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Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts community of Christ offers for today's world.

Robin Linkhart

Hello and welcome to another episode of Project Zion podcast. This is your host Robin Linn cart, and today is another edition in our series, What's Brewing, where we explore how God is showing up in the neighborhood and people of faith are living out mission in transforming forming ways. Today we are here with John VanDerWalker. John currently serves as the Mission Center President of Inland West Mission Center, supporting Community of Christ in parts or all of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota and North Dakota. John serves in the office of High Priest. His master's thesis focused on the sacraments of the church, and he is an avid fisherman. Among many other gifts and talents. John is a woodworker extraordinaire. Welcome, John. It's great to have you with us today on Project Scion podcasts.

John VanDerWalker

Robin, it's good to be here with you. Been looking forward this for some time now.

Robin Linkhart

John, let's take some time now to get to know you. So please tell us a little bit about how you became connecting with Community of Christ. And then what brought you to life devoted to full time ministry?

John VanDerWalker

I'm was raised in Community of Christ, joined the church age eight. And at that time of baptism in the Payout River. I was convicted to be a follower of Jesus at eight years old. It's ah, kind of, was an extraordinary experience for me and for all of the others who were being baptized that day. I have had experiences of God's grace throughout my life, in mysterious, intangible ways through the impressive The Holy Spirit of times, And I didn't expect it. And then, through the impressive the mind of God expressed to human voice and action. So all of that kind of combined together caused me to desire to serve the church. And when I was asked to respond in a way that could be a full time ministry, I did respond in a positive way to that. And I've not been sorry for that decision.

Robin Linkhart

John, It sounds like you had a very powerful spiritual experience at a very young ages age of eight, being baptized in a river, and when the opportunity to go into full time ministry with the church came. It was something that you embraced with a full sense of commitment in that journey, Can you tell us a little bit of what? But it was like growing up in the church? And as

you were called into ordained ministry, the different offices that you held in what ages has happened in your life?

John VanDerWalker

As a youngster, my early life before junior high or middle school, my family moved a lot, so my interaction with the church was pretty varied from congregations in the Seattle area, too. Silver Spring, Maryland when I attended the Washington, DC, congregation and then I landed in the Buhl Idaho congregation, 1971. The experiences were always one of acceptance and welcomed into a community that I was not familiar with. The experience of my of my baptism was when I was in a pretty stable congregational life, I had priesthood member come into my home and bring pre baptismal classes to me. And, uh, it was I was always looking forward to that that night of the week when he would come in and we would spend time talking about Jesus and the Church. And my grandfather baptized me at a reunion in Idaho. And during that time, when we got out of the water and there were, I think seven or eight of us baptized that day. When we got out of the water, there were people were weeping and I didn't really understand what was going on until later in the day when people began talking about the music. There was no musicians and present and there were no choirs there. And yet the people said they were hearing music, and they attributed that to Angel song. I did not hear it. I just knew that it was an important day for me and that I felt like I had been cleansed. Uh, in my understanding of baptism at that time was that it was a cleansing act for me. The interesting thing is that about 30 some years later, after I became a full time minister for the church. I was visiting with a lady in her home. She was in her eighties, and then I asked her when she kind of is my standard approached. Oh, meeting people. I didn't know. I asked her, you know, when were you baptized and she said that she was baptized July 7th, 1967. I said, Well, I was baptized July 7th, 1967 she said. Yeah, Camp Cascade Reunion, I said. I was baptized at Camp Cascade reunion. So we were in the same baptismal service at the river close to reunion grounds. And then the thing that really got me was, she said, and that's the day the angels sang, Uh and then she went into the other room and came back and brought a picture. And there I was in that photo and it was just It was an amazing experience of unity and, uh and that, you know, that was before I pursued a master's degree in religion and before I began my study of sacraments. But in that moment I understood the unifying principles and fact of baptism and confirmation, how we are we are tied to each other through those sacraments. It was just It was just amazing thing. And the cool thing about it was I wasn't alone. There was a elder with me that was able to witness what this lady said, bringing out the picture. It was just really a neat experience ringing.

Robin Linkhart

That's amazing. So what was your first office of priesthood and when did that happen in your life?

John VanDerWalker

I was called to the office of a priest. I believe it was in 1983. Dates are not terribly important to me, but I believe it was 1983. I was had a young family, had been married a couple of years, and we were starting out. I was a business owner at the time, and I found myself because from a very young age, probably when I was preteen, I was told by my grandmother that I would

be someday I grow up and I would be a leader in the church. And, uh, I always, you know, kind of aspired to that. And finally, when I was about 24 years old, I guess I began to think, well, there's must be something that is holding this back. And, uh, so I started examining myself and changing some things in my life. And it wasn't very long that evidently those changes that I was making must become evident to the pastor of the congregation. I was called a priest. I served in that that office for several years. Then I was called elder and a couple of years after that I was called the 70. And it was in office of 70 that I went to church to work for the church and full time ministry and served in the office of 70 for several years and then into the office of high priest.

Robin Linkhart

Thanks. Thanks for that. That kind of gives us a little bit of context as your discipleship unfolded in your life and took on various dimensions of ministry. There are so many avenues of mission, John that you could share about with us and we do planned to have you on the podcast again to delve into some of those. Today however, I want to focus on how you find tuned the mission lens while you were serving at the Community of Christ Samish Island Campground. So I think it'd be good for us to start with a brief overview of the longstanding camping tradition in Community of Christ. As many of our Lister's may not be familiar with that and we'll need to understand kind of that backdrop of our tradition as you share specifically about how you engaged mission with the Sandwich Island campground. So can you give us a little overview on that trip? Camping tradition?

John VanDerWalker

The Community Christ has been a church that gathers from its very beginning from back in the founding days of in the 1860's, there were every six months. There was a conference General Conference and then moved to every year. Now Community of Christ as a whole as a World Conference every three years. So we're community that finds important to be together. I like to call the camping experience is experiments and living in Zion. We used to talk about that a lot more than we do now, but it's coming together and being in community for a common goal, learning and what not. So there's a long tradition of this. And when we went every two years having a World Conference leadership, I thought it was fairly important that we have some something to take in, take up the slack of not being together every year, and so reunions became something that we're very much promoted, and the reunion is is no matter which mission center it is, reunions are a function of the World Church. They're not really a Mission Center function, publicized in the Herald and on the church's website. Unlike other missions interactivity, so it's Ah, reunions, especially, are kind of a big deal. Then we also found that was important, that we have formative experience for Children and ah, and youth. And so the camping program, along with a lot of other camping programs in the society that surrounds us, were developed. And we found that pulling use and Children away from home and the daily tasks of life and the daily temptations of life, our formative for young people, and they're able to have good experiences with one other one another, tighten the bonds of friendship, fellowship and tighten your bonds with Christ. We do have a rich tradition in camping, and it's been very successful over the years, and we've done it a lot of it

on a shoestring. So that's it, isn't it shows that you don't have to have all the fancy stuff to be able to really form people's lives in the positive way.

Robin Linkhart

That's for sure. In the early days of the camping tradition, where families basically horse and buggy wagon kind of deal, haul their stuff to wherever the church was meeting to set up camp for a week give or take. Certainly there were no frills attached to that. And that tradition somehow made its way into the heart of who we are as a people. Listeners, if you want to learn more about our reunion Camping tradition. Check out Project Zion podcast 1 17 with apostles Lach Mackay i and Janne' Grover and they will go deep into that. But for now, I think John has set the stage for us to hear more about incarnating the mission of Jesus Christ at Samish Island. And John, we just want to know all the details.

John VanDerWalker

Well, you said something in part of your introduction that was really important. And one of those things that I want to acknowledge, you know, as I start, you said that how did you find tuned the lens of the camp to be more missional and the fine tuning is the rial key there. I did not do this. The Samish Island Campground Retreat center has a long history of providing a place the sacred space for first the church and for youth, especially. It was founded kind of as a kind of it was founded as a youth camp. So let's say that again. It was founded as a youth camp, and reunion was something that was kind of central to it, but not not the motivating factor. They wanted a place for kids to be able to go and have an experience with Christ, and and so the grounds were developed for that. And Queen of Christ is a building culture way like to build stuff, and sometimes we build stuff we don't need. But we think we need it at the time. And they built a lot of stuff there at the campground, and it was a It is a fabulous facility. So there were a lot of people that went before me that we're dedicated to providing camping opportunities to church. But as time went by and there was a broadening understanding of stewardship on that our facilities could be a blessing to others. Others were invited to use the facility, and so there was a a significant number of not for profit groups that began using Samish Island on a campground. Some of the people that went before me and really set the stage for what Sandy and I were able to do. Sandy is my wife, Sandy, and I were able to do it at Samish You know, Glenn Fishel was the prison board for years, and he said, a trajectory that was carried on by Mark Chapman that was then carried on by Jim Fish and then all of the managers and can't caretakers that have gone before provided a palate for Sandy and I to work on. And then my experience with the church and spending ah, years steeped in the Enduring Principles, helped kind of shift a little bit of the practice of the campground. But more of how we as a church, should think about our grounds. As I said before camping for us in the Community of Christ is an experiment, Zion, but the the other groups that come there are coming there for various reasons. Some come to explore creativity through art. Some come to meditate. Others come for relaxation in a peaceful place to kind of find themselves in the world again. So there's a lot of reasons that people come. One of the things that I found in I'm a word person. I think words you're important. I like to use a lot of them, as you may be able to tell. But I also know that using the right words are important. When I when I would welcome a group to the campground and I welcome the group, I would say to the whole group on the first night

there, this space Samish Island on the campground retreat center is offered to you as a sanctuary of peace by Community of Christ. And when I would say that I would get very affirmative reaction from the people, especially those who had been there before, as they had experienced this space, they understood, because of our efforts as a church, to provide this place of comfort, to care for this place of beauty and to be engaged in the world by inviting others to utilize this put space we were offering and providing a place of peace for the people and for me, that was that was kind of a foundational understanding that bloomed into a lot of other other aspects. I began to see that the property was a witness and that everything that people encountered in the property I should be something that would bear witness to the Enduring Principle. The Sacredness of Creation, the Worth of All Persons, the diversity. And that's one of the things that a lot of us don't really think about. But something as simple as saying we're no longer going to use pesticides and herbicides on the lawn because it does two things. It damages the environment. And we have copious oysters farms just off of the property and vase around us that the runoff from our property could harm those oysters. We don't and we don't want to do that because we think that creation is sacred and the diversity that actually comes up in a lawn, when you quit spraying the weeds. You have, you have a very diverse of environment there, which increases the diversity of insect life and provides pasture for things like bees and other pollinating insects that were in dire need of preserving. So all of these things together just kind of witness of the principles of the that the church upholds and the people began recognize that. I mean, they began to see actually saw people standing on the lawn looking at the ground, watching pollinators work flowers because we didn't sprayed weeds. And to me, that's key accomplishment. And it was cheaper. We didn't have to buy pesticides or herbicides. I guess the fine tune our the fine tuning was more between ears than it was really anything else. Of course, that first creation in our mind did translate into the way we manage the property We tried. We tried to manage it at the highest level of hospitality that we could with the resource is that we had. And our resource is especially human resource is are pretty thin, two full time staff, and one volunteer person is there all the time. That was a pretty thin staff. We didn't have the the blessings of people coming. But then we found, is we is we expanded on our offering this as a sanctuary of peace and engaging others in the process of maintenance. A lot of the not for profit people would show up for work weeks. They would offer to have work projects while they were there, which was something that had been done before I got there. But we expanded that, and eventually they began to look for ways that they could financially support the campground in ways that were beyond just paying registration fees. The real change, I think, was in our in the minds of not only myself, but I think we we began to change the the minds of the campground board, too. And you know, it's not easy thing because it is a business that we're running, even though it's a not for profit business. We do have to pay attention to the bottom line so you can't just go willy nilly and spend money where you want. You have to pay attention to what what you're up to and get the most most bang for your dollar. We found that if we did things absolutely the best way we can, we would we would see a long term return on that. People were happier. We increased participation in several of the groups because we provided a more comfortable space. One of the things that was just extremely important was a Samish Island. We have a table where the staff eats every meal and that being at that table made us available to the campground, the program directors from not only committed Christ programs, but every program that was there, the Buddhists,

the artist's whomever was there. They knew that I would be at that table three times a day and that I was available to them three times a day without exception. And they also found me finding them. I mean, I would I would go look them up at least once a day and usually twice a day, morning and evening and just ask, How are things going for you and your group? Is there anything that I can do for you to help your group have more? A better experience? Have you heard anything that I need to know. Just that being engaged with the directors was a huge, a huge benefit to me as manager to know what's going on, but also it made them feel especially cared for I think. It's, you know, the big shift for me, anyway, was in. Like I said, between my ears seem to work out.

Robin Linkhart

John, there's something in particular that you did with representatives of the various renter organizations that I thought was very innovative and astutely insightful and connected with mission, and that was hosting a retreat with those folks together. Can you tell us about that?

John VanDerWalker

One of the things that I discovered when when I got there is that all of these people had profound, profoundly important stories about Samish Island Campground Retreat Center. They appreciated the beauty they appreciated Community of Christ. But they had no comprehension of just the volume and the diversity of people and groups that came there for worship, for meditation, for creativity. And so Sandy and I were thinking about this. We thought that it would be really good to have a retreat that would invite all the program directors and assistance to a retreat that the that the campground would pay for. I mean, we we sponsored the retreat, paid for the meals, offered free camping, and people wanted to lay over an extra day. Like for Sunday. They could stay Saturday night free and enjoy the campground without any agenda. On Sunday, we did have a fairly good response to that. Uh, kind of the prelude to our retreat, though, was we had over the year before the camping season before our camping season at Samish Island Campground started February 15th and ended the last day of October, So we have a long, a long season with 35- 39 or 40 events a year, and the calendar is fully booked, so there's event going on there all the time unless we're in a refitting time where staff and volunteers were doing some minor repairs are or upgrades. So during that year, we had offered to every person who came to the campground for an event the opportunity to do a survey. And it was a survey that was had a lot of questions about your experience. That Samish Island Campground. Well, it was all about your experience. What were the beds like? How do you, how do you like the cabins? How do you like the beds? What? What? How do you rate the food? And our food got extremely high rating. Very, very high rating. We have we don't have cooks we have chefs and I called him chefs, and I didn't put it on their time card when I paid him, we asked them kind of feeling questions, and then we asked them to share and experience. That was very significant to them that they've had at Sami Shaman. And we had a stack of paper, probably at the end of the year, probably 10 inches deep of all of these responses, and we compiled all of that data together and we wrote down all of those stories and put him put them together. And so the program directors came at the end of that year when they had felt like they had already been heard because of these surveys, and we took that data and that those responses and we we kind of fed it back to the groups. But the thing that

was really cool was that these these different program directors from artist groups we have had three different artist groups that came there that were different media from Buddhist groups, and we had five different Buddhist groups, yoga groups, and AA group that comes twice a year for a small retreat. They all came together and they began to know each other, and they began to talk about their experiences of that place with one another, and they began to discover ways that they could help each other in their common goals. And when I was talking to them, the question came up, you know why? Why are you doing this? You're asking me and the board. Why are you doing this? And I said, Well, I want you to know specifically This is not about money. This is not about growing our business. That Samish Island Campground. This is not a money thing. This is a human thing. We recognize that each one of the groups that that used Samish Island Campground We're groups that were dedicated to making the world a better place to art, through meditation ,and self discovery and improvement through addiction, recovery all of the different ways that these groups are engaged in making the world a better place. And I told them we want to be fully engaged in that. And I provided for them kind of an explanation of the community of Christ in a deeper way than they understood before. And the responses I got from different leaders was nice is not really a good enough word. But it was nice to hear folks say who were part of Christian organizations say I wish my church was open and caring as you will are. And their main experience with Community of Christ was through the campground. In fact, one of the ladies. It was interesting. I had been as a full time church minister, I had been the Inland West Mission Center President once before in my assistant who had worked with me during my first few years there. In 2006, 7 and 8, she's now working in a fair trade store. One of the ladies from one of the artist groups who is a Unitarian was over Spokane for a Unitarian convention or conference and she was shopping in and in the store where my former assistant was, and my friend said, You know, if I wasn't just steeped in my own church, I was that I was born into I might be a Unitarian, and the lady from the artist groups is, well, what church do you go to? She said, the Community of Christ and the artist lady said, No kidding. I go to a campground that's owned by Community of Christ over on Samish Island, and my friends said, Oh, well, then, you know John VanDerWalker. I used to work with John VanDerWalker, and it was like, and then this lady started telling my friend how terrific Community of Christ was. And you know, she had never been to a worship of service. She had never been to any function of the Community of Christ, but she had encountered the church through the facility and through the actions of the staff. So that was that was and I got I got a real quick communication from my friend Spokane, and she was just really tickled to be able to share this connection. And, uh, it's just we can do good with our facilities. We could do good with our facilities.

Robin Linkhart

I really appreciate the way fine tuning the lens of mission at Samish Campground has expanded so much and built on a great foundation that others have laid that, as you noted. But just turning the lens a little bit helps us see the magnitude of how we can be present and many diverse, powerful ways among the sacredness of creation by what products we choose to use by creating more space in the biodome that lives there in the diversity of wildlife that just has ripple effects of life, giving impact and being fully present and available in a relationship as we provided the infrastructure that supports the campground in ways of being available, whether

it's knowing where to find you during mealtimes or your proactive pattern of checking in with groups as their president and the campgrounds and then this retreat. That, to me, is just what an amazing opportunity to build relationship until listen to one another and help people understand that were we really are all in this together, whether it's at a campground that we all used in various ways or on this planet Earth, you're describing something to me that is a posture of being open and carrying and letting people know that we can learn from each others in ways that really help us experience the blessings of community beyond just the walls of our church or the fellowship of our faith. Truly, truly a witness, a living witness and the story you just told of one of your campers meeting a member of the church and Spokane and how that the connection was made. Um, really, it's such a great testimony of of what's happening and what continues to happen.

John VanDerWalker

So one of the things that that I found two is because we opened up conversation, making myself available, making us available to the regular basis, talking with them when you have a silent retreat of Buddhists there, you don't really get to talk to him much, but at the end you do get gestures of thanks for for what you've done over the weak form, but being engaged with the leaders and allowing free flow of conversation. You know, I learned a lot about other religions in other ways of looking at things, but we were able to able to share common ground. Our lives hope our life hopes and and the hopes of our churches, our church and whatever organization they were part of the artist groups were very much, most of them were probably raised in a Christian denomination. Some of them were probably active. So not, but they they really appreciated the Community of Christ and their ability to be engaged with with the church, the beauty of that place. And they appreciated the beauty of the place and the comfort, so that was good.

Robin Linkhart

Yeah, when we last space for a relationship to develop, and the mechanism you hadn't placed for capturing stories from the various groups and then reflecting that batter to the camp directors of the various groups representatives when they attended, they re treat such a powerful way of recognizing we have so much more in common.

John VanDerWalker

We also we also provided those in printed form on a bulletin board so that people could read them when they were in one and meal lines and they would see themselves in this community of folks from all over. You know, the greater actually, all over the world we had folks from Europe, Asia come for retreats that sandwich. So these people were able to see themselves in a context of community that was beyond their own group. That was kind of cool to be able to and and as I looked at that, I thought to myself, that is the Community of Christ. You know, all of these people that air engaged in all of these things that are are uplifting, our principles that we hold, they're not really our principles. Then are they the principles that are the community of Christ in that Community of Christ. Some of our Buddhists and some of our artists and some of them are alcoholics. And so it really broadened my perspective of what Community of Christ was.



Robin Linkhart

I love that. John, you've shared a lot, and some of it has touched on this next question. How have you witnessed the transformation of lives and communities as a result of this new way of being and living at Samish Island Campground?

John VanDerWalker

When you really focus on the comfort of another in which, which Sandy I did, and well, and Shauna, who's the other staff member while we were there. We all focused on comfort. Our chefs provided such outstanding food. You begin to see lives transformed. And it was interesting to watch the silent meditation group. You know, silent meditation is not an easy thing. People don't come there and bliss out. You know, it's not a it's not comfortable. One of one of the leaders of one of the Buddhist groups is usually when you slow down and quiet, quiet yourself. Life catches up to you, and then you have to deal with what you've been running from. And so we got to see in these other groups, significant brokenness emerge, and then significant healing emerge. As I looked at that phenomenon happening in all of these different groups. I began to see that people were really at the end of the week meditation or at the end of week creativity. They would go home, empowered, refreshed. Some of them would go home with a lot to deal with yet, and yet having tools to know how to do that, we saw a transformation of attitudes, and not only from the the people that were coming there as his campers, but also from the board of directors towards the campers. You know, you can't you can't have build a relationship on a spreadsheet. It's not something you can look at numbers and names and maybe group affiliation and have a relationship. You you really have to get to know these people the generosity that I saw emerge from folks as we began to build a relationship that was based on a common thread that was peas was really profound when in it, and it really was lived out and expressing away. Last summer, when the one of the artist groups, Northwest Water Color, said that they'd like to make a presentation to the campground board and wondered if we could have some board members there during lunch and so I arranged and told the board We need to have some people here for lunch on this day and the president of the board folk and said, you know, I've been a member of this organization for years and I kept saying, we ought to do this and we ought to do that and people would say, well, we can't do it on that weekend cause we're gonna be a paint out at Samish Island. We can't do it that weekend because there's going to be paint out that week, is it's gonna be paint out of the Samish Island over and over again. And she said, I listened to that for five years, and then I finally went to a paint out, and I understood this opportunity to be a community secluded away from the world and just completely, totally devote themselves to one another and the art. And then after she said that she presented at the prison the board with a check, a fairly significant check, and she said, We want to be engaged in the improvement in the continuance of this project that you all have. And then two members of the group came up and gave checks as well, which were significant checks. So the, you know, including them in the direction through that retreat that I had. You know, the thing that we learned is we gotta have better beds. Three inch foam mattress, cover of vinyl is not gonna cut it anymore by improving some of the cabins and making them ah, really comfortable place of hospitality. It really caused a change in in their attitude toward us. This church really wants us to have a good experience here. So we want to help with that. The lives they're transformed, whether it be a youth camp

activity of the Community of Christ. I've seen kids lives just totally changed because of their participation in like one near the Girls Camp wanted to have a work project. And so there were some things that that I thought were a little bit flimsy and and that was a pretty serious construction project, but it was a repeatable projects that were just building certain things boxes to go around service units on the RV park. And I wanted him to be more proof. So I built him out of four by six is bolted together and those girls made those things. And, you know, people were saying, you know, I don't know if he's these junior high girls will be able to do that. And I said, yeah they will. We've got people here to help and they absolutely loved it. And to see, uh, we didn't have them cutting weeds. We didn't have them pruning flowers. We had them out there elbow grease on abrasive bit drills, wrenches and saws and all of that stuff. And they they did a great job and they were so proud of that. And as they were installing those boxes, the care that they took to make sure that they were level and perfect it was just really a treasure in my mind now to see, to remember those young ladies doing that and how fulfilling they felt it was and to be a part of the campground and to be able to participate in that way. So, yeah, there's just experience after experience like that.

Robin Linkhart

Wow, that is heartwarming. To hear those stories and little glimpses into the healing and the generosity and the transformation that happens at Samish Island and as we know happens that many other campgrounds as well, No doubt, John, some of our listeners are thinking, How can we do something like this at my camp ground? So as you think about it, what are maybe some principles guiding questions or tips that you can share to help folks begin to explore possibilities at their own campgrounds?

John VanDerWalker

Well, first of all, it's the Enduring Principles that is our foundational document as a church because the thing that should be the litmus for everything that we do. So look at those and then the Mission Initiatives and don't complicate stuff. There's a lot of folks that really like to complicate things, and I want to have formulas for things. But here's a simple example. Invite People to Christ when you engage somebody, if your if your disciple of Jesus and you believe well, even if you don't believe that if you follow Jesus and you invite somebody in a relationship with you, you are inviting somebody in the relationship with Christ. Facility needs to be managed in such a way that people engaged or encounter the principles of Christ through the Community of Christ from the facility. And another example is that, you know, we, Sandy and I were certified in holistic management practices for farming and because we thought that was kind of the closest thing we could do to managing a campground that is 86 acres and has a lot of land on it. We learned a lot about soil and a lot about air. So we we decided we were gonna be more sustainable. We started looking at the campground in a way that's okay. What comes onto this campground on a daily basis. We have food coming and trucks. We have sunshine falling on the property all the time. We have rain falling on the property quite a bit of the time. There are birds and and animals on the property. How do we sustain? How do we operate sustainably in that? And so we started doing some things that we thought, okay, all of this energy is coming onto the property. How are we going to managed the use of that energy in a way that is beneficial not only to the people but to the property? And the use of pesticides

and herbicides is one of those decisions that was actually made before I got there. I typed it down a little bit that we didn't use any herbicides. We did use a little bit of pesticides when we had staying insects. It could jeopardize the health of people, but I used to be a beekeeper, and I'm not scared of those things. So a lot of times I just go take care of it by hand, without that for pesticide. But anyway, we tried to look at everything you know, How can we best manages property, and people began to began to notice. They they noticed when we quit mowing part of the property and allowed to go back to tall grass, and they noticed that there were a whole lot of flowers blooming down there now that we weren't mowing it. They also noticed that the young deer loved to go out there and bed down in the warm sunshine but still be secluded because they were in the tall grass. They noticed that there were more birds and rabbits and things like that utilizing that area. So we started thinking about how is it that we can weaken, manage this property that really lifts up the principles of the church. We did energy audit, pay the company to come in and do an energy audit. That energy audit costs us a couple of \$100. It ended up saving us thousands and thousands of dollars. And once we got converted to LED lighting, we were saving \$13 a day on our power bill. So that \$200 for an energy audit and the expertise that we got from that was absolutely essential in in the in the management of the property in a more sustainable way that up list the sacredness of creation. So the Enduring Principles are extremely important. One of the things that I always did was I would lift up it an Enduring Principle to the people that were there, you know, I was I gave my welcome speech. I would talk about Community of Christ is a church that is trying to become a peace church. We have these enduring principles, and one of them is, you know, the blessings of diversity, unity and diversity. And and I would tell the artist group because of the diversity of the groups that we have coming to this campground, we feel like we're stronger and that we are better because you are here because you are participating in this property because the beauty that you produce is helping the world. Um, so you just try to use the enduring principles in a way that the, uh, expresses to your guests on your partners? Um, you know, the the beauty that is a Community of Christ. Um, there is just like I said, that the beginning is mostly a change of what's between your ears and how to look at the campground. When I never looked at the bottom line, and I was in charge of running the budget that the board said, um, I did not find looking at the numbers to be that important because I figured if we served the people, the numbers were follow and they did, um, that doesn't mean that I spent money without thinking about spinning, because I did. I was very trying to be as careful as I could, but I didn't also hold back when there were necessary things that had to be done. Keep the folks that were coming. They're comfortable. It's a big process, and I think it's really important, especially for Community of Christ, for folks to understand what happens there campgrounds when they're not there, because there's certain people that come to camp ground to a campground for re union, and they never, ever understand what happens there in February. What a bunch of watercolor artists come and produce hard and, er, laughter and music and just fun. So it kind of important that they would people understand what happens at their camp ground.

Robin Linkhart

That is all very helpful information John and I know many of our listeners will be wanting to look at their own campground, using some of these principles and guiding questions for our listeners. We have talked about about community of Christ enduring principles, so I want to

give you a list of those so you know what they are Before I asked John a couple more questions. Our Enduring Principles are All are Called, Blessings of Community, Continuing Revelation, Grace and Generosity, Responsible Choices, Pursuit of Peace, Sacredness of Creation, Unity and Diversity and the Worth of All Persons. John, what are the hopes that you have for the Community of Christ camping tradition going into the future?

John VanDerWalker

I know that our camping traditions are like congregational life, like world ministries are in a time of transition. Um, I've had I was baptized. My first story that I told about baptism happened at a re union. One of the significant encounters of my wife's life was at the first reunion she attended with me shortly after we were married. So these experiences are important and not lost on me. I do know that we have, ah, lot of facility that is remote and far away from population centers in that, then they're having a very difficult time functioning, I guess, is I look to the future I think that we're gonna have as a church, we're gonna need to think about our facilities in a way that, as I've described in a way of witness, one of the facilities we have, that sandwich island is a gazebo and it was very poor to use because the birds got in there and roosted and and it was not a very clean place and the seeding was really uncomfortable. So we got some just regular cheap plastic Adirondack chairs put in their people, started using it and then we did. We put in new lighting and cedar ceiling, and the cedar actually came from the property. We had it build from trees and falling down part of our sustainability. One of my dreams is that there's a center pole in that that I would like to convert into a peaceful and have our different user groups provide a panel for the eight sides of that peaceful so that we could see a visual item visual symbol of the unity of these groups that come together at that place. Future, I think, is is going to be dependent on how we engage, I mean, for the Community of Christ camping program to be sustained, we're gonna have to have some shifting in our facility. Some of the facilities are gonna go away. But those that stay, we're gonna have to see a shift in how we operated and think about them and in some place, some places where we don't have a facility that we can go to, you know, we need to think about. But what is it? What is the purpose of our camp coming together? And I believe it's what has always been creation of community but we have to concentrate on the community and not the program. Um, I think Mica, the scripture from a few weeks ago. Mica points out to Israel, you know, you've become so attached to the to the rituals you forgot the god that's behind him, and God calls Israel to account for that. I think that that's happening has happened in the Community of Christ that people are so attached to the ritual that they for gotten that it's the community and the God, the God behind those rituals and the community that those rituals were supposed to be serving. Um, and some of those sacred cows, if you will, are the way we do camps and reunions. This world is in dire need. This can't this society let me say it this way. This society is a dire need of coming of age rituals for youth. And, um, we don't We don't really concentrate on that So much we've we've combined. Traditionally, boys and girls camps in tow, tow. You know, everybody comes together at all ages, and, you know, maybe we need to rethink that. I don't know. Maybe we need if we have those that are separate. Maybe we need to rethink that. We haven't effort, I just don't know. But we we really need to think about what it is we're doing and not just perpetuate that same old thing. That's kind of what I'm where I'm

coming from. And, you know, I hope that this year we have an opportunity in Inland West to be able to experiment with some of that.

Robin Linkhart

Thanks, John. It's really exciting as you talk about that. I agree with you. I think the camping tradition is deep in the core of our identity as a people. But how many engaged and operate in the context of that part of our tradition can take a monitor, different forms, from continuing to own and operate Kent grounds to becoming renters ourselves. Focusing on that question that you lift up what is our purpose really requires us to do some important self reflection as individuals and as a community for sure. John, is there anything you want to say today that perhaps I did not ask you about?

John VanDerWalker

The church is poised. We do have properties and beautiful places. We have a set of Enduring Principles that I've had people at Samish Island, whom I would share Sharing in Community of Christ with Campground actually bought a box of those. And I distributed to program directors that we're interested people. That told me I wish that our church could express as simply as you do what it is we were trying to accomplish and we don't really recognize that in ourselves. And I I wish that every congregation and if I were, if I would have a wish list, it would be that every congregation would think about, you know, how can this this building and how can these people function in a way that is sustainable and bears witness and absolutely every aspect that they do every every every aspect of their ministries, every aspect of the way they share in their community? There's a the great were poised. I mean, we really are in a good position. We just need to get that thinking into everything that we do excited about that, especially when it comes to properties of what I learned in those three years. That Sandwich Island is is really important, and I began to talk to congregations about that already, you know, how is this building, actually living out the as a building. I was the building living out the Enduring Principles. I am. Frankly, in most cases they aren't.

Robin Linkhart

Well, thank you, John. You certainly give us about to think about. And also we have a lot. I have a lot resident within us as a people, just as we are here today. And to recognize that and to embrace it and to embrace all the possibilities that are open before us truly is a key to the future, to be sure. Well, John, thank you so much for being with us today. It's been a joy to chat together and to hear more stories about your life and how I'm God invited you and those who served alongside you and utilize the campgrounds to embrace a new dimensions of how that campground could be part of creating sacred space and sharing with one another. Thank you so much. You're welcome. Thank you. And a very special things to all our listeners. If you would like to hear more stories about mission, check out our what's brewing Siris. If you have questions for our guests, John Vander Bacher, you can e mail him directly at J Banda Walker at Sea of Christ dot work again to learn more about Community of Christ Camping tradition. Check out Project Zion Podcast episode number 117 Reunions with Apostles Lachlan Mackay and Janne' Grover And to hear more about our Enduring Principles, check out episode number 239 with President Steven Veazey as he talks about those principles, how they came to be in the

church and the important role they play. This is your host, Robin Linkhart and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place.

Josh Mangelson

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