

281 | Percolating on Faith | Theological Education
Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 0:17

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

Carla Long 0:31

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and I am always thrilled to welcome back Tony and Charmaine Chvala Smith, from beautiful Independence, Missouri. Where right now I think it's probably a zillion degrees with a zillion percent humidity is my guess you're very,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 0:50

Very close. Yeah, it's in the 90s. And it's the heat index makes it 102. So yeah, delicious.

Tony Chvala-Smith 0:57

It is delicious. And you know, Carla, it's not a dry heat,

Carla Long 1:01

No dry heat. Nah, I don't know if I'll ever get Kruseman to move back to the Midwest after experiencing the actual dry heat of Utah, he very much enjoys it. So you're listening to percolating on faith are percolating on faith series. And we always interview Tony and Charmaine, which is very, very fun. And if you're still listening after all these episodes, it must mean you like us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:24

Or you're very bored. The quarantine has been going on too long.

Carla Long 1:30

That's right, we're, what, three, four months into the quarantine, you must be desperate.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:36

Or you just need to get a life.

Carla Long 1:39

But we're going to assume that you like us, because that's the much nicer answer. So today we're going to be talking about theological education I I've been thinking about theological education and community Christ for a while now I it because I was educated in Community of Christ seminary. And when I I look back over the last 18 years of the seminary, it started in 2002. I can see incredible changes in Community of Christ since we started this seminary experience. Of course, we have leaders who are educated before that. But it does feel like we're educating more people since the seminary started, and I've seen changes, like talking about the enduring principles, talking about the mission initiatives moving forward in a whole

host of ways. So, for me, I think that theological education is absolutely necessary. But Community Christ didn't always think that and I know that's for sure. So we're gonna have a little chat about theological education, perhaps a little bit about where we've been, where we are now and why it's super important. So, Tony, Charmaine, let's jump into it. Why is theological education important? Hmm.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 2:54

Oh, my goodness, so many places to go with that, but I think the main piece is that part of the reorganization and eventually Community of Christ was based on making theological distinctions and decisions. And I think that has stuck with us throughout is that we, part of the reason we became our own our own thing, our own denomination, eventually, is that we were not willing to just go along with what was we found questioning, essential for balance, but also to describe this relationship with God and how do we, how do we be bearers of the message that came before us and live with it today, but we the only way we can do that is to keep up asking the questions. And so, you know, people in our movement were the ones who question what happened in Nauvoo. They're the ones who questioned Joseph's theological statements and said, Whoa, wait a minute, Is There Really? And where do we get that? And so, you know, I think that our identity is actually kind of built around the the recognition that being educated theologically, being questioning theologically is essential.

Tony Chvala-Smith 4:30

Yeah, I think you can push the question back to the start of Christianity. I mean, why did Jesus spend so much time with a group of women and men around him as disciples? Well, they weren't. They weren't just talking about the weather for whether it was one year in the synoptics or three year and three years in John however long he was with them. Jesus is training people in the kingdom of God. And so, you know, Matthew's Gospel loves that word, disciple which in Greek literally means means a learner. And so Jesus, Jesus had circled around him a community of pupils who were learning from him. And, you know, they, they did see work. I mean, they, they manage, they pass sort of some of them did. Some of them went into remediation for a long time after but, but also if you think about it, too, if we start with the New Testament, New Testament writings and in the Roman Empire, at that particular time, in the first century, literacy rates were quite low. So we wouldn't know anything about Jesus in the early church if there weren't some literate people who were able to write in Greek and you know, in, in and the New Testament texts are in varying qualities of Greek so they had different abilities with the language. So yeah,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 5:57

And the fact that like each of the gospel writers has a different take on how to tell the story for the people that they're writing for. That's, that's an act of theological decision making and thinking and yeah, they took all the pieces, and then said, We want you to understand who Jesus is why Jesus is how Jesus is connected to God, how, with this kingdom of God thing is all of those. And so those are all, that's all part of the the writers are trying to teach train there, those who they're writing for. And so it's a theological act. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 6:39

And you know, for example, Paul, well, there's, you know, there's 13 letters that have Paul's name on them in the New Testament seven were surely written by him the other six, Probably not, but Paul is very theologically astute, you know, trained as a fantasy. He's he comes in His role as apostle, as someone who had the best Jewish theological training you could get at the time. And then the fact that he had disciples who after his death wrote for him means he had a school around him. So the idea that, that somehow the earliest church was full of untrained, non literate people who just opened their mouth and God spoke out of them is, is that it's a it's actually a bit of mythology that comes not from the ancient church or the medieval church or the Reformation church, it comes from our originating period, the Second Great Awakening in the US, you know, 1790 to 1840, that whole period that we rose in, there's, there's this, this push back, you know, people on the frontier who have, who have limited opportunities for education are pushing it pushing back on all those educated clergy, you know, out on the East Coast, and so on. So, it's a social cultural pushback to say, we don't, we don't need to go to Harvard or Yale, or Princeton, which were the major theological schools of the day. We don't need to go there to be able to administer we, we, we can trust God, and we can trust what we've got. And, and so I understand the pushback from that. But mythology arose around that, that somehow theological education was was therefore wrong. And that simply was not cognizant of the whole history of Christianity, and was not even paying attention well, to the New Testament. So,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 8:36

But a reaction in that time, and understandable in its own context. So but even then, you know, back at the beginnings of this whole movement, there's, there's Joseph who decides that, you know, kind of, as an amateur taking on Greek and Hebrew is important. If we want to try and understand more closely Those writings, the scriptures. So, you know, even there and, you know, in the Kirtland temple, a part of the temple being used as a school as for educating people so that that part of our, our psyche is there, there, that learning is important. But then there's the other there's the two prongs, as Tony was saying, and, and in the reorganized church in and today, even in the Community of Christ, there's this this other impulse, which is to be suspicious of those who are who are formally trained in theology or in ministry. Because you know, they're probably going to rely on those old theologians or whatever the newest theology is, rather than, you know, how we should understand God or or the the right of the church. So, you know, there was those times when we were particularly focused on self as the church and about proving ourselves as the one true church. That that was popular to say, Oh, those other people, those other churches, they rely on these people who have to go to school in order to be ministers. There was you know, that that devaluing, but at the same time, people, you know, I think about Tony's Grandpa, who, you know, very steeped in the tradition, but he read all kinds of other stuff from other denominations. He loved hymns that weren't even in our hymnal, you know, for them, they spoke something and so, you know, and then that congregation, that congregation is his grandpa Went to there the women were, were involved in church women united, as you know, an international Ecumenical Movement of women and prayer and, and mutual support. So, yeah, we we've always had one foot kinda in the main mainline churches and the theology that's there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:29

You know, I think those those two, those two tracks that Charmaine was describing, kind of the, the anti intellectual anti education track and the pro education track those two things, part of our psyche, they were both in Joseph himself. And so, you know, he and rigdon I forget exactly the how they work this out, but that little thing that they wrote called lectures of faith, honest to goodness, that was that was supposed to be an introductory theology text and it even uses the word theology in it. And and says, says says Don't, don't get upset at us for using the word theology. It's a good word. Basically, it says I'm paraphrasing, but

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:14
but as you were wanting to do

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:15

as I was, but the there's, I think it's important to see that that that anti intellectual non education track as an identity marker, you know, for a long time that helped us feel good about who we were. And we had lots of incredible, incredible ministers for generations and generations who are minimally literate or who were, were not University train. That's awesome. And when I think back to the congregation I joined charmingly says describing one of the one of the ministers there who made a deep impact on my life was a guy who had made it through eighth grade and Yet had incredible gifts of ministry and of healing humans. So though we're heavily involved in different kinds of formal theological education, I think both of us value that other side of our tradition and don't want to just write it off. On the other hand, we have to recognize that that's not the whole story in our tradition. And this this theological education side has been essential, essential to our, our life as a church. And it's essential to our future and especially in the kind of times that we live in.

Carla Long 13:39

I think part of what you're talking about, too, is is the way you present this theology, right? Like, I remember going to your class at Graceland as an undergrad, and then coming back to my home congregation in very tiny town, Kansas, and talking about what I learned in kind of probably a snarky way. Like a little bit snarky and it was not accepted. Well, you know, by a certain gentleman in our congregation, he was an older guy. And he's like, That's not right. That's not what the Bible says. I'm like, it doesn't know what it says. But that's what's behind it, you know, like I was being not as kind as I could have been. So I also think it's in the way it's presented, you know, to that that's probably a little bit important. That is burned in my memory about when somebody's learning something new. There might be a bit of reaction to it, and I need to be a little bit kinder, if possible.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:36

Well, I really appreciate you saying that, because I think in in the more recent times, like in the last 30 years, 20 to 30 years, that's been a big, that's a problem as far as people warming to the idea of the benefits of theology, because, you know, 20 some years ago, but it's Same time that as a church, we were exploring our history and willing to ask the hard questions about Joseph

and, you know, the Book of Mormon and other elements in our early history. And, and so is to be in like this, that 80s some of the 70s and 80s. You know, trashing our history or trashing the people at the beginning of our history was a sport, you know, it was something that we, we was like, ooh, let's see what other dirt we can find, you know, and that then went on, that kind of went into our theological discussions as well. And so though some of the people who had were theological, we're taking classes theologically in in different universities or seminaries. Some, you know, it's like whenever you have new stuff, and that insecurity, All of us to want to look like we know something or you know, to prove that we maybe are better than other people that came through unfortunately, in some theological, some people who are theologically trained, but also some, some people who didn't have a good understanding of what theology encompasses. And so for some people theology was whatever the new idea is, whatever the new thing that challenges old theology, that was what they thought theology was, it's the spectrum speculative and provocative. It's the thing that says, you know, was was Jesus even or a historical figure? You know, all the some of the questions that their their questions worth asking, but they made that the whole focus rather than this long tradition of theological thought back and forth. And letting the questions be there, but not making it all about the questions. And so, so there was some alienation, I guess, is what I'm trying to say. For some people in the church as those who were trained, sometimes didn't know what to do, in a kind way with with new information or, or then became dictatorial maybe in their in their home congregation and said, Well, I learned this in this class. And so, you know, we can no longer do this, or we can't say this about scripture. We can't. And, and then everybody's like, why was it a good idea that this person is taking, you know, classes at the seminary or wherever? And, and I guess, you know, the reality is, that's just part of the process of learning and of learning what you did, which is sometimes how we interact with people. If we come at it, like I know better than you do, man and then and then you know, we we just undercut the but but it is part of the human process of incorporating these new ways of thinking and understanding the world. And if we're not conscious of that danger, we may not have the self checking mechanism and sounds like you, you did pretty quickly. But, but, so during the 70s and 80s, that was a bit of a conflict. And it was also the time when ordination of women is is emerging. And so it becomes another one of those battlegrounds about are we leaving too much of our heritage behind? Are we embracing these other because we didn't have our own seminary yet. These those people's theology And how how much is, is our own being either discarded or tainted or stained by this new understanding that isn't didn't come directly from God. I mean, it's I don't believe that, but but that's that's kind of how it would have been categorized.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:19

In the 70s and 80s period, there was a kind of hardening of the hardening of the lines, you know, that that one side that wanted to value this old tradition of, we don't need educated ministers and so on. I'm really pushing back on anybody who wanted to go off to a Protestant seminary, like me, and I was in the I was in the second wave of people who went off to Protestant seminaries. This was in the late 70s. The first wave in the 60s, though those folks got hammered really hard by church members who wanted to preserve that tradition of, of we don't have educated claims. That's one of our hallmarks and theological education that people would say, say, those other churches, they have theology, we have the gospel, which is really

unfortunate because they were unable to recognize that nobody has the gospel apart from interpreting it. And so their one true church theology based on the old preaching charts wasn't interpretation. And, and it was theology. So you the gospel is not theology, per se, but you can't preach teach talk about the gospel of the gospel without doing theology. They belong together. So, so I understand the pushback. I got pushed back on by church people. I remember this one experience. I was at this weekend event, and there's a bunch of young adults at this event at a congregation and one of my friends was was doing a master's degree in opera at University of Michigan. And I was, I was one one year out from starting seminary, I was in between University and seminary and we were staying in this home with some other people. And this there was this couple who were from this was in Michigan, but there's there's this couple who were from a an area of the church far south of Michigan. Let me say it that way. And, and the woman in the couple was asking my friend Mike and me what we were going to do. And Mike said, Oh, I'm, I'm in my first year of Master's work. I'm studying opera at University of Michigan. And she was like, Oh, so wonderful that you're studying music, and you're going on to do this musical training. And then she turned to me said, and so what are you doing? And I said, Well, I just finished my bachelor's at Central Michigan University and next fall, I'm going to be starting Theological Seminary out on the east coast. And then there was this like, stony silence. And she looked at me a unpleasantly, and said, what does that have to do with our church? Of course, I didn't know enough at the time to say, well, it has everything to do with our church. By the way, did you know that Fred M. Smith got a lot of his best ideas from Walter Roshan Bush, the social gospel theologian. I didn't know enough to say that at the time. But, um,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:27

You've had that conversation in your head a few times.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:29

Oh, I've had that conversation. I guess I've argued that I'd love to have the time turner and go back. But I would probably be kind of mean, at this point. Sorry. But anyway, there was that sort of hardening of the lines about theological education and yet the questions we were faced with as a denomination from our international expansion from just culture around us in the 1960s and 70s. We didn't have stuff to answer. We we didn't. We did not know the Christian tradition well enough to have the resources to answer those questions. Well, we didn't even know our own tradition well enough, because we were all steeped in, you know, I know Smith Davis is the story of the church. And so we're in this little echo chamber of constant. One, two church, we've got the truth. Don't confuse me with anything else. And so we couldn't even answer our own questions sometimes. So, and I should say, you know, when people said before, gosh, if you go off to study theology, you're just going to lose your faith. And my, my response to that is, you don't have to go to theological school to lose your faith. All you have to do is get an emergency call to the ER with a bad result in for a family member or friend. That'll do more to challenge your faith than anything you'll ever learn in seminary, right? So you don't have to, you don't have to. You don't have to listen to me lecture about St. Agustin to have that challenge your faith you, you you can just be faced with a personal tragedy. And be trying to pick up the pieces that that that can do many things to challenge your faith. So

Carla Long 24:09

You know, I, I've heard that before. And I will say that when I took classes on the new and old testament at Graceland as an undergrad, and when I went through seminary, there were some very confronting things that you have to work through. But I mean, if you don't work through them, how will you ever grow as a person? Like, these are things that you need to work through? I mean, I will tell you that I was so naive. I mean, these are some things we need to deconstruct. I'm going to tell you a really fast personal story, not about theology. I grew up in Kansas, and I, we watched the Wizard of Oz, like most people, and I was under the assumption that the Wizard of Oz was only shown in Kansas, for some reason.

I'm not kidding. I went to Graceland as an undergrad and somebody made In the Wizard of Oz, and out of my mouth before I can even stop it. I said, you don't know that movie you're not from Can't wait a second. And so I agree. I mean, I was so embarrassed because that was like a just an assumption that I had made. And I had never thought to question it until somebody questioned it. And I'm like, Wait a second, that cannot possibly be right. So, I mean, I wasn't bracelet, I was 19 year old person before I realized that the Wizard of Oz was shown outside of Kansas. So I mean, we need people to confront those things and to speak about those things. Because if it's just an assumption you've made and you've never taken it out and looked at it and thought about it, there's no way you could ever talk about it in a responsible way.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:46

Right, you know, Karla, algebraic equations in the final six weeks, so geometry when I was in school in high school, that totally deconstructed everything I know about math, and I have never recovered from I'm just telling you because you're a mathematician. I blame you.

Carla Long 26:03

So you should, as you should. So I have a question for you. So I've heard it said, and you can tell me if you think it's right or wrong, that everybody's doing theology all the time. I don't know if that's true. So start with there started with that. And then let's talk about good theology versus bad theology. You know, like, how do we know the difference? or, or, you know, like, yeah. Talking about that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:33

Yeah, so everybody's doing theology all the time. You know, sometimes sometimes picking out a dozen donuts is just picking out a dozen doughnuts. There's not a thing. Immediately theological about it

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:43

It's not about the apostles?

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:44

Oh wait! it's a dozen donuts. Yes. Charmaine does theology well, picking out a dozen donuts. So, so, but yeah, I'm just tracing that. Not everything we do is immediately theological, but it could be because I could start asking the question How much has this person paid? who's

working at this donut counter? And where are the ingredients come from? And how is the environment treated? Where the products were grown like the wheat or whatever. And so when you start doing that, you start asking the kind of theological questions that we would encourage people. We teach people to ask in seminary but

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:28

but on the other hand, one of the things that we felt was most important when we first started in a theologian and residents job, how many ever years ago it was

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:39

a while back.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:40

One of the things we really felt was important was to help break down some of those barriers. You know, only people who have degrees can do theology, because that is one of the riches in our denomination. Yes, there can be the The ignorant side of it, but but then there's also the richest side of our denomination where people, whether they have formal education or not, are seeking to deepen their faith to deepen their ministry to, to ask the hard questions do not run away from them to share the the understanding of what we're called to as a as a church with the next generation. And those are all theological activities. And, and we've always felt, I think me maybe a little bit more than Tony, but I think both of us really value the idea that whenever we are engaging, even even as we're engaging in worship, as we think about the prayer that we're going to offer, that is theology. And so, whenever there's an intentionality About what is it, we believe and why would about how we will share that. That is theology. And anyone who's conscious of that, and and intentional about that, I would say, is doing theology because you can just repeat stuff that you've already learned or that you've read somewhere or someone's told you, and that's not doing theology. You know, that's just repetition. And

Unknown Speaker 29:35

I would say I agree,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:37

and even you know, sometimes for people who, who have wrote prayers, they, they may be doing theology as they pray those prayers, or they may not be, but it's about the intentionality about is what I'm saying and doing trying to help people connect to God. Is it being responsible for the bigger story Worry in movement, about Jesus about the kingdom of God about the nature of humanity or the nature of God. So, some some things are definitely more theological in nature than other things, even though they may both be religious.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:20

The other part of your question was about good theology or bad theology. That's, that's a tricky, tricky question. And it's the kind of question we actually would expect from you. I think a tricky question, but

Carla Long 30:36

Oh, yes, I am a hard time reporter like I really get to the heart of the matter. But it is something I want to know.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:44

So yeah. So different ways to respond to that. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:49

I would. I think where I would start is it's going to look different to different people, what's a good theology and what's a bad theology, but I think what that Question really brings into focus is, how is it that, what are the mile markers? What are the signposts? What are the criteria by which a particular group determines whether theology is good or not, and, and that tells a lot more about them than then necessarily the theology that comes from them. And so, you know, for a time in, in our movement, there were a lot of people who would say, our theology is our history, right? And if you repeat the story correctly, that's good theology. But as we became more aware that we might be idolatrous about worshiping ourselves or history, instead of The focus being on God, then, then for us good theology was, is what we're doing focused on God, and are what we feel God is calling us to and has been all along. And that became our new definition of our new criteria for is a theology good? Does it point to the nature of God, the enduring love the long suffering and patience and grace of God? Does it point to Jesus presence and teaching in the world and beyond? beyond his life, death, resurrection, to be about the kingdom of God about how we live with each other here and how we interact all creation. So those are become our new criteria on whether or not a theology is good or bad. You know, these these markers on of who God is And what our call is as a church and who Jesus is and what justice is and what pieces. Yeah, so what the worth of persons is. So, you know, these have become our new markers to for us to determine whether there's good theology or bad theology. And then we use those also to usually judge aspects of ourselves of our own ways of thinking of doing things that might be bad theology. And to look at others and say, Oh, no, you know, there's another, there's another denomination saying this thing. And I don't think we can say that, you know, because that that would be going into what we would say is a bad theology because it doesn't hold up those things we identify, maybe not an answer answer, but it's a way of getting out. It

Tony Chvala-Smith 34:00

In my view, you can only answer that question, kind of from inside a particular tradition. And Charmaine just did that, you know, inside of Community of Christ theology or inside of Community of Christ, we have these markers she pointed out that kind of give us some, some lights. I like to use the image of the lights on the runway. And those have evolved over time out of our tradition, but also as we've come into contact with other Christian traditions and taken in things we've learned. I think in addition, I might say that a, a theology is good today when it does not turn away from the profound, the profound destructive issues we're facing in In the world, a theology that writes off climate change is a bad theology. It's bad ethics, it's bad politics. Because what we have there is we have a series of facts that that are, potentially, and I've actually already deeply destructive of the creation. And so a theology would be if theology

is good if it works from that, and affirms, affirms that and wants to do something about it. A theology that ignores the damaging, damaging power of racism in American culture is a bad theology. I don't care who it comes from too bad theology if it ignores that and doesn't want to do anything about it. A theology that wants to say, Oh, you know, Jesus is going to come back. So doesn't matter really what we do, we can't do anything to change. fix anything. So let's just, you know, let it all burn down until Jesus comes back. Bad theology, really bad, bad ethics, a bad exegesis of the New Testament. So I'm going to think maybe there's some, some places where we can say and, and one of the things I'm saying, Community of Christ, ecumenical partners would agree with us on that, and we would agree with them, right. So that's, that's, that's where we are in the same stream, as as they are and, and so those are some ways to look at it. A theology that a theology personally that cuts you off from God would not be a good theology, a theology that makes you feel like somehow I can't, I'm a bad person, therefore, I can't and I can't reach out to God must hate me. Bad theology. It's it's untrue.

Carla Long 36:59

Like how some of our LGBTQIA plus people have been

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:03

Yeah, that's what I was thinking exactly,

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:04

Exactly. theologies, that theologies that marginalized people for their identity, bad theology. That's not they're not taking seriously the, the full expanse of what Scripture is trying to say. They're not taking seriously the full expanse of what the Christian version has tried to say about the dignity of human beings. And so, so those are the things I would add is, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:37

And this is I'm just gonna kind of go off in another direction just a little bit. You can pull us back, Carla, is that in the 70s, and 80s, and 90s, as especially young adults in the church felt called to go to seminary and so there's this whole time period in the 60s, Tony talks about That first wave of people like the Bill Russell's who he was working for the church, but he was also going to St. Paul School of Theology, which was a Methodist school and one of "those" churches and and then others like Scheinbeck and

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:20

Went to Union. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:21

So others who who had a big impact on either students at Graceland or the church, Jeff Spencer, Spencer, Peter Judd, who were apostles in the church that they took themselves to St. Paul School of Theology. And eventually others are going to places like Iowa, in Colorado. And the cool thing is that you can see not only did they get a theological education, that they became sensitized, and articulate. In talking about civil rights other in Justices of the day, and and that enriched the whole Church's worldview then. And so the theological training doesn't

just put information into people's heads and now, you know, you know, stuff, but in our case, and where people were feeling called to go to school, typically, typically, on their own dollar and on their own hour. They, they brought back a much richer picture of things like, you know, what, what is this kingdom of God? What does it ask us to look at in a different way, like each other, and the creation. So anyhow, there's all of these other pieces, the broadening view of women in ministry came out of that as well. And asking the hard questions about why do we do what we do and why aren't women in these roles? I mean, Marietta Walker, back in the 1860s and 70s and 80s. You know, she's the one who donated land that the Graceland sits on our undergrad University. She She was an educator, she had gone to a women's school, she had, you know, advanced education and wanted to share that. And so, so she influenced I mean, and at that point, she was challenging church leaders, about women having the vote in, in world conferences, and and so on. You know, all this these other layers of richness and getting new eyes to see the world? I you know, I think we've been talking with Zac Harmon McLaughlin, who's been who's the director of the seminary, but he's just teaching in the seminary right now. And we're talking and talking about liberation theology and some contextual theologies, and it's opening up students minds to whole different ways of seeing their own reality, seeing the arc of history, seeing what we may be being called to be involved in right now to change the world for good. And and it's exciting and, and frightening for for students as they get these new new eyeballs and a new heart in some ways For what's happening around them new ways of imagining what is God calling us to in this moment? So, yeah, anyhow, I took us a little bit off.

Carla Long 42:14

Well, that's good. Or maybe when you talk about getting a new heart We also talked about getting courage and getting a brain.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:25

No, I've never seen that movie Carla. They only show it in select areas. Yeah, there's a lot of tornadoes.

Carla Long 42:32

I believe it's only Kansas.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:36

Yeah, we don't we don't want to tick you off. Right. No, Carla, because we don't want you to release the Flying Monkeys

Carla Long 42:42

I do have control over them.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:44

and know about this. Yeah, I don't know about the flight.

Carla Long 42:46

What does that mean? Does that make me the wicked witch of the west?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:51

You're further west! Yeah.

Carla Long 42:52

I appreciate that. And I didn't mean to re bring up the Wizard of Oz connection, but you made it too easy. somebody's getting a new heart, just perfect. So I really want to make sure in this conversation, we talked about the seminary as well as other ways that people can be educated in Community of Christ. Because there's not just the seminary, there's a lot of opportunities. So I want to talk about that. And I don't know if we want to go there next. But and I also in that conversation I want to talk about if people do want to go to seminary, how they can do that. So let's talk about all these different educational opportunities that community Christ offers.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:34

Sure,

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:35

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:36

Well, gosh, so I think first of all, I'll talk about some of the structural things that have changed that communicate to the whole church that theological education is important. And so that would be a thing I'm going to point to is temple school classes, which, though there had been temple school classes before the time of ordination of women, with the ordination of women, we then had required classes, three whole classes that you have to take. Because before that it was a very informal process of going on to be ordained. And so now that there's these three, three classes that you're supposed to take, and one of them is an introduction to Scripture, which is a highly theological class, we think, but you know, we're a little biased on that. So that's one of the things is that, you know, for before there's, you can be ordained that we require that, that those classes be there, but those are those classes are available to anybody who wants to take them and, and it's, well, it's really kind of encouraged for people who are wanting to know more about the church to go ahead and take intro to Scripture, or maybe one of the courses on preaching or on ministry. So those are those are some cases where we've instituted a pattern that gives opportunity and hopefully requirements to do some some of that kind of work. We, temple school 20 years ago had lots and lots and lots of different kinds of options. Not as much now with reducing of people, but they some of these courses are now available online. And David Lloyd to be the person to the often coordinates these with facilitators in different areas. And simple school classes can be done. When we're back to doing that in person with a teacher and resources, they're available for small groups to work on. And then I'll just do one more and the other then would be in different parts, different areas. of the church. There are programs where over the space of two to four years, students commit to going to a series of classes. So there, there used to be one in in Michigan, I think it was a three year rotation

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:19
Three year rotation there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 46:21
And they would have classes two to three times a year for over a weekend and do more and do some in depth study some reading and preparation, sometimes assignments that they were required to do lots of conversation. So those were theirs. There's one, there's a couple in California, place like that, one in Iowa. One in I'm not sure how many how often they meet, but in Ohio and West Virginia. So there's different parts of the US and Canada, they have these these organized, kind of rotation of classes that will they have a speaker come in, and it'll be a time of worship together as well as, as study.

Tony Chvala-Smith 47:17
And they often use some of the same textbooks that you would have in seminary, but not not all the same but some. So some students invitation to some of them, right. So some students in these these local programs might be reading military might be encountering Migliore for the first time. Yeah, that introduction to Christian Theology that that we like and use a lot. So faith

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:41
So Faith Seeking Understanding, or, or when we're doing when we go to some do some of those classes, if it's a biblical class will often encourage people to use the same text that we use for our undergrads. And so there's a good exposure to some good scholarship. what we think is good theology so that they become familiar with the resources that are out there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:08
But yeah, so there's those kinds of opportunities and and there's some like that in the International Church as well. Um, so we've taught in a few of those programs like MEADS, ministerial education and discipleship studies, there's our meets programs,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:23
and there's international MEADS, and then Tahiti has a pastoral school. So lots of different programs like that. So to see what might be available near you, seminary, you want to go

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:37
Yeah, sure. I mean, our seminary has been officially going since 2002. You mentioned that before it was our seminary before was Community of Christ seminary. It had been for quite a few years an MA our program taught through Park University, which is a local Kansas City University, Master of Arts and Master of Arts from religion and, and then at that time, Park was more affiliated with the church. And then it decided to kind of move away from that affiliation. And that program passed to Graceland for maybe not more than two years or so. And that was right at the time when we were creating Community of Christ seminary. And so we're really, really proud of Community of Christ seminary, not just because it's where we work, but because for a small for a small school. We, in my view, we do an amazing job of

integration. That is critical intellectual theological study, a spiritual formation, worship, and then the kind of social analysis, social cultural analysis that's really vital for the church today in terms of mission and so on, in the space of our two year plus a few months program. You get exposed to quite a bit and that holism where spirituality is woven into theological study, that that is one of I think one of the great things that we we do. And it wasn't always part of theological education in the church, there was a, there was a period before this when theological education was pretty much all head work, and her work was on your own. We don't see it that way anymore. This we're interested in the whole person. And so spiritual formation is an absolutely integral part of theological education. And so so our current program is two years plus a little it's, it's 34 hours. So graduate of masters credit and we now starting this fall we have a tracking program where you where you can do where you where you can do concentration, you can choose Christian theology is a concentration or you can choose spiritual leadership as a concentration. And peace and justice I remember, peace and justice as a concentration. And so that means that there we are now able to offer extra extra courses to, for people to take those like electives, but also to focus your education a bit more. So, um, so that's kind of where we are currently with seminary. Um, it's a

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:37

There's a piece I'd like to add in about seminary is that not long after the seminary became part of the church and Graceland, we had leaders with Don Compier and, and Sue McLaughlin, who really understood that the way forward was to do to have online classes. And so they were very early on in understanding that that schools could do this and kind of groundbreaking, with some of that, and so on. Most of our degree at the seminary is done online. And so, yes, there, there is, you know, lots of there's discussion, there's written discussion. And as things like zoom are becoming more accessible, there's more face discussions and things like that. But most of the classes, most of the class time is online. And then we have out of the 11 classes, 12 classes that you would have in an MAR, four of them, maybe five, depending on how you did it would have a face to face component where you would come to independence for a week. And at least we're assuming in the present state of things that we will get back to that because that's been a very important part. Yes. A very important part. The seminary because otherwise, you're taking 11 courses and you're getting a paper, you know, you're getting a degree. But when it's a seminary, it's it's the hard part that Tony was talking about the ministry part. But it's also about community, it's about being there for each other because most of our students are off in their own parts of the world doing this on their, you know, on their some on their own time, some as part of their church job. But they may not have people around them who've gone through this before, who understand why they feel called to do this or the importance this has for them. And so there's, there's this community, there's this worshiping community that we are when we're together this time of fellowship, but there's also you know, there's relationships that last well beyond. And so seminary is not just about taking classes, it's also about How do we how do we integrate this into our ministry into our understanding of how we're connected to each other into the church? And and then how do we, how do we be a supportive community to each other as well. And ask those hard questions of ourselves and each other. So it's kind of a nice balance. So like right now, in the number of in the students that we have in seminary, I think we have five or six, five or six different countries that are represented. And so that means

different time zones. That means totally different cultural settings. It often means different first languages and some of the countries and so so we're really enriched by people's experience from their own contexts. But also the church in those different areas because the church is really different in different parts of the world. And so, you know, a student who might have grown up in Iowa or Missouri gets a glimpse at what the church looks like in one say, in Zambia. And, and, you know, begins to see that what they see is not all what God is doing in this little tiny movement that we're a part of. So, it's, it's a, it's kind of an exciting thing to be a part of, and the people of course, are what make it special and but what is the also the intentionality that that we pray for each other, that we pray together that we, we struggled together that we anticipate that you know, when we're Going through Community of Christ history or Community of Christ theology that some people are going to be struggling because they haven't heard these things before. And, and their view of what the church is or what it should be make it really deconstructed all around them and that we need to be able to be there for each other. And, anyhow, so yeah, you can tell we kind of like what we do

Tony Chvala-Smith 52:05

And Carla, just just to think back to your like, 18 or 19 year old self online, I am way less terrifying than I am in person.

Carla Long 56:40

Don't believe I don't believe it. Believe it?

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:45

Oh, yeah. Listeners should know that Carla's first experience with me in classroom when she was an undergrad was was horrifying. She was scared scared back to Kansas almost.

Carla Long 56:56

Oh man, listeners, you see Tony and Charmaine they're lovely and wonderful and fantastic and smiley. That was not the Tony, I saw on that first day of class. I, I knew I was in for it, and I was

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:14

And she rose to the challenge.

She did.

Carla Long 57:18

So thank you, Tony and Charmaine, for talking about this. I really think this is an important conversation for people to know about. I have one last tiny little question and then I'm going to ask if there's anything else we needed to talk about. The last question is if people are interested in getting an MAR or at our seminary, how do they do it? Who do they contact what happens?

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:41

They can get on the Graceland University website and find the seminary and they will be directed to contact Sharon Ward, who is the administrative assistant or they can contact Zac

Harmon McLaughlin directly and we start the process. So that you start, just do the application. process. We have we have a little bit of financial aid. We're working on that we have some for students at different levels of the program. But But I think, as as theological master's degrees go, I want to say it this way, we will, we will be the most elegant, best cheat date you have ever had.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 58:23

We really are compared to most seminaries. We, we we don't we, it's a it's a pretty good deal. It's a pretty good deal. So another piece that I would just add in there is that our school year starts each fall. And so if you're wanting to enroll, we would be starting in the fall. And typically we would have like a registration kind of deadline at the end of May. But we are fairly we're pretty flexible about that. So if there are people who are still wanting to be, they should check and see whether or not they could still get begin this fall. The beginning class, which starts usually at the end of August, is a required class that everyone has to take. It's kind of the introductory class into the seminary. And so that starts each fall. So if you if you're not able to get in this fall, then plan on it for next fall.

Tony Chvala-Smith 59:32

Plus, we use a cohort system so and you can do the degree in two years or four years, most people choose it choose to do it like in the two years plus a few months. But I guarantee you from what I've seen over a long time now, if you when you start with a cohort, be prepared to make friends for life with with some pretty cool people. So it's a it's a neat way to do it.

Carla Long 59:59

That was that was one of my favorite parts of seminary is that now I'm so good friends because, well when I did it, you know, we were going three weeks at a time and I'm just gonna say it. We kind of went through hell together.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:00:15

Fear is a good bonder.

Carla Long 1:00:19

And also, we also used to have really good karaoke parties in peace and justice room.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:24

There you go.

Carla Long 1:00:25

So I'll never forget David Anderson singing the eye of the tiger with so much vigor. Sorry, Dave.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:34

That is an awesome mental picture for me if you're welcome.

Carla Long 1:00:39

No, is there anything else that you wanted me to ask that I forgot? I forgot to ask her that something else you wanted to say?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:44

One other thing, I'll just throw it in, theological education includes all kinds of things includes mentoring. You can you can be you can be mentored theologically by, by ministers with more experience and so and that's a great way. But also, there's in the church today, there are a lot of people, like Charmaine, who have who have gotten spiritual direction training in spiritual direction programs. And that has become just absolutely a beautiful and a central part of church life in a theological education. So, as part of that whole ism to that, that theological education has to include deep spirituality, not just learning a bunch of head stuff. But the head stuffs good,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:32

Which I would say, you know, I talked about civil rights and and peace and justice issues emerging in the church, because some of these people who went to seminary said, Well, hey, what about this? How does understanding this issue in the world around us challenge our theology? But it's also like our our students who went to Isloph they Partly, I mean, it's part of our introduction then to Jane Barnard who was a spiritual formation, pioneer there who created a program. But then she became a very good friend of the church and church leaders and introduced our church leaders to spiritual formation before many people even knew what that was. And so it's kind of all of these different ways that our interaction with with different denominations with different seminaries has really enriched our our people on all kinds of levels, individuals, but then our awareness to and and then also helps us to make these really good connections with with other denominations. And, you know, Tony, and I got to teach at St. Paul School of Theology a class that they needed someone to, to teach. That was trained in the area, and it was one of Tony's favorite areas. And so, you know, here, it was one of those wonderful ironies is that many of our church leaders in the 60s and 70s, had professors from St. Paul School of Theology. This method is seminary, teaching our leaders about early Christianity. And then, you know,

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:26

35 years later

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:03:26

Fourth years later, professors from Community of Christ are going and teaching Methodist ministers about history of Christian thought in early Christianity. So it's, it's those wonderful little, little pieces that that show us how we're connected and how much that that willingness to risk theologically has shaped us and opened doors.

Carla Long 1:03:58

I thought the class you taught would be restoration movements

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:04:04

There were a few there were a few students who when they heard where we worked were like, you know, like, and they got over it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:04:13

When they, when they when they learned that I would put them through the paces on learning the Trinity because I knew I knew this stuff better than they did. They had to kind of like, Oh, so you guys don't sacrifice goats after all.

Carla Long 1:04:27

Like No, we do.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:04:31

Oh, yes, we call it barbecue.

Carla Long 1:04:35

Good old Kansas City. All right. Well, thank you both so much. I really appreciate your taking the time to talk with us. And until we meet again.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:04:45

Thanks, Carla. Take care.

Josh Mangelson 1:04:50

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