

270 | Fair Trade | Diana Wake  
Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

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

**Karin Peter** 00:33

Welcome to Projects Zion Podcast. I'm your host today Karin Peter for a Fair Trade episode with our guest, Diana Wake. Diana lives near Idaho Falls, Idaho. And we are just so pleased that she has agreed to visit with us today. So hi, Diana. Hi, Karen. Thanks for having me. Well, we're really happy to hear your story today. So before we start that can you tell our listeners a little bit about yourself so that kind of have an idea of who they're listening to?

**Diana Wake** 01:00

Yes. I grew up in Springville, Utah, which is just right next to Provo. So the heart of Utah County and Mormon town. I went to BYU after I graduated high school. And I got a Bachelor's in special ed there. Well, so my husband is also from the same town and we went to BYU together and we dated through college, and then he went on his mission. And then we got married about seven weeks after he got home from his mission.

**Karin Peter** 01:05

Diana, you're living the Mormon dream!

**Diana Wake** 01:48

Exactly. We were right on track to do all the things so yeah, so we've been married about seven and a half years and we have two kids and one on the way. After we had our second I stopped teaching and decided to stay home. And we moved to Idaho a few years ago. So that's, that's about where we're at.

**Karin Peter** 02:12

Okay. And that's where you and I met was in Idaho, in Idaho Falls. So, how, how did you understand your faith journey? You said you grew up in Utah County, which for our folks who come from an LDS tradition, they kind of know what that means from Salt Lake. Community of Christ listeners, maybe have picked up on that to some degree, but that really is the most Mormon county in the greater Salt Lake area.

**Diana Wake** 02:42

Yeah, absolutely. So growing up, almost every single person I knew was LDS I knew very few non Mormon people. And I like I come from pioneer ancestor. So all my extended families, members, and so on.

**Karin Peter** 02:59

Translation for the Community Christ people that would be like saying, your six generation Community of Christ.

**Diana Wake** 03:06

Yes. And in high school in my friend group, there was one person who was not LDS. And she happened to be my best friend and is still my best friend. And somehow she managed to put up with dealing with all of us for however many years. I'm glad we're still friends. So, yeah, so growing up, I had very, very little interaction or knowledge about other religions and other ideas that were different from from our church. Yeah, so growing up, I, I was happy to be part of church and I believed it but I also really felt a lot of pressure to, to be good, and to do all of the things that people expected me to do. That's probably partly the culture and a lot just my personality is wanting to be a pleaser and feeling. A lot of my self worth came from being good, and from other people thinking that I was doing good. I wanted to please my parents and do all the things are supposed to do.

**Karin Peter** 04:21

So what were some of the kind of positive markers of that journey? Some, some things that happened to you that you even now can look back and go, that was a real positive in my faith journey.

**Diana Wake** 04:31

I definitely had a real sense of community. You know, our neighborhood was really close. We knew everyone in our ward really well and I had a lot of leaders that were very supportive and and loving and so there were a lot of people around me who cared and who helped. I maybe I should have said this at the other part, growing up, I feel like a big, like the big goal always was to just go to the temple and so growing up with young women's and as a kid and as a teenager and a young adult like that was that was kind of it that was the end goal if you if you made it to the temple and you got married, then you were you're pretty much done like you had done that was where you needed to get and then after that point you had kids and you help them get to the temple, you know, you started the cycle over so that was a big part of my childhood was trying to always be good, always staying on the path and making sure I was doing what I needed to do. I don't recall like, exactly when it started. I think the metaphor that a lot of people use fits well for me in having a shelf and having lots of things that seem a little confusing or that don't make sense. And you put them on the shelf and you just try not to think about it and eventually the shelf breaks. And so there are definitely some, some markers that stand out to me of things that got put on the shelf. And the first big one was going to the temple. I was very excited and also nervous and I had no idea what I was what I was in for, I didn't know what to expect, but I was sure that since this was what I had been working towards my whole life, it was going to be great. Like it was of course going to be positive. And it was a couple of days before I was getting married. So I was really looking forward to that experience. And it just it didn't go well for me at all a it ended up being pretty traumatic when I look back on it when I within a few minutes it's about a two hour process when you go through and within a few minutes I just I started having a panic attack and I felt like I don't understand what is going on and this doesn't it doesn't feel how I expected it to feel. And as it went on the panic attack just kept getting worse and so being a people pleaser, I had my parents there and my fiance and his parents there. And so and I'm you know, I'm sitting in the front of the room and I know that everyone's kind of watching me and they're there for me and I'm just bawling and crying and confused. And, and I just kept thinking all these people are gonna think that I'm not, I'm not worthy that I'm not

supposed to be here and and and that was hard and I I had been excited to find out what, you know what covenants I was making to God. And I didn't know what they were because I couldn't pay attention because I was just trying to survive. And so after that I, I talked with my fiance and my mom about it, and they were supportive, and they just, they're like, it'll get better. It'll get easier, just keep going, you'll get used to it. And it just didn't, it never really got better. And we would, after we got married, we would try to go, you know, fairly regularly, and it would usually end in tears. And I remember, I think it might have been the last time that I went, we were sitting in the parking lot after and I was crying, and I was like, I just don't get it. And I was asking my husband, like, you're the same as me. We believe the same thing. So how can you, how can you do this and he says, Uh, well, I, I just have to not pay attention. Like I just have to shut it off and try and meditate and just kind of ignore what's going on and, and just do my own thing and that's that's how I can feel peace is just kind of by closing off. And I remember thinking okay, well I guess maybe that's an option that I can try but that just doesn't seem right if this is supposed to be, you know where we feel peace and where we we feel the spirit and we feel close to God we shouldn't have to be trying so hard to ignore what's happening and so I think that was that was a red flag for me but I also had internalized guilt about it and so, you know, I figured it just must be something off with me everybody else seems to be okay with it. So maybe it's just it's just my my problems. So that that was one of the things that that had been sitting with me for a while. And another one that I now know is a big deal for many Mormon women, but at the time I did not was the concept of eternal polygamy. So for people who don't know what that means it's women can be sealed to one man, but men can be sealed to multiple women. And so it was one of those things I tried not to think about. But every time you know, I would hear a tragic story of a young wife passing away, it would just send me spiraling into this terrible place. And that became my worst fear was that I would die young. My husband would remarry, and then you'd have a lovely life with someone else. And then in heaven, I would be stuck with them forever and it just seemed awful to me. And so I would get really upset and I would get mad at him for no fault on his part and every time he'd say, Don't worry, I'm not gonna get remarried, I don't want to marry anybody else, it's gonna be fine. But I also felt like, you know, it's not even up to you at some point because, you know, with our, our very orthodox and faithful beliefs, you know, if, if God or the prophet or whoever told you that you needed to take another wife, like, wouldn't you have to do it, you know? And so, that was kind of another thing that just made me feel like maybe I'm not doing something right here. Because if I, you know, if these are my options, then I would rather not go to celestial kingdom. I'd rather just go somewhere else if that's what what it's going to be like. So those were things that would come up every now and again. And it was kind of an issue. And then I think the other big one was when I became aware of kind of the epidemic that was happening around Utah with with youth suicides, and realizing how much the church was impacting LGBT youth in a, in a dangerous way. And so, you know, as as we became aware of, of that problem and started thinking about it, our kids were just tiny, but it just started feeling more and more unsafe for them. And at that point, we were still very, very committed. I don't think we'd ever even thought about the possibility that we wouldn't stay in the church forever and I was talking to my husband who He was very active faithful priesthood holder and, you know and doing the things he needed to do. And he said, you know, if one of our kids is gay, I don't think I can stay here. And it shocked me because he'd never said anything like that before. But instead of shocking me in a bad scary way, which I would have expected, it was actually very comforting to realize that Okay, I know that, you know, according to our faith, we're supposed to put God first we're supposed to love God first. But I know that my husband loves my children more and and i that's better for me, that's a better place and so. So those were kind of some of

the things that we started feeling doubts about. And I think over time, it just made us aware, when when things would come up, that didn't feel right and Eventually, I got to a place where I could admit that the church is wrong about some things. And it's, I think, at some point, I realized this is not this is not my problem. I am not the one making all of these these things issues. They, they are they're wrong. And so I started thinking about if, you know if these things are wrong and I and I know that these things can't be from God, then I don't know what else is from God. And I think that's the point where my shelf broke and crashed. And I, at the time, I was reading the ghost of maternal polygamy by Carolyn Pearson. And she has a quote that that has really stuck with me since then. Is if I?

**Karin Peter** 14:56

Sure. Absolutely.

**Diana Wake** 14:57

Okay. "When heaven As an earthquake, you fall to your knees and feel through the rubble to find the pieces of God. When my eternal temple blessed marriage shattered, and everything that had been meaningful, lay in jumbled charts around me. I had to slowly and carefully pick up every single piece and examine it, turning over and over to see if it was worthy to keep into us in building a new house of meaning. As I gathered the broken pieces of God, I used only my own authority, my own relationship with the divine and the good small voice that speaks inside me to appraise them, I threw away many and I kept many has something the bright pieces into the one great thought. I asked only do I see God's fingerprints on this? Does this little piece feel godly? Does it speak of love? That made it easy, I was forever finished with the insane attempt to love a God who hurts me." Um, so I remember reading that and it, it felt exactly like what I was going through and I, I remember kind of falling, falling apart and going into my bedroom so my kids wouldn't see me. And, and crying and just, um, and I did something I hadn't done before, which was I said, a prayer to Heavenly Mother, which is something forbidden in LDS Church. But at that point, I needed a God that was not a man to talk to. And I said, you know, God, I, I know I've made these promises and these covenants and I said that this is what I'm going to do, but they're hurting me. And none of this feels the way that it was supposed to. And I need to know if it's okay with you if I stopped doing this. I need to know if it's okay if I stop going to the temple because it's hurting me I need to know if it's okay to stop trying to believe these doctrines and teachings that feel wrong because they're hurting me and they're hurting other people. And I, I just I felt so much peace after that kind of soul shattering moment and I just the feeling I had was, of course of course it is okay. Of course. These things that hurt you that you know are not right are not from me, they are not from God and you know that and I know that and you do not need to stay in a place that is hurting you or keep doing things that hurt you. And so I luckily my husband happens to be really close to where I was at, he had been feeling doubt for a long time. And he had kind of just let it sit and he was a lot more chill about it than I was. So when I fell apart, he was like, that's okay. What do you what do you want to do now? And, and initially, we felt like, well, we're going to we're going to pick this apart. We're going to go through all of this and we're going to decide which pieces feel true and feel like they're from God. And we're going to keep them and we're going to throw out everything that doesn't make any sense and everything that feels arbitrary or harmful. We're, we're just going to be done with that. And, and we, we both thought that we would stay at least halfway in the church for a while. We thought we can do this. We've kind of come in contact with the Mormon feminist community. And realize that there were, there

were people out there who were doing church in their own way. And they were they're finding a way to make it work. And so that was our that was our plan for a while, so.

**Karin Peter** 19:17

So during this time, did you talk to your family about this other than your spouse?

**Diana Wake** 19:25

The first person I talked to about, from my family was my mom, because she was the person I was the most worried about. of all of my family. She is the church just as her life and she and knowing that she loves me the most and she loves the church the most. I just, I was afraid that it would just be too much for her and it would be too hard. And so that was, that was scary, but my she actually really surprised me and handled it a lot. Better than I expected her to. I was really relieved she she was able to take it and she was kind of the only person in my family who was still an active believing member that I that wanted to hear about why this was happening. You know, as I kind of decided to talk to other people later on, they might ask a few tentative questions, but really, it felt like most people were too scared to hear about it. They didn't. They didn't really want to know I think they had kind of their own idea of what was going on and, and that was it. But my mom, I wish everybody who went through a faith transition had that kind of love. It was very unconditional, and she wanted to hear about it and she said something like, I can tell that you're doing this from a place of love, which was important to me. Because growing up when whenever we heard about anyone leaving the church, it was because they had gone astray. And Satan had deceived them and they were weak or they just didn't want to live righteously anymore. And so, you know, having someone be able to see me for what was going on and to realize that it was it was from love and truth and not from something else was was a big deal for me.

**Karin Peter** 21:34

So at what point? At what point did you talk to people from church about this? From your ward, or did you talk to your Bishop?

**Diana Wake** 21:45

We did so we, for a few months, we kind of tried that in between place. I know some people managed to do that for years and years. And we ran into the roadblock of General Conference and I, at the time, I was really looking forward to it and I had this really optimistic attitude, that there would be something there for me there would be some sign that I don't know, something would ring true for me. And we had that next gen conference and instead what I heard was a lot of messages about you are in or you're out, you cannot do this halfway, you know, God expects you to do it what how we say, you know, 100% and then there were also just some messages doubling down against vulnerable populations, which did not feel Christ like to me. And, and so that that was the that was the breaking point for me and I I told my husband after conference was over. I can't do this anymore. I can't go back. I don't feel like the church wants me as I am. And I don't want to associate with something that is harming people that I care about. So we emailed our Bishop that night, and he asked us to come in and meet with him. We went in to meet with him and he asked what was going on? And I explained a little bit about what I was looking for and what was hurting me and that I felt like there wasn't gender equality. And there were there were some other things that were that were not working for me and that I did not feel comfortable keeping my children in that situation. And he listened and he was kind but it was, he had no idea what I

was talking about. It just looked like he kind of looked like a deer in the headlights and he didn't know what to say. And we just said You know, we want to be friends with everyone in the world and we appreciate everything but but we are done. We're not coming back. We don't want to be, you know, asked to come back, you know, we don't want anyone, you know, knocking on our door trying to get us to come back all the time. So, so he was respectful of that. And, and that was that was kind of the end there. So.

**Karin Peter** 24:30

So what happened from that point? Because that's not the end of your story, though.

**Diana Wake** 24:36

Yeah, it's not. So we my husband and I both felt like we still really wanted spirituality in our lives and we wanted to find, you know, a way to have it in our home. And we got interested in looking at other religions and we didn't, we didn't have a good reference point we didn't really know where to start. And so we went to Google and we started just looking at different places. And we were mainly looking for congregations that were affirming and inclusive, and that ordained women and we thought, you know, if they meet those checkboxes, then they're at least worth, you know, visiting and checking out that's a, at least a jumping off point. So we, I just, I felt like Community of Christ was the best place to start because it was our restoration cousins who started in the same place but ended up somewhere very different and, and I was really curious. So that was when we made our first visit to Community of Christ, which was we went to the Pocatello congregation which was about an hour away from where we lived, so that's that was how we got there.

**Karin Peter** 26:02

That was your that was your first encounter then with Community of Christ. Did, had you when you were doing your research, if you will, via Google and finding places what were What did you think you would find when you went to the congregation?

**Diana Wake** 26:22

I really didn't know I'd never been to any other church service and so you know, we went dressed in Sunday, Sunday best right what you know LDS people would consider Sunday best with you know, our our little boys in ties and suits and all the things and and we stuck out like a sore thumb. When we went down there it was. It was a very small congregation. It was a lot fewer people than I expected. And and it was a lot more casual and relaxed. And then what I had seen church be before so it was very.

**Karin Peter** 27:06

And so what happened to to you when you show up in the Community of Christ congregation? Were you able to just disappear afterwards and process together what that was like?

**Diana Wake** 27:16

No, everyone, you know, was really friendly and was very welcoming. And our dear friend Mary from Pocatello was brave enough to come over and chat with me. And she asked me I think one of the first things she asked was, are you a seeker? And I looked at her kind of confused because I hadn't heard that before. And I thought she was talking about Harry Potter and I just had no context for that. And I



was like, I don't know. And she was like, Are you from the LDS church? And I was like, Yes. That's, yeah, that word I know. And so, and she said, just so you know, there are There's a small group that meets in my home once a month and I also live in Idaho Falls and a lot of the people, you know, the members there also come from LDS backgrounds, and you are welcome to join us. And I thought, oh, okay, well, that seems just too easy, almost. But I, I took her up on that. So

**Karin Peter** 28:27

you did take her up on that. In fact, you became one of the I guess we could call founding members of that small group that meets in her in her living room.

**Diana Wake** 28:38

Yeah, definitely.

**Karin Peter** 28:40

So what were your early experiences at that point, when you would come to to the small group, we talked a little bit about this when you are on Project Zion on the panel that talked about house church. But that was in a more general sense. So how did your early experiences and coming To that small group fit in with where you were in your faith journey?

**Diana Wake** 29:08

It was really the perfect place for me at the perfect time. And it was right as all of this was going on. It was right as you know, I was having this huge faith crisis. And the big problem that I was having was I felt like I didn't have anyone to talk to I had my husband, luckily, but as for, you know, friends and family, they were all active believing members and I, I just didn't feel like they could, you know, understand or that I could really talk about the full extent of what I was feeling, you know, without offending them. And so, the, the first time that I met with you guys with you, Karin and JoAnn and Mary, and we sat down and and you asked me about it and you are all already very fluent in everything that I was feeling and what I've been dealing with. And I'm sure you guys have come across a lot of people leaving the LDS background who have experienced similar things. And it was it was just really, really wonderful to have a place where I could just talk about it openly and there were people who understood and could listen and, you know, as we went on for those next couple of months and meetings, and I got to know the other people in the group, they had been through similar things. They were all somewhere with the LDS church, either attending or not dealing with the family issues of, you know, not believing when your family believes and, and we'd all had to deal with those same issues, the same things. had brought me to that point it all brought them there as well. And so, at first, it honestly was more of a support group and I, I felt a little bit bad always just feeling like I was unloading but it was a really safe space where I felt like I could do that and, and it was okay and and then as time went on, and I started healing from that and moving on, it's just it's been a good place to have friends and to, to find spirituality and to start kind of rebuilding and re putting things together.

**Karin Peter** 31:46

When you have been coming for a while, when you'd been coming for all and you would go home. Did you talk to your spouse about, about your experiences at Community of Christ?

**Diana Wake** 31:57

Yes, I always came home raving I'd go to house church at seven and come home after 10. And he'd be ready for bed and he would say, How was it? And I would say it was great. I can't, I can't believe I can't believe that all of these other people understand the same things that I feeling and, and they've dealt with it and this, you know, this church has been through faith crisis, this church has had to grapple with the same things I'm grappling with. And I kept being just pleasantly surprised at how good of a fit it was for me.

**Karin Peter** 32:37

So how's your family responding to your shift because now you haven't just left your ward but you're actively participating in a different faith community. So how's that going over with family members?

**Diana Wake** 32:52

It's it's a little mixed. We've had we've had a lot of good support my husband's family has been really open and accepting and really great at just not treating us any differently not making us feel feel weird about it. And, you know, my mom was kind of the same way. I also have had family members who have really just backed off and just don't, don't talk and don't interact with us as much anymore, which is which has been hard and, and surprising. So, you know, it's a little bit of both i don't i don't think you know, our families know a whole lot about Community of Christ or, or you know, what we're doing with it yet, but, um, but from, at least what they know, overall it's been, it's been generally positive or neutral, or at least if they don't like it. They haven't made it hard on us for the most part. So

**Karin Peter** 34:02

So where are you now on your faith journey? So you've taken us kind of through your growing up and then the concerns and your shelf breaking and your process after that, where would you consider yourself now?

**Diana Wake** 34:17

I feel like I'm very, very slowly rebuilding. It hasn't happened quickly. I feel like I'm kind of a toddler. Again, I'm learning how to walk with God and talk with God again, and it's you know, it's a little bit awkward and it's, it's different and it's, um, I don't know I don't think we've we've come into a place where everything just feels normal yet, but I feel happy with it anyway, I feel I feel a lot of peace with just being able to Look at spirituality through a lens of what, what I need or what feels right instead of trying to follow a prescribed path. And so it's, you know, it's a slow process and it's changing. And I, I think we have a long road ahead of us and it'll just keep changing and keep learning and that's okay.

**Karin Peter** 35:24

And there have been pieces that have been helpful as you've been rebuilding from, from what you said as a toddler rebuilding what it is to walk with God again?

**Diana Wake** 35:34

Yeah, I mean, being part of house church is a big part of that. It's, it's a place where it's informal enough that we can talk about some of the messy parts, but, you know, I still get to be part of something bigger and look at how look at how religion can work and how, you know, finding new ways



to, to pray or new ways to look at scriptures. And, you know, I'm kind of just taking it in and it's just, it's nice to know that I don't have to have all the answers now and I can, I can just it can just change it can, can evolve.

**Karin Peter** 36:22

What what's been most challenging in this rebuilding period for you?

**Diana Wake** 36:28

Um, part of it is, is just being in uncharted territory, finding my place, you know, I mean, even a couple of years ago, I would have never expected ever that I would leave the church. And so, you know, there's not a roadmap anymore. And I was raised very much thinking about things in black and white and good and bad and that all of my choices, you know, I needed to ask God or ask someone in authority what the right answer was, and really not developing a sense of how to make those decisions for myself. And so that has been challenging, but it has been a good challenge in that. I'm learning how to, to listen more to myself and to my own spiritual needs and trust myself a little bit more and not looking so much for someone else to tell me what I need to do or believe.

**Karin Peter** 37:34

So what are your hopes going forward on this journey? What's next for you and what do you envision as as where that will leave?

**Diana Wake** 37:47

Kind of like I said before, like I am happy with where I'm at, but I also know that it's it's going to keep changing and it's going to shift. I'm looking forward to finding new ways to deepen my spirituality. I feel like there's, there's so much that I haven't even gotten to yet. I just feel like there's just so much depth and, and so I'm looking forward to finding that. I'm hoping, moving forward that we can find new traditions and spiritual practices for our family and ways for our kids to develop, you know, a relationship with God and find their spiritual paths and build on that. So that's, that's what I'm hoping for.

**Karin Peter** 38:43

So now you come to the house church as a family. Yes, yes. So tell us a little bit about that.

**Diana Wake** 38:51

Yeah, we it's, everyone's been really, really great about being so sweet and welcoming. To our little kids, but also they're kind of rambunctious and wild. And so I was hesitant to bring them because I just didn't. You know, I didn't want to ruin the experience for anybody else. So I think I think we've only had, I mean, we've been kind of quarantined now. So it's been a change, but at least I think that they are at least getting some exposure. So we're still kind of trying to figure out, you know, how that works and how it looks with little kids. But, you know, everyone's been kind and loving to them, and they, they like being there. And I think even if it's just a small takeaway, that they're getting there, at least realizing that this is, this is a good place where they feel loved and you know, it's something that is important to us.

**Karin Peter** 39:59

So what would you if you met someone who was in the kind of early part of a, of a similar faith transition? They are putting things on the shelf and the shelf was getting to the breaking point, what would you say to them?

**Diana Wake** 40:16

I would tell them to be gentle and kind with themselves and to trust their instincts. I think I was really hard on myself for a really long time. And I blamed myself for things that really were not my fault. And so I would tell people to, to have compassion for themselves. If you run up against dogma that makes you feel sick, your assumption shouldn't be that it's somehow your fault, or that you're wrong. I would tell them to sort through their shattered pieces of God To save the ones that are worth keeping, because there are certainly beautiful things worth keeping, and to to learn to be comfortable with the uncertainty. I'm still learning to practice this, but I, I do think it's okay if you don't believe the same things you did yesterday. And it's okay when your beliefs change again next week. And if you think that you've got it all figured out, you will probably miss out on finding something more true or more beautiful. So being open to change can be a good thing.

**Karin Peter** 41:40

Diana, I want to thank you for being open in sharing your story with us today. And articulating it in such a lovely way. Any last thoughts you want to share? Before we come to a close?

**Diana Wake** 41:57

I just want to thank you for having me on here. I was really nervous at first about doing this because it is, you know, really personal and vulnerable. But I've found a lot of peace and comfort when I get to hear other people's stories. And I realized that, you know, so many of us have gone through the same things. And it's it's a conversation that I'm really grateful to be a part of now.

**Karin Peter** 42:25

And we're grateful to have it with you. We look forward to our continued journey together. So thank you again to Diana Wake from Idaho for being with us today here on Fair Trade Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin. Peter, thanks so much for listening.

**Josh Mangelson** 42:49

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