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Project Zion Podcast

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

Robin Linkhart 0:33

Welcome to another episode of Project Zion podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart, and today we are talking about ordination and Community of Christ post faith transition. I am delighted to welcome two amazing women and dear friends of mine, Brittany Mangelson and Nancy Ross. Brittany and Nancy grew up The LDS Church come from a long line of Mormon heritage and over the last several years, found their way to Community of Christ, Nancy and Brittany currently serve in the office of elder. Welcome Brittany and Nancy. We want you to tell us a little bit more about you so our listeners can get to know who you are today. Before we dive into the deep end of today's stories, and topics first, Brittany, who is probably very well known to many of our listeners, but usually is sitting on my side of the microphone. So Brittany, tell us a little bit about you today.

Brittany Mangelson 1:45

Yes, I'm no stranger to Project Zion, but I must admit that being on the interviewer side is a little bit easier than being the interviewee. But I am Brittany Mangelson. I live in Saratoga Springs, Utah, which is sandwiched between Salt Lake in Provo, which basically means it's the heart of Utah and in the midst of a lot of Mormonism, and I live here with my husband, Josh, who edits for the podcast, and then my three kids, Sophie, Lilly, and Grant. And we attend the Salt Lake congregation where I serve as a member of the pastor leadership team. And I also work full time for Community of Christ as the social media secret ministry specialist for the church, which means that I support Latter-day Seeker Ministry on the internet in a variety of ways, including helping out with this podcast. So that's us in a nutshell, I serve in my congregation as an elder, and in this time of COVID-19, we've just been doing everything online and keeping things afloat that way, and it keeps me plenty busy.

Robin Linkhart 2:54

Thanks, Britt. Nancy, tell us about you.

Nancy Ross 2:58

So I am the pastor of the southern Utah emerging congregation with Community of Christ. And I live in St. George, Utah with my husband and two daughters. And I am a professor at the local university. And I do a lot of interdisciplinary kinds of research. I've been participating in the Mormon feminist community for a long time and I blog at the Exponent. Yeah. And so just glad to be here.

Robin Linkhart 3:28

Well, we are really glad to have both of you with us. Today, we want to talk about what it was like to transition from the Mormon Church, to the Community of Christ, and then to become ordained ministers as women. These two churches, as many of our listeners know, share 14 years of founding heritage. But following the assassination of Joseph Smith, Jr, the founding prophet. These two groups took very different trajectories. Now there were a lot of groups that splintered off, but two expressions flourished to one degree or another. A large number of folks followed Brigham Young out west to become what we might call the Utah Mormons. Those known today as Community of Christ stayed behind, and in 1860, reorganized under the leadership of Joseph Smith the third, some similarities remain between the two restoration traditions. And I would say that if we diagrammed the two priesthood structures on a flowchart, they would look kind of close to the same. But I'll tell you how many would say that is where the similarities and in Community of Christ all are called to engage in the mission of Christ. Some are called by God to priesthood to serve in specific purposes or roles, and each of those represents a different part of Jesus ministry. In the Community of Christ priesthood is considered a sacred covenant with God and the church. And we recognize the Office of member or disciple as having duties and responsibilities that are absolutely essential to the mission of the church. We also have two orders of priesthood erotic and caustic. So calls to the offices of deacon, teacher and elder originate in the congregation and now those calls come through the pastor's both males and females are eligible. And in the US and several other nations that includes LGBTQ+, occasionally and Community of Christ. In the present day older teens are called to serve an ordained ministry, but I would say generally speaking and I would say the vast majority of folks are called at college age or older. If a call is accepted, the individual takes classes to prepare for ordination and serving in ministry and the first call to priesthood consists of three classes of preparation. Each call must also be approved by a majority vote of the congregation. There is no progression of offices. So for example, my first call to priesthood was to the office of elder I was 39 years old. I currently serve as an apostle and the council of 12 apostles. My husband most called to deacon in his early 20s, soon after we were married, and that was the office he loved and thrived in and had absolutely no desire to serve in any other office. So that's just a quick a high level overview of priesthood and Community of Christ. And now Nancy, I'm going to ask you to give us an overview, overview of priesthood in the LDS Church.

Nancy Ross 7:13

Okay, so we have an in the LDS Church many of the same titles of offices. These days, deacons can be ordained as young as 11. And that applies to pretty much all boys, aged 11 and so the LDS church ordains children. then two years later, boys are ordained to the office of teacher and then two years after that to the office of priest when typically when young men are getting ready to serve on a mission to serve a mission when they are 18. They are ordained to the office of elder and if you're familiar with the LDS church, we typically call the top call the missionaries, the elders, but all of the offices of the aaronic priesthood are really held by teenage boys. So it is teenage boys who bless and pass and prepare communion on a Sunday. And that is a great extent of their responsibility. Sometimes they also assist with collecting tithing and offerings. It but but mostly only if you live in Utah will you get deacons knocking on

your door on a Sunday? So that that that really is what priesthood looks like for the aaronic priesthood and for men and of course no women are ordained to priesthood offices in the LDS church. And so for men, they are elders and they, and they are elders until at some point someone determines that they can be a high priest and elder elders and high priests serve the community in a variety of ways. They help by witnessing and performing ordinances of a variety of different kinds. They are, they hold a lot of offices, administrative offices in the church, and they help run in congregations. And then in the upper levels of administration, there are further offices and including, you know, stake president and 70. And, yeah, the structure is really, it's a very hierarchical structure. You move from you know, you start with deacon and then you move through offices, usually at particular kinds of ages. And that's, that's how that works. So it's in many ways it's almost like a developmental priesthood, you know, that you kind of start at a particular stage in life, and then at various stages you advance to to an office The higher the office, the more responsibility and ritual authority you have.

Robin Linkhart 10:05

Okay, thanks for that overview. Brittany, do you have anything to add to that?

Brittany Mangelson 10:10

Yeah, I think I have two things. So the foundational definition of priesthood, an LDS person would say it is the power of God, that men are that men are able to act in God's name. And so it's, it's very literal, it's very authoritative. Mormons believe that they're the only ones with true priesthood. And so it's, it's, it is an office, but it's also the power of God. And so with that, no matter what office you hold, you have the authority to speak in God's name that holds a different weight than if you don't have priesthood. One thing that's interesting that I brushed up against because I, my first call in Community of Christ, and we'll get to that, but was to the office of priest and I was trying to figure out when that came what a priest was in the LDS church and I realized that the LDS church and the aaronic priesthood, Nancy kind of mentioned this, but it really is a preparatory priesthood the function of it is not parallel at all to Community of Christ. I feel like when you start getting into melchisedec offices, there is a little bit more of an overlap. But because in the LDS church, you're dealing with young boys, they're not learning how to be peacemakers. They're not learning how to be ministers of hospitality, like a deacon would be. They're not learning how to do a lot of family ministry or relationship building or community building. That's not what the 12, 13, 14 year old boys are learning. And so it's really, really focused at that stage in the LDS priesthood structure to prepare yourself for your mission to become an elder. It's not something that anyone expects they'll stay in for the rest of their life. And so it's more of a rite of passage that you graduate through once you hit the certain age for the next advancement. And so I have just found that in communicating about the two priesthoods, it's just speaking two different languages, even though there's a lot of shared words there. But again, the underlying assumption of what people are talking about when they talk about the priesthood in the LDS Church is the literal power of God that Mormons hold, and they do not believe that anyone else has the authority of priesthood.

Nancy Ross 12:36

I would just like to add on to that Brittany, I think that's that's exactly right priesthood is the power the power of God in the LDS tradition. And because priesthood is the power of God and nearly all men and teenage boys hold the priesthood in the LDS tradition. And the priesthood is something that really is supposed to command a lot of respect. Therefore, there is a lot of additional respect and talk about respecting priesthood and respecting the office of, of someone's priesthood and honoring priesthood. And sometimes that refers to the person and sometimes that refers to the office. But often those things really aren't well articulated. And so but there is a kind of inherent demand that that priesthood be given a special respect and honor in the community. And I think that that's, that's very obvious, you know, in LDS communities.

Robin Linkhart 13:32

Alrighty, so now I want to give each of you some time to tell your story. First, give us a quick overview of how you came to be a member of Community of Christ. And then I would like you to tell us the whole story about your call to priesthood to and how that played out for you in your lived experience. And let's start with Brittany.

Brittany Mangelson 13:58

All right, so I think it's important to note and I have talked about this before on the podcast, but really what catapulted me out of the LDS church and led me to seeking and Community of Christ was the excommunication of Kate Kelly, who was the founder of the Ordain Women movement. This was all happening when I had toddler twins and a newborn. And so I really was in the camp of, "women have enough to do we don't need the priesthood. I don't want to be ordained." And yet I would have considered myself a faithful Mormon feminist. And I was very supportive of ordaining women and questioning and asking and even lobbying with their actions that they were doing, to start a conversation. And I was very eagerly watching this because I thought, you know, maybe at some point in my life, that could be something that I would find value in. And then church leadership refused to have conversation with Ordain Women. It was very, very painful in a variety of ways, and it's ultimately ended in Kate Kelly's excommunication. And I was absolutely devastated. And I shouldn't say ended because Ordain Women is still going. But a lot of the motivation and fire under them was just put out. And I was very torn up about it more so than I thought that I was going to be and that and that scared me and I was already on a path of transitioning out of the LDS church. I was already deep into a faith transition. And that was just kind of what what made me really say I need to take a break, I need to step away. And so we found Community of Christ, my husband had been going off and on for a little bit and we we went to reunion. I've told this story so many times on the podcast, but but basically, we went to reunion and recognizing that women truly were equal in Community of Christ was alarming it was it was uncomfortable for me because I wasn't used to being treated as my husband's equal. And the following week we attended church at the Salt Lake congregation, we had a little seeker gathering participated in communion for the first time. I'm thinking Robin that you facilitated that. And it's, it's still even even seeing your ministry at reunion and even that Sunday, it still didn't like click with me how much the LDS church was missing by not ordaining women. I just really thought that it was cool that this new

church did. But a few weeks later, I had asked you, Robin, to come down. You were living north of Salt Lake and we're south of Salt Lake. And I had requested that you come and give me what I call the blessing at the time. So the sacrament of administration laying on of hands. And that's a really meaningful sacrament for the Mormon feminist committee in particular, and I had never experienced that with a woman before and I wanted to. And so I asked you and you came down and we had a great time and a really meaningful time. And that was the moment that I really realized how much the LDS church was missing. It wasn't just this demand for equality. It was there's a huge void of ministry that's not happening. And there's no reason why it shouldn't be happening. And so for me, the conversation of the ordination of women kind of shifted in that moment. And I think, I don't know why I had that experience with that sacrament as opposed to Communion, because I absolutely love communion. And, and maybe, maybe it's just because laying on of hands was a bit more personal. It wasn't a scripted prayer. It wasn't something I was used to. I didn't really know what to expect. But it was it was something that's always been done at the hands of men and so to have that done by a woman was just hugely, hugely impactful for me. So we, we, this was the summer of 2014. And we joined in the in January of 2015. And by August, I had my priesthood call to the office of priest, and I struggled with it. And I've been open about that struggle, it was very, very odd that feeling like I was completely rejected and pushed out of my LDS community, to then being this total newbie who didn't know anything who was just soaking up all the answers to all the questions that I was asking to them within just a few months being seen as a leader. I really, really struggled with that. But recognize that very quickly, I was the one answering the questions that I had just been asking a couple weeks before because there were so many new people coming and when we when we joined There had been a lot of secret families coming in and out. But I hadn't really seen any families that had stuck it out who had joined and had, you know, really committed and said, we're gonna raise our kids in this community. And so I kind of had this idea or this thought of like, somebody has to be the first one, there has to be a family that's going to stick. And it might as well be us. And that's honestly kind of the the attitude that I had about priesthood too, because somebody had to be the seeker that said, yes, that then could turn around and help people on that path. And I had so many insecurities and so many struggles with it. And I knew that I was going to mess up and I knew that I didn't know enough and I knew that people would probably see me outside of the community would probably see me as like, Oh, look, she got what she wanted. She's now working you know, that's Why she left the LDS church and now she's getting what she wants. And I was really insecure about that because I really almost turned the call down, because I was just so insecure about it. But I did end up having, you know, a pretty intense, what I consider to be a spiritual experience just recognizing that there were so many women that came before me that would have given anything to have their ministry validated by priesthood, or to be able to participate in sacramental ministry, both in Community of Christ and in the LDS church and within a variety of branches within the restoration. And I just kind of recognized again, that somebody had to say, yes, if I really believed in the mission of this church, if I believed in how we articulate Christ mission that I had to say, yes, somebody had to say yes, and I was being asked to. And so I was I was going to do it. I didn't know anything about the office of priest because again, in the LDS church, there's no equivalent. The priest in the LDS church is completely different from a priest in Community of Christ. And so I didn't, I felt like I had no foundational understanding of what it even was. And

so the classes did help the temple school classes. But I also just reached out to people I was connected with other priests in Community of Christ just to learn what the Ministry of a priest was about. And I really realized that it fit me very, very well, the idea of Jesus's ministry as friendship. It's relational based, it's a little less mission focused, if you will. So it felt like I didn't, I wasn't bringing any sort of agenda to my ministry. I was there to build relationships and to build bridges with families and how do we help parents teach about the mission of Christ and how do we build a community, this community that was being built in Salt Lake? How do we foster relationships within the congregation? I was less worried about, you know, outside of the walls and more focused on what was happening inside of the walls. And I really think that the idea of Jesus's mission as a friend, Jesus's ministry, as a friend is still where my ministry thrives. I don't want people to think that I have an agenda. When they come through our doors. I would much much rather maintain a relationship with people even if they step away from Community of Christ, because I don't want it to be about numbers or people in the pews or who we baptize. And so I really, really got comfortable with the Office of priest because I just felt like it could. It could liberate my personality and my enthusiasm about mission but again, people would find out But I couldn't confirm them. So, it was like, okay, so you're safe, like, you're not gonna just try to get me to join. And I'm like, No, I just want to have a relationship with you and, and it just it was a really safe, comfortable office. So, I was ordained a priest, April 2016. And served in that for a couple of years. And again, was really, really happy with it. I mean, I really love the Office of priest. And then in the summer of 2018, I went to what I thought was just a regular pastoral meeting with my pastor and my other co counselor. And then I got presented a preset call to the office of elder and if Blair White is listening to this, I guess I should publicly apologize for laughing in your face because that's what happened. I was very, very surprised. It was not something that I saw coming and I, again, had been so comfortable with the office of priest that I just didn't even know how to respond to the idea of being an elder. And, again, I think that I just kind of had this funnel vision of what an elder is or what an elder should be. And I'm realizing that I was probably mistaken and not liberating the office of elder in the way that it should be. But I was really hesitant to say yes, again, I was very comfortable as a priest and I had no idea how I was supposed to rework my ministry to fit the office of elder that's how I felt like that's what I, that's what I felt I needed to do. Since then I recognize that maybe I was already functioning as an elder in a lot of different ways. And so, but that that's been a long realization, a very long realization and something that I'm still wrestling with. So, I think that, you know, there's a big part of me that wherever my ministry takes me for the rest of my life, I am really grateful I had that foundation of being a priest. And I think that in many, many ways, the office priest will always be kind of where my heart sits. And a while ago, I interviewed apostle Janne' Grover, and she kind of said the same thing. And I was like, Oh, that makes me so happy because I really truly feel like Jesus's ministry as a friend is just where my heart sits. But it, ordained ministry has really pushed me and pulled me out of my comfort zone. And it has really, it's just it's been very interesting, again, going from the girl who felt very pushed out of her faith community to then turning around and now being the one that's inviting, and answering the same questions that I once asked. And so, ordination has not come easy to me with either call. I kind of wanted to turn around and run away. But I did say yes, and I don't regret it and it's been just really Sacred and humbling to see the trust that people put in my ministry. Because most of the time I feel like I just need more grace than I'd care to admit. But

it's been really amazing to have my daughter's see me officiate baptisms and confirmations, and weddings and things like that. And just knowing that this is their normal life, it's so different from what I grew up with. So, I don't take any of it for granted. And I really, really am mindful of all of the women and the men whose shoulders we stand on. Because it was not an easy journey for the church to get here. And it was not an easy journey for me to get here. So those are my reflections on my ministry.

Robin Linkhart 26:46

Thanks, Brittany. Now, let's go to Nancy and share your story now.

Nancy Ross 26:53

In many ways, I think my story begins somewhere around 2011. I read a book called by scholar Gary Macy, called something like the Hidden History of women's ordination in the West. And reading that book was really quite a turning point for me and I, where I came to believe that maybe women had been ordained in the past. And because they had been ordained in the past, they could be ordained in the future. And I was very LDS at this time. And I was probably beginning to sense a call. So I began to develop a testimony or a belief that women should be ordained. And maybe also, I think, at this time, maybe syncing a call that I would like to participate in that and that sounded good and right to me, but also, I wasn't able to tell anyone, even my husband for like, more than a year because it I was just filled with so much shame about it. Because I was participating in the Mormon feminist community at that time, and I still am and at that time, it was kind of like Well, the good Mormon feminists don't talk about things like ordination and priesthood. But changing this change of belief, which was very internal and very private, suddenly pushed me into the bad Mormon feminist camp. I wasn't really sure what to do with that. When the Ordain Women movement popped up in March of 2013, I submitted my profile because they were collecting profiles of people who believed in the ordination of women, and I submitted my profile the very, very same day that it popped up. And because because I felt like I've been waiting, like I've been waiting for something and, and, and this was apparently the thing. So I was involved with Ordain Women. I was on the board of Ordain Women. And, and, and I learned some really hard lessons about advocacy during that time. And that was really painful. A lot, a lot good lessons, a lot of painful lessons in my involvement with ordain women. So I was very involved in and I was throughout the time that I was participating in Ordain Women. I was teaching Relief Society on a Sunday. So the women's, the women's lesson, I had also met Robin at about this time, maybe about the summer of 2014 or so. She was at feminist Mormon girls camp. And I think saying For Everyone Born at the talent show with Katie Langston, and that was really beautiful. And I really remember that and then I remember Robin answering our questions about Community of Christ and the thing that pushed me out of the LDS church was ultimately the exclusion policy. And I didn't know that that would be my last straw, but it was and then Robin helped us form a new tiny congregation here in St. George, the southern Utah congregation. We had a number of people participate in that congregation. And, you know, at that time, I was just sad and confused. Because leaving the space that I felt that I devoted my life to, but felt felt very pushed out of was just devastating. And that's, that's, I think, sometimes not emphasized enough, the the grief and the loss and all of that. And then, in the first few months, we had some people participating who

are no longer participating, and that's fine. But some of those other people had really taken charge and done a lot of organizing with the congregation and I was playing the piano, I think at that time, which is a very surreal thing to be in new and a religious tradition and playing hymns that are very unfamiliar. Sitting down at the piano thinking every Sunday What am I doing, you know, like, I think I'm supposed to be here, but I do not understand this. Um, But also finding, thinking, feeling there was something good. Um, and later that year, it was kind of at the end of that year, the end of my first year of participating in this congregation that I decided that I wanted to be confirmed. And that was, that was good and lovely in the LDS Church is often a push to, to undergo baptism and confirmation very quickly. And I had resisted that. And I had received some advice that you know, it was okay to take this really slowly. And I'm really glad that I did. And so I felt like by the time that I was confirmed, I had really, I knew what I was getting into. And, and I'd already been quite involved in the congregation for a year and felt good about that. And at that time when I was confirmed, our pastor was Emily Rose, and who is very involved in the congregation, but not there every Sunday because she lives in Southern California. And so we saw her about once or twice, really twice a month. And so I was doing a lot of organizing for the congregation, especially on those Sundays when Emily was not present. And I enjoyed that I've often done organizing sorts of things in my life. And that just kind of felt right. I started to realize that maybe I had, I had for a very long time, maybe all the way back to 2011 felt a call to priesthood. And like with my feelings about confirmation, I also felt like it probably just needed to be a slow thing and it would happen in its own time and which is exactly what happened. And it was in the spring of I think it was in like maybe it was in like march of 2018 And when Emily Rose came to St George she typically stayed with me and my family and we loved her and still love her and and through all this pandemic nonsense, miss her and miss the people that we see in our lives and those good connections. But often what would happen on a Sunday evening after the service is that we would eat dinner and I'd need to walk the dog, my dogs and Emily would come with me on and we would kind of like walk the dogs and just talk about ministry things and, and that was kind of our tradition, and it's really nice tradition. And so on one of these walks, I think it was in March 2018. Emily was like, you know, I've received permission to be able to tell you that, you know, you will be extended a call to the office of elder and I was just I was like, ready to wait this out for a while, you know, with like patients and trying to grow into things and just saying, you know, I kind of come to me like this is just going to take a while. That's okay. And so when it when it happened, it was it was a surprise. And it was a surprise and it felt like shockingly more complex than I had really anticipated. And Brittany and I've talked about this a number of times before and I didn't think it would be as complicated as it felt when it happened. And so I took started my classes to prepare for for ordination and that was good. One of the things she said to me when she told me the news that that I would be extended the the opportunity to be ordained to the office of elder. She said that something that had been very clear to her in the process, in the call process which is kind of a lengthy, which I understand to be a fairly lengthy process was that, um, elders were, I think she is the words The office of elder was in ministry of blessing and I had really begun. In the years prior to that, I had first started giving blessings at Mormon feminist girls camp, you know, a few years before and had felt quite nervous to do such a thing initially because it felt like breaking a huge taboo. And I, I've mostly been a fairly strict rule follower my whole life. So to break taboos was, it was a big deal, or it felt like a big deal. But I had engaged

in this practice and felt so such an outpouring of love and spirit in the process and community and in the process of these blessings and had gone on to write a lot of blessings for people and I've written blessings for a number of people who have not been able to be with to to give a blessing in and when she said that, it was like, Oh, yeah, maybe that's maybe that's the right thing. You know, it was one of these moments, it was a, where I had a lot of feelings. And one thing that really began to creep up in that moment was the sense that that the part of that there was part of me that was deeply uncomfortable with being ordained, and that I was mostly like 95% on board with this as a good idea. But there was like, a part of me that still just wanted to like, be able to sit comfortably in an LDS church and in an LDS congregation, and not be a weirdo that really resisted. And this kind of came to a head about a few days before I was, was ordained. Robin remembers this, where I may have had a big meltdown at Sunstone And, and, and Robin assured me that this was pretty normal. And I talked with Robin at that time I talked with my friend Lisa Butterworth. And we and and Lisa is a therapist, so she's so great at like talking through these things and she's like, well, there's just a part of you that is like this very traditional Mormon, you know, and right now she is like screaming and fighting to like drive the bus and she doesn't get to drive the bus, but we're going to invite her to your ordination. And I was like, that's a terrible idea. Like she's, she's gonna ruin everything like that, that is a terrible idea. And Lisa's like, no, this is a good idea.

And because I trust Lisa, I trusted her. And so, I you know, spent a few days trying to make peace with this particular part of myself so that we could invite her to the ordination. Um, I had to the planning this the ordination. took place and maybe a slightly unusual spot. So I was ordained an elder in Community of Christ at Mormon feminist girls camp. by Robin, Brittany was there my pastor Emily was there and it was a really, really beautiful, wonderful outdoor service in the mountains with many people I love and, and many more and really mostly Mormon feminists to, to kind of celebrate in many ways, just not just ordination for me, but the idea that women can be ordained and claim power and have institutional power and, and, and kind of overcome all the things I think I'm still trying to figure out, and so many ways what it means to be a former Mormon woman who is now ordained in the melchisedec priesthood of all things. It was just it was just a very beautiful moment and very beautiful blessing. I actually have a friend who made an audio recording of the whole thing. And recently I think we, we sang crisis called us to New Visions as the closing hymn, and I played that, because of course, my congregation is meeting online like everybody else's congregation now and I think that that was our him a few weeks ago. The Christ has Called us to New Visions from from the ordination and and I was so happy ultimately, with how that went, and that I've been able to kind of make it through that and that my, you know, inner obedient Mormon woman had not destroyed everything. I think that there were so many things.

It was interesting because I'd had a lot of anxiety, I have anxiety, um, but I'd had particular anxieties. And in the process of being ordained, those anxieties went away. And I kind of interpret this is, I wasn't exactly on the right path before. But as I have come to be on the right path or to find the path I'm called to or to find the path that is best for me and feels good to me, the more some of these anxieties have gone away and being ordained, actually, I think I had felt, if you will, and anxiety around call an ordination for maybe seven years. And that

worry and concern just went away. And that was kind of a strange and unexpected thing. So I continued to help organize my congregation and be very involved and invested and to do lots of on the ground organizing work and that sort of thing. I mean, my congregation is really tiny. So I can't claim that this is, you know, an amazing ton of work. It's very small congregation. But what happened then things were good things were good and things were easy and or they felt good. And I felt like I was growing into my role and then I was learning what it was to, to be an elder to be a minister of blessing. And then I ended up having a meeting with my mission center president, and my pastor, they both came were in St. George. And this was a year ago last this past March. And they asked me to be the new pastor of my congregation. And that like obedient Mormon woman who had been like silent for a year and a half just kind of reared her head again, you know, and, and it was like, I knew that this had been the path that I was on this was likely to happen. But it seemed. It seemed like a really big step. And even though it didn't involve a new ordination of sorts, it felt like a really big step because before I could just say, you know, I help out with my congregation, you know, I'm ordained in Community of Christ, and I help out with my congregation. And that felt like a very comfortable role. I am someone who has always helped out at church. And so that was just like, Sure, yeah. But what, but to be a public leader, or to some degree, a public leader, felt like a very different, like a step that was well outside of my comfort zone.

And that was it. I think at about that time, when I also began to realize that to do the job well, that I might need more knowledge and skills than I had. And I had been super jealous when Brittany went to seminary. And I had been super jealous when several when Gina went to seminary, and then several other friends went to seminary, and, and I had thought, you know, I have a full time job that I love. And you know, I can't we cannot just like pack up and move or go anywhere and it has to be online and, and really I need it to be free. You know, some combination of like, this is never gonna happen. These, these stars are just never going to align. It wasn't long after that. When I started, that I saw our friend Katie Langston, who works for Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, had posted a notice saying that her seminary would be offering full tuition scholarships to all new students. And they had, it was possible to complete a degree fully online. And so, um, so I applied, and I think they had so many applications that it wasn't that they were overwhelmed by, by that, and I did not get a place that first semester and I was quite devastated by that because I was like, No, I need help. But anyway, eventually I did get a place and a scholarship and the ability to be fully online student and, and I have felt quite uncomfortable with being the pastor. Not because I felt like I was doing anything wrong or that it was the wrong thing. But just because this is never a role that I had anticipated for myself. I have not seen a lot of women lead congregations in my life. I've certainly have a wonderful example of Emily who is a fantastic pastor and a great friend and mentor to me and continues to be a great friend and mentor to me, but it was just not something I had ever really anticipated. And seminary has been fabulous in terms of learning to grow into this new role, because there's so much explicit conversation and direction around what it is to be public leader. And I am just about to finish up my second semester. And in my first semester, one of my classes had a required formation group where we, there was a very small group of us and we were led by a retired pastor in the ELCA. And, you know, we were effectively asked to bring all the challenges that we were experiencing in ministry and to talk about them, and we had a

process for analyzing them, you know, osmosis for questions and, and, and as everybody else started talking about all their problems that they were encountering in their current, you know, in their ministerial context, so how I realized that I was the pastor, and that this was a job I could do, and that I had skills for doing this. So I really feel like this whole call an ordination. And being a public minister, which is, which I can't emphasize enough is never is never something as a Mormon woman, I could have anticipated even if even as I was hoping for the ordination of women, and hoping that, you know, women could someday be bishops and state presidents and, you know, the president of the LDS church. I couldn't. There wasn't necessarily room in my imagination to imagine me as a public leader. And seminary has been tremendously helpful for growing into that role for finding new language to describe that role, for being able to talk about my role and do my role, which has brought me a great deal of comfort with the whole idea of ordination were long Julie, I see, you know, my job is to affirm that God loves people. You know that, right? That is my ministry of blessing is to affirm that God, that God loves people. And sometimes people are very in the spaces where we're where I am the pastor, where I am the minister, there are a lot of non believers. And so I have to be able to minister the idea that they are loved. And that there is abundant love, even sometimes without naming God explicitly, because sometimes it's not always right in the right context, in the context that I move in, but just naming that people are loved and valued, and they have worth and dignity. The enduring principles are such a useful thing sometimes in in, in the marginal spaces where I often find myself ministering to people, but I feel that call now. And I know I'm on the right train. I felt that for a while. And one thing I have understood too, is that that ministry and public ministry and being responsible for people is at least spiritually means training means engaging with what should we be doing? What should we not be doing means respecting people's boundaries, you know, to a very large extent. You know, I think people like you said, Brittany, I think people often think that I have an agenda like I'm out to convert the whole of St. George to Community of Christ. And that is really not true at all. I know that largely the people of St. George do not want that. But they do want to be able to hear that they're, that they are loved, and that they are valued or that God loves them. Even if many people feel like leaving the LDS church they have turned their back on God. That is almost the most important time to be able to say, you know that that is not a thing that can happen. So, yeah, it's, I still feel like I am on this journey to figuring out what this whole priesthood thing means. But I do feel that for me anyway, it means continuing education and learning to grow into a space of not just say, Well, this is a fun, volunteer job, what it is, and, but also saying, I'm responsible for something that's very sacred, which is, you know, companioning with people in their spiritual lives, and that is not something we just do on like a wing and a prayer. Prayer is good, but like not a wing and a prayer because people's emotional safety and their spiritual safety, you know, is, is precious and sacred And needs to be respected as as like a priority one. So, so that's that's kind of what where I feel like I am with this whole ordination thing, you know?

Robin Linkhart 50:19

Yeah, I think you've said a lot of things that are so critically important and just identifying the journey of life. Both Nancy and Brittany have talked about their personal journey and relationship with self in the context of your whole life. And working through all those things. I think one thing that's been really interesting in Latter Day seeker ministry, and I was part of

Community of Christ Latter-day Seeker ministry team in the early days before we were present in Salt Lake City in an intentional way, helped right many of the resources that we use with latter-day secret ministries. And that team was made up of lifelong Community of Christ as well as folks who had been raised in the LDS tradition and later transitioned to Community of Christ. None of us predicted the steep learning curve that would be associated with LDS transitioning into Community of Christ and the journey of ordination. And it really kind of shocked us when we were first presenting calls to priesthood in Salt Lake City, Seth Bryant, who grew up in the LDS church was the co-pastor with me and we were presenting these calls and we presented five with five calls at one time and recognize that this was going to be tough because folks hadn't been members official members for a year but everyone had been around for at least a year actively attending and had some good foundation, we had we still, to this day have new people coming in every week. The need was great. I was transitioning out. There were definite calls. I mean, as far as that sense of God confirming, Holy Spirit witness and others, you know, bringing confirmation those calls to us, but it has been a really rough ride. And I think those first five people that said, Yes, they were in this and Brittany can speak to this more in depth, but all of them were on this kind of freefall experience, which we didn't anticipate which kind of threw us into a freefall experience to how do we provide safe space for people to work through this and so many dynamics of the transition multiple layers of relations kinship both in the context of the congregation, but in home life, of coming from a highly patriarchal expression of the restoration tradition, into a be very now a gala. terian expression for both genders and all sexual orientations has been super, super tough. So I want to give space to you, Brittany and Nancy to kind of talk about some of those different layers how they've experienced the live. living through that living with it, continuing to walk with people who are transitioning into Community of Christ, and also being in relationship with lifelong Community of Christ people who to some degree or other don't really have a context for that experience or a deep understanding and how that can shake up the applectart so to speak. So I just want to And up to you to kind of talk about some of those angsty things and different things that you've identified on your journey personally, and also as you walk with others.

Brittany Mangelson 54:12

Yeah, so I was one of those five that Robin mentioned. And I kind of went into a tailspin I, I really would say that I had sensed a call from the time that I came to Community of Christ. And I think a big part of that was just that I was so awestruck about how great Community of Christ was honestly and it Community of Christ kind of solved all of my issues with organized religion and the Joseph Smith story and the Doctrine and Covenants and all these things, and I was so so excited about it. And once I kind of rip the band aid off, and let family and friends know that we were no longer Mormon, I kind of couldn't keep my mouth shut about Community of Christ because I was just so excited about it. And yet, when my call to preset came, I was shocked. In fact, I don't know if you remember this Robin, but I think, well, you and Seth were over at our house. We had just had a little house church experience in my home. And we were sitting on our couch and I had a cup of water. And I somehow fumbled and threw it on myself. And so I had to go change my pants because I was soaking wet. Like it was so embarrassing. And I was so just like physically jittery. And I was not It was almost like an out of body experience. Because I had assumed that whatever was coming was going to come years and years down the road. I

wasn't thinking in just a few months, I was thinking, you know, by the time I have 3,4,5,6 years under my belt, then maybe something would happen. And so it was it was shocking to me because Again, I felt like I still had so many questions I didn't know, my own personal theology, I still was trying to differentiate what was okay to believe in Community of Christ and I still was working in this structure of having right and wrong answers. I was starting to break free from that, but I still was just very much I was not liberated to just sit and rest with God and be okay with mystery and just kind of be okay with wherever God was taking us together. I still needed a checklist. I still needed a clear path forward, I needed easy answers and, and none of that came with the call to ordination. And so I, again, I mean, I hope I didn't sound flippant in my remarks earlier. I don't mean to say like somebody had to be the first but I learned best by seeing other people do things that's just has always been my learning style. I love working side by side with people I love being mentored by other people. just figuring out how to do the thing, whatever the thing is, by working with other people. And I just did not feel like I had that in Community of Christ. I think my congregation had one priest, who had never been Mormon who I love him dearly, but he wasn't necessarily overly enthusiastic about his office. And so I would try to talk to him about it, you know, what is a priest and Community of Christ and he didn't really have solid answers. And it just, I just really struggled with how to frame this. And I know that a lot of women who grew up in Community of Christ, who were a generation or two older than me can relate to this, but I didn't grow up thinking that preset was going to be part of my existence. And so, you know, when you're a little RLDS Boy in the 1970s 60s 70s, you were probably mentored into something by an older man and women weren't. And I wasn't as a Mormon woman. So I just felt like I had not only catch up to do as far as ordination goes, but I was still so new to Community of Christ. And so I was still figuring out the new language, the new sacraments, the new songs, the new scriptures. And then suddenly, I felt like I was being called to turn around and be the person that was being Invitational and helping create this community that I really, really believed in. But I didn't feel like I could offer any amount of ministry to folks, because I still needed ministry. So luckily for me, though, I was able to be connected to folks outside of the congregation and get a little perspective on what the office of priests was and if I remember, right, I had a really, really good conversation with the president of gala at the time Erin Cavanaugh. But she was a priest at the time. And she really, really helped me see ministry through the eyes of Jesus as a friend and his relationship and really recognizing that that particular office should be mindful about the most vulnerable in the community and it's kind of like a down in the dirt. You know, I think she even used images of Jesus walking barefoot with people and you know, friend of the street walker and, and that kind of thing really, really helped me start to see myself as a priest. And so even though the timing still felt just kind of accelerated on my part, I felt confident, to some degree that I, I know that I like that kind of Jesus. And so if if my ministry if I'm being called to emulate Jesus, that Jesus as being a minister, then I can do that. And I don't know what it looked like, I'll probably continually mess up, I probably will have to refer people to other ministers who are smarter than I am or who know the answers. But I was able to step forward. But there was still a lot of baggage that I had to work through as far as my own gender goes and my worthiness. And being a Latter-day seeker woman is tricky. Being a Latter-day Seeker in Utah is tricky, because we're surrounded by Mormon males. And so my neighbors were suddenly aware that I was a minister and I suddenly became a threat to other people. Now that I took on the ministerial role

and that is not something that I was trying to put off, but it was almost like I became competition. And that was something that I wasn't expecting. I think that some male family members that I have felt threatened by it, and just didn't know what to do with it because suddenly, you know, their sister, their niece, their sister in law, their daughter in law, whoever it was, was almost on a similar playing field as far as denominational ministry went. And that was something that I had to work through. So I felt for the first couple of years, I felt like every time I turned around, there was a new something that I had to address. And just when I felt like I was getting comfortable with things, somebody would call my ministry into question or somebody would call my faith into question and especially if it came from a male voice, it would just I would spiral. So yeah, there's just been a lot of baggage that I've had to work through. And sometimes it's hard to not be resentful of it. I mean, sometimes I look at the youth in Community of Christ, who have grown up in Community of Christ, I look at my own daughters. And sometimes it really is hard for me to not think, man, you, you don't. You don't know what it does to you when you are told from a very, very young age that you are not as valuable as your brothers. And you'll never be as valuable as your brothers or as little boys in your primary class. And I'm really grateful that my daughters don't get that messaging. And I'm grateful that the kids in my congregation don't get that messaging. But I still have those voices in the back of my head that come out more frequently than I would like. It's difficult it's been a really difficult journey. And sometimes it's hard to articulate that because I don't want I don't want people to think that I'm being selfish or that I'm being a drama queen. You know, I'm, I'm very apologetic for my feelings, which I also know is not right. But yeah, it's just difficult. being ordained has kind of unrehearsed. A lot of points on my faith transition that I think I would have just blissfully ignored. Had I not been invited to ordained ministry. And yeah, it's just been difficult.

Robin Linkhart 1:03:33

Nancy?

Nancy Ross 1:03:34

Yeah, I just want to, even though I may be experiencing some of these challenges with different triggers. Brittany, I just want to acknowledge that I think I experienced the exact same ones. And that I will probably be unearthing I in my mind. I think of it as excavating my baggage and trying to put things kind of I see it as a process of like, Gotta excavate the thing. The problematic thing, the baggage thing, I got to expose it to air for a while. And that's usually a very upsetting process. And then once it's been exposed to the air, it can start to rock and then become something ground for something else. But it is definitely a process of excavating and sunlight and air and then rotting. And there is none of that that feels very joyful. It mostly feels quite painful. But at the same time, you know that I think you're right, Brittany in the sense that if I wasn't ordained, and if I wasn't a pastor, then I wouldn't have to answer some of these questions. With the same kind of intensity or focus or there probably be a lot more that I could just say, who knows and just kind of Keep going and let it go. But for me, I've had a lot of God questions and I tend to think of conceive of God is like old God new God, with the idea that new God has always been with me, I just hadn't separated out these different ideas and how they were manifesting in my life. And it's very, it feels very complicated. I've had a lot of God

questions I've had a lot of, I feel like there's ongoing gender baggage that has to be excavated. That is that is like a never that will not end there is no like bottom to that pit. It feels and I think I've kind of made peace with the fact that it isn't just that I will be doing some of that work for a little while and then it will come to an end but rather than I will probably be doing it for the rest of my life, and that's at least coming to that realization is better because I don't keep wishing that I will get to the end. Because I've I've been able to stop doing that. That's, that's good. But I've been able to use some some different kinds of tools to help me get through some of these big questions and some of these real moments of tension with like faith and spirituality, and call, which one of which is that I have a spiritual director now. And she is a member of Community of Christ. And she is awesome. She is an awesome spiritual director, and I've probably been seeing her for a year and a half online, because, you know, full time job and there aren't any spiritual directors in southern Utah, that kind of thing. But um, so it's like, as I've been needed to minister and be present to other people, I've needed to pay more attention to the ways in which I need someone I need that time and attention and ministry and spiritual direction has been able to provide that. And that's been really helpful. Because in spiritual direction, we can just kind of open up all these questions and you know, explore explore them. I've also been fortunate that in my seminary programs, I've been required to have things like mentors and be encouraged to do things like spiritual direction and therapy. And that there have been, there's been so much support for learning to be a minister. And that's something I've really realized this past year, which is that if I have to be, if I can and should be present to people, as a pastor, as a minister, I also need that same care and that I can't just, you know, continually be present and patient and non judgmental, you know, or, you know, but that and compassionate but that I also need that too. And again, that wasn't really a model of leadership that I ever saw. You know, mostly it was just give give, give, give, give, give, give, give, give, and then crash and burn out and, hopefully, recover. Again to can like, give give, give, give, give You know, I didn't see real models of like people asking deeper faith questions or wrestling with questions of God that wasn't question questions and questioning, we're not open, openly discussed. Or, or often privately discussed. And so I have had to learn that if I wish to be present and do and live into my call, I have to be attentive to my own spiritual and emotional needs. And that has been an interesting learning process.

Robin Linkhart 1:08:34

That is so so important to life in general. And I think as women we struggle with that even without being more deign to serve in ministry, but certainly, to serve as a minister in any faith. It's critically important that we make space for our relationship with God with ourselves, and we find ways to receive ministry. To be nurtured, and felt. And I mean, obviously it's life giving, it helps us model, a sacred rhythm of being with all the people we journey with, but it's so vitally important to our continued growth and learning and making space and embracing the fact that none of us are perfect and we all make mistakes, and we're going to fall down sometimes and to have that network of support, whether it's spiritual direction mentors, friends, colleagues, others in the congregation or community that helped nurture us to help us stand up again, and continue on our path and embrace that as being part of life and part of learning. It's good to hear both of you as you identify discovering that Your journey and Brittany early on still in that part of your journey where you needed ministry as well. And yet we're

being called to give ministry and and listening to you talk it. You're both in a situation of an on admission ministry with an emerging congregation in St. George, and in Salt Lake where it's just this continuing influx of, of seekers and people in different stages of faith crisis and oftentimes a lot of trauma and dealing with really critically important questions. It's hard, it's really hard to be in the midst of that. But yet it's in many ways it feels like first century Christianity. You know, living in the midst of an oppressive Empire and following Jesus and congregations are small communities gathering together To understand what it looks like, I also just want to ask you a little bit you, you've each talked about this, you both live in a very high demographic, LDS demographic and St. George in Salt Lake City, which, and you both have extended families that are still in the LDS church to some degree or other. And the This continued presence of very defined gender roles, male privilege, male power, and I have to wonder that that doesn't continue to precipitate and press on you in ways that folks and seekers in other parts of the world may not have to navigate the same way but yet, they certainly bring the imprint of that culture with them that impacts them. Do you have any reflections on that?

Nancy Ross 1:11:55

I think it is just a very difficult tension to navigate. You know, with family and with extended family who are still LDS there, there can be almost no conversation about any of this. In my context, people don't know how to have conversations across difference. And so yeah, there's that. So it's, it's like, people know what I'm doing, I think, but it's way too shameful to talk about. And so that and I think I'm mostly to the place where I realized that that's about them and not about me, but like, that doesn't make it good. Is it is an additional strain on relationships. You know, and I see people in my congregation handle, you know, they've got moments of handling things really well with family moments where everything blows up and goes terribly wrong with family. Recently in our congregation there's a there was an ongoing story with with one of our congregants where she had been given a crystal statue by her mom at some point, and then it ended up in the garage and mom saw and, and so many phone calls so many letters, like, like months of, you know, drama and upset for my friend because she had moved, like the religious statue from like the living room to the garage. And sometimes it feels like there's no winning relationally I mean, like we do what we do our best, you know, try to be patient with other people or just not bring up you know, the thing that you know, that they can't handle to talk about, but there it's like we all just need to continue to pretend that we're still active LDS That's what works best. And I don't like that. But that's where we are relationally with a lot of extended family.

Robin Linkhart 1:14:07

Yeah. Brittany, do you have any other reflections on that reality?

Brittany Mangelson 1:14:12

Yeah, well, just to touch on the the gender aspect a little bit. The reality of what I have witnessed in Latter-day Seeker ministry across the board is kind of an overgeneralization but also a pretty accurate one is that faith transitions in marriages impact the gender dynamic, almost 100%. So, when women are finding their voice when they're becoming more empowered, when they are starting to make decisions on their own, which are all things that

are not encouraged in the LDS church, there's actually just a recent study that came out of BYU that just kind of affirms what every Mormon woman has always known is that we were never taught to have our own voice or that our voice mattered, or that our opinions mattered, and Mormon women are definitely culturally taught to divert their thoughts and feelings and voice to the voice of authority, the voice of men. And so when you go through a faith transition, and you are a woman, and you're realizing that and that's, I don't, I don't have to give my voice to the my own. It shakes up a lot of marriages. And I think that it's very destabilizing for a lot of relationships. And even the most sincere feminist leaning men, I think, still struggle with it. And when they are, I mean, I can speak out of my own relationship, my own marriage, my husband and I, we've just recently talked about this that we made very big life decisions, because ultimately, he pushed us to and I was the good submissive wife and even if I didn't want to go in that direction I did it. And I did it because of my faith and because of my belief in God and my belief in that priesthood of power that priesthood power held me to my husband's authority I mean that's that's the reality of it and I it's very solid eyes in the temple and I very clearly remember thinking will crap at least I got a good guy because men are given a lot of leeway for a lot of abuse. And so and it's and it's righteous abuse, you know, it's like benevolent abuse. It's it's not even seen as abuse. It's just seen as using priesthood power. And I'm not trying to say that every Mormon men is like that, or every ex Mormon man is like that, but it is there. And, you know, I look at it situations in my own marriage and think like, yeah, you totally, I completely gave up my voice and my opinion for that. And so, you know, we're currently making some pretty big life decisions, and I've put my foot down on different things. And he's been kind of shocked. Like, I'm sorry, I'm not a doormat anymore. Like, I'm, I'm gonna have an opinion on this. And so all this to say is when you're doing ministry with people who come from this background, it can be tricky because I work with women who are so afraid to bring up doubts to their husbands or to bring up positive things about Community of Christ because it's going to be a direct threat to their authority, kind of like I became a threat to the Mormon men around me. When I was ordained when when Mormon women are empowered, they become a threat. And the natural tendency is to shut down that threat. And so when you're dealing with your sometimes even teenage sons, a lot of women are up against the priesthood authority have their sons or their husbands or their parents or their dad or whoever It's really, really easy to be overwhelmed by that. And I, to be brutally honest, I feel like I can say this because I doubt he'll listen to this podcast, but I'm a different person around my dad. I will never be an empowered woman around him. And I love him dearly. But like Nancy said, there's just parts of you, you have to turn off just to keep the peace. And so some women are dealing with this in their own marriages. And so I recognize, you know, Josh ordained me that's not something that I shared earlier, but he was ordained a priest a few months before I was and then he was actually the one that ordained me. And we baptized my twins together, he baptized one and I baptized the other. So we really have done a lot of this together. And I recognize how lucky I am to have that because not even a lot of women and Community Christ have that.

And, and yet, it still doesn't make it easy. It still doesn't mean that we have not had huge, huge conflict over gender roles in my own marriage. And again, I got quote unquote, one of the good guys. And I recognize that very early on in our marriage. But but it's it's real, this lowering of women's status and of voice is so consistent with the Mormon experience. And so when you

start dealing with Latter-day Seeker ministry, I almost have to check myself and recognize my own privilege in all of this, that I have a spouse that's on board and I have a spouse who's supportive of my ministry, and I have a spouse who is currently a priest and I'm currently an elder and, and it's okay and that would not be okay in a lot of marriages, and so that that's kind of just like in the back of my mind whenever we have a new family coming into Salt Lake, or whenever a new family pops in on Forward With Community or online gathering for Latter-day Seekers or whenever I get contacted by someone, the family dynamics, and the reality of those family dynamics is just always something that is at the forefront of my mind, because it's really great to be empowered, but it will drastically change relationships. And that's not easy. And sometimes it's actually really terrible. And I don't love. I don't love that aspect of it. I mean, it's really it's really difficult and really painful. And so, I'm always sensitive because I don't want people sharing too much with their spouse, or you know, totally freaking them out. Just taking things at a pace that's healthy and good for them. Because in Community of Christ, we never want our ministry to deteriorate relationship, that's the opposite of what our goal is. And so to walk that fine line of, of allowing people to go with their own pace, and to get excited at their own pace about their own empowerment and their own journey with God, while recognizing that there is a there's another side to this, that is pure grief, and, and it's really, really difficult. And so I feel like anyone who's engaged in modern day seeker ministry understands this to some degree that it's just this constant pole. And it's really I don't know what word I want to use to describe it. It's just, it's really odd when you've been on the side of, you know, of finding Community of Christ through the latter day secret program to then be on the other side of that because I know exactly what these women are going through and, and it's hard. And so while it's really easy to get excited about it, the devastation also just weighs weighs on me.

Robin Linkhart 1:22:12

Yeah. So I wanted to ask you, what would you like to share with longtime Community of Christ members so we can be more sensitive, aware, and really just helpfully present with folks who are making this journey. If you are going to give tips.

Nancy Ross 1:22:33

I think one of the first things would be to realize that even if there is something good or something that feels radical that's happening, like the offering of a call to ministry or presenting a call to ministry, to maybe a woman or a person who's never had the opportunity to do that before, that while that is good, that is deeply complicated, in ways that often cannot be anticipated by the person themselves. And to expect then some unexpected responses you know around that and for that to not be a smooth process

Robin Linkhart 1:23:10

Thank you, Nancy. Britt?

Brittany Mangelson 1:23:10

I'm gonna say it's complicated and and that that's not Community of Christ fault. I think that some Latter Day seekers I want to make it clear that that I mean, Nancy we don't speak for the whole movement you know there's a lot of people that are really really anxious to be involved

and so be invitational about how you invite people into ministry whether it's ordained or not. And if there is some hesitancy or struggle just try not to take it personally because even seekers outside of the LDS tradition, I think that there's just so much baggage with church structure and hierarchy and authority and power and all these big words. being invited into that space, no matter what your background is, I think is a complicated transition. And so although seekers might be really enthusiastic, and they might want to be involved, just recognize that at any moment, they could turn around and find something to just totally unravel them. And again, it's not Community of Christ fault. There's just a lot of things that need to be worked through. And I have been in this for five years now and I'm still consistently running into things every once in a while that I'm like, oh, reframe that, reframe that, reframe that. And it takes work. It takes a lot of work, and it's something that honestly I'll probably be doing for the rest of my life. So that's just that's just the reality of it.

Robin Linkhart 1:24:48

I think you've both touched on the fact that there's no rush to go through this journey and the sensitive pastoral approach is to create safe space and allow people to discover their own path and take all the time they need, whether it's at the very beginning of a transition, whether it's when or if one might want to become a member and certainly the whole process of call and ordination. And I appreciate what you said, Nancy, that it's complicated. You both Foley's say it's very complicated, and that the individual who is being presented the call may not even anticipate themselves, the feelings that will welled up in response or how complicated that journey may be. So I before we close, I just want to give you a chance to, to say anything that you wanted to say that I didn't ask you about.

Brittany Mangelson 1:26:01

I just want to say that underlining all of my insecurities and my struggle to figure out how my ministry works within the structure of priesthood and how it is amplified or helped or steered. I guess, with priesthood offices, the underlining thing that's driving all of that is my deep sense of call. I do have a deep sense of call. And that call is because I have seen this particular denomination change lives. And so when I talk about me being a learner that experiences growth and seeing things and that's how I experienced growth is by seeing things happen in front of me. That's, that's what I'm seeing. I'm seeing women be empowered. I'm seeing husbands and wives move into a space of being more egalitarian. I'm seeing LGBT Q folks openly love who they love. And being unapologetic about it. I'm seeing teenagers come out well before they would have if they were in other faith traditions. And being part of that conversation, whether I'm ordained or not, is vitally, vitally, vitally important to me. And the way that Community of Christ interprets Christ's mission and our dedication to peace and reconciliation just gives me so much hope. And so when I get bogged down by the definitions, and I'm still trying to figure out how and why I'm an elder, and I'm just I still have all these voices in the back of my head, not knowing what the next steps are going to look like. When I focus on the things that I do know and that bring me joy and that would be seeing people's lives transformed through the gospel. The peaceful reconciling gospel Jesus Christ. That's when it all makes sense. And so, a lot of times, I feel like I can forget about an office or I can forget about a certain position in my congregation, or I can forget about the title of my employment status

and Community of Christ. And when I just focus on what we're actually doing with the people, and I focus on Jesus as a friend, that's where I thrive. So I just want to make that clear, because I feel like I've let out a lot of insecurities. And I've been a little bit more vulnerable than I anticipated, but my dedication to Christ mission is pretty solid.

Robin Linkhart 1:28:44

Thanks for that, Brittany, Nancy?

Unknown Speaker 1:28:48

I think that just the, the sense that, I guess I'd always thought that ordination would be something like an event and then just something else. Something else that is constant afterwards, maybe that because that's largely what I grew up with. And I don't understand priesthood as the power of God. I, you know that that's not how I understand this whole priesthood thing, which, you know, there are a lot of administrative responsibilities. Pastors are often elders, right. So it's leading congregations. But it's nothing. It's nothing like you know, there was an event and now there is a new, constant reality. It's, I think, just a, like a deeper, more complicated part of this journey to figure out what is the call if there is a there is a sense that, you know, my call to elder means that I am to be a minister of blessing and to engage in a ministry of blessing. Then you know, water What are the details of that? You know, and how do I sense where those details are? And how can I move toward that? And how can I answer the questions that I need to about God or about scripture or about church and community so that I can find my way, which often feel like they're in the way of understanding the deeper call? And and that somehow wrestling with these bigger questions and finding a way through, or finding answers that will at least work for the moment is just like another step on the journey is trying to figure out what what it is I'm supposed to be doing. Exactly. And that's it's not it's not an entire mystery, but there are still a lot of elements of mystery. Because all of our all of our particular contexts and our particular congregations and the way that we serve are different and they have different needs. And I think that a tremendously important part of serving is to understand what is needed and and who we're serving. And that Quite a lot different from the ways in which I saw people approach priesthood in the LDS church, which felt like, here's the hierarchy of authority. And now we have to be to like submit to that. You know, and that's not at all I want people to view me in my role that would be really unhelpful. For, for me as a minister, if people saw that that's what or if that's how I acted, that would be like the antithesis of what I was trying to do. And that would not be bestowing blessing. Yeah. So it's it's priesthood seems to be, you know, there are some like, general guidelines and things that I need to know and then it's, it's just like a deeper journey.

Robin Linkhart 1:31:44

Well, I just want to say how much of a joy and privilege it has been for me to have the opportunity to walk with each of you in various ways, and to see how The giftedness and skill that you each possess has been liberated in ways that just infuse your ministry, with blessing with joy and the ways that you each utilize what you bring in your relationships with other people and walking with other people. It is a joy and a privilege to know each of you and to be blessed by you. And I want to thank you for being with us today on Project Zion Podcasts, it has

been great to hear your story, and also a very special thanks to all our listeners. If you would like to hear more about Brittany and Nancy's faith transitions, check out Episode 20 to hear Brittany story and Episode 54. To hear more about Nancy's story. This is your host Robin Linkhart and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care, and we'll see you next time. Bye Bye.

Josh Mangelson 1:33:18

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