

Music: [00:00](#)

Josh Mangelson: [00:18](#) Welcome to the Project Zion podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts community of Christ offers for today's world.

Britt Mangelson: [00:34](#) Hello everyone. Welcome to Project Zion podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson and I will be your host for today. And today we have on a repeat guest as part of our No Filter series, which is all about faith and gender and sexuality. So we have on Nancy Ross, which Nancy, I'm really excited to have you on today.

Nancy Ross: [00:55](#) I'm always happy to be here, Brittany.

Britt Mangelson: [00:58](#) And like I said, we've had Nancy on before and we've talked about her faith transition story. We've talked about faith and feminism, we've talked about stages of faith, but today we're going to be talking about a hashtag that she has used on Twitter and it is #queerpastor and Nancy and I, we both follow a lot of progressive faith people LGBTQ inclusive pastors and clergy on Twitter. And so there is just this whole community that's really trying to push boundaries as far as what Christianity stereotypically looks like and who can be involved with Christianity. And so I have seen Nancy's posts and I just really wanted to get her on to talk about the use of this hashtag and how it's been perceived in the community. So thank you Nancy. So I'm thrilled. So Nancy, why don't you just catch us up to speed a little bit. Maybe just give like an elevator pitch of who you are, where you are, and then how you got to where you're at today?

Nancy Ross: [02:06](#) Sure. So I was a Mormon for the first 35 years of my life and for the last four years I have been in community of Christ and I was ordained and I was confirmed about three years ago, ordained about a year and a half ago and earlier this year became pastor of the emerging, Southern Utah Community of Christ emerging congregation. And it was, it was kind of near the end of my time as an LDS person that I was really trying to come to terms with my identity as a bisexual Mormon woman. And in 2013 for a Lent, I decided I was still Mormons and Mormons don't typically observe Lent, but I decided that I was going to give up my shame for Lent because that seemed like a good thing to give up for Lent. My shame about bisexual and I read at that time Brene' Brown's Daring Greatly to kind of begin to work through that shame.

Nancy Ross: [03:08](#) I can't say that I completely gave up shame for lent, but I feel like it was a good goal for me and I was able to make progress

and maybe come to terms with an identity that I'd had for a long time but felt deeply uncomfortable about. And another thing, another complication of being LDS and having an LGBT identity is it, if people know in your congregation, then you might have an asterisk placed on your church records that would prevent you from being ever able to work with children or youth. And I spent a lot of time working with children when I was Mormon and, and I enjoyed that and I wanted to be able to continue doing that. And I was really afraid that if I came out to people as bi that that would end. And I would also say that the only other group of people who gets an asterisk in their records are like convicted sexual offenders. So LGBT identities are often kind of conflated with sexual abusers or sexual predation and the LDS church. And even though that seems like a very old idea, that's often an idea that can kind of come up and it can make coming out really hard and filled with shame, which is, you know, very much part of my experience.

Britt Mangelson:

[04:25](#)

Yes. So that's, that's why I think that this hashtag that you've used has been, and just how open you've been in general has been so empowering for me to see because you have been able to take back and take back that shame and, and not let it control you.

Nancy Ross:

[04:44](#)

Right. And I think one of the, one of the most difficult things to overcome at the beginning of that process was to tell people was to kind of come out to people. And I still only ever kind of come out in a face to face way with people who I know were gonna respect what I have to say, um, or respect my identity. And so one thing I realized fairly early in this process was that when I came out to friends who I knew would be accepting of, so I've been married to my husband for more than 15 years and we're totally monogamous and that's not going to change. So that's like also, you know, part of, part of the deal here. But still, I feel like my bisexuality speaks to an important part of like who I am at my work. And I started realizing that I could release some of this shame by just telling my secret to people and, and receiving loving, affirming responses in return.

Nancy Ross:

[05:41](#)

And that was a really important in like, in the last five, six years, that's been a really important process of letting go of shame, which can be such a destructive thing. And when I spend time on Twitter, especially, you know, there's a large of former Mormon crowd on Twitter and really a large progressive Christian crowd on Twitter or progressive religion crowd on Twitter. And I saw lots of folks tweeting about LGBT folks, former Mormon LGBT folks tweeting about coming out the difficulties that they experienced in their lives and that kind of

thing. And I wanted to be able to offer not only love and support as like another queer, former Mormon, but also to be able to say and affirm love and belonging to God or from a religious perspective. Because so like if what I have received in my life is so much rejection or even just rejection of idea, like the November 5th policy or the exclusion policy, it was devastating.

Nancy Ross: [06:48](#) And that ended my time in as an LDS person, as a Mormon. And I'm feeling so much rejection, you know, really needs to be countered with love and acceptance and, and that's so, so important. But then also knowing that for former Mormon folks or for Mormon folks who are LGBT identified, but so much of that shame has come from organized religion, right? It's coming from their religious environment. And I feel like one of the things that God has called me to is to offer affirmation of identity and belonging. I'm related to identity as a pastor, as a local religious leader, as someone who is ordained. And to be able to say God loves you. You are made in the image of God and that identity is Holy and sacred. And so I feel like the queer pastor, hashtag that I sometimes use sometimes it just feels very vulnerable, comes from this place of wanting to affirm people from a similar kind of position to the crowd who has rejected them, right?

Nancy Ross: [07:59](#) Like, and not that that undoes the hurt and the pain, but it is to show something else like God and religion are not fundamentally opposed to LGBT identities. God created all of these identities, right? And we are left to experience and understand them. And so it's just really important to me to be able to offer love. And acceptance to people often on Twitter. Twitter seems to be the place to do this or where this comes up a lot from that position of being a, like a local faith leader in a progressive denomination is to counter that message. And I realized that I cannot counter all of the Mormon homophobia and transphobia. Like that's not a thing I can do on my own, but I can push back and I can offer folks maybe the thing that they wish they had heard a long time ago that I'm certainly offering when I offer love and affirmation, I'm certainly offering the thing I wish that I had heard a long time ago. Does that make sense?

Britt Mangelson: [09:08](#) It makes a lot of sense. And I think that there are multiple layers to this because not only are you a queer person, but you're a queer woman. So the fact that you are ordained again in a very conservative area and then coming from a very conservative religion and people know you in Mormon feminist spaces. And so I really appreciate it. I've talked to, well my evangelists, Kris

Judd and she and I have often talked about how when you feel like there's only two choices in front of you, actually there probably is at least one more way, you know, a third way. Cause if both binaries of a decision are causing you to stress or they're not really where you fit, then forging your own way in the middle. And finding that third option is sometimes the best thing you can do. And I feel like that's what a lot of Latter-day Seekers now members of Community of Christ or members of other churches who have gone and become ordained ministers or who have even just align themselves with a progressive religion, they, they've been able to find a third way.

Britt Mangelson:

[10:19](#)

And so I feel like that's what I see you doing with this queer pastor hashtag is that you don't have to say that you can only find healing by rejecting all of religion. And I, and I'm not saying that that's rejecting all religion is, is the wrong answer because for a lot of people it, there's just too much hurt. But you also don't have to stay in an institution that isn't affirming of you and isn't going to accept all of who you are. And so you've been able to find this middle ground of faith on your own terms, religion on your own terms, in a community that affirms you and allows you to have what you said, you know your ideas, your, your part of your personality that makes the all of you and you haven't had to reject that and hide that, but you've been able to bring that to the table, bring that to your ministry and then show other people that, that that's a viable option, which is really awesome.

Nancy Ross:

[11:18](#)

When I think about the things that have like, you know, what am I called to do or what am I called to do in Southern Utah or what am I called to do in St George? I feel like this is a really big part of that and it's just the disruption of doing something different, right? Like, if we have this idea that, you know, religion says, you know, religion is like this, then part of what I think I need to do is to show people, no religion can be like that. And when we organize in for faith or church or belief or spirituality but can include the acceptance and like the deep acceptance and affirmation of belonging for groups that have traditionally been rejected by church. One way that we do this in my congregation as it were very involved with pride in pride of Southern Utah is the organization.

Nancy Ross:

[12:11](#)

And, and we organize an interfaith service together with pride and, and you know, we try to, you know, partner with our other more progressive faith traditions in, in the local area. And our, we had St George's really hot in the summer, so we tend to celebrate pride in September. And at our last interfaith event we had, um, between 80 and a hundred people show up, which

was super awesome. It was our biggest interfaith event in every year. We try to bring in new and kind of expand our, um, LGBT affirming clergy group that offers prayers and blessings to the LGBT community and just to show people that there is really something that there is something different that it's not, and it's not even just me, it's, it's like other other groups or just Community of Christ, right? There are other groups that also see this issue of LGBT inclusion differently and that we can name that in public spaces and we can say that and we aren't ashamed of this. This isn't like a shame filled issue. We're trying to kind of keep naming this affirmation to counter that sense of shame. My congregation also has a booth at our pride celebration where we, you know, handout rainbow buttons or stickers or let them know again that we can offer affirmation from a place of faith and Christian belief. And we now see other congregations like the Episcopalians in St George also having booths and, and we feel like in my congregation that this is a good way to be doing the work of God in our community.

Britt Mangelson: [13:56](#)

So Nancy, I'm curious because I have participated with my congregation in several pride events as well. And a lot of times when people come up to our booth, they approach us. I mean they, they are very open and honest with, with how much religion has harmed them and they're shocked that a church would be at pride and there's, uh, immediately some distrust and yet intrigue because people are like, okay, what is this church and being Community of Christ in Utah as you know, there's always that, okay, how do I articulate who we are without being completely anti-Mormon? And I'm using air quotes there, but, um, you know, it, it's difficult to, to talk about. And so I'm just wondering, uh, how that's been for you down in St George. When people approach you either at pride or if they walk into your congregation, how is that, how does that understanding happen? Of like, yes, we have shared history and shared roots and yet we are affirming or just doing the Jesus thing here in our own way and it works.

Nancy Ross: [14:52](#)

Yeah. And, you know, I feel like for me this gets easier to, you know, at the messiness of this gets easier to speak to the more practice I have. So like every pride it gets like a little, a little easier. So we show up at pride with like all the rainbow things because that's part of pride and, and people are often surprised and see the thing is if someone says to me, you know, I've really been harmed by organized religion, I don't feel like that harms my faith or my position in any way. I'm probably quite likely to agree with them, you know? Right. Like, and, and, and, and I think that I can feel confident in speaking to those things because of the fact that I've been through faith transition.

Nancy Ross: [15:49](#) I've tried to do a tremendous amount of reflection through this process of faith transition and faith transformation. And so when someone expresses that organized religion has really hurt them and the process, I don't feel like that is in any way a challenge to me. Like, I can totally agree with them and that, and people are often surprised by that. They feel like as a religious person I should be, you know, really defensive about that. And that is just not something I am defensive about. Which I think helps because I think when we can respond with listening and understanding, that's a super helpful part of this. But people are often surprised when they walk by our booth at pride. They're like, Oh, I didn't think there'd be any churches here. And one thing I try to emphasize in our congregation is that we're just trying to show people that there's another way to do religion.

Nancy Ross: [16:45](#) Like there's another way, like just as you were saying the, the, you know, it's not this or that. There are other ways to do this. And actually some of the most critical comments we tend to get are from people who are at pride to protest pride. There was someone this last year who kind of near the end of pride kind of gotten my face and was telling me that I was doing my Christianity all wrong and I just disagree in the strongest possible terms. And um, I really feel like no one gets to interpret the message of Jesus for me. And I feel like what we do in our congregation and the church and like the national conference in the United States with being fully inclusive of LGBT folks is perfectly consistent with the message of Jesus. And, and there are a lot of theologians and church folks out there who understand that the message of Jesus was really trying to challenge so much of the purity culture of his time and the, the purity culture of our time, you know, LGBT identities, but that God calls us to reject that rejection. Say, you know, religion is not about the checklist of rules and how well we police ourselves in the minutiae of things like ideas or thoughts or sexuality even, but really in what we're doing. But like, but like there, there is more and there is often a third way, right? It's not just like this way or that way. We can choose to set a different kind of example. And that is what I feel called to do. Yeah.

Britt Mangelson: [18:27](#) Thank you so much. I am reminded, I recently recorded a podcast with Robin. It hasn't aired yet, but maybe by the time this one airs that one will be up. But I, I talk about how I had to detach the gospel of Jesus from motherhood because for me, being a parent and being a mom was what the gospel was all about. And I think that that really relates with the LGBT plight as well. Because when you come from a church that has marriage

kind of at the, at the center, because you don't fit that narrative at all. And so as you're talking, it just kind of reminded me of, of my own experience having to find a different way to do the gospel. So if the gospel wasn't all about motherhood or if at all, if it wasn't all about traditional marriage and traditional gender roles, then what's the point?

Britt Mangelson:

[19:22](#)

So there's a whole theological deconstruction and reconstruction that needs to happen. Not just saying like, Oh, well we are theologically the same with other. Uh, and I don't mean to, I'm not trying to just call out the LDS church because this is, I mean, evangelicalism, Christianity all over the place is very, very much into heteronormative gender roles and things like that. But to take the gospel of Jesus and to divorce it from all of that is a huge theological undertaking. So I'm wondering, Nancy, as you have done that, uh, and now you are in seminary, so you're doing this to an even more intentional, rigorous degree. What's been helpful? How, how have you been able to encounter this new gospel or this new way of looking at Jesus? Are there theologians that have maybe been helpful or just what's been helpful?

Nancy Ross:

[20:19](#)

Yeah, so I think one thing to understand is that reconstructing faith or belief or theology is a slow process, right? It's not that you can just read one book and be like, okay, I'm done, we're good. You know, I'm moving on with a new faith and it's, it's not that simple for me. It's probably been reading a lot of different books and also trying to reflect on my own experience. One of the first things that we talked about in seminary in my like intro theology class was how was the Wesleyan quadrilateral and how we construct theology from a mixture of experience, personal experience and reason and scripture and tradition and that we can use, we can kind of use, and we do use all those different things to construct what it is that we call belief or theology. And so now I kind of realized that instead of, I felt like in my former religious life, the goal was to get to a single place and then just to stay there in that belief place for the rest of my life.

Nancy Ross:

[21:28](#)

And now I understand that theology and belief in faith and spirituality are journeys and I am on the journey and I read a lot and those different things that I'm reading kind of caused me to reflect in different ways on what I might believe. For a long time you had suggested reading Marcus Borg's meeting Jesus again for the very first time and I finally did read that, which was a really good one and probably something I wish I'd read much earlier and my faith journey, but also an important one for me was like Walter Bergman's Prophetic Imagination and trying to

understand well what, what was it? What is it to be a prophet? Exactly in a tradition that has embraced prophets. What is it to read? Feminist theology or what is it to read Liberation theology. We've read a lot of liberation theology and black liberation theology and seminary and I feel like those have really helped me to understand the concept of liberation and and where that comes from and that God stands with the poor and God stands with the oppressed.

Nancy Ross:

[22:32](#)

And those are ideas that resonate very strongly with me. And so I think now that faith faith is a journey like learning to read scripture again has been along in a hard journey because for a long time I've just felt really freaked out by trying to read scripture and that's something that we've been working on and my congregation, you know, reforming faith and rebuilding faith is just a really slow and difficult process. One thing that I now understand about my own journey and I can see in other people who I'm kind of walking with in their journeys is that we often get to a place where we have to reform God because I came to a place where I realized that the God I hadn't been, you know, worshiping or acknowledging my whole life, that guy was like a jerk and I didn't want to like I was, I was going to have to let go of that or or in my mind or allow that to be transformed into something else and do a better God and ideas from process theology really helped me.

Nancy Ross:

[23:32](#)

My pastor at the time, Emily Rose really helped me, pointed me in a direction of some resources with process theology that would help me maybe create a more lasting God and I can sound like a really strange idea, but if you've never had really terrible experiences with God, then, then you might not understand the need to reform God, but I feel like it's such a journey and I'm surprised. I'm surprised at how long it takes and how messy it is and how I'm probably going to be thinking about who God is and maybe changing some of those ideas now throughout my life. So now there's no longer I need to get to a particular place and just stay there for a really long time, but an understanding that like what I believe and my faith are going to change throughout the course of my life. That's okay, that's normal and I'm allowed to do that.

Britt Mangelson:

[24:30](#)

Yeah, that's a really a difficult place to get to. Being okay with understanding that you are going to change and giving yourself the permission and the liberty and the grace to theologically page. I know that that's been difficult for me because I, when I exited seminary, I felt like, okay, I should have it all figured out by now. Like I just spent two years in intense study and I realized that I actually probably left seminary with more



questions than I had at the beginning. So that was, that was interesting for me. But I, uh, I do think that there's a lot of liberation in being able to study different perspectives and theologies because you don't have to have it all figured out, which is scary and vulnerable, but kind of exciting,

Nancy Ross: [25:22](#)

Totally exciting! And, and I think then that faith can be a little bit more of an adventure, you know? Um, like it's, it's a journey, but it could also be an adventure. And I feel like seminary has so far this semester, I'm just wrapping up final projects and things this week has really been kind of an exciting adventure where I have been learning some things that I wanted to learn for awhile and I've encountered some readings I definitely don't agree with. And that's okay. And, and I, and like you said, I have a lot of questions, but that's okay that I have questions and that's not a problem. It's like I have to keep reminding myself that my questions and my challenges all stem from a place of wanting to better understand God and I feel like fundamentally God is okay with that and that that is just gonna be a kind of messy and difficult process.

Nancy Ross: [26:22](#)

I feel like the God that I believe in now is robust enough to handle my questions and to handle my doubts and that doubting is something that through exploring doubt or trying to better understand my doubt or my questions is also something that becomes part of a cycle of building faith. And so that questioning and searching and seeking is just probably part of a lifelong journey adventure that I'm going to be on and I'm making peace. Like you said, it takes a while to make peace with that and I still feel like I'm working on that whole making peace with it thing.

Britt Mangelson: [27:05](#)

I super love that you brought up faith adventure. I just recorded a witness the word sermon in independence, and that was the scripture that I based my thing on my, you know, that your faith adventure with God because I have been very well when we talk about faith crisis's crises, a lot of people, they don't like that term necessarily. And I'm one that did defend the term because for me it was a crisis and it took a long time for me to be able to see it as an adventure. I remember when I read that scripture, it almost felt like a challenge. Like, Whoa, I pretty much hate God right now, but apparently this whole thing can be seen as an adventure, you know? And, and yeah. So I like that reframing and I'm now to a place where I accept that as a, as, as the viable option, the third way. But it did take me awhile.

Nancy Ross: [27:59](#)

Totally. And it's very, you know, it's very hard when we come from black and white thinking environments to be able to say,

Hmm, neither of these options are really working for me. I'm going to do something else. Because in me there's, there's maybe a little bit I like, I've never been a rebellious person in my life except for maybe the last five or six years and and so there's like a little bit of rebellious spirit, but then there's the part of me that's always been like the good girl conformist who always internally freaks out about paving third ways. But now I feel such a that I am right drawn to resist the traditional narratives that we've told ourselves about faith or about belief wherever those are coming from. And that we live in an era. I think that we have to talk about like the era of the nuns or declining religious participation. And my history of Christianity professor reminded us a couple of weeks ago that all of these like moments of religious decline are always kind of followed by spiritual renewal. And I am trying to anticipate that spiritual renewal, not just for myself because I've been going through a spiritual renewal of sorts and a faith trend in the context of a faith transition. But that I would love to see our culture more broadly engaging in a kind of renewal. So I'm just trying to anticipate the future, whatever that means.

Britt Mangelson:

[29:34](#)

Well I hear ya and it's, it's a little bit daunting but exciting and I assume there will be a lot of adventures to be had.

Nancy Ross:

[29:44](#)

That's just like the nicest possible way and I think it's also worth pointing out, like you say that sometimes I use the word faith transition a lot because I feel like it is a more neutral term. But you were, you said just that you were defending the term faith crisis and when I was experiencing the worst of it, it was definitely crisis. And now I'm going to label it all with adventure and put like a more positive and exciting spin on it. But these processes are messy and they are difficult. And you know, I will still tweet things with the hashtag like queer pastor and think, did I do the right thing? Am I saying too much about myself? Or inevitably I will have some kind of crisis the week before pride or I will ask myself, am I doing the right thing or am I doing the right thing in the right way? And so I just keep trying to remind myself that no, these, these are the things that I feel God has called me to. So I'm going to live them out in the best way that I can. And it is going to be messy because God is messy. So.

Britt Mangelson:

[30:48](#)

Exactly. Oh, I love it. So Nancy, I have a few more questions. I am intrigued by I guess just your community in st George and when you are working together with other congregations, partnering with pride, different events, things like that. Uh, what have you learned in the process? Because another aspect of our upbringing is that you don't necessarily do ecumenical work and so to do ecumenical work based on a ministry for a

marginalized group that the predominant culture has caused harm towards. I'm trying to be respectful here, but we all know what I'm trying to say. I mean you are rallying together with other clergy and other faith communities to show a third way to people who have been hurt by the predominant culture. And so I'm wondering how that has been, what that's looked like, what lessons you've learned or maybe if there have been any surprises or just kind of walk us through how that's been.

Nancy Ross:

[32:00](#)

Yeah, so one of the things that has surprised me in doing some of the pride work is the way in which, so coming from an LDS background, there's within the LDS church, this is program called correlation. And the goal of correlation is to try and like make sure everybody believes the same thing or something like that. Other traditions, especially mainline Protestant traditions don't have that same impulse. And so, uh, so for instance, we have a number of churches in St George besides the LDS church. And so that align with that, that are, you know, from mainline traditions. And a number of those congregations are not LGBT affirming, even if their denominations are LGBT affirming. And this is something that I feel a bit frustrated with. When I'm sometime talking sometimes talking to clergy from traditions who are affirming but their congregation is not affirming or they are not affirming.

Nancy Ross:

[33:10](#)

So there's a lot of variety in how people address this issue. And in other traditions there's probably a big tent of belief as there is in most traditions and including in the LDS church, right? Really big and wide tentive beliefs. People often believe very different things. And so the goal or one of the goals is to always be feeling clergy out. Like where are you on this issue? Like and for some people they might be LGBT affirming but not have done a lot of like work to become an ally yet. And we've definitely experienced that. And so, and other people speak with more ease about LGBT issues and so we are trying to, or I've been trying to understand better what is the flavor or particular positions of the local clergy and their congregations. What are those congregations like? Where do those clergy sit in relation to those issues?

Nancy Ross:

[34:09](#)

And so then church and church partnerships become complicated because just because a group is from X denomination doesn't mean that they're going to embrace why ideas. So, so it's just been like, who are my, who are my partners in this area? And that's just been, you know, a process of getting to know people and also being disappointed. Like, because there are a few folks I just feel like, Oh, they're such wonderful local leaders or they're charismatic and I just wish we

could have them on board with LGBT inclusion. And they're not quite there yet.

Britt Mangelson: [34:50](#) That's gotta be frustrating, especially when people have influence in the community and you have a relationship with them. And yet there's this big thing, this big part of you, this big part of your ministry, this big part of your community that is just not, it's just not in alignment with where they're at.

Nancy Ross: [35:09](#) Yeah. But at the same time also trying to recognize that education and continually raising the issue is maybe also part of my responsibility too. It's like, how can, how can I be supportive to other clergy who are trying to learn how to be affirming in their congregation? Or how can we make sure that I'm, how can I make sure that I'm continually having conversations with people and maybe seeing if we can't shift some of that ground a little bit. And I'm not sure I'm very [inaudible] have been very successful on that front. But you know, that's its own journey also.

Britt Mangelson: [35:45](#) Well and like you have said, you know, things like this take time and I would just hope that because you are so vocal about who you are and your position within your own denomination that that will, like you said, start shifting the ground and at least having the conversation that is that again, there is a third way to do this and that you can be faithful and faithful to scripture, faithful to the nature of God, that this isn't an act of apostasy or rebellion, but actually being affirming and being queer is completely in alignment and in conjunction with the gospel. So,

Nancy Ross: [36:28](#) And that is the radical idea I keep trying to connect to. And express. And, and that is it, that, that, that is, that is at the core of it. And that is the most challenging part of the working as a queer pastor is that people don't believe that those things are possible. You know? Or if I let people know, yeah, I'm BI and I'm a woman and I'm a pastor and I'm ordained, they're like, does your church know about these things? Like, yes, yes, she does know about these things. Thank you very much. You know, it's, you know, the assumptions that people have about some of the identities I hold and how that somehow automatically disqualifies me and instead of qualifying me. And so I kind of feel like that's the part of the radical nature of the gospel is it we want to append these things that we think we know about God or, and that's hard.

Britt Mangelson: [37:29](#) So Nancy I made mention earlier, but you do have a lot of connections and credibility and respect in the Mormon feminist world and in a lot of different circles there. Uh, and I've, I've

watched your journey as you have become the hashtag queer pastor. And I've watched you as you've continued to be actively engaged in Mormon feminist spaces. So I'm just wondering how the community has accepted you now as being a queer pastor?

Nancy Ross:

[38:02](#)

So I feel like the Mormon feminist community is part of the community. I feel called to serve as an elder and not as like an official pastor, but like an unofficial person offering spiritual support to people in groups. And you know, that is something I have to continually keep negotiating and trying to understand better because within the Mormon feminist community, there are people who are still very believing Mormons and, and people who are all the way out of the church and maybe don't believe anything or they don't, they don't believe in God and still participating in Mormon feminism. And so Mormon feminism is a very big tent. And then it's like, okay, well what is my role in that space? And I think it's just to support people where they are and to love people where they are and if there are ministries that are appropriate or things to do in that space that are appropriate to offer that.

Nancy Ross:

[39:08](#)

I feel like I do a lot of listening and yeah, I still feel like this is very much something of an ongoing negotiation. I'm aware, cause I, I blogged for the exponent blog, which is an important Mormon feminist institution and on that blog are a lot of people who believe in attend church and I need to continually make sure that I am not like stepping on their toes or like undermining the things that they're trying to do in the community where the good that they're trying to do in the community. I fully recognize that the place that I minister from is awkward in a number of respects. Right? Queer pastor isn't like the from an easy center of Christianity, right? It's like it's, it's kind of a weird fringe and in these restoration of spaces I still feel like I'm on a fringe. I feel like my ideas and the beliefs that I hold are very much in line with main stream Community of Christ. And yet because of my Latter-day Seeker, weird ministry, emerging congregation thing, I'm kind of on an edge and at the same time on a far edge of traditional Mormonism as many of the people in my congregation and those that I minister to are former Mormons. And so right ministering to former Mormons as a Mormon woman who opened the identifies as BI. So like there, there's some weird edges there. Um, and I am at the intersection of some weird edges and I try to always acknowledge that social location and not to try and tell people what they should or should not be doing when they are in a different social location. And sometimes I do better with that and sometimes I get it all wrong. So it's an odd, it's an odd place, but it is a place that I feel called to like sometimes,

sometimes we're called to minister and big thriving congregation that are doing well and other times we're called to minister in like the really awkward spaces of Christianity and

Nancy Ross: [41:10](#)

yeah, so it kind of is what it is.

Britt Mangelson: [41:13](#)

That's where you found yourself.

Nancy Ross: [41:16](#)

And I kind of love it. So I can't really complain, complain about, about how I feel like how God has called me to work because I feel like the more I spend time in my weird awkward spaces, the more I love and appreciate, um, my weird awkward spaces and try to fit, you know, and sometimes I struggle to, to relate to people who are in different spaces of Christianity or even in, in Community of Christ because I love my weird awkward space. But, but yeah, the church needs all of us and the church conceived very broadly, needs all of us.

Britt Mangelson: [41:54](#)

Ah, I love that. So good. So Nancy, I think I have one more question then I always like to end with, is there anything else you didn't get to say? So we'll throw that at you as well. But before we jump into that, uh, I'm, I'm wondering now as you have been out, you've been on this faith transition adventure journey and you have been able to begin to claim your space to be able to really fine tune your ministry and your purpose in your ministry. Uh, what have you learned about yourself? And I'm guess I'm wondering coming out, you probably, and maybe I'm putting words onto your experience, but I'm assuming there were people that were like, why is she coming out if she's been married for 15 years, happily married to a man, you know, why couldn't she just stay in the closet? Or why did she have to make a big deal about it? I'm wondering if you did get that pushback and then what you've learned about yourself in the process of coming out and continuing to claim your space as a queer woman in ministry?

Nancy Ross: [43:04](#)

So no one has ever said those things to my face or written them to me and messages. So, and I think I'm, I think I'm mostly just very lucky and, but I do see people being like, why? I don't understand why this is a big deal about other people like, or other situations. Um, and I think people often won't, like heterosexual people often want to claim that like their sexuality just isn't that big of a deal and maybe they don't experience their sex drive is that big of a deal or whatever and way in which that makes sense to them. But, um, but heterosexual people present as heterosexual, right? Like the world reads them as heterosexual and, um, and my bisexual identity is important to me. It's, and, and it, and, and for a long time it was my dirty

little secret and I hated having a dirty little secret so much. And that was like destructive.

Nancy Ross: [44:00](#) Like I can't even begin to say that the ways in which, like having to feel like you have a dirty little secret while you're trying so hard to conform to community norms is just internally destructive.

Nancy Ross: [44:15](#) And I, I want to be pretty transparent with people, right? Like there are a lot of times when I've come on this podcast or other podcasts like, and shared a lot of like really personal stuff and it's not that I feel like I need to share all my really personal stuff, but I also feel like acknowledging that these layers of existence exists and it's complicated and right, and we hold a lot of different identities and, and some of them have, some of those identities have tension with other parts of our identities. But I also just have realized more recently I need to be more comfortable with who I am as a way of like calming my own anxieties and rebuilding myself from all those bits that got destroyed. Um, and that being comfortable with myself is in part being able to say allowed at least people who are accepting like I am bisexual and that's important part of my identity.

Nancy Ross: [45:10](#) It's an important part of who God made me as like that's, that is part of my divine image. And, um, and, and being able to come to a place where I can say that out loud on a podcast, it, um, without feeling shame, it represents tremendous progress for me. Like, like this is not something I any longer feel embarrassed about. And the more that I can say it out loud and not feel that embarrassment, the more I feel like I'm model for other people that they don't need to be embarrassed, that they can heal themselves from the inside out. That this is not a cause for shame. I have not done anything wrong here. Like this is me just naming something that is and it impacts my experience. Um, and it has always impacted my experience. But that understanding it more deeply and being able to name it more deeply, you know, has been important for me. It's been important for my marriage, like, and so

Nancy Ross: [46:26](#) I think that there's something about like, it's about being honest with myself and um, and that's just, that's an important understand of me understanding myself. And I feel like, so one thing that's happened in seminary this semester, it's like we do something and then we reflect on it and we do something and then we reflect on it. And I feel like part of what I'm being drawn into is this process of like doing something and reflecting. And so I engage in a lot of self reflection and I've probably really

always engaged in a lot of self reflection. But now, um, some of those processes have been more formalized and I feel like I can't really reflect on me or my social location without also reflecting on my sexual orientation. And, um, it's just a part of me and I get that for people who feel like sex is a very private matter but have a very public marriage, you know, like may not understand the ways in which heterosexuality is often front and center in people's lives. Um, and it's not that I need everybody to know that I am bi, but I need to know that I am bi and I need to continually be okay with that. And I also want the other LGBT identified people around me to also be okay with who they are. And in my context that's generally not okay or it's very fraught. But uh, continually affirming, not just that this exists but that this exists and it's part of the image of God that I hold as something that I feel like I just have to keep saying out loud.

Britt Mangelson: [48:13](#)

You said something that was just so simple but yet so poignant just that this is part of me and to me that's where it begins and that's where it ends. You know that this is just that this is just part of you. And I think that when we look at the LGBTQ community at large, I know that there is a lot of eraser of the BI community and people like to talk about maybe in a, in a more demeaning way of passing as straight, you know, maybe because you are married to a man, but that, that that doesn't erase who you are and it does harm when you erase that part of you. So I really appreciate how you articulated all of that.

Nancy Ross: [48:57](#)

And when people read and people have, you know, do typically read me as straight, um, but then share their own homophobic ideas within the context of reading me as straight that has been super harmful. And that's something I experienced have experienced a lot as a Mormon. Um, and something that was deeply, deeply, deeply, deeply harmful, you know, feeling where one person, you know, feels like they're sharing, you know, their thoughts and feelings with another heterosexual insider only to really be doing harm to that to me and to my relationship with that person. Like that's, that's really, that's been terrible. And so me being able to like calmly affirm this is who I am. That's okay. Like it's just been a really important process for me.

Britt Mangelson: [49:51](#)

Yeah. It's a good boundary to set, you know, that to just be able to claim that part of you and to articulate that certain belief system, certain ideas are not welcomed in your center of friendship, of intimacy because they are harmful for you. So yeah,



Nancy Ross: [50:13](#) And I think this has been an important thing for my children to see. I recently had a kid come out and um, I am so glad that I have taken the time to like become comfortable with this and to be able to state this out loud, to engage in pride, to talk about the ways in which I believe that um, LGBT affirmation is fully in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like I know that other people see us and, and I know that like that modeling other people like sharing their identities was important for me for understanding that I will be happier if I can come out and make peace with this and I want to offer that same model of yes, I did come out and I did make peace with something that was deeply troubling to me and I am much happier and much more like I've been able to rebuild that bit. That was destroyed and that's a good thing.

Britt Mangelson: [51:21](#) It is a good thing. Thank you so much for sharing. Nancy, this has just been an awesome conversation. So now I'm to the point where I ask if there is anything else that you would like to say that I didn't get to ask or anything you'd like to leave us with?

Nancy Ross: [51:36](#) Yeah, I just want to just kind of affirm some of the things that I have said already that like LGBT people are also made in the image of God. And so there must be something queer in the image of God that ends up in LGBT folks. And so that is sacred. That is a sacred part of my identity of LGBT folks identity. But also there are many ways in which people try and become comfortable with LGBT. I attended identities by just dismissing it as though being straight and being LGBT, especially within Christian circles is pretty much the same when it's not the same because we have always privileged, um, heterosexuality and heteronormativity and, uh, gender roles, right? Like, and so, um, and so LGBT folks in our lives do need to hear words of affirmation. They absolutely do. And they need to hear that they are loved and that God loves them exactly how they are and that and that you can't overplay that hand. Um, at least in my mind and in my experience. Um, and you know, straight kids get a lot of that affirmation but LGBT folks don't. And so please let the people, let the LGBT folks in your life know that you love them and that they are made in the image of God. If that is an inappropriate thing for you to conversation for you to have because that is not a message that they get. That is a message I needed to hear.

Britt Mangelson: [53:11](#) Thank you Nancy. That's a really important reminder and challenge. I think that we talk about social location and for those of us who did not necessarily hear that harmful messaging growing up when our lived experience was the norm in church,

in politics, in school, in everyday life, it's difficult to step back and say, Ooh, we've been missing an entire population and just how we articulate what it means to be human. So I really appreciate that, that reminder. Okay. Thanks so much Nancy. This has been really helpful and good and I'm glad that I follow you on Twitter and I'm going to continue to look after your hashtag queer pastor adventures. So.

Nancy Ross: [54:02](#)

Thanks Brittany. Thanks for having me on.

Britt Mangelson: [54:04](#)

Thanks so much.

Music : [54:12](#)

[inaudible].

Josh Mangelson: [54:13](#)

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