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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.

Karin Peter 0:33

Welcome. I'm your host, Karin Peter. And this is Cup of Joe, part of the project Zion podcast family where we chat about all things church history. And today's episode we're visiting with Reverend Rock Fremont who lives with his spouse Ernie in Phoenix Arizona. Rock is a pastor at Shepherd of the Hills United Church of Christ. He's also a spiritual director, college instructor of world religions course I believe he's an ecumenical and denominational leader and a passionate advocate for justice. And I'm going to add he is a very good friend. So thank you, Rock for being with us. Today we're going to talk a little bit about one of his many areas of interest, and that is religious history. And Rock, from our conversations I have learned is well versed, not only in religious history in general, but especially in primitive religions or American frontier religions, which our branch of Restoration came from. So that was surprising to me when I learned it. And I was intrigued by it, which brought us to this podcast today. So hi, Rock.

Rock Fremont 1:54

Hi, Karen! Thanks for having me.

Karin Peter 1:56

Oh, we're so glad that you are willing to come and have a conversation. With us so before we kind of launch into the the religious history part, can you tell us a little bit about yourself so our listeners can get to know you?

Rock Fremont 2:10

Sure. Well, you've mentioned quite a bit so far, but I am a pastor in the United Church of Christ. And for listeners that may not be familiar with that denomination, we are a what, what folks would call a United and Uniting Church or denomination, or what I would say a Christian movement. So we are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world and made up of four different denominations actually, originally, so some of those denominations were the congregationalists, which many of the listeners will probably know a lot about from that restoration church history. And they went on to merge with a small group of another another frontier group of Christians called The Kelley Christians to form the congregational Christian church. And then my church family. My family came from a small group of German Christians called the evangelical church. And they went on to merge with the Reformed Church, the German Reformed Church. And in 1957, all four of those branches merge to form the United Church of Christ. So I grew up in this tradition, grew up in a small church in the metro Phoenix area that was actually federated with the United Methodist Church. So we were one at the local congregational level. So I really do, as you mentioned, already have a love for humanism, and

being together, walking together and really asking, you know, what can we do together? So a humanism is really my passion and where my heart is.

Karin Peter 3:57

So our listeners will resonate with the movement illustration that you're part of the Christian movement, we too have used that terminology as opposed to denomination, it seems to reflect our journey more effectively. So we have that in common.

Rock Fremont 4:14

And I have to say that I stole that movement, a movement for wholeness and a fragmented world. I stole that from our Disciples of Christ full communion partners, that's their tagline, which I just absolutely adore.

Karin Peter 4:28

So in full disclosure, thank you, Disciples of Christ for, for sharing that. So you do live in the Greater Phoenix area. How long have you been there?

Rock Fremont 4:40

My family moved here to Phoenix when I was in kindergarten, so I've lived here most of my life.

Karin Peter 4:49

So you're an almost native,

Rock Fremont 4:51

Yeah, I would say at this point in my life, people would say that I'm a native. I'm used to our heat.

Karin Peter 4:59

And so you pastor the congregation there at Shepherd of the Hills. And you are married to Ernie. And what else? What are your deep hobbies? Do you have other interests?

Rock Fremont 5:15

Well, a church history, as you mentioned, and I know I'm kind of a I'm kind of a church nerd. So, you know, if I had to say, what are my hobbies, I would say, liturgical year church history, probably all of the things that make me a great listener for project science, because I actually, I absolutely adore all of your episodes and try to keep up and in listening to each and every one. So

Karin Peter 5:46

well, that's wonderful feedback. And we appreciate that we love to hear back from listeners and we also take suggestions what's I think I was going to ask you before we close, so if you think of anything, we're happy to look at that.

Rock Fremont 5:59

I'll give you some And and honestly I guess the other thing that is worth mentioning is I also teach world religion as adjunct faculty, for America County Community College System. So, so communism and interfaith really are my hobbies and my everything. So when you invited me to come and be on projects I and of course I was going to say yes.

Karin Peter 6:25

Well, we met at an event where you were actually practicing your ecumenical ministries. you attended the sunstone event at the Phoenix Central Community of Christ a couple of years ago, as you were getting to know your parish neighbors, and I happen to be there, which is how we met in that time. So take a few minutes to tell us a little bit about your work in the interfaith and ecumenical communities.

Rock Fremont 6:53

Sure, well, I just, you know, remembering back to that day, specifically, I just became pastor of Shepherd hills United Church of Christ. And they are a local congregation. And I heard about that event and thought, Wow, how wonderful. I want, I want to go, I mean on many levels on it on a history level, but in terms of why I was there, it was really more of relationship driven. I'm always looking for opportunities. I think, pastors in so many ways, are better pastors, when they're looking. They're looking around and asking themselves, you know, where can we work together with other congregations and even, you know, to go a little bit wider angle, wider lens. How can we work with people of other faiths, you know, that there's a lot that we can agree on as people of faith? And I think if we worked together more, the world would be a very different place.

Karin Peter 7:53

Indeed. So what would you say to community Christ pastors who might be listening Core Community of Christ folks who are just beginning to explore ecumenical or interfaith council participation in their areas.

Rock Fremont 8:09

We're ready. We were ready. You know, many ecumenical councils at this point, like, as we look around in our world, and see institutions that are struggling, a lot of our ecumenical institutions are also struggling. And often they look towards interfaith dialogue, as as a way forward. So there are a lot of folks that are in you know, traditional councils of churches that may not even know that the Community of Christ exists. There are other ecumenical organizations like mine here in the metro Phoenix area, that Arizona faith network, which was our old Council of Churches, they decided to rebrand themselves and become an inner religious group. So they're They're incorporating our not only our LDS friends, but they're also incorporating Muslims and Hindus and people of other from other communities of faith and looking at just what I mentioned, you know, how can we be better together? And more importantly, how can we work together on things that we agree on? So it's not only that we're ready, I would say that you're ready, as well. The Community of Christ is ready. And I know you'll probably ask me, ask me this later in the podcast, but I really do think that the Community of Christ has so many gifts to share with the world but I think more importantly, you have a tremendous wealth of, of

history and opportunities to share that history in terms of especially in terms of what I would call being more like Jesus. Being welcoming of all people and being more inclusive and helping others in that journey.

Karin Peter 10:09

Okay, well, let's dive in then what that journey has been there. So you do have a lot of interest in religious history, but we have had some wonderful conversations in particular about frontier religious history that has sent me back to the books many times because you are a wealth of information there. But you do have an interest in the history of the restoration movement. So where did that come from? And where has it kind of led you as you've explored a little bit more about the branches of restoration history that became both LDS and Community of Christ.

Rock Fremont 10:52

So I think it originally came from my confirmation class we we confirm in junior high most of our mainline Protestant traditions, well really confirm our faith at the junior high, sometimes high school level. And my first pastor. He had a love for church history. And I think he shared that with me. He absolutely shared that with me. But in in doing that, you know, especially being part of a local congregation that was part of two different church traditions, both United Methodist and UCC. History was a big part of who we were at the local level. And we had a lot of it since we had two denominations to talk about. And, of course, within the United Methodist tradition within the Methodist tradition on a whole, there's a lot of history there. And most of that history connects with that Second Great Awakening movement within the United States. And so many connections with the restoration church in terms of Methodism, and then more importantly, on my own side of the United Church of Christ with those O'Kelly Christians that also had Methodist roots. But they were one of those movements, one of those Churches of Christ movements early on or groupings of Christians that were journeying together and trying to ask bigger questions about, you know, how can we work together? I mean, I think that that's something that people don't often talk about when we talk about restoration, the restoration movement on a whole in terms of other denominations or other movements that evolved during that time, but one of those key pieces for for that movement was being a United Church and, and so then I think you're trying to get more personal and maybe no me. And so at a personal level, specifically with the Joseph Smith story, I'll just go right into that. I am, as you mentioned, I have a spouse, Ernie. And so that's the same as same sex relationship and like many people that are struggling with coming out, I was in that confirmation class and struggling and I remember talking about the restoration tradition in different streams of that tradition. And of course, living in the metro Phoenix area, we are surrounded by the LDS tradition. And my mom's family actually married into an LDS family. So I grew up going to family dinners and having the missionaries at those events. And would always get into religious conversations with them, of course. And it was really exciting for me as a young person kind of being a church nerd early on, and having the ability to just connect with another young person. You know, the missionaries they were older than than I was, but you know, they were always up for a religious conversation. And I just found that so magical. And so I really began to relate to the Joseph Smith story specifically in specifically in the first vision, I

think, is really where I connected because, you know, you have Joseph Smith, you know, as as the three volume history of Journey of People says.

Karin Peter 14:55

Thank you for the plug!

Rock Fremont 15:00

He talks about Joseph Smith's this vision. And a young person between 14 and 15 years old, having this vision and as a young, gay man struggling with acceptance and being concerned with, you know, would the church accept me? Now, many may not know the United Church of Christ is a very inclusive tradition. We're very progressive in terms of social, social witness. We were one of the first denominations to ordain an openly gay person back in 1972, a man named William Johnson. We were one of the first churches to ordain and a woman into Christian ministry. So really on the front in terms of making our church Better Place and more welcoming for all people early on. So, as I heard more and more about this Joseph Smith's story, I couldn't help but relate to it. So in in that book, I just wrote down one thing. You know, Joseph Smith's story, he says that he was swallowed up, swallowed up by the divine. Divine is my word, but to be swallowed up by the divine, well, who doesn't want that? I want to be swallowed up by the divine,

Karin Peter 16:40

Especially when you are struggling with "Am I included?"

Rock Fremont 16:44

Absolutely.

Karin Peter 16:45

"Do I have worth will I be valued?" Yeah,

Rock Fremont 16:47

Absolutely. And so you know, I just related so much to the Joseph Smith story, especially, also relating to the United Methodist in our United Methodist history and to the John Wesley's story of Wesley's heart being strangely warmed, you know, these wonderful conversion experiences, like who doesn't want to be converted? Who doesn't want to have that experience? And so I could just relate so much to that story as a young gay man and asking myself, you know, asking myself, what is my place in the institution now to bring that forward? When I came out to my mom, she did not accept me like I hoped that she would at that time, and out of all places, she put me in the car and she took me to the church. And she sat me down in front of the of the pastor, and she said, "You deal with him." And so the pastor asked, A few questions he asked, you know, when did I know? And we had a long conversation. And you know, really all I really remember him saying was that you are a beloved child of God. And I don't think he said this, but this is what i, this is what I heard. And this is what I continue to play out. In my mind today, you know, God doesn't make trash. And I heard that and, you know, so in an age where so many people are exiting the institutional church, or so many of these institutions that so many

of us have been hurt by, you know, I had a radically different experience. You know, my experience was being welcomed and accepted by the institution and and told that I was loved and, and That institution continued to nourish me throughout my life. And then ultimately, of course, I decided to give my life to that institution.

Karin Peter 19:13

Where you relive that invitation and welcome on a daily basis, not just in your congregation, but as I've seen you participate with us in Community of Christ and invite us to participate with you in interfaith and inter religious activities.

Rock Fremont 19:30

Absolutely, I am and I was one thing that we didn't mention is I was a prison chaplain for the Arizona Department of Corrections and served two units there one of them was there condemned grow or death row, and every every opportunity that I had to go into that place, you know, I reminded myself but for the grace of God there go I and, and so the opportunity to share that grace or as that three volumes, says it, you know, To journey to joruney as a people. I mean, that's an amazing title because that's who we are as people of faith. Not only Christ, not only the United Church of Christ, but to have the opportunity to share that radical hospitality with all people is a tremendous privilege and, and a challenge for us today. It challenges us to go into places that may not, you know, that we might not feel, we feel that they may not accept us like councils of churches. You know, I would hope that any council of church would accept the Community of Christ and I know they would, but I know that sometimes that that history is a struggle and like with any religious tradition, you know, people have ideas about something They might have heard about anything. And you know, there's so there's a challenge there for us to share who we are.

Karin Peter 21:13

Well, and who we are in that uniting way. Yes. So I want to, I want to connect a little bit when you were speaking earlier about growing up in your tradition and the different churches uniting together. That's a really point of commonality that we have with other traditions in the restoration movement. You see that over and over again, you see small churches uniting with the what had become Joseph Smith's movement and his new church at that time. I think it was the Church of Jesus Christ, I'd have to go back and read the book again with all the different names that it had. But over and over again, we find people small churches coming and uniting because that was what was happening at the time. It is not just a unique thing to the restoration, it was all these other groups uniting into other ways, as well. And so we were very much a part of a bigger picture just like now we're part of the bigger ecumenical and interfaith picture.

Rock Fremont 22:15

I think that one one thing that may be different within the mainline Protestant tradition, often churches come together, out of you know, from an early perspective in ecumenical history, a lot of that early ecumenical witness, it was churches coming together, Christians coming together, to be in mission together, to actually do things be in ministry together, which is a

wonderful, you know, instigator for us to be together, you know, how can we work together to make the world a better place, but unfortunately, in many ways, you know, the Ecumenical Movement has lost a lot of its umph in the world, because, you know, many things that bring us together now are out of weakness. You know, so how can we merge the institution? You know, how can we bring our institutions together to better serve those that are in our pews, I think Ramsey, one of the Archbishop's of Canterbury and leaders of the Anglican Communion. He said that the church is the only institution that that is to serve those who are not its members. And I think, you know, that's something that we as Christians just to be might need to be mindful of more mindful. You know, often we sit in our pews and we think that the church we forget that we are the church, but we think that the church is an institution is to serve our needs.

Karin Peter 23:56

Oh yeah, we do hear that, and they Thank you for that reminder about our true call. I think it was William Temple that said a church aged admission is not Christian.

Rock Fremont 24:10

You're right. Archbishop temple.

Karin Peter 24:12

All right, and Tony Chvala-Smith, if you're listening, there's a shout out to you. I remembered that from seminary. So that's amazing surprise that came out. Yeah. So with all of your study and reading in the primitive traditions and the restoration movement and you have read Mark Scherer's three volume Journey of a People, what bits have been interesting to you, or do you find strains of still kind of resonant in Christian community today?

Rock Fremont 24:50

I think that the primary emphasis for me in terms of the restoration movement and as I look at my own denomination, one of the quotes, We we worked with an advertising agency back in the 1990s, to come up with an entire branding campaign. Because, you know, we're a wonderful inclusive church, much like the Community of Christ in so many ways, but we had a name problem. And so instead of changing our name, which I would really love to do, we decided well, how can we better articulate who we are? And and so one of the things that came out of that was is to use this quote that God is still speaking. And then also never place a period where God has placed a comma an old Gracie Allen quote out of all things. And, and I think that if there was one gift or one area that I find so important in terms of the restoration tradition is especially In Community of Christ is that you never placed a period where God has placed a comma, that God is still speaking. And so we you know, in the United Church of Christ tradition, we find that God is still speaking that quote, actually comes from the pilgrims, Pastor, when he sent the pilgrims or when the pilgrims came to the Americas. He said that never place a God never place a pier. No, sorry. God is still speaking through His Holy Word, through His Holy Word. And so this idea that there's still more light there store still more breadth and depth. In our not up not only our scriptural tradition, but in our individual traditions, that, that God is still

speaking. And as you read the history, the journey of a people it's throughout you see it over and over.

Karin Peter 27:02

It's one of our enduring principles. Yeah. Right. So continuing revelation or, or the ongoing epiphany, whatever. Whatever other liturgical language we want to use. That's still what we live out in our movement.

Rock Fremont 27:18

I think that really popped out for me with your your, one of the recent podcasts by was it Lach Mackay?

Karin Peter 27:28

Lach Mackay.

Rock Fremont 27:30

Mackay, when he talked about that, that first vision of Joseph Smith, but specifically looking that looking at that as a conversion experience. And then specifically when he talks about those videos and what people hear in those videos, you know,

Karin Peter 27:50

Yes, yeah.

Rock Fremont 27:52

And being more open to other traditions and, you know, how can we share this secret story to a new generation.

Karin Peter 28:03

I think it that ties in so well with what you said about thinking the churches there to serve us. We also think that you're just there to speak just to us, as opposed to us figuring out how to share what God has brought in our experience with others.

Rock Fremont 28:20

Absolutely. Well, I just think of, you know, people that might be listening to this, this, you know, my story specifically insane. Wow. I mean, the Joseph Smith story?

Karin Peter 28:31

Well, I'm thinking that I thought it the first time you and I talked about

Rock Fremont 28:35

Has something to say to this, this, this gay, this gay little kid, you know, this, this scared, Junior High student that's trying to figure out, you know, if I'm okay. That's an amazing I mean, I think that that's something that we, as all people of faith are called to. You know, it's not that we're not relative But I do think that we have to learn new ways of engaging our story and making

that story sharing that story in a relevant way with a new generation. Because those stories continue to speak. And of course, I'm going to say that because I love history, but you know, as as, as we know, if we don't know our history, we will will repeat it.

Karin Peter 29:25

So outside of our historical presence, which is how you encountered us to begin with and Community of Christ. When did you first encounter in real life, Community of Christ outside of research and study?

Rock Fremont 29:39

I think it was in 2015. I went to the Parliament in Salt Lake City,

Karin Peter 29:44

The Parliament of world religions.

Rock Fremont 29:46

And I was I was so excited to see that the Community of Christ was there with a booth. And of course, I always heard about the old RLDS church is as soon as I read about it, That tradition and asked LDS friends of course, they knew nothing about or acted as if they knew nothing about that tradition. And I, of course, was very interested in that tradition, especially once I realized, maybe looked at the website and saw that you all ordained both women and and then later on, of course, LGBT people. Of course, I wanted to learn more, but was never really able to connect and so out of all people to connect with, to have the opportunity to meet President Veazey and have my picture taken with him and see that he was so open and accessible.

Karin Peter 30:46

We've heard other people state that is something that was of interest say more about that.

Rock Fremont 30:53

I think I'm a big Richard Rohr fan, and, you know, I know others have said this as well. I think I think Carl Bart may have said it first. But, you know, how do we how do we share love by sharing our presence? And so just that ability to walk up to someone and it might help that he's, where's he from? Tennessee right? He is, you know, so you know, as he would say, Good Tennessee boy. You know, I just I feel like that, you know, just gushes out. You know, that hospitality that been welcoming. He's someone that you would meet and, you know, I felt he may not remember me from anybody else. But you know, my feeling was is that he would forever remember me. I mean, he knows people. He's a people person. And that was just so wonderful to have that opportunity to meet him and until Learn more about the Community of Christ from Community of Christ folks. Now, I also went on to serve on the board for the Arizona interfaith movement. And many folks might know Eldridge Spain. Sure. And so Eldridge and I have been friends now for many years. And I've had a good opportunity to learn more about the Community of Christ through Eldridge. And you know, and honestly, through his ministry as well. You know, I also I think of that St. Francis, quote, or the quote that's attributed to Francis where, you know, we hear that to preach the gospel at all times, and if words if

necessary use words. And, and honestly, I know it may not feel this way, but my limited experience with the Community of Christ in terms of people, everyone that I've met from Community of Christ, they've all been Good people, as my grandma would say, y'all are good people.

Karin Peter 33:06

We'll take that. We'll take that as a blessing from you. Rock. Thank you. So you had held up your journey of a people, volumes there. And I think it was last year, you messaged me a photo just out of the blue, I get this photo from you. And it's a photo of the three volume history journey of a people and the caption was, look what came today. And so impressed that you had gotten that. So did you glean any new insights from that text as you went through and read some of that?

Rock Fremont 33:41

Well, I will say that. do you remember that? I'm sure you remember that? What was it a 10 volume nine volume series.

Karin Peter 33:47

Oh the blue one, yeah.

Rock Fremont 33:50

And so somebody told me about that, about that series along the way. So I get on Harold house and look at the website and I can't remember what the price tag was at the time, but they were outrageously expensive. For me wherever I was on my journey at that time, they were expensive. And I called Herald House. And maybe I shouldn't say this. The person on the other line on the on the other end of the phone said, Oh, well, you know, you might call the, Is it the old Stone Church?

Karin Peter 34:25

Stone Church, yeah.

Rock Fremont 34:29

Stone Church. They have a used bookstore, or they have used books for sale. And so you might call and see if you could get a used set of those. So I called and I think it was maybe a week later, after leaving a voicemail week later, somebody returns my call. And they sold me a set of those. So I had that old traditional set. And of course, they were really difficult to

Karin Peter 34:56

They are dense.

Yeah,

Really dense and tiny font so hard to read and a lot of words.

Rock Fremont 35:05

It was a lot. So I still have that set. You know, it's wonderful, and it's a great story. But then when I heard that there was a new history coming, and I think you've may have told me that it was coming out. I called Herald House this time and I, I purchased the set and I was so excited when they came and even more excited as I, as I, you know, kind of opened them up and mined them. But specifically what stands out for me in terms of what Mark does in those, this gives us a real sense of history and more importantly, what was happening during a specific time. So time and place a context. Yeah, so having the context is everything, you know, so it's not just a story that's stuck. Time, it's a story that becomes relevant and relevant, maybe not personally relevant. I mean, although, although, especially the early history, as you can tell, did, you know become very personal for me, I think that it becomes relevant in terms of historical context of who we are as American people. And, and I think that's probably why the restoration movement on a whole, historically is so fascinating for me is that we begin to see these home home grown American churches. And, you know, really, I mean, I think they would all say historically, trying to get back to something that has some depth, you know, trying to go back to something, although I feel you know, that it's also something new. You know, because there is And I think they'd be, I think it was historical characters and our history would also be comfortable with this is that, you know, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is doing something among us.

Karin Peter 37:13

So to go back to something, and yet, on the cusp of something new is kind of where we are right now in the church, where we've been living online, using zoom for all of our interactions. And a lot of us are wondering, when do we get to go back into our buildings and back into meeting in the way that we used to? And yet, in reality, we recognize that somehow we're on the cusp of something new. And our journey is taking us in a completely different direction.

Rock Fremont 37:47

Who knew that our journey would would go this way three months ago, we we host exchange students and two years ago, one of our exchange students came from Italy so we probably had better sight of what what the new way was looking like a little earlier than than most Americans as we were worried about one of our, our sons, our Italian son got caught up and in this in Italy, of dealing, you know, earlier with this, then then we needed to. But I think more importantly, that this is something to be lived into, you know, for as awful as this time is on so many levels. It's also very exciting in terms of what we're doing and what we're able to do in terms of engagement. Ernie, speaking of church nerds, my spouse is really annoyed with me sometimes on Sunday, because I'm like, Oh, where are we going to go to church today? You know, so we'll, we'll watch my service, which we do pre recorded elements throughout the week. And so Sunday morning, we'll watch my church service but yet, I'll say Oh, John Wesley's chapel in London is doing a service. Do you want to watch that? And he's like, No.

Karin Peter 39:10

How many of these do I have to watch?

Rock Fremont 39:12

Right? And but but you know, amazing things have happened in terms of technology. And I think that it's important that we as church recognize that, you know, we need not go back to the way things were. I mean, this is a new mission field a new way of being. I don't know that I ever need to go back to meeting with my church Council, for instance, in person. Like, let's do it via zoom. We've even talked about the way conferences might look. Right. You know, we probably do, you know, a lot of business here in the virtual world. But what that means is, is when we do come back to being together, I think that those ways of being together will be much more intentional. And definitely when we talk about presence, you know, we show our love. I think that our ways of being together physically will be very different and more intentional now. And it's important that we don't go back to the same way with that either. You know, I think that there, there are ways of being together that will be very different and ways of being present to each other. You know, I can't count the number of times where I have my smartphone on the table at a meeting, and I'm multitasking now whereas now I'm craving to be with other people. I don't know that all. I don't want to go back to trying to multitask and be present to my phone and to an email or to a text message and to the folks that are with me. I mean,

Karin Peter 40:53

So for a long time. I think we have taken our being together for granted when we come to church. It has been either an obligation or a duty or a habit. We come to church for a lot of different reasons that aren't always because we want to connect spiritually with one another and with the Divine. So now, when we come together, it's like, right now right here, we have to really love each other.

Rock Fremont 41:21

Absolutely,

Karin Peter 41:22

Is that not part of the restoration movement in finding people to connect with, I mean, communitarianism, all these other things were happening, people were trying to find all these new ways to connect in the frontier of this country. And here we are doing it again.

Rock Fremont 41:42

And to make it more accessible. I mean, I think that this, you know, accessibility, you know, I've struggled a lot with privilege during this time, and those that don't have access, you know, so to ask bigger questions in terms of how we how can we help folks And get them, get them online, get them connected. I can't tell you how many, you know, folks that are over at over 90 a few hundred plus folks that I've that I've connected to zoom, and just opened an entire new world for them. You know, as we continue to live into what this reality will be, at least for the, you know, upcoming months, you know, it's so important to ask the question Who's not with us? Right,

Karin Peter 42:35

Who's been left out?

Rock Fremont 42:37

Yes.

Karin Peter 42:39

So from a community, a religious tradition, or religious community that often does not reflect on how we are seen by those outside of our tradition. What do you see when you look at Community of Christ Now

Rock Fremont 43:03

Oh, that might be a scary question for some folks. But I see a vibrant community of faith and to be very distinct, but a community of faith that's able to transition and to speak to our times, and to into this place. Maybe season would be a great way to describe that to speak to the season. And to actually really, physically, be with people. You know, I would I would also just add, you know, since we're talking about technology, I know at least here in Phoenix, a lot of the Community of Christ congregations were some of the earliest to you know, transition to the virtual world and and just the ability to pivot. You know, I think it's just, it's not only needed today it's it's also connected with, with our history, you know, as as a people and if part of part of this journey, that we're on

Karin Peter 44:16

Bigger journey.

Rock Fremont 44:17

Absolutely. And you know, when we're talking about reaching out to different folks, you know, specifically with I hate to go back to women's ordination, to you know the acceptance of our LGBTQ siblings those are things that I know that the global church for you looks very different. You know, that's not the the same reality for many of us in the main line where we're just national churches, but there are many mainline traditions. So, just a little bit about that the ELCA the Evangelist Lutheran Church in America. They're the largest Lutheran body in the United States. They ordain women and they also ordain LGBTQ folks, Presbyterian Church USA, they're the largest Presbyterian body in the US. They do the same United Church of Christ as the same, and so does the Episcopal Church. And, you know, I think that as we look at the world, we'll begin to see that we're not all that different. And you know, there's a there's something called the Lund Principle in ecumenicalism. And that Lund principle is about it's about ecumenical relations or relations between Christians. And the idea is that it affirms this idea that churches should act together in all matters, except those which where we find deep differences of conviction specifically. Where we have to act separately.

But as I look around, I mean, there's so much that we as people of faith share in common. And it really is time, in my opinion, in my humble opinion, that we come out of our silos and and do more together. Because that really connects with that scripture of the ecumenical world that we use and in in john 17:21 that they were Jesus prays that we all might be one. And the tagline that we often forget is that the world may believe, you know, so it's through our unity, we're

already one. I mean, that's most of the ecumenical world would affirm that we're already one we're one church. It's, it's we that so often need to atone for that sin of separateness. You know, I talked about in terms of being separated, like St. Augustine did, and I think that, you know, that's maybe the biggest sin. Sin for me is this idea that we're somehow separate. And going back to the importance of where can we work together? What can we do together?

Karin Peter 47:21
Like this podcast?

Rock Fremont 47:22

Absolutely. And, and, you know, so that really connects to the world. As I speak to young people that are, you know, 18 19, 20 sometimes I'll have a 27-28 year old in a community college class. You ask them about Buddhism, they're excited, they want to know more, you ask them about the Sikh faith. Many may not know about that faith, but as soon as we talk about Sikhism, and I have a sick come in to talk to them. They're interested in Hinduism. They're interested Christianity. The body, you know, just the whole body changes and they're not interested. And so many people have a lot of ideas. A lot of young people have a lot of ideas about what Christianity is about. Because, you know, honestly, we have hurt a lot of people and that hurt, you know, generations have passed that hurt down. A and we just have at least two generations of people that are not connected to any religious tradition now. You know, but belief in God remains very high. And, you know, as I speak to young people there, there are still many young people that have no idea that there are churches out there that are welcoming of LGBTQ people or welcoming of women in ministry. So you know, some of us It might be old You know, we may not want to continue to talk about those things. But it becomes more important when we talk to young people because, you know, people have no idea that there are churches out there that are fully inclusive and welcoming of all people.

Karin Peter 49:13

That are loving. Thanks, Rock. So you did mention a little while ago that you are a Project Zion listener. And we're happy to take suggestions or requests for topics if you happen to have any.

Rock Fremont 49:33

Well, I love I love the liturgical year. So, anything with liturgy or worship or liturgical year, I'm a big fan of as she mentioned, and in the very beginning, I am a spiritual director, so anything about spiritual companioning would also love that and more importantly, kind of church history stuff. I love church history stuff. But

Karin Peter 50:00

This is why we're friends Rock.

Rock Fremont 50:05

Specifically, I would love to know more about, you know, you guys lost a giant this year in Dale Luffman. And I never had the opportunity he and I became friends on Facebook. And we met to connect over the phone. And you know, I have a lot of ecumenical contacts, in many

institutions, National Council of Churches, churches uniting in Christ, both on the national levels and heard so many wonderful things about Dale, and specifically about the journey of the Community of Christ into becoming full members of the National Council of Churches. I would love to not lose sight of that history. Dale would have been the one to of course, share that history. So I don't know who does that now, but, you know, to just not lose sight of his legacy.

Karin Peter 51:08

I'm making notes as you're sharing here. Okay, you might hear some of these come into a project science episode in the future. So I have very much appreciated knowing you rock and being on this Christian journey together and even the broader journey of faith together to be a sister and brother in Christ. And so I want to give you the opportunity for any closing comments, but first, I want to let our listeners know that you have been enjoying your beverage during this episode out of your Project Zion Emma mug.

Rock Fremont 51:49

I just wish everybody could see it.

Karin Peter 51:52

Maybe we'll put a picture on the website. So Brittany, if you're listening, look at a picture of an Emma mug. I can put it up there, but I have seen that in your office and it, it just makes me very happy. So I want to thank you for being with us here. But do you have any closing comments for our listeners before we go?

Rock Fremont 52:13

You know, the only comment that I have is the Community of Christ is such a rich tradition. I really do love the history of the restoration. And and as I've said, already, continue to do what you do best and sharing the love of the Divine with all people and being a welcoming, more just more inclusive, forgiving people. I mean, that's when I talk about Jesus. Those are the things that I hold up and those are the marks for me of what it means to be a Jesus people as the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church here in the United States would say, and, more importantly, make some phone calls. You know, look up some of those churches that I suggested. In either the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church, USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, maybe the Episcopal Church, look and see what church is, maybe near your congregation and make a phone call. Don't be afraid. You know, we want to have a relationship. And as I've said many times in this podcast, we really are better together and just brainstorm How can we work together?

Karin Peter 53:29

Let's be at one. Absolutely. Well, thank you again, rock for doing this. It took me a couple of requests to get you to agree, but I'm so glad you did. So for our listeners, thank you for being with us today on Project Zion. This has been cuppa Joe, with Reverend Rock Fremont from Phoenix, Arizona. I'm Karen Peter. Thanks for listening.

Rock Fremont 53:55

Thanks, Karin.

Josh Mangelson 54:04

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