

262 | Coffee Buzz | Sacred Community in Coronavirus Times 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.

Linda Booth

Welcome to the eighth episode of Coffee Buzz. My name is Linda Booth. I'm retired now, having served nearly 22 years as a Community of Christ Apostle and Director of Communication. Lately I've enjoyed hosting this podcast and the Coffee Connect podcast. Coffee Connect is a story based Coffee Buzz is a conversation with one of the three members of the Community of Christ First Presidency. Today is an anomaly. Instead of one member of the first presidency, I'm talking with two president's Scott Murphy and Stassi Cramm, and you're invited to listen in on the buzz will be having a conversation around the topic, sacred community in Coronavirus times. Usually two of us sit around the table with podcast equipment, but because we're all keeping our social distance, Stassi's in St. Charles, Missouri. Scott's in Grain Valley, Missouri, and I'm in Lee Summit, Missouri, and we're using the wonders of Zoom technology to have this conversation. Also, it's possible you might hear my dogs barking and others around the house sounds because we're all at home, not in a quiet room in the temple in Independence, Missouri. So, as many of you already know to stop the contagion, Corona or Covid-19. Leaders in many nations around the world have asked people to stay home. And typically it's called social distancing, but I prefer to call it physical distancing because as humans were social beings and physically, we may be separate and isolated. But socially, we need to stay connected for our emotional, spiritual and physical well being. And community is so important to all of us, and I believe that sacred community can be experienced even during Covid 19 separation. So I welcome my only friends, Stassi and Steve, to Coffee Buzz before we get started on Sacred Community and Corona virus times. I'd like to check in to see how both of you were doing how your family's are doing Is everyone healthy? Scott?

Scott Murphy

Yeah, I'm I'm doing well. So I I'm deeply grateful for that and, uh, have been feeling well and keeping busy in that regard and so my and I'm unfortunate to say that all of my family so far are doing well, too

Linda Booth

Good! Thank you. And Stassi, How are you all doing?

Stassi Cramm

Yeah, it's a crazy time. I jokingly told the first presidency earlier this week that we needed to get back to the office so things could slow down a little bit. But I'm doing well. My husband is still working at his office due to the nature of his work, but their teams were trying to be extra careful about following public health safety guidelines. Our son is still in Tokyo. He's been working from home since late February, and he's doing fine and our daughter is a surgical

resident at Massachusetts General in Boston. At this point, she's not directly supporting Covid 19 patients, but she is doing a surgical consults in the emergency department. So, in fact, tomorrow she gets assigned to the Salem Hospital, which is on the perimeter of Boston, because they need some extra surgical hands. They're so, um, everyone seems to be doing fine, but we're just mindful what an unprecedented time it is. And we're grateful to everyone around the world who are either staying home to keep the virus from spreading or who are out doing their part in essential businesses.

Linda Booth

Absolutely, and both of you have been working hard to facilitate the safety of staff at international headquarters and members and ministers in mission centers and congregations around the world. Scott. What's been communicated to mission centers and congregations?

Scott Murphy

Well, the first communication that really took place with a, uh, a definable action occurred in mid March, when the president see sent to communication to the fields, advising that that mission centers and congregations suspend a group gatherings. We have been monitoring the progression of the virus, monitoring the advice from the professional health organizations like the CDC and the World Health Organization, and finally came to the realization that for the welfare of our members, but also our participation in keeping safe all humanity, that we needed to suspend the group gatherings. So that was the very first, um, action that we took in the midst of this virus. Ah, Week later, a further action from the Presidency was to provide to the mission centers and congregations further guidelines on dealing with some of the sacraments of the church and primarily the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick and the sacrament for serving that the Lord's supper. It was important from our perspective understanding the growing concern, the evidence of how the virus was being spread, that we needed to provide guidance, knowing that priesthood would have this pastoral desire in need and that the the congregation's the membership in the community would have a need for that kind of spirituals support in their lives. And so the pregnancy had to spend some time in reflection to consider how we could continue to extend the sacrament of laying on of hands in a online, socially distancing, physical distancing kind of setting while being able to maintain the integrity of the sacrament. So conversation took place. President Veazey did a lot of work as Stassi and I were really doing a lot of work at preparation for moving operations of international headquarters into remote settings with our staff. But in the conversations that we had the guidance that we were able to give to the church that there were provisions for offering that kind of sacramental prayer for the sick in ways that could be done remotely through online or over the phone, that didn't necessarily involve the use off the secret oil, that confirmation oil that we use but understanding that in unique times there are there are exceptional circumstances and making this provision for prayers that we felt like that the divine grace, um that comes would over seed the normal provisions that we normally have for how we administer the sacraments. So that was a that was a second communication and guidance that was given out to the church and again also on the guidelines for serving the Lord's Supper, which we've done already previously for providing for online guidance. But if it was to be provided in person the advice of really following the safety provisions put out by the local or

national government health organizations and so those provisions have been out there in the life of the church, which again have been really important. And one of the I think it's important for the for the listeners to understand that one of the things that really drew us as a pregnancy to give consideration to this the guidance coming out of doctor and covenants Section 1 60 to hair grab to That indicated that we have been already told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body And it's not the form of the sacrament that dispenses Greece but is the divine presence that gives life. And so those that understanding as we as we spent that time reflecting preying on that became an important part of us recognizing that in these unique situations for this period of time, we were able to make some exceptions for how the sacraments would be experienced out there. I think one of nice things Linda that I would just want to lift up is that there has been this wonderful confirmation that we've received in messages from both numbers and priesthood who who have been grateful for those kind of exceptions at this unique time and even had a communication with a, uh, pastor yesterday as they're preparing for the Palm Sunday Service and the opportunity for serving and sacrament of the Lord's Supper asking if that could be done if if they can't do it over the computer online with Zoom in that if somebody could do that on the phone, listening in and again being able to share with the pastor that yes, we have made those provisions that just opened up a whole another level of ministry and how grateful they were to be able to extend that to members in their congregations. So, yeah, in this unit time now, I'm grateful that we've been able to move in this direction and give further guidance to the church for these kind of exceptions.

Linda Booth

Yes, thank you, Scott, and thank you, First Presidency for giving that direction to the church. I myself have participated in several lane on hands, and it has been a remarkable, very spirit, spiritually and greatly needed by the person. There's a lot of people are feeling isolated and some of our dealing with life threatening diseases. And so I really appreciate the first presidency's compassion and support for ministers who are trying to bring God's grace and blessing to the people. Stassi, what's been occurring at international headquarters?

Stassi Cramm

Yeah, that's Ah, good question. It's been kind of busy. Um, we actually made the decision that back on the 16th of March that we needed to do everything we could to prepare the staff of international headquarters to work from home as much as possible. And so it became a very busy week of meeting with the various teams off assessing what tasks could be remotely located. What additional technology we could bring online to help make remote work more efficient. And then what? Uh, activities had to actually still occur in the temple complex. So by Wednesday, which was the 18th of March, the presidency and the bishopric had decided that we were going to implement our plan for remote working starting on Monday, 23 March. And so on Thursday we went ahead and notified staff that international headquarters would be doing that historic sites that Kirtland had already really moved to that posture. And so Nauvoo was going to move to that situation as well, with headquarters on the 23rd. Then over the weekend, before we even got to that Monday, both the Independence Missouri, on local counties as well as Illinois started issuing stay at home orders and for independence. It actually

didn't start until the 24th of March, But fortunately in all of our locations, we were ready to go. So we still do have a few people working at the temple complex each day because of the size of the facility. It's important that we monitor how the building is doing and keep, you know track of the infrastructure, which is being used to support everybody's remote work. We've created a process of scheduling, so we are able to have people schedule when they need to go into the complex. And that way we are able to maintain complete social distancing, which we're really grateful for. So we're really mindful that we're trying to do everything we can to protect our staff.

Linda Booth

That's good. That's good news. And Stassi, so these actions that you've taken, what's the impact on the ministries and support the church is accustomed to receiving from international headquarters?

Stassi Cramm

Yeah, so obviously right now, which would normally be the beginning of our visitors season for both the Temple complex and historic sites, we are clearly closed to the public until kind of further notice. So with regards to being open to visitors, we're going to continue to wait and see what the government says in the you know, in Ohio and in Illinois and then in Missouri on. And unfortunately, we are also having to postpone the fulfilling fulfillment of any Harold House shipments, and and that's because the whole network of delivery is trying to make sure that the delivery capacity, can stay focused on the most critical items that need to be transported. So we do a lot of work, for instance, with Amazon and UM, an Amazon put us on notice that that our books would no longer be part of what they're releasing during this time. The good news is that we've set up the Herald House websites that for ebooks or PDF material that's directly available off of our website, people can still download those items. We're also using Microsoft Office teams to coordinate efforts and keep people working efficiently. So from the standpoint of the church, who gets support from headquarters, ministries and service is are generally being supported without interruption were a little bit slower because it takes a little bit longer for us to coordinate with each other, and we're also having to work a lot of items that are specifically related to Covid-19 in particular, such as the government aid packages. And so we've got a lot of people that are tied up doing review. But overall postal mail, email and voice mail are all being monitored during business hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and helped us that are normally monitored over the weekend or still being monitored. So people who need support or he have questions that require answers should continue to send email or leave a voicemail, and someone should get back to them.

Linda Booth

That's good news. You all are working so hard to support the church. Thank you, Scott, because we are such social beings and community is at the very core of the foundation off who we are as Community of Christ. What are some of the creative ways that congregations or groups are meeting without physically becoming together?

Scott Murphy

Yeah, I would. I would want the listeners to know Linda, that I could not be more pleased with how are our mission center officers, pastors, the apostles, all working together, the steps that they have taken to ensure that there still a social connection of in community that's being provided out there, that throughout the church, mission centers or congregations have moved quickly to online gatherings that's occurring through platforms like Zoom or or Facebook, live streaming or congregations to have the capacity to stream worship service is out into the homes of the members. It has just been exciting to see, and that number continues to grow as I as I am checking in with apostles on a on a weekly basis, and more and more congregations and mission centers are moving forward with those kind of experiences. I this last Sunday, I had the opportunity. I kind of popped into four different online worship experiences that were taking place and was just extremely pleased with the sensitivity that people are using in the way they were coming together. The recognition of the separation that physically, that they're experiencing but yet awakening to a new way off coming together, there have been jurisdictions that not only are doing Sunday worships in that way, but they're also providing midweek connections for people to come together for a moment of worship in in a moment off of recognizing the sacred community that they share him. Um, steps have been taken for the daily prayer for peace, to be offered by staff members who have taken the initiative to be able to offer those on during the week from their home and on the weekend world, church leaders are streaming through Facebook live the prayer for peace so the church can participate. So that's been another initiative that's been taking place. I'm aware that priesthood and congregations have taken the initiative to kind of divide up the congregation and taking a priesthood, taking groups of members and reaching out to members through e mails and phone calls, zoom calls just to keep that connection, um, to make sure that everybody's okay and that they know that people are not being forgotten. The presidency, working with our communications team and through consultation with the with the apostles have worked to put together an Easter service for the church. We know that local congregations in jurisdictions will be providing Easter service is. But we felt like this was an important time for us to be reminded of our global nature as a as a church in the global community that we share in. And so we will have an Easter service being streamed out to the church. The first streaming will occur at 4 a.m. On Easter morning. So for those who like to really get up early, that's ah, that's a great time. But we're looking at trying to get that Easter service out for people around the world in the different nations and time zones to be able to participate. And the second service will occur at 2 p.m. in central daylight time so that it's another thing taking place. I also know apostles are working and arranging time to be available in different mission centers through zoom connections, as a as a means to offer support and pastoral care to leaders and to members, and so making just again making those connections as part of the community. So those air those were just array of different ways that, um, people have really stepped forward to continue to uphold the importance of being together. Why honoring and upholding the social distancing that we have put in place.

Linda Booth

People are amazing in their abilities to connect, aren't they? I yeah, I was, I was supposed to have preached it Stone Church this Sunday for Palm Sunday and that got canceled, oh three or four weeks ago and then received an email from Mid Atlantic Mission Center, asking me to speak to that center mission center. And so we'll be doing that and then, um, Monday, Thursday service for next week. I thought it was gonna be cancelled, and this congregation locally, is scrambling to figure out how to do it electronically. And and I see all these e mails from places even like Escataba, um in the Deep South who are meeting and prayer service is using Zoom it a variety, and it just it just shows that because we love each other, we love to gather. We love to worship together that people are finding a way to do it.

Scott Murphy

Absolutely. And the the other incredible thing is Linda is that I've heard from mission Center officers and apostles that I've talked to that people who have been kind of disconnected from the church for a while have reconnected through online gatherings. And there's just been this spirit of blessing of community that has drawn people together in a new way. And so it is a It's a waking us, too other ways of being together that we normally haven't engaged in. And so it's just been exciting to encounter how people are finding these ways of sharing together in meaningful ways that have been deepening in the richness of community.

Linda Booth

Yes, sacred community continues, no matter what. That's good news. Ah, Stassi. I recently read an article in an e-newspaper that focused on the challenges that didn't. Some denominations and congregations are having to meet their budget beach because they aren't physically able to gather. And I am assuming that this is the same challenge that Community of Christ congregations, mission centers and the international church are facing. Is that true?

Stassi Cramm

Yeah, absolutely, Linda. There is a lot of economic uncertainty right now and that economic uncertainty is happening in our personal lives. But it's also happening at various jurisdictions within Community of Christ. While the circumstances are different in each nation, the implications are similar. Individuals have lost their jobs some overnight, with little or no warning, and the markets, as we all continue to watch. Those have been really volatile as investors try to make sense out of what is happening. And, of course, there's lots of people trying to predict what the future holds, and all we really know for sure is that there's a lot of uncertainty. But what I know is that for Community of Christ, working together as a worldwide church is going to be important. As we journey through this first, individuals and families should focus on making wise financial decisions. Right now, everyone needs to make sure they're tending to their basic needs. Some people may be sitting at home watching shopping channels or perusing amazon dot com or other online shopping places, but this is not the time to be purchasing things that you don't really require. And if families or individuals were having trouble because of their circumstances, they should work with their financial officer on the possibility of ablation support. Currently, you know, the church has ablation aid available, and although we've not had to use it in such a significant pandemic situation as we're facing now,

we do want people to know that that type of financial support is available. Second, we need to remember that local congregations, mission centers, campgrounds and the world church still have bills to pay, even in this unprecedented time and in fact, the stay at home orders have direct impact on income. A specific example at the auditorium would be that all graduations through 15 may have been canceled, and we anticipate that the graduations that are scheduled after the 15th of May will also still cancel. And, of course, graduations are really significant. Source of income for the auditorium, and we know that there are similar events happening campgrounds and at other places around the church. And so these types of cancellations are going to cause impact not only to the worldwide mission budget but also to campground and congregational budgets. So the church has an interesting challenge. In this moment. We want people to make sure that their personal and family financial needs are met first. But then, for those that are able, it's important to continue to give to local and worldwide mission ties. And, of course, for those who haven't been supporting mission ties, now is a great time to start. If circumstances allow, some may even be able to increase giving, which will offset the loss for those who may not be able to give as much or who have to stop at this point in time because of the financial difficulties they're facing.

Linda Booth

Stassi, I understand the church wants to share the church's financial needs but still upholding the need for people to make sure that they're okay that their needs are met. At first. Are there any silver linings and what is happening and what happens if income is well below what was budgeted.

Stassi Cramm

Well, one of the silver linings that may be coming out of our need to suspend meeting for worship is related to what Scott's talking about, and that is that we are finding a rise in some areas of participation in church activity. And so that's a really good news story. And, um, and I consider that a silver lining. The other related aspect of that is I've been so grateful to the local leaders and mission center leaders who have been facilitating online worship for their willingness to provide various forms of electronic giving. So each country has, you know, different ways that they can give. I know in Canada it's the pre authorized transferred method, and in the United States we have the opportunity to give through e tithing. So we have been excited to see that the number of actual people participating e-tithing went up by I don't know the exact number, but just around 15050 people in March, and so we hope that if we're required to physically distance to use your words, that people will, since the opportunity to get involved in sharing in other ways. So the goal is to work together to determine where financial shortfalls exist for local and world church budgets and then figure out what we need to do to fill the gaps. As I mentioned, we're looking right now at what's available through some of the acts that the government in the US have passed. Um, Canadian staff are also looking at that. So, you know, in different areas of the world, we're seeing what other sources of funds might be available. As an example, I'm aware of one campground that already had to lay off staff who were paid by the hour because of the loss of events. So most of our groups don't manage with large reserves, so reductions and mission ties and other income will definitely have ramifications, as we've shared in previous financial updates. Will church leaders have shared

that? In some ways, we were looking at the possibility of budget reductions World Church simply due to the ongoing decline of worldwide mission ties. So this pandemic is undoubtedly going to create even more difficult choices that leaders will have to make. I'm not sharing all this to make people feel guilty. We never want people to contribute to the church out of a sense of guilt. We know individuals and families will have to make tough decisions about how to use the funds they have. It's just important to remind those that have the financial capacity to continue to support local and worldwide mission ties, that they continue to do that. And we're so grateful, grateful beyond words to everyone who supports mission ties both locally and for the worldwide church, as well as all the forms of whole life stewardship that people are practicing to support Christ Mission. And we're so encouraged as people are finding unique ways to do this in this very crazy time that we're living through.

Linda Booth

Yes, they say, as you were speaking, it reminded me of the plan the stock financial plan that you and the presiding bishop would have worked so hard to implement to guide the church. So how it is all of this impacting that plan?

Stassi Cramm

So I heard a quote recently, and it went something like this. If you want to make God laugh, create a plan and so I would say that World Church leaders had a pretty good plan for financially supporting mission over the next several years, while also raising what was needed for the retirement responsibility. People have heard us, you know, talking about supporting mission ties to support mission today and about the need to also give to Bridge of hope for the retirement responsibility and to grow our endowments. Unfortunately, Covid 19 has infected not only people, but it's also seems to be infecting some of these plans that we've made and rendering them obsolete. Things have changed, but we are faithfully adapting. To be honest, it's hard to be reminded that I don't have total control over the church's financial future. But even in the lack of this control, I'm not afraid or discouraged. For now, we're managing one day at a time and responding as the circumstances change. Soon, I'm sure we'll find advantage point where we can pause, rethink and create another long range plan. Of course, I understand that even a new plan may have to be adapted. It's all part of the process of living a disciples life in continuous discernment, of the best way to respond to God's call for us individually and as a worldwide church, and I know the spirit is going to guide us as we travel into the future.

Linda Booth

I believe that too Stassi, and thanks to all of you who are working so hard up, Scott, I also know that the spirit is reaching out to folks even in this time of separation. And we all know that pastoral care is critical in community, life and ministry. Any suggestions on how people can care for one another when they can't give ah really hug or visit in each other's homes?

Scott Murphy

Yeah, and I think the first thing is, you know, to recognize that in the midst of what we are facing in our homes and our communities, families in our nation's there's a lot of anxiety taking place. And, um, there is a need for that human connection to exist. Pastoral care does not have

to be a complicated endeavor. It can be as simple as just reaching out to another with a phone call or email, as a means just say you were important enough that I'm making this effort to connect. I really mindful of that because as this virus was taking a stronger hold in the U. S. And as the presidency and bishopric were monitoring about the progress in other nations, as we are concerned with with mission centers in the church in and other nations Stassi has indicated there was a lot of work in time that we were focusing on trying to get international headquarters and and processes in place for the operation of the church to continue remotely and in different ways. And one day I received a message and email message from one of the priesthood members in my local congregation who had a group of members that she was reaching out to and simply sent a message to us saying, I'm thinking about you. You're in my prayers. Is there anything that you need? Let me know. That simple gesture met a great deal to me, and I was a mindful of the meaning of that moment of blessing that just it occurred in in receiving that e mail. So that that was an experience for me that really further helped me recognize the power of individuals in the congregation is being able to reach out to one another just simply to say hi. I'm thinking about you. You have not been forgotten and to hear voice to see faces if it's through, zoom or face time or other ways of connecting that level of pastoral care makes a huge difference and sends a powerful message of loving community that is desperately needed in these times. So I would encourage our listeners even daily if there's one person that they could reach out to to offer that that point of connection, take advantage of that and begin to recognize the blessing that that occurs for the under other individual. But to be sensitive and aware of the blessing it brings into each of our lives when we extend that hand of compassion in presence with another

Linda Booth

Thanks Scott, I know that's even true in our neighborhoods because I walk our dogs. I've been taking time to talk to neighbors and others to see how they're doing, texting them and checking on them. We have quite a few widows and a widower in our neighborhood, and even to go out and get food for one gentleman who is not able to drive. So we we have an opportunity to be the living Christ in our neighborhoods as we walk the neighborhoods or check on each other there, too.

Scott Murphy

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, I think the other thing is just to take advantage of where it is feasible and responsible. If there are volunteer opportunities in communities for delivering food and things like that, I think those are other ways where individuals in the presence of the church can be sharing that kind of community, love and support out into the lives of others.

Linda Booth

Yes, and yesterday I called a friend who who's been staying, in which I've been staying in touch with her during this isolation period. And she's the mother of three school aged sons. So she's now trying to home schooled in which he's never done before. And her husband, who traveled several days a week, is now home all the time. And so they're home. They're all together, and they have been for a long time, and I listen to her talk about coping with the constant man's, and she said, I can't seem to find a moment from myself, So I'm gonna ask each one of you if

you have any council on self care for families or people who are living at home. And Stassi, I'll start with you first.

Stassi Cramm

Sure, Yeah, I think this is a huge challenge for many people. Right now, we're living in circumstances that are just so different that we're used to, and there's either too much together time when multiple people are stuck at home or there's too little togetherness for those who live alone. As I mentioned earlier, our son has been working at home since late February. Normally, he lives alone, but during this period, one of his co workers has actually moved in with him and it. It was kind of interesting because the co worker has a roommate. But the co-workers roommate went back to India to work from there so he could be closer to his family. And so the co worker, really, I think, didn't want to be at the apartment by himself. So he asked Spencer if he could stay with him. So it's never been totally explained why this relationship got set up this way. But I think it's been really good for Spencer because he has had someone else in the apartment and it's given him a place of connection when he would be otherwise really isolated since he's not going to work. So for people who are living alone, I think this is a time to be more socially connected. So I love the way that you said you know not about social distancing but physical, distinct sing because we do need to be socially connected, and I think it's a great time. Thio use technology, but also some. The old fashioned methods, like mailing people a card or peeling them a note or or sending a phone call. I told one friend who has looked living alone and was feeling really isolated. We brainstormed another person that that friend could kind of buddy up with. Not that they're actually living together, but they made a commitment to do daily check ins with each other so that so someone is aware, you know? Did I get out of bed today? How am I doing? I think this is also a great time as at Scott mentioned for the priesthood of the church to work together to contact church members who live alone in particular so that they're not feeling so isolated. Asked for family where there's not much space, I think that's equally as hard. One of my fun activities as that I've been reading a newsletter that's put out by New York Times called In Her Words, and there has been lots of items covered in there, everything from home schooling, kids. What's the appropriate where for zoom meetings, You know, all those kinds of things, but a lot of emphasis on close quarters. I think that the heart of all of it, at least the way it is for my husband and I is that we need to extend a lot of grace. We recognize that we're all experiencing stress in different ways and were happen toe go through the patterns of our lives in a much different way that we're used to. And I also think that it's really important that we're honest with each other. So I think when Mommy or Daddy needs a timeout because they're about ready to bust out, they need to be able to honestly speak to the family and say, I've just gotta have 15 minutes to catch my breath. So, um, I think that as we, as we continue to move through this honest conversations with each other, are gonna be really important.

Linda Booth

Scott, how about you?

Scott Murphy

Yeah, I think you know what Stassi just shared. Really is really important for the listeners and for all of us to think about. I think in a lot of ways, Linda, one of the things that we have to work on is we have been forced so quickly into a new way of having to live. And so one of the things that way need to work on is really reframing the reality of what life is in this moment. Part of the part of the anxiety that creates forces when we we keep wanting it to be normal, back to the way it was. And it isn't. And so being able to reform or refrain on understanding of what life it is in this moment I think is important. Secondly, breathing is this powerful opportunity to help us find those that physiological change within our body when we're feeling stressed. So just the capacity to pause for a moment and to breathe as deeply as our bodies are physically able to take in that oxygen and allow it to enrich our our bodies can have a physiological impact of relaxing soothing in those moments of anxiety. So while again as Stassi suggest out of this article finding 15 minutes to catch our breath, I think that there's moments in between that where we have to be reminded to breathe deeply just to relax and to reframe the self talk that goes in our head to, rather than statements and words going off in our head that exacerbate the frustration and anxiety and reframed those expressions to really be one of relaxing and centering again. Those those can occur in just short moments of awareness. And then when you have those larger blocks of time like 15 minutes, you can really begin to go deeper into that opportunity of relaxing and stress relieving. But again, there's no question that our current situation is putting us into different ways of having to live together, be together in our family units and and how we refrain that husband and wife's partners of families all need to be having conversations together in working together to be able to create that kind of sacred space off caring for one another as much as we can.

Linda Booth

Thank you to both of you. Yeah, the spiritual dimension is critical in all of this and because for some who are now not working or working from home, it does provide. If we take the opportunity space for spiritual disciplines that can really enrich our time together, even our family time to take time to sit together and pray together or read a Bible story together, or seeing camp song together or light a candle and just say, You know, this is to remind us the goddess in our midst and God, we're not alone. Absolutely. Ah Stacy. I've been very impressed with how well the church has been communicating with members. There's of videos from President Profit Steve Easy from his home as he talks to members than friends of the church. There's e mails and website that's pulling Instagram etcetera. How can coffee buzz listeners connect with these resources online.

Stassi Cramm

I think you're right, Linda. Our communications team has really pulled out all the stops to try to keep the church feeling connected, to try to make sure that the church has information and they've been using all the various social media platforms that they can to push out this information. But with all the other information that's being sent out in the world. I'm sure it can feel a little bit overwhelming where people are like Oh my gosh, you know, I don't even know what's going on. I can't find out information. So one thing that communications has done is they've created a one stop location for this unique period, and our listeners can find this

at www.cofchrist.org/covid-19 So basically the church website Cofchrist.org slash Covid dash 19. And if you go to that site, the listeners will find pretty much a running tally of everything that's being pushed out both from an administrative standpoint but also from a pastoral and spiritual support standpoint. So that's the simplest place to go to kind of get a good list. But it's also a good time for listeners to get connected in ways that will last beyond this particular moment in time. And so there's several different e mails that people can subscribe to, and people can find that list by going to the church's website So [www dot c of christ dot org's slash](http://www.cofchrist.org) and then the word subscribe and if you go to that slash subscribe. There's a list of of different kind of newsletters that people can have pushed directly out into their inbox and, of course, on Facebook and Twitter by, you know, by liking by joining by, you know, connecting in the different ways that each of the platforms allow. That helps make sure that that information kind of gets pushed to the top of your feed and one last place that I would suggest people to bookmark, which will stay active again. Beyond the situation of this pandemic is on the church's website again [www dot c of christ dot org slash news](http://www.cofchrist.org/news). And that's where all of the news and information about upcoming worships or released videos shows up. They're a swell, so there's a couple different ways, and we would just really strongly encourage people to take advantage of everything that's being shared.

Linda Booth

Excellent. Excellent. Tell the communication team thanks from all of us from the church. Ah Scott, I've already mentioned that I have been walking the dogs a lot through our neighborhood, and I have been talking to new neighbors I've never met before from other neighborhoods that are walking down the path behind our house, and I had a rather lengthy conversation with a 30 something man, and I think it's name was Harold. And he referred to covid 19 and said, Um, makes you wonder where God is in all of this. How would you respond to this man's question?

Scott Murphy

Well, Harold's question is the kind of question human life has been asking since the dawn of time, when light becomes difficult for any of us who have even read in the Psalms. The psalmist, when life is going good, as is very generous, so with praising God. But when life is difficult and life is feeling threatened, there is the e always the expression of Where Are you, God, Why have you abandoned us? And so there's certainly a always a question of mystery that occurs in the midst of times when human life faces tragedies like this and even the listeners that they've watched any of president vece's weekly messages to the church. Even in his first message, President Veazey shared his own moments of frustration with God in the midst of all of this, there is no easy answer. There's no pat answer that I think can be given to make this all better and yet for myself, I find I find comfort in assurance in some of the words that, uh, a spiritual writer that I deeply value and that many of our listeners may know Henri Nouwen. And But Henri, in his own journeys and years of reflection and difficult times, offers these words for us. The mystery of God's love is not that our pain is taken away, but that God first wants to share that pain with us. I see for me that mystery of God's love and presence in the act of human life, wanting to do some incredible things that occur in the midst of human life tragedies. There's images that we've seen on the news or on Facebook, off of health care

providers who are putting their lives on the line for welfare, for others. Just the other day, I saw a newscast of health care providers nurses in that from the Kansas City area who were volunteering to go down to Louisiana at another hot spot to help hospitals down there who were being overrun and didn't have enough support and that sense of of call that since a passion, that sense of care for the welfare of human life that they would put their lives on the line for that. For me, that's an expression of the mystery of God's love and presidents being lived out through human response. People volunteering to help in restaurants prepare food to take food out, to deliver food as a means to help people be fed, but also to be able to help restaurants be able to stay alive and open. Those kind of human acts again are an expression of that divine love that exists in the midst of human life that gets sheared to support human life. So when the question about where is God? In the midst of all of this, I have to remind myself to open my eyes and to to see all of the incredible human acts that are taking place that are done out of the essence of love and care for the welfare of another. That's the mystery of God's love that's with us in our pain. Um, that joins with us, and now, as we find ourselves in the spirit of Easter, being reminded that that that love off God came to us in the life of Jesus, where we encounter that kind of love in the midst of suffering and the assurance that that God is there, that life is precious and that we are not alone. That's how I choose to live and see and respond in the midst of these challenges, to recognize that we are not alone, that, um, that God is still present with us in the struggle.

Linda Booth

Yes, God is God is all around. It's a matter of keeping our eyes and ears and our hearts and souls open. And for that presence. Stacy, how are you experienced God's presence in this trying time?

Stassi Cramm

Yeah, so we've been talking about virtual worship, and I had the privilege of preaching last Sunday, the A zoom for a Midland's mission center worship experience. And as we're still in the moments of Lent, the Scripture that many of our listeners probably read recently was Ezekiel, Chapter 37 about the valley of the dry bones and the parallels of that story with what we're now experiencing were really profound for me. I won't go into a lot of details at the risk of breaking into my full blown sermon. But when we think about Covid 19 and the fact that it impacts a person's ability to breathe because it you know it, it impacts the respiratory system. And Scott talked about the importance of those deep life giving breaths. I have found myself focusing a lot on the nature of breath and how that helps not only physically, but also spiritually. And so in some moments I find myself feeling really healthy and really able to identify God in ah, variety of places. And in those moments I try to be really intentional about not only breathing and God's presence for my itself, but touching base with others to see how they're doing. I think the other thing is that when I am feeling dark or spiritually sick, being willing to embrace my vulnerability, because sometimes we don't like to admit that we go to those spaces and then reaching out to others. It's It's like buddy breathing when you're scuba diving. Sometimes only one person has the oxygen tank and you have to share it until you can get to a place where you can both breathe. So I am finding God's presence bubbling up wherever I see humankind reaching out and supporting each other, it's It's like the Scripture

and Matthew, You know, when I was hungry, you fed me. When I need clothing, you gave me clothes. All of those different places come out where, as we're able, even in a socially distanced world or a physically distance world that we can connect with each other. I'm seeing you know, God's spark of life and spirit in the midst of all that, and I keep reminding myself and others that are face story teaches us that God will not abandon us, just like Scott said. And that life and connection can come even in the driest of places, or even when we're required to be physically isolated, where social distancing is required for physical health and the valley of the dry bones reminds us that only God can fill us with the spirit and call us back into life. Only the breath of God breathing through us can recreate us in God's image and restore our spirit. But we have to be willing to breathe it in. And so I think, the simple answer I've found to experience God presence in these crazy times is to just remember to breathe.

Linda Booth

Thanks, Scott and Stassi breathe in that spirit and then let the spirit breathe. And thanks to all those who have listened to this episode of coffee does stay safe and healthy both physically and spiritually, and stay connected in sacred community. And remember, physical distances does not mean social distancing. So stay connected with each other and especially stay connected with God. I'm looking forward to our next month ninth episode of coffee buzz with profit president Steve Easy. So watch brought my friends. Until then, God bless you.

Josh Mangelson

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