

Katie Langston 00:16

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Mike Hoffman 00:59

Hello, this is Mike Hoffman with Project Zion Podcast. Welcome to Coffee in The Swarm. And today, my guest is Casey Maine, who is going into her junior year this fall. And she's got a unique opportunity to be one of the first people who major in the social change major, which is a brand new major. Casey, welcome.

Casey Main 01:24

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Mike Hoffman 01:26

Yeah. Glad to have you here. I'm really excited to talk to you about the social change major, because it's been actually a part of Graceland student government for a while that we actually adopted the social change model that we were implementing through this in student government and then to have you work on this, because I know not only are you going to be one of the first majors, first students to major this, but you're going to be, you were actually very instrumental in getting this started. So I'm really excited. What, what else can you tell us about yourself? Where are you from?

Casey Main 02:03

Yeah, I'm from Blue Springs, Missouri or Kansas City, Missouri. Blue Springs is a suburban Kansas City. And I grew up in the Community of Christ church, I go to Liberty Street in independence. My church family there, and my brother is actually coming to Graceland this fall. His name is Jack and he got an Esports scholarship. I'm really proud of him.

Mike Hoffman 02:23

That's really cool. Yeah, that's the I guess now. That's the second newest sport behind rodeo. So anyway, that's gonna be a new sport this fall. So very good. So how are you dealing with the Coronavirus? I mean, I know that's in everybody's sort of mind right now and things like that, but before we get started too far into what you're doing, are you doing okay?

Casey Main 02:50

Yeah, I would say, I've been privileged enough to be okay. Both my parents have jobs, and they work at home. And we've been self quarantining pretty heavily. I have elderly grandparents that I care about very much. So we've just been very careful about where we are going, who we're seeing, I've only really seen maybe two of my friends and my boyfriend. But I've been very careful about social

distancing, and making sure that everybody stay safe. Mostly so my brother and I can go back to school in the fall, and everything can kind of return to a normal pace someday. We're doing our best.

Mike Hoffman 03:28

That's great. That's great. I'm glad you're, I'm glad you're mindful of your grandparents and other folks, because that's important and getting ready to come back this fall. I know that it's going to be a, well we're anticipating students coming back, it's going to be a little different, I think, when we all get back, the social distancing, and masking and those kinds of things. Well great! So recently, Graceland University announced the social change major. And I remember a few months ago, even though I wasn't directly involved in the process, I was involved in a process that was similar to that. And I remember going to a meeting with you and you presenting on this social change major, you know, can you explain it a little bit and tell us what it is? And then what what motivated you to make this happen?

Casey Main 04:21

That's a good question. When I first came to Graceland, my freshman year, I was studying communication. I was heavily involved with the humanities department at Graceland. And I thought to myself, I feel like I'm studying more than just communication. I don't feel like that's what I want to label what I am passionate about what I want my career to be someday. And I know a lot of my friends and my peers felt very similarly, that their mission and initiative to be at Graceland was to be a world changer was to do something more important and greater. And so I went with this idea of a social change or social justice major to my advisor, Raquel Moreira. And she was over the moon and thrilled with the idea and really wanted to help me, I guess, hone in on what this could be for our institution. And so then my next process was just I want a lot of the professors and faculty, and community to be on board with this major. So I made lists of everyone. And I met individually with professors and community members and kind of pitched them my idea, and I'm glad you remembered that, because I met with so many people, I kind of forgot that that even happened. It's been so long. But yeah, that was one of the things I did just to get people on board with the idea. I also created online petitions for people to sign up. So that way, alumni could be involved with the process as well, even if they weren't on campus,

Mike Hoffman 05:47

That's right!

Casey Main 05:48

Yeah, that was really fun. And then eventually, it led up to I got to be on a committee to create the curriculum for the social change major, which was a huge privilege that I got as a student. I mean, I don't know any other university that lets students do things like this, of it were very student led and student driven. That was a huge honor I had. And then eventually, this whole process kind of led up to presenting to the Board of Trustees and I got a lot of my friends and family and community just to come out and see that presentation, because I thought the more support we get in the audience, the more support we might have for the major actually passing. And that was, I believe, last fall in last winter kind of in between was when that presentation happened. And that was also a major deal, because they let me be one of the lead presenters to pitch that initiative to the Board of Trustees, which was really

awesome. Like, I can't even believe that they allowed me to do all of this, but it just shows that when a student can come to a professor with an idea like this, that they'll be supported. So that was really cool.

Mike Hoffman 06:56

That is really cool. I mean, I, I didn't realize all of that process, because I think I think what I remember is a meeting here on campus, that it was like, sort of one of the earlier meetings, but I remember you presenting and maybe some others to, you know, presenting the idea about it to other students and faculty, well I think it was just the faculty staff. Now that I say that, but I remember, I remember you being there and sharing that. So yeah, that's that's very good. So what do you think is, I mean, where did this idea come from? I mean, do you, you know, is it part of who you are? This seems like a silly question, but I don't want to be too leading here, but where did this whole initiative, do you think, come from?

Casey Main 07:00

That's a good question. Um, the first thing I can think of when I heard that question is, this is an idea that's been happening for years. I mean, I bet the humanities division and department has had something like this going along. For years and years and years that kind of led with the minors critical race, ethnic studies, and women's gender and sexuality studies, those two minors were Tim Robbins ideas for I think, over three years, and those kind of co-aligned with my social change major idea. And so we kind of packaged them together to make it a more appealing for the student body and for the faculty. But personally, I think this idea stemmed from I want to make a difference in my career. I don't think that, first I believe that having a career means making sure you're helping others. And that kind of stems from my beliefs in the Community of Christ. But I think a lot of my peers feel very similarly to me, that they don't want to just have a quote unquote, desk job, they want to be out in the world taking action, being a part of a social movement, and creating real change, and not only their own communities, but in global society as a whole. So I think that's where the social change major idea kind of stemmed from. And then it kind of turned into this beautiful creation of not just my ideas, but like peers and faculty ideas, and then it kind of made this whole amazing thing that turned into a social change major at the end of it. So yeah,

Mike Hoffman 09:18

Very cool. So yeah. So you've got two more years. So you get your major in communications and a major in social change. What would be your dream job? If you have a dream job? I mean, we know you want to help people and be on the front. Have you thought about what the dream job might be?

Casey Main 09:40

Oh, the dream job? That's a good question. Um, throughout communication, and creating this social change major, I was even unsure if I would be able to take the major have the opportunity to be a student, for this major, but now that I do, I'm really excited to take different classes I haven't taken before that might show me what the dream job could be. But it's hard to say. I mean, I did work on Elizabeth Warren's campaign last winter, and worked for her a little bit. And I was the precinct captain in Decatur County. And so I helped a lot with the Iowa caucus. And that was a really cool opportunity that I got from being in Iowa that I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else. And I really enjoyed that. So maybe something close to that. Or I know that my mom does fundraising for different nonprofits, and I

really see how much she's impacting others through that job. So there's a lot of different jobs. And I'm sure the dream job that I want isn't even created yet. Since there's so many new jobs all the time, but yeah. That's kind of where I am with what could be a possibility with the social change major in my life.

Mike Hoffman 10:51

Well, it's, you know, I would say, it's ironic, but I'm not sure I believe in irony completely. The fact that you are engaged in this, and the university has just approved it, and the two minors that you mentioned, you know, at a time in, I would say United States, you know, the light the United States, but it seems to be more of a almost more of a global movement, in terms of social injustice, moving towards social justice, involving police brutality, and just, I don't know, social justice issues all over the place. So you know, I know you were on this path before all this happens, you know, so what do you make of what's going on? With the lens of social change? What do you what do you make of all what's going on in terms of right now in the United States in the world, in terms of social justice,

Casey Main 11:47

Right, especially with the Black Lives Matter, movement happening, it's kind of earth shattering for a lot of students and for a lot of people my age, and it's very heartbreaking to see the stories of Breonna Taylor and Elijah McClain, and George Floyd and thousands of other black people who are murdered by our law enforcement. I mean, that's kind of eye opening to why we feel obligated to fight for a better future, and to fight for a change in our society. And not only society, but a change in policies, and a change in how we see humanity. So I guess the social change major was created so that my generation and that future generations at Graceland can understand and be a part of a social movement just like this one. And I think that it was approved in a very timely manner. Right during this black lives matter crisis. And during what could be defined as a black genocide of people in our country. And as you said, it's not only being nationally recognized, but it's a globally recognized. So I think that also is a huge piece of Graceland as well, since we have a very large international student population. And I know that a lot of my friends that are international students want to give back to their communities. And I think that is a really key part in why they would want to major in social changes as well.

Mike Hoffman 13:17

I think you're right on. I mean, there's there's so much going on, how do you do you think that the social justice Black Lives Matter movement, those things going on, do you see them impacting the campus this fall? When we get back to Graceland? I guess I'm here, so when you get back to Graceland this fall?

Casey Main 13:40

Yeah, I definitely think so. Maybe that's just from my perspective, and in my circle, and with the people I communicate with at Graceland who are very strong leaders and advocates. But I don't see a lot of performative activism with students at Graceland for the most part, which is just posting on social media or preaching diversity and inclusivity. But our institution knows that we need to do more than that. And I think the students also know that as well. Because we we donate to bail funds and nonprofit organizations, and we attend protests if we are able, and we signed petitions and and I think one of the main values that Community of Christ has that correlates with this is time, talent and treasure. And I

think those are three things that students at Graceland really understand. And that they're going to be very avid and focused on this fall this upcoming semester, is that as allies, we have to discover new ways we can use our time which is educating ourselves, reading and our talents, which is for me, it's it's writing and speaking, but for some other people, their talents could be different. And then using our treasure and using our funds that we have, like donating to bail funds or donating to important organizations. So I think that my generation really sees that. So hopefully, this semester, we could do something cool, not only with the social change major in the Black Lives Matter movement, but on campus, I could see a larger movement happen with the student, in the student body happening.

Mike Hoffman 15:16

Interesting. So earlier this year, another thing I saw you very actively engaged in, and you mentioned earlier, was the Elizabeth Warren campaign during the presidential caucus and caucuses here in Iowa. And you know, what motivated you get involved in politics, at least here in Iowa? When you know, and this may be a separate question, but I know that some of your peers at least, don't get politically active. So I don't know, what are your thoughts about, you know, what motivated you and then what causes others not to get motivated that way?

Casey Main 15:58

Yeah, that's a good point. Um, originally, I got involved by going to a Black Student Union meeting. And this host denounced actually like, something like here are the organizers who are in town, here's who would like to talk to you about different social justice issues and what they could do with their political campaigns. And here's their information. And so I was immediately drawn to Elizabeth Warren's political organizer that was in town, just because that was the person that reached out to Black Student Union. And I really appreciated that. And so after meeting with her, I was just very set on this is so important, not only for our country, just but for my community, personally, and for the people that I care about, which are my peers and my friends. And so I decided that I would get involved, which is was a crazy experience, I knocked on your door, I knocked my professor's doors. And I knocked on almost every door in Decatur county with a bunch of my friends who volunteered to also be a part of this movement with me. And through all of this, I realized that my initiative wasn't wasn't as much to personally get involved in politics as it was to assist my friends in my community and getting involved in politics. Because I got the opportunity to talk to people about really important issues like health care, and equal rights for the LGBTQ community, and mass incarceration, with my friends, which I wouldn't be able to do unless that was in a classroom setting. And then I got to give them that opportunity to use their voice on a national platform that they may not have had somewhere else. And so that was a really interesting opportunity. But I know you kind of said that it's hard for people my age to get involved in politics, it's hard for college students, especially to get involved in politics. So were you meaning, what again was your question about that?

Mike Hoffman 17:57

So I know that some students that I've talked to, like, I tried to encourage students to become engaged in the political campaigns, or, you know, in that kind of thing, and I've actually had students tell me, well I'm not political? Or, you know, I'm not going to get involved. And I just wondered if you had any thoughts about that? You know, I mean, I don't know what what caused, you know, I don't know, maybe it's already related to your whole social change, ideas and those kinds of things. But I wondered if you,

you know, if you run across people who said, I don't really want to get involved? Or is there have they shared with you, you know, sort of a, an underlying reason for that or?

Casey Main 18:43

I think, mostly, the underlying reason for that is, people have told them no, um, a lot of our community at Graceland is with people of color, and minority students and international students. And they have grown up, and we have grown up in a society in a culture that tells young people that their vote doesn't matter, that their voice doesn't matter. And they live in areas built on redlining, that tell them that their people in their community does not matter. And so I think that constant, not affirmation, but the opposite of that.

Mike Hoffman 19:26

Well, really oppression. I mean, it's systemic oppression.

Casey Main 19:29

Yes. Part of voter suppression, right, and how that works. But I think that was a huge piece of the puzzle that I didn't even know existed until I talked to my peers about why they weren't voting. And a huge part of it was my vote doesn't matter. It won't matter in the end of it, and you're gonna win, no matter what with your cause, like, I believe in Elizabeth Warren, for example, I believe in her ideas, but I don't feel the need to get involved because I don't think that it will matter. And I think that was the main comment that I got when I was talking to my peers, once I convinced them that their vote does matter, and that attending caucus would be not only changing, I was community, but our national community, and it's on a national scale, they thought that their vote was important and their voice was important. And then we ended up winning in our precinct with that with the student body in the student population. And I know some of the more, I guess, older generation in limbo night, I could see, were a little bit upset caucus that there were so many students there, which I think is also interesting that we need to change our culture with having young people in politics and being involved in politics, not only at my type of forefront with getting people to vote and volunteering, but also seeing young people in spaces of power, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who is a very young Congresswoman, or seeing young people run in elections, I think that's a really important piece of that, as well.

Mike Hoffman 21:11

Yes. I agree. I mean, I think I think well, I'll leave my opinion out of this for now, but good job. Yeah. Do you think you'll continue to be involved in politics? Once you get back to campus? I mean, you know, we'll have school starts August 17. And so we'll have roughly Well, it's going to end before Thanksgiving, the fall semester. But that puts it still the election, the national election will be before we leave. So yeah, will you still be involved?

Casey Main 21:45

I think so. I mean, the experience I had working for the one campaign was so monumental for me and eye opening for me, that it's hard to not be in politics anymore, honestly. Just because I realize the importance of it now.

Mike Hoffman 22:01

Yeah.

Casey Main 22:01

And so even if my candidate isn't in the race, I understand the importance of the national election for President. So hopefully, I can stay involved and students will want to be involved with me.

Mike Hoffman 22:17

That's good. So sort of a question that ties it back to all of this so far back to Community of Christ or understanding our lives as followers of Jesus, how did you, how does what you're doing relate to being a disciple of Jesus Christ, like connecting it to the mission of the church mission of Christ that we typically articulate Luke 4:18 and 19, or the Mission Initiatives that may be a more modern interpretation of Luke 4, is there is there are no connections there for you?

Casey Main 22:54

definitely think so. I have one of my best friends. Her name is Georgia Seagraves, and she is one of the youngest women in the priesthood in the church. And one thing that she constantly reminds me is that Jesus was never neutral. He wanted to create a peaceful world. And he stood on the side of immigrants and the poor and the sick and outcasted and minorities. And by helping the poor and healing the sick and clothing, the naked and the feeding the hungry, and uplifting, quote, unquote, the underdog, he was mindful of how important social change was in that time period. And it still is now, if Jesus was still alive today. I know he would be marching in the protests. And I know that social change and social justice at least for Community of Christ, are major parts of our Christian tradition. And by helping those who are abused and violated and oppressed as Christians, we can't reject that existence of systemic racism and misogyny, and homophobia, and other forms of oppression that hurt others. So to me addressing things like racism and immigration and gender equality and inequality, and you know, a litany of other issues, it's equal in following in the steps of Jesus and what he was trying to teach us.

Mike Hoffman 24:22

Well said,

Casey Main 24:23

Thank you.

Mike Hoffman 24:25

So what do you believe the future holds for Graceland? And and I guess I'll stop there for Graceland, and then we'll move on to a little more extension of that. So what do you think that future Graceland is going to be like?

Casey Main 24:41

Recently, I've been working with Graceland admissions about promoting the social change major to more students because I know our admissions numbers have been lower recently. I've been working with Ed Skinner. I've been making videos about the social change major, a little that's debatable. But I have been doing that. And I've been talking on podcasts like these just to promote the social change major to new students that could possibly come to Graceland. So I'm hopeful, I'm hoping that the social

change narrative can be a big part in what Graceland could be in the future. For students who not only want to make a difference in the major that they already currently have. For example, I have a friend named Maria we know who wants to make a difference in the field of medicine and have more research towards Black women. And by majoring in both social change, and biology, she can pair those two together and be a world changer. And I think that's going to really change our future of Graceland with how we portray education, how we foresee what students could do in the future with their careers that could actually impact millions of people. And that is going to be a huge part of I hope, what Graceland's future could be.

Mike Hoffman 26:03

That's that's a great vision for Graceland. What about for Community of Christ, you think that some of what you just said, describes the future of Community of Christ?

Casey Main 26:16

I hope so, I really do. I know that our world is hurting. And I think our church recognizes that as well. So we just have to make sure that we are continuously challenging racism in our church and making sure that we recognize the consequences of our history and promote justice, with peace, connected to peace. Because without justice, there's no peace, kind of like that phrase in saying that's going around in the Black Lives Matter movement. I think that is very true for what religion can look like in the future as well, especially, especially in the Community of Christ church.

Mike Hoffman 27:03

Yeah, that reminds you that sort of a campus ministries tagline, I guess it would be is, "Build community, share faith, create peace." But when you get to that create peace, it's always that you've got to have justice. I need to almost finished that statement by working for justice, because I really feel that, you know, it's like, we can have peace, but only only if there's justice and equality for everyone. So, yeah, anything else you'd like to share with us before we close our time together?

Casey Main 27:38

I'm just very hopeful, in general, for what our world could look like with the social change major, I was really privileged to be a part of this initiative. I'm really glad I got to share it with the world. And hopefully it could impact not only a student's life with their education, but many lives with what they could do possibly in their career someday. So thanks for having me.

Mike Hoffman 28:02

Thank you. Thank you, Casey. It's been great. I really appreciate what you've done with this major and the impact you're having in Graceland and on the Community of Christ as well. So thank you.

Casey Main 28:15

Thank you so much.

Mike Hoffman 28:17

Bye.

Josh Mangelson 28:26

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