

ES 79 | Coffee in The Swarm | Georgia Seagraves
Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 0:16

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Mike Hoffman 0:59

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast and Coffee in The Swarm. This is Mike Hoffman on campus minister at Graceland University. And today I have with me Georgia Seagraves, who is going to be the Council of House Chaplains president next year at Graceland University. And we'll talk a little bit about what her responsibilities are. Welcome, Georgia.

Georgia Seagraves 1:22

Hi, Mike, thank you so much for inviting me.

Mike Hoffman 1:24

Very good. Thanks for being here. So, Georgia, tell us a little bit about yourself, like what your majors are and what's going on? And, you know, those kinds of things, if you will. So,

Georgia Seagraves 1:35

Of course, I'm going into my last year at Graceland University.

Mike Hoffman 1:40

That's your third year right?

Georgia Seagraves 1:42

That is. Yes, I'm finishing a year early.

Mike Hoffman 1:45

Very impressive.

Georgia Seagraves 1:47

I'm double majoring in Hispanic Studies and International Studies with a minor in Political Science. I'm an ordained priest in the Community of Christ. I belong to the Sierra Pacific Mission Center. And I'm the oldest sister of three girls.

Mike Hoffman 2:04

Yes. Do you know, do your sisters plan to come to Graceland? Or do you know that? Or do they know that?

Georgia Seagraves 2:10

Yeah, one of them is 13. So she's not really thinking about that yet. But the other one is going into her senior year of high school, and I think she has her heart set somewhere else this time. Oh,

Mike Hoffman 2:20

Oh that's okay. I do understand that. So. Very good. Well, I appreciate knowing a little bit more about you, although we work together. This year and next year especially when you've been serving on campus ministries already. So. So, you know, there's a lot going on in our world right now. And that's one of the things I think that we wanted to share about is some of the perspectives you have on what's going around what's going on in the United States and around the world. Obviously, COVID-19 the pandemic has really thrown a loop in for all kinds of But how has it affected you? Or you know, or how would you talk about that?

Georgia Seagraves 3:05

Well, it's definitely induced a lot of fear, that's for sure. And I'm sure I'm not the only one who thinks and feels the same way. But it's also highlighted the amount of privilege that I have, and blessings that I have in my life. I've been really fortunate to be able to come back to a safe home surrounded by loving family members. Financially, it's been okay for everyone. Nothing too drastic has happened. But I know for many other people, that's not the case and that this is a really hard time full of a lot of suffering. And so I think the conversation right now is a lot about what can we do to help others from a distance?

Mike Hoffman 3:45

Absolutely. You just continually hear, especially in the last little bit, we've heard more and more cases are happening United States, although we might call it a second wave. It certainly has been is a continuation of the first I don't really know, but, but I appreciate what you said about the the thing, sort of the angle of privilege, because we do know that so many essential workers who have to work regardless or can't work remotely, are affected by this. You know, so, this summer you're doing some work. I know you're working for campus ministries for one, remotely, so are you doing something else remotely as well?

Georgia Seagraves 4:33

I am Yes. So I'm actually I'm the individual giving intern for this nonprofit in the California bay area called life moves. And they focus on helping the homeless population in the Bay Area and helping to transition them into permanent housing. The idea is to focus on whole person care, not just providing a bed and which is actually going to be really important in this upcoming year because due to COVID alone, homelessness expected to increase by 40% this year.

Mike Hoffman 5:04

And yeah, I'm not surprised by that. But that's the numbers are staggering. So I'm really glad I think I'm sure you're going to be a huge asset to that organization as an intern, but that's tremendous work that you're doing. So it goes along with your sort of your call as a priest I would imagine, too, because it's really helping those, that organization focus on families, or does it focus on individuals or, and all of the above?

Georgia Seagraves 5:35

All of the above, actually, it's really amazing. They have different shelters for family sites, and then different shelters for individual sites. And then they even have shelters that primarily focus on LGBTQ+ homeless and making sure that they get provided a safe space where they feel welcomed and comfortable to be who they are.

Mike Hoffman 5:54

That's really excellent. That's excellent. So there's so many things going on in my mind as you describe it. Not only is COVID affecting our lives, but you know, there is racial justice, and if I don't know what it's appropriate to call tension, but certainly there are protests going on across the country and around the world that so, you know, COVID and racial, the seek, the seeking of racial justice are both not just the United States but around the world. So how do you perceive what's going on in the other things? Like, the racial justice issues, are they, how are they impacting you?

Georgia Seagraves 6:38

They're ever prevalent. They're definitely on my mind. I think there's a lot of suffering going on right now, racial injustice and justices COVID but it's with racial injustice and the systemic oppression specifically, it's been it hasn't, it's always been here. And so I think what's happening right now is a lot have self reflection amongst the privilege folk, myself included, which is a really difficult process. I think it's difficult for me and I was and I had already tried to keep an open mind, but it's still a learning experience. And I think what's happening is, we're grieving, right? We finally are seeing the suffering for what it is we're realizing how corrupt the system is. We're seeing the brutality, the violence, the pain. And I think we're grieving this idea that we had as a country that we were so special or that we were in a safe place, or the United States was different than everywhere else, and I think it's a harsh wake up call, and even harsher and missed a pandemic.

Unknown Speaker 7:45

I totally agree with you on that. I know. I find myself as a middle aged, white guy, middle aged, as I creep up older and older, but I totally get that because I mean, grieving especially, I think is the same way because, yeah, I, I recognize several years ago that I have privilege as a sort of a middle aged middle American white guy. And you know, it's you start, that's one thing to accept it. But then when you start looking at racial injustice, and you said it's been around for, I think you said forever. It's I mean, you know, in our American history, I mean, it's really before the beginning of the nation, you know, for 400 years. There's been systemic racism, and I don't I don't know it's overwhelming sometimes when you think about or when you talk about it. You know, the other thing you mentioned is a part of your internship was the homelessness for the LGBTQ+ community. And you know, I this is June It's June of 20. So, you know, this is actually Pride month. So, you know, what about those issues? I mean, there have been recent developments in that as well, I don't know if you've been keeping up on those issues.

Georgia Seagraves 9:15

think it's especially important right now with this particular Pride Month of this year in the midst of the racial protests that are going on right now, to acknowledge that black lives that belong to the LGBTQ plus community. If you I mean, this is like we're beginning to get into the topic of intersectionality. Breona Taylor, for example, was killed in her own home, but the protests started with George Floyd, right? Often people are much more upset about the killing of black men. And so then there's just there's just this discussion on how do we transition to focusing on black trans lives, or black people who are a part of the LGBTQ plus community and making sure that we give them the same gumption and power and response as everybody else because their lives are just as valuable.

Mike Hoffman 10:12

Nicely said. Do you think these things, you know, you've been in campus ministries and going into the house chaplains president next year. Do you see these things impacting Graceland next year?

Georgia Seagraves 10:27

I honestly don't see how they couldn't.

Mike Hoffman 10:30

I mean, Grayson, yeah, sorry. I was just gonna say we know COVID-19 is going to, because he's already seen some rules, but what about the other things? Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

Georgia Seagraves 10:42

No, no worries. I think if we acknowledged systemic racism to be as prevalent and contagious as COVID-19, we would just be getting to the surface of how in depth and real it is. I think it's even though Grayson's isolated you know, it's rural southern Iowa, and it's to forget, it is very much so a part of the rest of the world. And people are bringing these things from their homes back to Graceland and they're carrying these heavy experiences and we don't know what their home life was like when they show up and we all have to interact together.

Unknown Speaker 11:17

Yeah, I know, I think about the fall and what that's going to bring and, you know, think about not only covering it and how we're sort of making plans for that, but then thinking, you know, what is it that campus ministries and Community of Christ because that's our sort of take on campus ministries, you know, how do we how do we support all these different people? I say difference just that's sounds like my white racism. I don't mean it that way. But you know how to find a we ally ourselves. How do we help people who are people of color people of different sexual orientation and those folks, when they get back on campus? I would imagine some of the students have probably had a tough summer. I don't know. You know, I, I haven't kept in touch with a lot of students over the summer. But I know, you know what you were sharing is, that's part of it.

Georgia Seagraves 12:20

Exactly. I think a lot of people's home life is not safe for them. And so maybe coming back to Graceland is something that they're really looking forward to. But I had heard this excellent metaphor, so I can't take credit for it. But they're talking about how you know, if you were going to go breathe underwater. You could do the right motion, you could try to fill up your lungs, you could open your mouth, relax, breathe out, but you wouldn't be getting any oxygen. The problem there is the environment, right? Sometimes people are in the wrong environment and they're doing all of the right things, but that place isn't safe. It isn't giving them oxygen. It's not good for them. And so I'm hoping as we get it to Graceland as counseled house chaplains president and with campus ministries team, is to try and give people that space for them to breathe easy.

Mike Hoffman 13:17

You know, it's easy to see how some of these also relate to the vision of Christ or the mission of Community of Christ, if you will. So, have you had thoughts about how all of this or any of these in particular, relate to Christ's mission either based in, I don't know, when I think about Jesus's mission statement, if you will, based on Luke 4:18. Or even the more contemporary, you know, Mission Initiatives that the church is about, did you see how those are related?

Georgia Seagraves 13:52

I think it's hard to see how they're not related.

Mike Hoffman 13:57

I guess I never really thought that that might be a trick question. I didn't mean it that way.

Georgia Seagraves 14:02

No. I think this is an excellent time for Christians and people who are figuring out their spirituality or are part of another religious organization to kind of, in a blunt way, put their money where their mouth is. And I think that we can say these beautiful things and to agree to abolish poverty and suffering and develop disciples to serve and pursue peace, but it's really easy to hide behind these broad general statements in the comfort of your home. So if anything, I'm hoping that what's going on with the racial and justices in the pandemic is that it's going to push us to be uncomfortable as we continue to try and figure out what ministry looks like today, which I think is challenging and scary and obviously, change is new and difficult, but what I've seen in these past couple months has been extraordinary. I mean, in all honesty, Mike, if you would have told me four months ago that I was going to be seeing all of my congregational members via video chat on a computer, I would have told you there's no way they can figure that out. And yet, every Sunday, I get to see 60 beautiful faces, figuring out zoom and worshiping together remotely.

Mike Hoffman 15:23

Yeah. That's really cool. That's cool. Yeah. So that's, that's a great example of how things are changing and impacting the church. So yeah, so I'm thinking a little out further out, and you've touched on it already, probably. So, you know, where do you see the church going in the future? I mean, you know, it's certainly addressing the issues right in front of us, but maybe

there's other issues or other concerns or things out in the future. What do you think about that?

Georgia Seagraves 16:00

While I definitely do love to think of the future, it's really hard to not be thinking of right now. So I think as we think about the future, we should think about what we can be doing now that will impact it later. And we got to have a nice conversation about this with where do we think that the church is going. And I just envisioned this Community of Christ that helps people with the day to day aspects of ministry. That gives people examples or encouragement or ideas on how they can be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. But in on the micro level, the day to day level on the trip to the grocery store or the you teach your kids to go sit next to the first grader who's alone, right and acknowledging that that's the Holy Spirit moving within us, even if we can't solve these systemic problems on our own.

Unknown Speaker 16:54

That's, that's really that's really good advice because I know you even in mind experience at Graceland every now and then I will notice a student sitting by themselves and some students are okay with that, but it also might be in place, and I, when we think about COVID-19 and coming back to campus, I know that some of the students are likely to be isolated and they may choose not to have roommates this year, because of the impact of the pandemic. And you know, so I think those are wise words, because not only as a first grader, but you know, a first year student by themselves to be incredibly lonely.

Georgia Seagraves 17:40

I think it's easy to get overwhelmed with looking at the big structural change and the future and the things that we can do now but I mean, Graceland University just put into place the social change major with two new,

Mike Hoffman 17:54

Oh yeah!

Georgia Seagraves 17:55

Right? How impactful is that to create a generations of leaders that are equipped to deal with the future that we are always thinking about.

Unknown Speaker 18:03

Yes, I am, I when I saw that announced that I knew it. I knew it was under consideration, but I didn't know it got approved. Approved by the Board of Trustees. That's excellent. Yeah, social change. And I don't remember the minors but the minors are almost as exciting is, I think one had to do with race and then had to do with sexuality. So it's like,

Georgia Seagraves 18:26

Exactly.

Mike Hoffman 18:28

Right where we are today. In some ways.

Georgia Seagraves 18:31

It's perfect if the Community of Christ and Graceland students can really lean into this idea of positive change, then I feel like we will be as, as children of God as church members, as classmates. as citizens, we will be more prepared to address these things and so that we can take down together these big structural institutions of racism and oppression and neglect.

Mike Hoffman 19:02

Those are big issues, who do you? You know, do you see us? Is there anything? Any buddy in particular you see us partner us in the future? to do that? You know, you work for this, you're doing an internship for this organization. But is there any? I don't know. I don't mean necessarily specifics, but what do you have in mind?

Georgia Seagraves 19:27

Well, last year I got to be the interfaith director, I think is the title. And I think it would be really powerful to see all of these organized religions and churches getting together to work towards this mission of abolishing poverty and ending suffering. And even though maybe, like, the beliefs are different, and the religions are completely different, there is this underlying idea that we're all connected and World Peace should be a goal and nobody should have needless suffering. And so I think it would be amazing as a church if we were able to find other churches and to work together and to seek community with all of God's people, even if their beliefs don't directly reflect ours.

Mike Hoffman 20:19

Absolutely. I knew you had an interest in the interface when we first started working together. So that's not surprising that you had that experience, impact. Yeah, so is there are there other things that are stirring your soul right now? I mean, in terms of, I definitely covered some big topics, you know, it's like, oh, is there anything else? I mean, you know, what, what excites you most about your major, I mean, you know, like, where it goes in the future and that kind of thing?

Georgia Seagraves 20:53

I was most excited about the Hispanic studies, Major, because I love community. Haiti with other people. I originally fell in love with the Spanish language in high school. But obviously high schools aren't equipped with the best resources and tools and teachers lives are stressful. And that doesn't end when you get to college. But I was really lucky to have an amazing Hispanic studies professor at Graceland. And being able to connect with people from other parts of the world, in different regions, or even just in the United States by demonstrating that I care enough about them to learn their language, I think can be a powerful thing. Something that I'm hoping in the future is that the United States recognizes as a whole that we are not called to be isolationists. But even though it's kind of easy to forget, because we're only surrounded by two different countries and one of them speaks the same language as us. The world is a diverse

place. And it's a really powerful ministry, I think to take that time and learn to speak and be with others.

Mike Hoffman 22:02

So when you're Hispanic studies program, did you get a chance to travel at all before? Before the vendor?

Georgia Seagraves 22:11

Yes, actually I did. So last summer I got to go on an experiential learning trip to San Juan Puerto Rico, which was amazing. We even did, we had a little service day where we helped this Waldorf School on San Juan helped to rebuild a shed so they could store their supplies without getting wet when it rains. They have those torrential rain forests and Puerto Rico, and how can you kind of protect that? And that was a really powerful experience, because the United States denies Puerto Rico often, right? It's an example of this relationship or they just exploit this island for profit. And in high school, and throughout all of my education, they never even mentioned that Puerto Rico is essentially a US colony. By getting there and getting to be a part of the culture and speak the language, you just realize how powerful of a group they are, and how independent they are and smart and the things that they have to offer. And it's just another example of how this isolationist behavior that we have can be really detrimental, not just ourselves and the things that we learn, but to those around us and how there's still a lot of work to be done to make sure that we are global citizens.

Mike Hoffman 23:32

I always had I always wanted to go to Puerto Rico, I thought it sounded like an incredible party. I don't think when I first thought that that I even knew it was part of the United States. I think it's important, like a life that I've learned to have. I mean, I knew it existed and you know, and that's I appreciate what you said about that. So I think that's great advice in terms of being open and learning from other people and the importance of learning another language. And not just the language, it sounds like you also, were learning about their culture while you were there and this kind of thing. So that's excellent. So, so I know you're from California. So, you know, have you had? Have you been able to use those language skills in California? Or was that just not possible?

Georgia Seagraves 24:25

So actually, I think there might be more Spanish speakers than English speakers in California. I know that's definitely true for some regions. And if that is incorrect, and I apologize if it is, it's definitely the second most common language. And by 2050, I think there will be more Spanish speakers in the United States than English speakers. So it's amazing that you can find it just about anywhere. But one of the most exciting blessings that I've had in my life was showing up to Grayson and using Spanish more than I ever have in my life with the grace university students because they do an excellent recruiting people from all over the world. Last year, one of my best friends was from Colombia. And I got to practice speaking Spanish with him. And people are so kind and generous with that Graceland attitude that they were willing to let me fumble along, as I tried to connect with them.

Mike Hoffman 25:19

So do you see that, you're talking about Graceland, how do you see that impacting maybe of Christ? I mean, we have a world conference coming up in 2022. If everything's working out like it is, assuming the pandemic might be over or waning enough that we could do that or finding other options but what about your you know, your Spanish and your action? Do you see yourself getting involved in other international or conferences and things like that, like all conference,

Georgia Seagraves 25:55

I hope so. Last World Conference, I got a couple of amazing opportunities to speak and read and sing in Spanish to participate in the services. And that opened a whole new door of Community of Christ members because then people who traveled all the way across the world to come visit for World Conference, whose first language is Spanish came up to me and said, "Thank you for speaking or singing and sharing." But it was in Spanish. It was the first time someone had felt comfortable enough to approach me in their native language as opposed to assuming that I only knew English. And that was such an exciting moment in blessing and I could just really feel especially in that environment like what we were talking about. I could really feel the spirit moving like between us, as we saw each other and love each other as equals as neighbors as brothers and sisters.

Mike Hoffman 26:51

It's amazing actually that you had that experience. I know world conferences are always just so amazing to me. And the fact that a relatively small denomination in terms of global churches and organizations, we have so many different countries represented and represented in so many different languages and experiences. It is truly a remarkable experience. Is there anything you'd like to say about Christ's mission in the present? The future? As we close our time together? Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Georgia Seagraves 27:30

I think I'll just have to say, just one little going away message is to not give up hope. Just as we were talking about, all of this is extremely overwhelming, and I can see how it feels like we are breathing underwater. But I think if maybe we're doing we think we're doing all the right things. We're praying and we're going to church on zoom church on Sundays, but we still aren't feeling connected to the spirit that it's okay to try and change up your environment. Anything so Anything so that you can help and breathe easy and allow the Holy Spirit to breathe in and out of you. It's really easy to get tired and discouraged, and to want to stop and give up or look away, but God calls us to look and to act, and to be there. And we have an excellent support group of this Community of Christ church that is all here for each other. And I think if we can really support each other the way that we're called to that together, we can get through this.

Mike Hoffman 28:32

Thank you for sharing, Georgia Seagraves! I look forward to seeing you on campus in a few weeks actually. And, of course, we'll probably be hidden behind mass. So the great experience and we can sit down in the swarm and have coffee for real.

Georgia Seagraves 28:52

I can't wait.

Mike Hoffman 28:55

Thank you for spending time with us today with me.

Georgia Seagraves 28:59

Thank you so much for having me

Josh Mangelson 29:08

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