

Episode: 261 | Connecting in an Age of Quarantine  
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.

Karin Peter

Welcome to Project Zion. I'm your host today, Karin Peter and with me is another Project Zion Podcast host Robin Linkhart. Robin serves on the Council of 12 and part of her responsibility is to serve as the chair of the Online Ministries Council of 12 subcommittee. That's a long title, which also includes two presidents of 70. So Hi, Robin.

Robin Linkhart

Hey, Karin, it's great to be with you this morning.

Karin Peter

Well, thanks for taking the time to visit today about a relevant topic because we're going to visit about ways to connect during this time of stay in or shelter in the orders as we navigate this new reality we're living in with the cool at 19 virus. So first, let's just walk through what our current reality is. So where I live in Washington state, we've been staying in Gosh, now it's two weeks, with even more restrictions of coming from the governor recently, And as you may have read in the national news, the National Guard has been deployed to assist our state in its efforts to lower the curve of cases here. So what are some of the current realities of life in response to the virus where you are?

Robin Linkhart

Well, Karin the emerging infections of Coronavirus in Colorado are definitely lagging behind this state of Washington. We certainly have kept all of you in our thoughts and prayers for sure. Um, but I would say the common sense norm and just based on national understanding of what's happening in the state of Colorado. Folks have been staying at home. We've certainly have had business is shutting down restaurants only allowed to do take out some of those things based on national directives have happened, but in effect today, officially Colorado State wide Ah, effective 6 a.m. today has a stay at home order, meaning that everybody in the state must stay at home unless they need to leave for an essential reason. Um, and also I noticed this morning when I read our state Web page on Kobe that the Colorado State Patrol is on an accident alert across the state. And what that means is, you only call and report crashes. If it it meets certain criteria like somebody is hurt or dead or involves alcohol or drugs. Ah, hidden run damage to public property, That kind of thing on there, saying, you know, if you don't fall in that category than just exchange information and file at your report online. So it definitely in just in the last 24 to 48 hours has heightened and we are just officially on lock down, so to speak. We've been having some great sunny weather, but we have a snowstorm due to hit tomorrow.

Karin Peter

Oh, of course you do!

Robin Linkhart

That is springtime in the Rockies. So, uh, we look at the picture broadly in a big swath of the United States. We are home either alone if we live by ourselves or with our family members or roommates. And many of us have kids at home because the schools have been closed or are just closing, and we have financial worries and medical concerns. And with all of this, our church experience has been restricted. And so we're no longer able to gather in congregations in small groups where we would normally gather to have support on the share how we are feeling together and worship together and find drink. So what kind of impact is this having on our personal and spiritual being? Well, I think it has a very profound impact. We understand life is being a fully integrated way of being physical, spiritually psychological, emotional, all of the things they're interconnected. And, you know, the human species is very community oriented, even those of us who, maybe more, uh, non social or introverts. The reality is we are connected with one another, and when that is cut off in certain ways, it has profound, um, impact on us and all of that impacts are spiritually well being. So we find ourselves reeling from the effects of isolation, just this profound fear and uncertainty of what the future is gonna look like. Our relationships are strange. Some of us, especially folks that live alone, are completely isolated elderly, that are in senior housing care or senior centers were not allowed to visit them. And then we have the flip side of that where all of a sudden we're together 24 7 and we're not used to living our lives that way. We have people working from home at the same time that you know Mom is trying to take care of kids who are out of school, just dealing with all these multi dimensional, multi generational impact and in the midst of relationship, and then to have our faith community not allowed to be together and see each other face to face. And we realize, I think, in a deeper way than we have in the past that the physical touch and physical presence with one another is such an important part of how we connect and how we communicate. I mean, body language is makes up a much larger percent of our communication method. Then verbal communication does so all of that takes its toll. And alongside that, our medical needs physical needs just a regular routine stuff that, um, folks of different generations are dealing with. And then the threat of someone that we know and love being infected with coronavirus. What does it look like when you're isolated at home and a family member is infected? How do you navigate that as well? Um, so it's it's difficult. And, um, I think even folks that aren't part of a faith community are feeling the loss of the visible presence with folks and are are starving and craving that and, you know, carrying the reality is we are on the front end of this journey and it's it's Ah, it's hard And then we have people losing their jobs. I mean, my son in law lost his job last week. It was a complete shock. My husband, businesses is not going right now. He's no longer participating in that as a result of a reduction. I have friends across the nation who in the last week have been laid off, and, you know, we all understand the economy is dropping like a rock, and this has a ripple effect. So this is like a perfect storm of, I mean the top 10 major crises in our life that psychologists would say, If one of these things happens, you know you're in this stress. If more than one happens, it's higher. I mean, it's like pick pick one from the list. I think they're all on there. What do you think?

Karin Peter

Everybody's off the charts on the stress chart at this point, so that's where we are. But now let's talk about what we can do to continue or to begin to build community during this time, you said that by s human beans were geared for community. I don't know about you, but when this all first happened here in Washington, I just felt like I was just stuck or paralyzed. Or just I I don't even know quite how to describe it other than I was on my couch for two days, Not quite in a fetal position, but really feeling the stress of everything. Before I could even begin to process what this new reality looked like for me and and figure out strategies for that. So as a people, what are some things that we can do to, um, to look how we conform and live as community, which is a central core understanding of what it means to be Community of Christ.

Robin Linkhart

So I think we have looked primarily to how we can connect in an Internet and tell a communication age, and and we're exploring that further. We also are really lucky in Community of Christ because we have had some current online ministries that were already taking place prior to Covid-19 becoming part of our reality. So we have had some online ministries emerging across the globe. I would say the first one's emerged in Canada with Community Place. We also have in Toronto, Canada, they've explored lots of different ways of delivering online gathering possibilities. We have Community Plus in Australia. That was going for quite some time. We've had community space in Oklahoma, and all of these connected and learned from Community Place in Canada. We've had congregations that live stream their worship of worships on Sunday morning. And even though in online ministries that we've been exploring in recent years, we really have focused on those things that are live time with two way communication. It is a plus to be able to have. Livestreamed worships that folks who are homebound in particular can tune into. We've had things like the recent spirit spirituality along the edges and Lynton formation opportunities offered through the Temple and this Spiritual Formations and ministries team. We've had books studies that have been available on mine over in the Eurasia Fields Community Circle has been going for a couple of years now, connecting folks across Europe and beyond Community Connections in the British Isles. Um, Kahealani in Brussels, Belgium, last fall began doing online ministry connecting with different folks, including Tahitians that live in France. Ah, so he can do French and Tahitian ministries, which, just due to the connection of the culture, was picking up people in French Polynesia, Um, in the North Central Field's we've been sponsoring Forward with Community online worship gathering that is primarily focused on conducting Latter-day Seekers who are isolated by distance from a Community of Christ physical congregation. Ah, you Karen have been involved in the leadership with community elevated for young adults. Um, the Mid-Atlantic Mission Center sponsored Church Nerds Unite, which I've never visited that one. But it just sounds divine. Ah, and they've experimented with a few other things beyond which feature sermons or talks, Uh, and again a variety of congregations across the USA streaming Sunday service is and trying to integrate some kind of two way communication. A new one in the Western field was Holding Space that one started this last fall, and they're going strong. Ah, Sunday Chat, which is actually our first online gathering interface sponsored by the Council of Presidents of 70 started many years ago. That one has continued over the

years and is now adapted to using the zoom platform on. And I think that that probably gives you a good overview of what we had in place before Covid-19 emerged on our globe.

Karin Peter

So that's a pretty extensive list of things that were already happening. You mentioned a couple that seemed to be focused in particular communities. Young adults are Latter-day Seekers, but for many of these were they open to anyone to join our they limited to people in there in their geographical area. Yeah, what does that work?

Robin Linkhart

That's a really good question, because just by virtue of the fact that that we have emerged from this tradition, that's a physical on the face of the Earth, people gathering oftentimes brick and mortar buildings. When we first started doing online ministries, there was a reflection of that kind of context. Very quickly we learned that in the world of Internet, those kinds of boundaries are fuzzy at best. So although some of these have remained targeted at certain groups, many have just flung the doors wide open, and those would have their listings online of how you can join in Eurasia. The privacy laws on Internet or a little bit different. So you have a contact person that you reach out to, and then they provide you with information that you need to join on Facebook. Often times you can see these being posted in a watch party or the links posted. We also have this information available on the World Church website. Um and we do have some. This is an interesting challenge that we're finding now, as more and more people are just desperately looking for some way to connect that the tier one Zoom account and a lot of these do uses Zoom platform is limited at 100 participants. So just this is last week or two for those that have posted their links online. We've already hit that limit. So we have people exploring what tier two and three look like, which really expand those numbers. So I would say in response to your question, Karin, some remained focused like we do, Community Elevated, I know remains focused with young adults. All are welcome that might show up. We weren't not going to throw anybody out. Um, but many of the others are really recognizing not only the need, but the opportunity for making it available for as many as can come on.

Karin Peter

So have there been new opportunities that have developed as people are responding to this new reality of not being able to connect physically?

Robin Linkhart

Oh, my gosh, yes, and it has been so exciting to see not only the response of people across the church that are now totally open to exploring what connecting online looks like as a participant, but those that have emerged as saying, I will help something happen of what can I do or getting together a team in their mission center or their congregation and exploring? What can we do to provide something to the church, to the people in our mission center, to the people across the globe so that we can connect for one another? And the other thing is congregations that we're streaming live services. And of course, that hinges on a group of people gathering in one place are exploring ways to utilize their equipment in there, streaming service to tweak it just a little bit so that they can continue chipper by it, a way to connect. So we will put this Web link to see

if Christ dot org in the show notes, and this is specifically the current listing of online ministries and communication Team is working daily but minimally weekly updating this list. So if you are listening and you have started a ministry to provide an online gathering opportunity for Community of Christ, please contact the communications team at headquarters to be included. But let me just run through this list. Karin, to give you an idea, since you just heard the overview of what was there before, what we have available, Um, Olathe Community of Christ has a podcast, and they have listed that so like Project Zion they're continuing to provide audio resource is that could be archived and used at any time. Children's Sunday school class. There's a zoom link, and this is hosted by Eastern Great Lakes, and they have some instructions of what kind of equipment to have uh, ready for your kids to use adult Sunday school, also hosted by Eastern Great Lakes. We have zoom links for service is from Eastern Great Lakes and mid Atlantic Lakes. Edmonton Community of Christ has a Facebook page that you can join on Sundays Laurel Community of Christ has their Zoom link and they're providing a service connection. Springfield Community of Christ, Bethel Community of Christ, Effingham Community of Christ, Amarillo Community of Christ, Yuma Community of Christ. We've got Clinton Golf Fort. All those are congregations who are providing a way to connect. Inclusive Church, which is from Toronto, has actually adjusted their Sunday times so that it's more user friendly across North America. They had live stream on Facebook, and then they archive on YouTube. So if you can't get it on my time, you can go to YouTube and look at it there on. Also connect through their website, Salt Lake City Community of Christ, doing a live worship open to everybody that one is listed now as well. Walnut Creek has been streaming live for some time, but they're providing something new through their website and then Community Circle over in Eurasia. Community Space I mentioned before Sunday chat is still going strong. Church Nerds Unite uh, Canada in Toronto, Toronto, Canada is also expanded to their meditations. They've added more meditations. Those are facilitated guided meditations through the week and then their Tuesday class time they've adjusted that time just a little bit to make it more user friendly. We also have midweek connections. So prayer meetings online on Wednesday night and Michigan is doing that. Cedar Valley Nauvoo is doing that and Mid Atlantic Mission Center. So we have new things happening all the time. And I know just this week we've had different ones, um, coming up. So I anticipate this list will just continue to grow and the response is overwhelmingly positive. Um, folks that actually never even dreamed that they would be open to ever doing anything online, trying it for the first time and coming away just profoundly impacted in a positive way of how real the connection can feel when it is an online internet virtual presence with one another.

Karin Peter

And it's if someone had tried online connecting many years ago, it's a different feel to it now, with modern technology and the platforms that are available whether it Zoom or Skype or FaceTime, there are there have been such improvements.

Robin Linkhart

Absolutely well, and I know Karin just in meetings. We often a meet online for meetings and years ago. The Skype Platform, which was great for that time it just, there were limitations. It didn't feel as natural. But the way technology is today and Zoom I know is one of many. But the

sense of being with each other, the quality of the video and the audio is so much improved. The capacity to have multiple little tiles with the people's faces all at one time really enhances that experience, as you say, and in such a way that it's just really offers so much.

Karin Peter

So if you haven't tried it in a long time, give it a whirl now for sure.

Robin Linkhart

I just wanted to add one more thing. And that is, um, I think it was just last week or late the week before the First Presidency released some ah, a statement on Sacraments and Covid 19 which we know, Um, since World Conference 2019 that the First Presidency made guidelines available to provide for the opportunity to share the sacrament of communion online, which, if you're not familiar with that, please look that up. But the new statement address specifically on the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick with some really helpful guidelines to provide opportunities for, um, our ministry, too, provide the ministry of the prayer of the laying on of hands for the sick, even though we may not be able to have the physical proximity of anointing of oil and laying on of hands. And I think the pastoral counsel the First Presidency provides, is really, really helpful also points out our responsibility as ministers to observe all the health guidelines. If in fact, we are going to be physically present with someone who's ill with Covid 19. So I think that's something that's helpful to us at this time and just want to make sure that folks are aware of that as well.

Karin Peter

Thank you. And they can find that on the World Church website or on the Community of Christ app on their smartphone. So we've talked about some group kind of activities and worships that have been going on for a while and many new ones. What are some other ideas for connecting with others during this stay at home time that go beyond maybe congregational type or mission center type ministries?

Robin Linkhart

As I peruse Facebook every day and just kind of check and see how people are doing and what's emerging. I'm seeing lots of things connecting with one another people are talking about. In fact, just this morning I was I'm seeing on Facebook how some Mom's got together and their kids are missing playing with each other, and they got together on Zoom with other households and got the little kids set up with the laptop. And those kids just talk to each other and I can imagine that they had toys in the room with them and they could just chatter away. And I think I'm thinking, you know, this is great. What a wonderful opportunity to be able to connect like that. I was thinking, as I read that about the Diary of Anne Frank and reading about her, her family being isolated for a very long time during World War II, and how different that might have been if even you know she is a child, have had an opportunity to connect with other kids outside of her home who were going through the same experience. I mentioned book clubs earlier, and I've seen those taking off more and more. I've heard people talking about. In fact, my daughter called me the day and she goes. You know, Mom, just every couple days we should just connect by phone or online and just have afternoon copy together and catch that,

um, spiritually practices are really awesome. I mentioned Toronto Center having the meditation practices. Leandro has expanded those. And yesterday afternoon, I just cued it up in my Facebook and listen to him guiding us through your meditation, as I said quietly in the afternoon and had a few other things going on. But I could be present with that, Um, and I'm I'm thinking that's something that we can listen to or have both the audio and the video, and it could be part of our life alone or with a group in our home. Um, they're just tons and tons of things and opportunities to really experiment with things we haven't even thought of yet. And I don't want to forget, you know, the telephone because some of our older folks in particular may not have smart phones where they can access like a computer bud or even have a laptop or a dust cop computer. So telephone and even the basic telephones. Now I think you can network other people in, but don't forget about that as well, and there are a lot of things that we can do. Even a book club on telephone is is an option. Um, I do want to point out too that Project Zion podcast just yesterday posted our first in an ongoing series with spiritual practices that will be guided, facilitated by Katie Harmon McLaughlin online. And the title of that is Awaken to God's Presence: Finding Calm in the Storm. And every week on Wednesdays we will be posting that with a different spiritual formation practice. So, Karin, how about you? What kind of ideas have you had are things that you've seen coming out?

Karin Peter

So like you, I've been cruising Facebook and enjoying getting different ideas. We have a House Church that I visit on a regular basis, and we went online for the first time for our meeting, which was great. And part of that experience is when we're there together in person, in the morning, we'll have coffee and chat and connect, and everybody is missing that. So we're going to including online coffee and chat experience before our next gathering. And it was interesting to me because we talked about after we have the online gathering. Are we okay at that staying once a month, or do we want to try it more often than once a month? And people were like, We don't have enough to do, we want to do this a little more often So we're going to do every week. So I thought that was an interesting development out of that house church experience. But other than that, um, have been involved at different times in different online ministries with Community Elevated and other things. But I've been trying to find ways to connect with people outside of those more their informal but their formal kind of opportunities. So I have Ray and I, my husband and I have scheduled for next week a dinner with two people from a congregation north of where we live. We're going to each have our dinner and have the computer and and we'll be visiting as if we were having dinner together. And and I think that table fellowship is part of what we miss being together in Community of Christ.

Robin Linkhart

I love that. In fact, today I saw I'm Julie Smith at headquarters always rallies up the headquarters folks staff of the temple on. They do a lunch on Thursdays, and I noticed that they're doing that. They're all working from home now. So she sent out an email and said, Bring your lunch to your computer. We're gonna zoom together and eat together and share what's going on in our life. I think that's fantastic. And I don't have the interview and rare doing that with your friends.

Karin Peter

Yeah, and I mentioned before we started that we have small grandchildren and story and I brainstorm the other day. How weakened do an Easter egg hunt on Easter via online? Um, so we have that laid out for us, and we're quite proud of ourselves as older people having figured out how that will work. So we'll see. Um, we'll get some feedback from small grandchildren after we have that. See how that was for them. But there are so many options, and they're they're unlimited. There is many, as there are our creative minds will allow us to imagine. And I don't want people to think that they have to be super proficient the first time they do this. I mean, what kind of skills do people need.

Robin Linkhart

Well, actually, you can totally do this as a novice first timer. I want his lift up the page on the cofchrist.org website, and that would be the Covid-19 page. And you can find that by entering into your search engine sea of cofchrist.org/covid-19. And on that page you can scroll down and catch all the announcements relative to the church life in Covid 19. And if you go on down further, we have worship in formation. Resource is and then helps for pastors and leaders, including at the very bottom. How to join a meeting if you have brand, if you are brand new, you've never done anything online. Just open up your browser. Go to this page and at the bottom you can click. There's a little tutorial video on how to join a zoom meeting. So, um, the other thing is, we have lots of folks around the shirts that were willing to help someone figure out how to do that, said don't let that be a deterrent. We also have people who want to be part of starting something on mine and they don't necessarily have the tech savvy or experience to do that. But they're getting together and with groups, and we are offering tutorials to help teams get ramped up so that they can have the tech support that they need or the tech Uh, just basic instructions on how to do that. And the reality is, Karin, we've been doing all these things together, face to face. It's just a matter of repackaging or interpreting it into an online setting. We're taking bits and pieces here and there to discover how we can do this online in ways that are really meaningful and relevant.

Karin Peter

The church has always adapted to the circumstances in which it has found itself. So this is part of our continuing journey as a people to use the name of our historical text of the moment. So what kind of resource is are out there? That would be helpful. You mentioned there's a list of them. Can you talk about some of those?

Robin Linkhart

Yeah, on that Covid-19 on page on the website under the worship and formation. resources, there's ah list there. Of course, they make sure that everybody knows that we do have a phone app, and if you don't have that downloaded on your phone, you can do that any time. It's free. We have our old standbys like daily Bread and Daily Prayer for Peace. That can be things that we can look to, even the scripture reading and the story of the daily bread prayer time, oftentimes of him is included in that. Prayers for Peace are very easy to adapt for online setting. We've got lots of resource is available for a Lent um, and there's a link on that list. All of that. There are things that are coming out now. For example, the prayer blessing that President

Veazey provided for us. This last, it was week before last. I think in time for Sunday the 15th spiritual practices all the Spiritual Formation Ministries resources online are great. We have the witness, the word sermons. We also the DGR, so disciples generous response videos that can be downloaded and shared on a zoom platform. There's a way to share a video so that everybody that's connected with you can all watch that at the same time and of course Karin are one of our favorites is Sacred Space. Small Group Resources, which is available online now. If you go to worship helps, it's the third tap on your right. As you look at the tab for worship helps, sermon helps and small group resources, and we'll be looking to get that posted under Worship Information Resource is on the Covid-19 list as well. Um, and I know Karin and I know you've worked with adapting different resource is for use in house church as well as Community Elevated, so I'm sure you have some tips on how people can do that as well.

Karin Peter

So I think we have adapted a great deal of them. One of the things that's out there on the website has been for some time our spiritual practices for children, and they are on a pdf that you can download or you can simply from your computer, engage in them with kids. And that would be a great thing for if you have kids in your congregation that we're used to seeing each other on Sundays, they could gather together and participate with that. We have used that for some of the resource is that we've developed. There are all kinds of pieces of information found in other resource is so in the Sunday school lesson material for discipleship, formation material, you confined pieces That would be hopeful. Um, if you're not interested in doing a whole small group online, you can still take the small group resource and take a piece of it and do the spiritual practice. Or do the thoughts for Children with your family, an extended family online. It's a great thing for grandparents to do, so it's a matter of looking at something and instead of immediately seen all that won't work for when we do, but instead reimagining and saying, How can we make this work? So I was on online in a meeting with a colleague, and we were talking about a class that he was adapting to do online, and we were brainstorming ways to do something that I actually learned from you. And that is to always begin a class with a quiz on who can name the nine Enduring Principles and five Mission Initiatives, and when I would do that in person, I'd always have low prize to give to whoever could do that. And, um and so our conversations like Oh, but we couldn't do that online is like, Oh, sure we could Let's let's figure out how we could do that online and have people use the chat function That zoom has and put their answers in online and the first person that has that winds and you can through, um, e mail. You can send them at a Starbucks card that they can order coffee. Or you can send them on Amazon card or whatever the prize is that you want to do so. Lots of ways to adapt things for online ministry.

Robin Linkhart

I love that you're always so creative. I just adore that. I just want to talk about Sacred Space for a minute because, as you're talking, I'm reminded that the way we laid out Sacred Space, a small group resource is having a facilitators guide on the front end. That kind of walks through a basic gathering, but then each of the pieces is separated out on a one page handout following that. So, in a sense that serves as a tutorial of how to look at a whole thing. That you might do and then how to lift out these pieces. And, of course, Sacred Space already has those printer

formatted where you could pull out a piece and just print the page. And it's all there, for example, if you just wanted to do the spiritual practice or the sharing around the table, which could be sharing around ours online connection as we discuss a scripture.

Karin Peter

So Robin, we've come to the end of our time together or our episode. I want to thank you for the conversation, the ideas, the resource references and the information that will be really helpful for folks to stay connected and form community in this really challenging time as we go forward, as you said with the beginning of this and we'll see, um, how this continues to unfold. But in part of this, as we go forward, it will help us be more intentional and being the community that we are called to be not just for those already in the community, but for those looking for community as well. So any last comments before we close?

Robin Linkhart

I just want to dovetail with what you just shared about, not just opportunities to go deeper in our own relationships but to reach up outside of our community. And that this time as uncertain and dark, is that feels is also a time of hope and possibility and invitation because we're not the only ones that have these feelings. Um, don't be afraid to invite your friends to hop online with whatever you're doing and to be part of something that, um, that is deeply rooted in community and then the turning to the Divine presence to walk with us.

Karin Peter

Thank you. I'm going to close our episode with, um, a small reading that actually comes out of John O'Donoghue's, *To Bless the Space Between Us*, a text that many of our listeners are familiar with. "Now is the time to hold faithful to your dream to understand that this is an interim time full of awkward disconnection. Gradually, you will come to find your way to friends who will open doors into a new belonging. Your heart will brighten with new discovery. Your presence will unclench and find ease letting your substance and promise be seen. Slowly a new world will open for you the eyes of your heart refined by this desert time will be free to see and celebrate the new life for which you sacrificed everything." So with that. Thank you, Robin Linkhart for being with us. I'm Karin Peter. This is Project Zion. Thanks for listening.

Josh Mangelson

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