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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

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart with another open topics episode focused on something of keen interest to many of us as we journey in faith seeking understanding women finding their place in the church, and what it looks like to live into the art of who God created us to be today Our guest is Lucia Piehi. Lucia is a graduate of Graceland University and has completed four years of graduate studies in the Community of Christ Seminary. She has been a key leader in French Polynesia for many years. She currently serves as Mission Center Financial Officer for the French Polynesia Mission Center. She was born and raised in Tahiti and has seen a lot of change in the life of the church. Hello, Lucia. Welcome to Project Zion podcast.

Lucia Piehi 1:34

Bonjour!

Robin Linkhart 1:37

Very good to see you today. Let's see. Let's give our listeners a chance to get to know you better. So please tell us just a little bit about where you grew up your background in the church, your family, and how you came to be a full time minister with Community of Christ.

Lucia Piehi 1:58

I grew up here on may not even have French Polynesia. I have two sisters and one brother. My father was converted to church after an experience in his life, when my mom gave birth of me I was a child who was diagnosed with tuberculosis to the bones, and especially to my hip, my right hip. And so the doctors at the time had no treatment to let's say, to save me. And so I when I was the age of six, emergency, and I needed to get a surgery, and it was a tough time. And my grandfather who was the pastor of our congregation. And my mom's father had prayed for us, but had especially encouraged my parents to turn to God. And they did so and through the sacrament, laying up the hands. And miraculously, I was saved and it affected my father. That's how he became a church member. So they both were, were very active in the church. I grew up seeing both of them working hard for anything about a congregation, and without me knowing why they were so courageous like that. But as I grew up, I just I heard their testimonies and they weren't doing that as a return to, for the blessings that they have received. So, yeah, my mom put me to piano lessons and forced me to play every Sunday church kid. We had to go to church. It was a time when children had to go to church compared to today.

And so I was one of their children who every Sunday and we never miss church. And it shaped my faith and looking at my parents, the hard work they were doing. And I felt like I had to be

like them, for me was a normal action to do when I would go up. And so one night they sent me to Grayson, because during my childhood Put below my sense because of the disease that I had. I wasn't able to play with the kids or myself and, and I felt like being left alone. Not loved by people except my parents, my family. And I heard later on that my mom sent me to Graceland because she wanted me to see a new world. She she was, she was telling me later on, she was suffering. They both were suffering, seeing me being away. And she didn't know what will happen to me. And at the time, I didn't want to go but I just trusted them. And it was a great beginning. It was, my experience at Graceland has opened many doors and windows for me to see the world through through internet new ways. And so after I graduated from Graceland and came back to Tahiti, and the first thing in mind is returning it to God, even like my parents. And, and then I thought about working for the church in the first place. But at the time, there were no openings. And Emile Teihotaata was the church president here, and but I've helped them with translations. And then I found a job. And as I was growing because my last year at Graceland, I had a hip replacement because I was really suffering my during my junior year and after that surgery, it was another huge door that opens another It was a new life, new opportunities and possibilities, and it completely changed my way of looking at life. So coming back to Tahiti, and with a boyfriend at the time, we were both we invested our time for the church with the children. I was the children minister, my first ministry in my congregation then with the youth and I was called as a priest, then pastor gave me responsibilities. And so it was time it was for me was Okay, there we go. This is how the blessings that I have received, so I accepted the call, and what's called after that as an editor and then financial officer for my congregation. So I served as a financial officer for nine years in a congregation. And during the sixth or seventh year, then the mission center started to ask me to help in the bishopric here. And so I got, I stepped into it and for me, okay, here's another opportunity to find God and help the church. And then they started to call me and offered a position at the mission center and I was expecting my third baby at the time.

Robin Linkhart 8:52

Oh my goodness.

Lucia Piehi 8:54

Third baby that became third babies because I was expecting twin boys, and the day I delivered them. Yeah, I've had phone calls from the United States from apostle Dave Brock at a time encouraging me, they started discussion earlier but I resigned at the time. I said, "No, I don't think I'm ready for that." But yeah, so church leaders came and visited me in the clinic. And for me, it's like, What is it? What is a mission? Is this a call? Is this an obligation? Am I not done yet with returning what I owe you? All those questions in my mind and because they were twin babies, much work at home.

And I said, after talking to my husband, we both decided, Okay, maybe this is the right time then to change the job because my previous job was kind of time dependent, consuming. And so we made the shift. It was a great shift in our lives because it meant lower finances. It meant a lot. So it required to both of us to reorient our projects, our needs and family and church. And at one point, we said to ourselves, the church is family so we can do both. So we made the

change. And for me personally, it was my way of saying thank you, Lord. For much of my life, and so I took that call as just a follow up a new journey, a new opportunity. So and that's how I stepped in at the mission center. I started as a financial director, two years. Tough years. Yeah, because there are much work to do, and I didn't. I think if I knew what the mission center needed at that time, I wouldn't have accepted. But at the same time, it gave me, I still had that in my mind, God, God was still there. I needed to do something to please God, and there was work here, work to do. So it was my motivation. Okay I'll do it and after it's done then I can think again, Mm hmm. Two years after was done. And then here's another call to be the mission center president. And for me that is never the operators. So another big challenge. So I did our MCP and MCFO at the same time.

Robin Linkhart 12:20

That's huge.

Lucia Piehi 12:22

That was huge. And seminary!

Robin Linkhart 12:26

And seminary! Over the top!

Lucia Piehi 12:28

Those who have been to seminary understand how, but it was a now when I look back this journey. All I want to say like I said, Every morning, thank you, Lord, for putting me in that journey. So this really helps me see the church and its mission differently in a spiritual way.

Robin Linkhart 13:02

So let's turn our focus now specifically to the role of women in French Polynesia. And if you can kind of give us a little window into what it was like when you were growing up, or maybe even stories you've heard about time.

Lucia Piehi 13:20

But what I grew up seeing my mom and sister working hard for the church, I grew up seeing women with a strong character doing whatever responsibilities, they had an church or so when I was only 14, when the revelation was approved, and I didn't really understand what it meant, and why this call and why people were agitating words. They were questioning, didn't quite understand. But when the first ordination of women took place here, the ladies were ordained. I remember Tatehau Richmond was ordained as a high priest, Odile Pirato as a Seventy They were women that I knew when I was a child. They were our Sunday school teachers and they were during terms. They were our leader. So for me, it was normal. It felt really nice. Yeah, that's, uh, oh, yeah, I know. I know her. I know them. Oh, yeah. And for me, it was like a natural.

Robin Linkhart 14:50

So I'm, what I'm hearing you say is even though women weren't ordained yet they were fully invested in the life of the church and they were serving in leadership roles that did not require priests to even, but always present and such as training in the church. So just for our listeners who may not be familiar with Doctrine and Covenants 156, this came to Community of Christ in 1984. And it had two very important things to say to the church. The first was it was time for the long awaited temple independence to be built, and that was celebrated, profoundly people have waited for generations for that moment. The second thing it says, is that the time had come to provide for the ordination of women. And on that topic, there were lots of really strong feelings from differing perspectives across the church about whether or not it was God's will for women to be ordained. Things were really difficult in some places, some places not so much, but others very difficult. So you've talked about your sense of it felt really natural as these women that you grew up with who were strong leaders to be. And you had women that were going to evangelists and high priest right away?

Lucia Piehi 16:19

Yeah. Oh, yes,

Robin Linkhart 16:21

That is amazing. So what was it like to the church in French Polynesia, and in general, when this big shift came?

Lucia Piehi 16:31

I could hear up in my congregation, I didn't see any resistance or anything like that. I think it depends on the congregation when, especially during gatherings or events or church events that you could easily hear some comments, or whenever women would be preaching. Yeah, I would hear Not many people, but you still hear people saying they should have chosen this man or this man. But why her? And I think the women, I don't know if it's typical from French Polynesia, but those strong women with a strong character, they were wise enough to speak up and express their knowledge of first the revelation And also they have things to say, like they've been, they grew up in a church, and God has called them and so they were sharing their testimonies. And it required them a lot of courage to do that. Because some would prefer to just be quiet. Accept the call, that then be quite. Do whatever minister you have to do. But yeah, I've seen some courageous women who were able to stand up and, and yeah, it was. I think about my mom. Even without her priesthood, she's a loud woman. She would say, frankly what she thinks. And her nickname in our congregation, people say oh she's a crazy woman because she says loudly, so when she became a priesthood member, she had to work on that. Not say what she believes in, but then for me, I found that no, women have to say we need to learn how to say but their voices are necessary part in congregations in our life. And so for me, what I really remember is the courage that these women had at the time.

Robin Linkhart 19:17

So you've talked a little bit about how the face of ministry has changed over time. Are there any other ways that you've seen that expression of ministry change as the addition of the feminine? The female came to ministry?

Lucia Piehi 19:38

We had our first Mission Center President, a woman, when Mareva became Mission Center President, first time for a woman to that position in the church where I could remember those, this minority of members and what is this? And then for me, it's like, I was like, oh, there are some people not knowing that there was this revelation. And I said to myself, Oh, we need to give classes to them to let them know maybe, maybe these people have not followed our time has happened. And I felt the need to deal with this lack of information for many members, and I felt the need to inform members because most of them most of the comments that I've heard is who said, "Did God say that?" and I said, "Okay, so maybe they have not heard about the revelation". And, and I remember during Mareva's ministry as a Mission Center President there were Pastor schools, temple schools were really really did a lot not just for women, but it was a need that people they would hear new information. They go straight to the information but without taking it away, the things that have changed and the reasons change. So education was a must for me, even for my son, for the majority of the people, when I came when I accepted my work here at the Mission Center, I had this experience with one main minister, who was, he had questions in his mind and it happened that it happened one day, we were taking one same class and sharing. And yeah, he needed to talk. He asked us for a meeting, we had that meeting. But strangely enough, it was that he wanted to talk to us, and especially tell me what authority did I have to say the things that I wanted to say? And I kept telling him, oh, but I worked for the Mission Center. And you have asked questions I have answered and I didn't understand why you disagreed with because I, it was my answer. And then at one point, he said, "Where did you get the right to say the things?" I said, "As a church member, I can say what I what I want to say, but you have no right to do that, what what do you really mean?" But along our discussion, I found out that he he was not comfortable with women taking over positions in the church, and especially giving lessons. So it's happened at the beginning of my time here at the mission center. It I felt scared because at the time I didn't have enough, I wasn't well equipped yet. But today I want to say thanks to this man and to the Spirit of God, he pushed me to go deeper into learning, because he kept he kept saying scriptures. No women, no this and no that. And I said, I don't think I don't think that's God's message but thanks to that I went into scriptures and took classes to understand better what scriptures say and requested that I take seminary classes.

Actually, before I accepted the position on the Mission Center, that was one of the conditions. I remember saying to Steve Graffeo, Hey I would say yes, but here's one condition. I want to go into seminary, because for me, it meant a lot to be equipped for taking a job would require a lot from you and equipped to do church work to know more about the church and to especially be equipped so that I can give answers to people. I am one, I am a kind of person who would ask many questions and one I don't get an answer. I can be not really I can't, I won't be comfortable with that. And if I don't get answers, then I may be discouraged to what I'm doing because I like

to understand why I do this and why I should do it this way. And so yeah, that first encounter with this man had pushed me so thanks to that, man.

Robin Linkhart 25:59

Yeah. I think you've said a lot of really important things, Lucia as you've talked about your journey. One is how important it is to provide education and conversation for people, especially in the midst of significant changes. Some people may not be aware of here in French Polynesia in this mission center. Tahiti is the big island, but there's many, many small islands. So the Mission Center membership are spread out. But unlike most other Mission Centers, they're spread out across the ocean and makes it very difficult. So it's easy for people to have a gap in in the journey and to, for us to be aware of that as as we're changing as a people and how important that is. And also the importance of education for people who are stepping into new roles, whether it be women at a time of change in the church or anyone, at their next step of discipleship, I really appreciate how you have found a blessing in an encounter that that felt maybe even a little threatening. And in the midst of someone feeling angry and condemning your role, how you were able to bounce back from that and see that it motivated you to go deeper and really helped you take some steps towards developing a sense of confidence and a broader knowledge base so that you were equipped when those encounters came again. So I think those are all really important things for us to understand about what it was like and the things that women did to help support themselves and others, but also how we learn from that, as we walk into new challenges have changed in the in life of the church. So I want to just ask you, if how you see the current situation with the rights and equality of women in this part of church of the church, the French Polynesia Mission Center, do you see there is work still to be done? If so, how might we support that journey?

Lucia Piehi 28:34

Yeah. It's an interesting journey. Here in in, in French Polynesia, and because we are a church that ordain women. So we are, people who are watch us, friends of the church or even members. And they, because it's something new and if it's so they want to know they people are I feel like people are always they want to hear the last two days. So, so what's now? So these women and some of our members are they get the feedback from our side. And unfortunately, there's a minority that are still questioning. Is that really a call from God? Or is that really something that God has expected from us? So I think there's still we still need to share education and also to show to express our ministry one thing that I keep asking telling myself is do your ministry well. Because people will watch you look at you will hear you, just because we are women. And so if we do it properly and faithfully, then then we are sharing the gospel, but also it helps others who are not familiar or don't know much about it to an end and we become the reference. So I keep telling myself out every day, like because people would watch us, then let's just do it one. Because when we say things are not correct, they remember that and then they pointer fingers to us. And so that's a big challenge to always do that. But I have some friends from other church denominations, women and they will tell me, how did you go to make that change? I would say, Oh, that's another story now. And they were interested. Yeah, just because we are friends and they didn't know but they were watching me and watching other women, other ministers, female ministers in the church, and I would hear good

comments from them and it's somewhat open their mind to and and we see more and more women in politics in the society these days and and we hear more about women in the society, requesting the government reminding them that they have a right to do so. And so my church friends, we should follow the same path. Another one from another church group has said, Oh, we started and our leaders are seriously thinking about it. And so I felt that happiness deep inside myself. And for me, it's almost like, there you go, it's something from God doesn't even touch us, and it touched them then for me, it's gone. Yeah. And so in the church here in French Polynesia, I think we need to continue teaching And go deeply into our Enduring Principles. I use the enduring principles all the time when there are tough question in front of me, or when I see tough situations and and i think women are they express it easier than males a slot judgment, but I don't know

Robin Linkhart 33:36

The different dimensions.

Lucia Piehi 33:37

Yeah. And it's easier for us to say, or to share or to give examples of daily lives. Either examples from home or from society, from church from, from everywhere, but the Enduring Principles would be something that I would keep sharing and teach. It helps, It puts everyone on the common ground.

Robin Linkhart 34:07

Yeah,

Lucia Piehi 34:08

There's no gender for everybody.

Robin Linkhart 34:11

I really appreciate the way you describe the role of women in the church as life examples in the church and the ministry dimension, the multi faceted nature of ministry when both genders are represented and a reminder that the women serve as lights outside the church as well as people see and, and how that brings hope. So as I'm talking about hope, as you think about the church at large and the larger scope, all inclusive, what are your hopes for the church into the future.

Lucia Piehi 34:57

I hope for the furniture, Oh lots of hopes. These days we are living, tough period of time in the church and but also a great opportunity to try new things or it changes. But it has led us to a way and I'm talking I'm talking about French Polynesia because at the beginning of when we heard the challenges that are coming your way people started questioning again and I am happy to see that we are taking a path that there was no strict or direct decision to say okay, no more than one crisis, but instead of that is taking your path differently into that so different but returning to God. Put yourself in a spiritual practice and to listen deeply what God wants us to

do. So my hope for the church is for us to continue spreading the gospel but but also to to talk about about where we come from in to know that these challenges are not new challenges.

Robin Linkhart 34:59
Right.

Lucia Piehi 35:04
These are challenges that many churches are facing, but also companies. It's not like as if all this is just Community of Christ. No, it's everywhere. And so for me to even if we look back at church history, we have been challenges to what I appreciated in learning about our church history is that we never give up.

Robin Linkhart 37:46
Right

Lucia Piehi 37:47
We never gave up and our ancestors never gave out and, and it, it opens new opportunities and the path is We have taken throughout the ministry of the prophets of the past. We are church living it's time and so we take decisions, big decisions significant based on what our world needs. And so I'm not afraid of what we are living, the challenges that we have, I'm just afraid that we won't take all your opportunities that are in front of us to inform our members inform them that, Don't panic. Don't give up on your ministry, and God will always be there.

Robin Linkhart 38:56
Exactly what a great insight and perspective you Bring to the church as we like many other churches and businesses and nonprofit organizations continue to rebound from the great down, turn in the global economy a few years ago and, and respond to that faithfully and deepen our spiritual awareness and awakening as a church. We've been called to, to do that, as you said, and and to keep the mission in mind. I love the way you said your hope is that we will share the message of the gospel and not lose sight of the many opportunities in this changing world to to share those messages and those Enduring Principles. So Lucia, is there anything else that you want to say that maybe I have not asked you about?

Lucia Piehi 40:00
I have, I read a lot. I like reading. I just don't have enough time to. I like I buy and I bought and I'm still buying books. I'm not having a lot of them at home and it helps me find this secure place and it feeds my soul. This courage I yeah dive into the books. And recently I have read something that put a smile to my face. Something saying that we are chosen to do what we are doing today and we are ordinary people, whatever church positions we hold. We are ordinary people doing extraordinary work for an extraordinary God. So I read that and say, oh, and we are just people who chose to say yes. And by saying yes to the ministry, it is a yes to the good times and yes to challenging times. It's like one a couple can get married it's for better or worse. And so it puts a smile on my face, recently. And yeah, we said yes. Let's go on. Let's continue this ministry.

Robin Linkhart 41:58

That is a wonderful message to share as we wrap things up, it's been a joy to share with you Lucia. And to get to know you a little bit better through our conversation today. Thank you for making time. And thank you. We'll do this again sometime. I also want to thank our listeners. If you would like to hear some more interviews about women and ministry and Community of Christ, I encourage you to check out the following episodes, number seven, number 13. And a two part series with President Becky Savage who served in the First Presidency as the first woman, and those are number 165 and 166. And I want to remind you of what Lucia said to us just now these words are profound. We are chosen to do what we are doing today. We are all ordinary people doing an extraordinary work for an extraordinary God. We are just people who said, Yes. Thank you for joining us today as we explore the role of women and Community of Christ and hear powerful stories about how women are claiming their place and living into the all of who God created us to be. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to project Zion podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care, bye bye.

Josh Mangelson 43:57

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