of these people have some pretty deep hurt and rather than focusing and remaining angry, and dwelling in that hurt, they are truly looking for healing and reconciliation and they're looking to move forward with that, at the heart of their journey. And so I think that that's also really important and, and really inspirational. And I believe that the Holy Spirit is kind of working in them to help that happen and to help that be a desire that they have. And so, you know, it just in the short time I've been here, that's kind of how I've seen the Holy Spirit already working. And I'm excited to see more as they continue to engage with people.

Robin:

[35:39](#)

So Joelle your journey to Utah has been a little bit on the wild side as well because there's this whole sense of applying for something that you may not even totally understand what, what that job is, and then being offered the job and making a decision to say yes to something that wasn't just a change in focus of ministry, but meant changing where you lived, what you were doing, you're far from family. Tell us a little bit about how that was for you and how you've sensed the Holy Spirit working in the midst of your own life and decision making in that process.

Joelle:

[36:27](#)

So I'm in complete awe of people who are able to articulate really well, you know, kind of the Spirit's guidance in their life. I'm not sure that I'm one of those people who can put words to it very well, but I can definitely tell you that this whole experience has been one that's been guided by God. So I graduated in May from the school of social work in UMKC and I was kind of tentatively looking for jobs because I had a few, not obligations, but I committed to a few different camps and reunions over the summer and I knew that I wouldn't really be able to start work while I was having to leave multiple weeks of the summer. And so, you know, I wasn't looking very hard for, for jobs. I was just kind of on the periphery. And then when I finished with the summer, I started looking more intentionally in August and I applied for a different job at the same time that I applied for this position and the other job was with the school district and I would've been able to stay at home. I would have been able to, you know, stay in the Independence area and I actually, I got that job

Joelle:

[37:35](#)

and it was a quick turnaround of whether or not I was going to accept it. I had not yet interviewed for this position, I don't think. But I think like the interview was on the calendar. And it would've been the easy choice to just accept that position and stay in independence. And for whatever reason, it just didn't sit right. And, you know, I'm, I'm kind of an indecisive person anyway. And so, you know, part of me chalked it up to that, but the other part of me knew that, you know, I'd prayed that God would guide my life and that God would show me where God wanted me to be. And so I just had to turn that position down and it was a really hard decision. I felt really guilty about it, you know, putting them through the whole interview process and then not accepting the job.

Joelle:

[38:16](#)

And then I went through the interview for this job and, and as you mentioned, Robin, it's still growing and expanding and it's hard to nail down exactly what work I'll be doing. But when the position was offered to me, I just, I kind of knew that I needed to take it. Um, again, I wish I could articulate better exactly what that experience, what that feeling was like. But it was just the next right step. And I think that, God doesn't expect us to make perfect decisions. You know, God's given us our agency, we have control over where we go and what we do. But I think God does want to partner with us in mission, kind of as we've already talked about today. And so for me it's about just taking that next faithful step and trying to do that and trying to, to figure out where the Spirit's working and where I'm being called to go.

- Robin: [39:06](#) I love your story, Joelle. It really parallels in a sense the journey of Community of Christ. We've had ups and downs as a faith community and now in the 21st century when the world is just in a state of flux and change, uh, technology changes overnight and our future as a church is connected to God's ultimate vision for creation. We have that, that vision is clear and at the same time, how we get from here to there just seems very uncertain. As I hear your story, I just hear echoes of the same faith that we're called to have as a church. And a sense of rightness going forward but not always knowing all the details of a whae that is going to look like or even feel like. And also this sense that we're in this together and I've visited a couple times since you've been in Utah and it has really warmed my heart the way those who you are working side by side with, as well as the community, has embraced you. I hope that you already feel that sense of, of a welcome and being one.
- Joelle: [40:25](#) Well, I definitely do. I do.
- Robin: [40:29](#) So over the years of your discipleship and ministry, and especially in these recent years and as I mentioned, as we embrace a new paradigm of our context, our culture, all of that impacts mission. As you think about that, and maybe step back a little bit from it, what principles of mission or key dimensions do you see playing out as you support mission or maybe common threads that you can pull out? What do you see and what do you think is important to know about living, living out mission in today's world?
- Joelle: [41:08](#) That is a deep question, Robin, and I guarantee you I don't have a complete answer to it, but I'll give it my best shot. So first I think that there are a few of Community of Christ Enduring Principles that kind of helped me respond to this question. So our Enduring Principles are those things, those values at the heart and soul of who we are as a faith movement. I don't think that they've been in their current form, you know, the exact language that we use now. I'm not sure that they've been around my whole life, but it seems like they have. And so to me, a lot of times they help me to describe the work that we're doing and the presence that we want to be in the world. So ultimately they shape our lives. And thus our mission. So the first Enduring Principle that comes to mind is Continuing Revelation, which is one of my favorites and it reminds us that God is still engaged in our world and interacts with us today and we don't have complete understanding of what forms mission will need to take in the future if we're truly to be ministers of Christ peace.

Joelle: [42:12](#) And so it's important that we continue to try to discern what God is revealing to us today. So the mission can be meaningful, it can continue to be meaningful in whatever context and culture we find ourselves. A lot of times I think that we want to pray, God, please let this thing I'm doing. Please bring more members to my congregation. Please make sure that this event is a success, but instead we should really be praying, God, where are you already working? Reveal to me how I should be joining with you in the work that's already happening. So that's kind of the first enduring principle that comes to mind. That to me seems like a principle of mission. The next two kind of pair together. Uh, so the first would be sacredness of creation and the next would be worth of all persons. And both of those come to mind when I think about mission because God is still creating today and calls us to be co-creators.

Joelle: [43:02](#) And so when we talk about salvation, you know, Christianity throughout history has been focused on salvation. And so when we talk about salvation and salvation, we seek, it isn't some distant time in place. It's not after we die for the Community of Christ, it's here and now. And it's for all of creation. And so the mission that we participate in isn't about getting to the right place after death. And it's not about just a select few, it's about all people. And so to me that changes all of creation, not even just all people that changes the focus of mission for sure. And I think it's an important thing to keep in mind as we engage in mission. And then I also kind of talked about worth of all persons, each person has an inestimable worth and is deserving of love, compassion, and connection. And so this should always be at the heart of the mission we pursue and of why we're pursuing mission.

Joelle: [43:54](#) So then, another, I kind of have another pairing of Enduring Principals. Another two that came to mind are All Are Called in Unity in Diversity. So mission isn't something that we do to or for some one. Mission is engaging with people of all different backgrounds and working together to create a new world. And so All Are Called and Unity in Diversity. If we don't have diverse voices, then I don't think we're really going to be um, performing or performing isn't really the right word. I don't think we're really going to be participating in mission to the full extent possible if we don't have those unique perspectives. And if we don't also realize that All Are Called, even the people, you know, if I feel like I'm ministering to somebody, somebody, that person is also called to be part of mission. And so I think it's important to recognize that relationship.

Joelle: [44:43](#) So these are just some of the key principles I think are essential to mission. They are also Enduring Principles. And we have to be open to God's call and vision. We have to recognize the worth and sacredness of all of God's creation. And we have to engage with people of all backgrounds as equal partners in mission. And I think moving forward with culture and context changing, if we hold those things at the heart of the work we do and at the heart of the mission that we participate in, I think we stand a pretty good chance of being on the right track in terms of living mission in the world today. I was struck within the last few months with a somewhat overwhelming realization. It's something that I'm still wrestling with and have been since that time. I'm not sure exactly what it means for me or my life or you know, for our community on a larger scale.

Joelle: [45:31](#) But it's something that, you know, kinda hit me a few months ago and I think it's important to, to how I live mission in the world today. So I'm a pretty big Marvel movie fan. If you're not into that genre, just know it's like the superhero movies that Disney puts out in conjunction with Marvel specifically. I'm a huge captain America fan. He's my favorite. And recently, I think it was last spring, I went to the theater to see the final Avengers movie with a friend. And I'm going to do my best not to give away any spoilers, although if you haven't seen it by now, you probably should go 'cause it's November and it came out in the spring. Um, but I was sitting there and I was watching the final battle and of course it's between the good guys and the bad guys and it's so inspiring and you just want to stand up in the theater and you, you want to cheer because, uh, you know, Captain America does this awesome thing again.

Joelle: [46:22](#) No spoilers. They do this awesome thing and then all of a sudden it's like, Oh, maybe the good guys are gonna win. And so you just get really excited. But in that moment I was struck with the thought that this was not God's will. Many people would probably disagree with me because as long as good prevailed, it has to be. It has to make God happy, right? But I do not believe that God wants some final battle between good and evil. I believe for God, and I'm going to have to paraphrase here a little bit from an author named Shane Clayborne, but I believe that for God, mission is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice.

New Speaker: [46:56](#) You have to disarm evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight, but the careful arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice.

Joelle: [47:09](#) It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free. So as we go about living mission in our world, we have to completely realign our lives and our priorities. Does that mean I can't watch Captain America anymore? I certainly hope not. But it does mean that when I'm watching those movies, I have to be intentionally aware of the structures and the understandings that are contrary to the mission of Jesus Christ. And I have to be aware of the ways that the world does things that I'm being called to look at differently as a participant in that mission.

Robin: [47:45](#) And that makes me want to stand up and cheer. That is great. I love the way you articulated that and it's such a poignant core of the nature of God's love. Right. So I'm sure we have people listening to this that would like for you to just pass on a couple of tips. So do you have any practical application tips on engaging in mission in the places that people live and serve? Understanding that you just gave us some really great core principles of mission and discipleship.

Joelle: [48:25](#) Yeah. So in Community of Christ we have the Doctrine and Covenants, which is modern day revelation, you know, continued revelation. God's still talking to us today and one passage, in fact, I'm going to probably mention a few passages in responding to this question, but one that really stands out to me when I hear that question is the passage. It says, "opportunities abound in our daily lives if we choose to see them." So for the people out there who are listening that are choosing to see those opportunities, I guess I would have three bits of advice. So first have confidence in your call to participate. There were not tryouts, you didn't have to do anything special to make the team. Every single person is gifted, called and chosen to participate in mission. So don't let doubts about worthiness stand in your way. My second piece of advice would be to become aware of where God is already working.

Joelle: [49:19](#) So we kind of talked about this a little bit earlier to pray that God will help you see the work that God is already doing. So we have a prayer in Community of Christ that's called the Mission Prayer. And a lot of the people will say it every morning or they'll place it somewhere where they're going to see it every single day. And it says this, "God, where will your spirit lead today? Help me be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant me the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace." So using this prayer is one way to try to become aware of where God is already working. But if this prayer doesn't, doesn't work for you or if you're already

engaged in some other type of spiritual practice, that's another good way to become aware of where God is already working.

Joelle: [50:02](#) If you're interested in spiritual practices and kind of that process of discerning where God is at work, we have lots of great resources on the web, the Community of Christ website. So Cofchrist.org has a lot of spiritual practice and discernment resources that can kind of help you get started on that process. I would say that I'm somebody who's not, like, I would not describe myself as super good at spiritual practices and I feel like the resources that we have from Community of Christ are, you know, something that I can get behind and I can do fairly easily. And so, um, you don't have to be somebody who feels they're super gifted in this or you know, has a lot of experience in it. You can jump on as a person who's never even heard the word spiritual practice before and start participating.

Joelle: [50:48](#) And I just think that those things are really important to do, to kind of try to figure out, we've talked about, you know, God's vision for creation a lot and I think that those are important practices to do to kind of figure out what that looks like. And then my third piece of advice would be don't hesitate. There are countless people waiting to have the good news shared with them and you might be just the person to share it. So they're, like I said, when I answered this question, there's a lot of Doctrine and.

New Speaker: [51:12](#) Covenants that comes up to me, but there's a section of 155:7-8 of Doctrine and Covenants that I find specifically helpful when I find myself feeling hesitant. It says this, "Know. Oh my people. The time for hesitation is past. The earth, my creation groans for the liberating truths of my gospel, which have been given for the salvation of the world. Be not overly concerned with method. As you go forth to witness in my name, there are many techniques for proclaiming my word which may be used as needs and circumstances dictate. The call is for workers and the cause of Zion. Therefore, neither tarry or doubt that I am. I know your perplexities and I'm aware of your uncertainties, but if you will call upon my name, my spirit will go before you into whatsoever place you are sent and I will continue to bless you as you have need." So when I hear this, I realize that there's no one right way to participate in mission. Everybody who is participating in mission has fears, doubts, and competing loyalties and perplexities and things that would cause them to hesitate. But God is aware of those things that might hold us back and wants us to participate anyway and will bless us along the way.

- Robin: [52:19](#) Thank you for those tips. Let's get down to looking into the future for just a couple minutes, Joelle. what are your hopes for Community of Christ as we journey into this somewhat uncertain future?
- Joelle: [52:34](#) Yeah. So I have numerous hopes for Community of Christ. My hope is that we become more fully who we are called to be and that we embrace that process of figuring out exactly who that is. I hope that we continue to become more and more inclusive and always choose love in the face of difficult questions. I hope that we truly embody signal communities that show the world an alternative and peaceful response. I hope, and I'm quoting again from the Doctrine and Covenants here, that we "become a people who see violence but proclaim peace, who feel conflict, get extend the hand of reconciliation who encounter broken spirits and find pathways for healing." So those are my hopes for community of Christ moving into the future.
- Robin: [53:18](#) Well said. Well said. Joelle, is there anything that's just burning in the bosom that you want to share with us that I didn't ask you about before we close up for today?
- Speaker 5: [53:30](#) I don't think so. I've already talked a lot.
- Robin: [53:35](#) It has been a joy to visit with you today, Joelle, and to have a window into your life and how God has worked in your life and how God is working in you today and leading you and changing lives through you as you yourself are changed at the same time. Thank you for being with us today and for sharing your story with us. And as always a very special thanks to all of our listeners. If you would like to hear more stories about mission checkout, our "What's Brewing?" series, you can just click on the categories list and pick that up. If you have a question for our guest, Joelle Wight, you can email her at jowights@cofchrist.org and if you want to learn more about Latter-day Seeker Ministry, check out the website, latter-dayseekers.org that's L A T T E R dash D a Y S E E K E R s.org. This is your host, Robin Linkhart, and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Bye bye.
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Speaker 1: [55:59](#) [inaudible]

Speaker 6: [56:11](#) [inaudible].