

Episode: 314 | Grounds for Peace | Peace of Mind: Mental Health and Well-Being | Sarah James and Hannah Langford  
Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

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

**Andrew Bolton** 00:33

Today is the eighth podcast in a new international series Grounds for Peace under the auspices of peaceprojects.eu. I'm your host Andrew Bolton, joining you from Leicester, England, and a member of the Community of Christ European Peace and Justice Team. Today we're looking at finding personal peace. Specifically, the title of this podcast is Peace of Mind: Mental Health and Well-Being. And it's my great pleasure to welcome Sarah James and Hannah Langford. They're sisters from a loving caring Welsh family, with deep roots in the Community of Christ. Both sets of their grandparents and subsequently their parents have influenced and molded their compassion for others. Sarah has a PhD in neuroscience, and is currently a post-doctoral researcher at University College London, studying mental and cognitive health. Hannah lives in Leicestershire, with her husband, Dave, and daughter, Fion. Hannah has worked in special educational needs for years, and works currently as a child education and community psychologist in Warwickshire, serving people from infants to 25 year olds, and also has a doctorate in educational and community psychology, as well as lots of clinical experience, Sarah and Hannah can bring together holistically spirituality and psychology to talk about Peace of Mind: Mental Health and Well-Being Sarah and Hannah, welcome.

**Sarah James** 02:15

Thank you.

**Hannah Langford** 02:16

Thank you. It's great to be here tonight.

**Andrew Bolton** 02:18

We want to be clear right at the beginning that this podcast is not a therapy session. Would you like to see a little bit more about this?

**Hannah Langford** 02:27

Yes, we just wanted to start the session by being really clear and transparent, that although I'm a psychologist, and we both work in the field of well-being the mental health field as professionals, today we want to share some perspectives, research findings, evidence based models and frameworks. And we're discussing these and then information sharing capacity, to hopefully develop some of your understandings and knowledge around mental health and well-being. We're hoping that we'll be able to give you some ideas and tools of things that you can apply in your daily life, to support your well-being mental health and peace of mind. If there is anything today that triggers you from this podcast, we would encourage you to seek support from your support network or professional.

**Andrew Bolton** 03:05

Thank you, Hannah. So we're looking at finding personal peace and specifically looking at mental health and well-being. Is it right that one in four in the United Kingdom suffer from a mental health issue, and that is increasing?

**Sarah James** 03:21

Yeah, so this statistic is taken from the UK based survey. And actually, it probably excludes some people at higher risk, like people who are homeless or in hospitals or prisons, so the true number is slightly higher. And so to understand a bit about why it's increasing, is, I think is quite helpful to understand what mental health issue is in the first place. As we kind of tried to stress in the presentation mental health is a spectrum of health, just like physical health. And so mental health is not just the absence of the illness is defined as a state of well-being in which people can cope with their normal stresses of life can work productively and fruitfully and interact with their community. So the very definition of a mental health problem or issue is that there has to be a change in mental health, that affects our ability to function in everyday life doing the things that we normally do. So is it affecting relationships? How health are our relationships is it affecting how productive we are within a work or school or maybe caregiving or volunteering capacity? And how are we able to adapt and cope with adversity? That kind of definition, I hope, give some clues to perhaps why rates are increasing. One of the reasons is that there most likely is more awareness around mental health. And people generally are a bit more willing to report or admit that they have problems and in some communities anyway, but it's also clear that 21st century life is taking its toll. And modern society is presented with a range of stresses that can profoundly impact our well-being and social interactions and economic contributions. I think to understand why things are increasing, maybe we can look at known influences of mental health across the spectrum. So things that can influence our mental health both in positive and negative way. So we know that social conditions are a big contributor to our mental health. And we know that social inequality is on the rise and lots of Western nations and this is a big risk factor for mental health, and employment, which normally can serve and to give people independence, purpose, and connection is a big risk factor. Things like rapid social change, economic uncertainty, lack of social support, these are all contributors of perhaps worse well-being. And so we know that these things affect people's mental health, but where lots of people are particularly worried about how these factors which have been exacerbated in the pandemic are going to affect people. And there's other things as well. So things like psychological factors, like your lifestyle, or loneliness, or the pressure that we put on ourselves, can also increase our mental health in a negative way. And then there's also the element that there are groups that face discrimination and social exclusion. And those people are particularly at risk of having increased mental health problems, especially when issues start to intersect.

**Andrew Bolton** 06:43

So racism is not good for our mental health, poverty is not good for our mental health. No, these issues of injustice and conflict have to also be addressed for good mental health in our society.

**Sarah James** 06:58

Yes, sir. Absolutely. It's true that these are the dimensions of peace can indeed influence our personal peace. And like we said, you know, the social conditions are some of the biggest predictors for mental health, whether it's negative or in a positive way, and particularly people who are in conflicts and

trauma, people who are discriminated against people in poverty that all risk factors for mental health problems. So in answer to your question about whether we have to adjust these dimensions of peace, I would say yes, as all these dimensions are interrelated, but actually, it depends. If you're talking about an individual, it depends on what spectrum of mental health that individuals currently on, if they're on the healthier side of well, being, then addressing these other dimensions of peace, like our community, or national aspects is great for our peace of mind. It can give us ways to act in line with our values, perhaps to fight injustice, it contributes to our community, and we can strive to improve and promote the well-being of many others. So that would be very helpful. But at the same time, you know, perhaps an individual can also be struggling in that period of time with poor mental health, and they might not be in a place to address other dimensions of peace. And in that case, I think it's, you have to be kind to yourself and have no pressure to work on other dimensions. And actually, in that moment in time, working on your own peace of mind might have to take priority as that can often require eminent care and you can't run on empty, so you can't fight the other dimensions of peace, perhaps if you're kind of not in a good place yourself. So I think personal peace is fundamental to these overall dimensions of peace, but it's not exclusive.

**Andrew Bolton** 08:43

So comprehensive, thank you. So if I break an arm, I'm likely to get lots of kind of positive attention, sometimes teasing, but it's all supportive and helpful. But if I'm mentally ill kindness and positive attention doesn't always happen. So can you suggest a few positive things we can do to help someone who's suffering from mental illness?

**Hannah Langford** 09:07

I think that when we can recognize that somebody is really struggling with their mental health, or with mental illness, there's some things that we can do in the way that we kind of interact with them. So things like being compassionate by being empathetic, being judgment free about their situation, and how they might be responding to it. Perhaps trying to put yourself in their shoes and trying to understand how they feel rather than reacting to their responses and behaviors. Listening to them and validating their feelings and experiences, rather than trying to fix them or to solve the problem for them unless they're actually asking for you to give that kind of support.

**Sarah James** 09:45

Yeah, so I would agree, and I think the main thing is just treat them as individuals with respect. And I think often you can just ask them, you know, how can I support you right now? And maybe that is, you know, a form of action, maybe, you know, they want you to help find some resources or you know, go to an appointment or something with them. But it could also just be to be in that moment with the person. So I think if people are actually more interested in this, there's a international mental first aid course, that people can do as individuals or communities, and I think could be great. And we can talk about that later, but greater as a community, if we could get more people who are mental health trained as possible.

**Andrew Bolton** 10:34

I've never heard of mental first aid, that would be really helpful, I think, reassuring so you know how to be helpful.

**Sarah James** 10:42

Yeah, exactly. And I think so. And I've done the course myself. And so some of it is about just recognizing signs in yourself, or that mainly signs in other people, and who are in distress or how to kind of communicate in that moment, and then what you can do to help. But I found that was a really good framework to work on. And, yeah, we can put that in the podcast notes for the link to that.

**Andrew Bolton** 11:07

So thank you. There's a great deal now that can be done for people suffering from mental illness. So we're talking about something very helpful, yes? And we shouldn't be ashamed of asking for help. Is that right?

**Hannah Langford** 11:21

Absolutely. There's nothing to be ashamed of in seeking help, it can take real strength to ask for help, especially if you're really struggling, I think that we can worry about making ourselves vulnerable or showing our real self. However, this can just cause a different barrier towards restoration of finding that peace of mind, I think also, the social perspectives towards mental health has changed over time. So if we think about the ship of fools, and how people will literally put onto ships and shipped and displaced away from societies, and then we kind of move towards those intimidating psychiatric units that films like to portray, and some of the barbaric treatments, which used to happen and actually, we shifted from that significantly. So one of the roles that used to work in several years ago was actually a child and adolescent acute mental health unit. And I can kind of contest to say that actually, the kind of, there is a much more holistic view and understanding of mental health and actually, the therapies we try and offer can be just as broad as their perspectives and treatments. I think mental health is a really complex construct. And I think, today, we're starting to realize it's not just a within person problem. And it can be the result of factors from our childhood environment, or genetics or society, lifestyle factors, cognitive patterns and behaviors. And actually, it's not quite as straightforward as it was once thought to be. I think it's also important to recognize that as we discussed in the webinar, mental health is something that we all have and as Sarah has said before about to be on a spectrum. Actually, we can shift on that spectrum throughout the day, on a weekly basis, or even at different seasons in our lives. So I think it's really important that we kind of recognize that in order to access support, that we recognize that the stigma is reducing services are there and available, and there should be no shame in seeking help. Admitting you need help is not always easy. But reaching out is a courageous and strong act.

**Sarah James** 13:25

From my point of view, you said about, are we talking about something hopeful, and I think, for people who perhaps are struggling or in crisis is quite hard to see that hope, but from a longer term point of view, I have quite a lot of hope within medical research or research in mental health. And there's fantastic work by the charities who are advocating and come up with some fantastic resources, and big advocates for people with mental health issues. So I think it is a time to be hopeful in many ways.

**Andrew Bolton** 13:58

So in your webinar you quoted the second great biblical commandment, love your neighbor as yourself. How can this be a foundation for positive mental health?

**Sarah James** 14:11

So I think we often oversee an important part of this. It's such a familiar, texted to many people, whatever their faith, but I think we often oversee and the part that begin to love your neighbor as yourself, you need to know how to love and to be compassionate to yourself. And I think as people working for peace, who perhaps are listening to this, we often may think that taking time for ourselves is selfish. And I think that, and I tried to put the scripture here because I think it's provides some context for the importance of prioritizing the love and intention that you should give yourself as well as your neighbor. That if you're running on empty and not at peace with yourself, it's sometimes harder to give and be that peace but others around you I think yeah, I think it's just a context that I wanted to put across to say, you know, the capture yourself. And in doing so then we can look after our neighbors.

**Andrew Bolton** 15:12

So I like that balanced emphasis. Thank you, Sarah. Now, if I understand things right, there are two parts to our nervous system. First of all, our brain, which acts as the control center, then the second part is the peripheral body system, which includes the sympathetic and parasympathetic system that unconsciously regulates body functions, such as the heart rate, and blood flow. Do you want to say a little bit more about all of this? So make it really simple for us?

**Sarah James** 15:44

Yeah, yeah, sure. So you're right. So we've got these two systems in our nervous system. And our nervous system is the system responsible for transmitting information around the body and keeps our organs in a stable state. And mammals have the most advanced nervous system on the planet. And of those mammals, humans have the most complex. So I'll summarize it, but it is complicated. We have the brain which is control center, and it receives information from the body, and it controls our motor movement and behavior. So we've got different parts of the brain, but they all work together. But each part has its own special property. So the largest part in humans is at the front called the frontal cortex. And this is the part of the brain that's responsible for lots of functions that perhaps we associate with being humans, such as language, and thought planning at the core processing. And then, whereas you've got the second system, which is called the peripheral systems, that's the body, and it's made up of nerves throughout the body. And the role of the peripheral system is to transmit information to and from the brain. And so this is where the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems come in. So these systems work together to regulate actions that we're often aware of, such as heart rate, blood flow, breathing, things that we don't think about. The synthetic system prepares our body to exert energy, and it does so by affecting other organs. And so this is known as flight or fight. So increases our heart rate our blood pressure and breathing. So you can imagine and this in a system where you know, you're anxious, or whatever, or maybe you're going on a date, and your body is making all these changes, and that's because of the sympathetic nervous system. And whereas the parasympathetic does the opposite, and slows the body down and conserves energy, and it lowers the heart rate. And this is called rest and digest system. So a mammal who is constantly exposed to dangerous or stressful situations, will eventually become overly exhausted because of that overriding sympathetic nervous system. And the body needs some time to regain the strength lost by this.

**Andrew Bolton** 18:04

So if I understand it, right, is the fight or flight system that can get overactive? And that can be a part of the problem in some forms of mental illness. So how can we address this and enable the parasympathetic system to do its job of calming us down? I got that right. Oh, can you say a bit more?

**Sarah James** 18:27

Sure. So in the context of our evolution, and general everyday situations where, you know, there are times in the day that we need to be a bit more energetic, there are times that we need to be a bit more restful, so that this makes sense. And these divisions work well together to kind of study our internal state. But this system can be triggered inappropriately to their strains and tolls of everyday life, and can be produced in response to minus stress and set off a chain reaction. And so like I said, in the case of anxiety, so anxiety can be expressed through these physiological body changes, such as sweating and panic attacks and having a fast pulse and shallow breathing, or shortness of breath. So in such situations, I think it's important to understand the body changes because what you can do is you can try to break this vicious circle of this fear sympathetic response, and learn to manage your and your body successfully by bringing it back into your conscious control. So like I said, these systems happen unconsciously. So if we can consciously take that back, so focus on taking back control of your breathing and focus on that, or learn some relaxation exercises and trying to mimic the opposite the parasympathetic nervous system, or trying to consciously override this can be helpful.

**Hannah Langford** 19:52

There are many people whose thresholds for what the brain perceives is a threat or not a threat, or whether this threshold is lowered. It's not their fault. It may be the result of their previous life experiences. So a fight and flight system can continue to be triggered and can affect the way that we interact with others or how we may be perceived. So in my workings, I'm often having discussions with parents and school staff, but when children and young people may have the system triggered why this may be what that may look like, for example, I find that many young people find distractions within the environment to be a trigger, or being talked to face to face when being given direct instructions, perhaps in the way that a head teacher may interact with a child who's been summoned to their office, and also been in busy and noisy environments. So fight responses can look like shouting back physically externalized behaviors or throwing objects. Flight responses can look like leaving the room, slamming doors, walking away, trying to run away from the situation. There's also submit and freeze response where people may be unable to move or may shut down. So in helping people to understand what this behavior is and what is triggered, it can then help us to understand what changes or accommodations need to be made to be able to support that person to help them return to a state of equilibrium and calm.

**Andrew Bolton** 21:13

So that's really interesting. And going back to what we were saying earlier, for instance, to be discriminated against or to be put down, triggers our fight or flight response. Let's move on. People talk about mindfulness, you talked about mindfulness in the webinar, and there's a lot of talk about mindfulness these days. So what is mindfulness? How do we do it? And how does it help us is this when we're using our brain to take back control as it were, that Sarah just mentioned?

**Hannah Langford 21:48**

So mindfulness is about paying more attention to be in the present moment. Mindfulness offers the opportunity to reconnect the sensations you may experience, including what you may see, taste, feel, smell and hear. To improve well-being as it improves your understanding of yourself and the world around us both inside and outside. It can help us to be able to have the opportunity to stand back from our thoughts and start to notice patterns and to not become entangled in our thoughts and feelings. To be mindful, you can remind yourself to take notice, to name the thoughts and feelings and sensations, and experiences throughout your daily life. So this could be washing the dishes mindfully, where you may focus on what the water feels like on your hands, what the temperature is, what the sensation of the bubbles feels like. What can you see, as you look out the window? What can you smell? Can you smell the washing up liquid? Is the water running from the tap or is it still? Does this provide any sounds? And to recognize what thoughts, feelings or memories that may come into your mind. You can also take a mindful shower, you can eat food mindfully do mindful yoga, or go for a mindful walk. I think this is actually something we do a lot with young children. And so we may go on a walk and say, "Oh, look at that and red ladybug." Or can you hear the wind blowing through the leaves or what color are the leaves and or smell this flower? And I think when we are doing these things without realizing we may be having mindful moments where we're thinking about our senses and being present in those moments. There's also many resources online or through apps with things like guided meditation, body scans, different mindful activities and programs, something as simple as mindful breathing, where it can give you an indication of when to breathe in, or when to exhale. So there are a wide range of ways to engage in mindfulness. And I think it's about finding out what works for you individually.

**Andrew Bolton 23:46**

So thank you. In the webinar, you introduced us to a therapy called act or ACT to help attend to our mental health and psychological well-being. So do you want to briefly describe ACT and in the program knows pass for this podcast, we can provide them more information?

**Hannah Langford 24:06**

Yeah, so Acceptance Commitment Therapy, or act encourages people to embrace their thoughts and feelings, rather than trying to fight them or feel guilty for them. So it may sound a bit confusing at first, but it's been found to be one of the most powerful and effective approaches for psychological support and well-being. Although today, we obviously don't have time to go through the whole model of ACT. I've just briefly introduced you to some of the key concepts. So Acceptance Commitment Therapy is an approach which encourages people to develop psychological flexibility by accepting what is out of your control and taking committed action towards decisions and actions which will enrich your life. The key principles are to accept your thoughts and feelings and to be present, to choose a valued direction and to take action. So ACT suggests the best method of managing negative emotions and feelings is to acknowledge that presence and to let them be without having to analyze or judge them. accepting them doesn't necessarily mean agreeing with our thoughts and feelings or feeling defeated by them, but to accept that they are there and to sit with them until the feeling passes. This often goes much quicker than we expect, especially if we're not fighting with them. accepting our emotions is like letting the ball float up on the surface of the ocean rise and fall in with the waves. ACT also suggest that if you make decisions which are in line with your values, it's going to give you a greater sense of life satisfaction. So

I'd suggest that whenever you're able to consciously unintentionally make value based decisions, it'll bring you more joy, more purpose and life satisfaction. This can be on a daily basis or for larger decisions. So the aims of ACT are to help you be aware of your feelings, but not preoccupied by them, to help you be able to accept your feelings fully, and allow them to come and go of their own accord. And that no matter what you are feeling to keep doing what you value.

**Andrew Bolton** 25:57

So it's very simple. It's not complicated, so I like that. So having good values that we work towards are helpful for mental health is what you're saying I think.

**Hannah Langford** 26:10

Yes, so there is lots of research around contentment and well-being, which indicates that we can increase our well-being by identifying and keeping realigning ourselves with our values, and to commit actions to be in line with these values. So I did briefly mention living in line with your values when describing ACT, but if we consider that as Christians, what our values may be, These may include additional values, which are in line with our faith. So that may be compassion, kindness, the worth or persons or peace. So we're probably aware what our values are, perhaps subliminally, but maybe we haven't actually got round to kind of thinking, what would my priority ones be? What would my top 4, 5, 6 be? Research suggests that if you pick a small number, such as kind of 5-6 values that you are able to remember, and you keep making decisions, which are in line with those that can give you a greater sense of satisfaction in your life,

**Sarah James** 27:06

I think is a good thing to raise that actually communities can have values as well. So Community of Christ historically had these core values. And after a lot of consideration, they developed these into what we now know is our Enduring Principles. So these include things such as Worth of All Persons, Pursuit of Peace, Unity in Diversity. And so these Enduring Principles can also be seen as by us, and they guide our communities identity, mission, message and beliefs. And it's always worth touching base with these and your personal values are in line your community by you. So I know for me, I resonate a lot with Worth of All Persons and that is very important for me, especially when we think about something like mental health, where we often might discriminate against people, this value of Worth of All Persons is very important in shaping the way that I am going to address that.

**Andrew Bolton** 28:04

So one of the things that I've had a suspicion, experiences of discrimination harm people's mental health, so racism is bad to people's mental health. So that makes it really outrageous. It's struggling enough as it is to be human, to make it even harder for people, it's just race.

**Sarah James** 28:28

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, say the most vulnerable groups, and people who are discriminated against for anything, whether that's race, sex, and ethnicity, like any kind of discrimination, and those individuals are definitely at risk of poor mental health.

**Andrew Bolton** 28:50



Fascinating. I guess we can move on to religion a little bit more. Religion can have both a negative and positive impact on mental health. So let's start with guilt. Is there such a thing as healthy guilt? Like when I do something dishonest, I should feel guilty. It's like, the warning oil light on a car dashboard. I should take notice. Guilt serves that function. Something's wrong, and I need to pay attention and put things right, but then there's unhealthy guilt when it's out of all proportion. It's sick, and so unhealthy, like when the eye light is on all the time on the car dashboard, but the oil level is actually okay. What are your thoughts as a psychologist about guilt?

**Hannah Langford 29:37**

I think you're absolutely right under the way you described it. The emotion of guilt can help us adapt our behaviors if they're inappropriate or harmful or hurtful towards others. So this is also helpful from an evolutionary perspective, where in one way our minds have helped us to develop a way to help us be part of a group to not be rejected by others, and for survival, acceptance and to gain a sense of belonging. I think guilt is a really interesting and also a very powerful emotion, as you said that often we can kind of find ourselves feeling guilty for things or get into kind of cycles of thoughts, which can be really unhelpful. So I think it's a, it's really important to be able to deconstruct situation, to be able to take a step back where you can look at where the guilt is coming from, and why you're feeling it. So is that coming from an internal source? So did you do something that you shouldn't have done? And that's your self recognition? And also is the level of guilt that you are giving yourself? Is it inappropriate? Or is it an appropriate level? Or is that guilt coming from an external source, where people are trying to guilt us or shame us for our thoughts, feelings or actions? I think as a psychologist, I'd say it's very unhelpful and unhealthy to put shame or guilt upon others, especially if it's come in from an organization or religion, as you mentioned, as this can have a significant impact on the well-being and mental health of others. For example, I think about people in the LGBTQ community, who perhaps have felt the need to hide their sexuality, their gender, their true self, in order to be accepted, and to not be shamed, or guilted. However, this internal shame and guilt is present. It's there, and it's immensely powerful, hurtful, and harmful. I think, my understanding is that in the Community of Christ, we're experiencing many people who have been previously heard in other religious groups reaching out to us trying to find a home seeking for peace and acceptance. I think as peacemakers we can provide a place to nurture these people, to give them a safe place to explore their past hurts, and come to a place of acceptance of the past and what that means for them, and their faith on their onward journey. I think this is a unique ministry of Community of Christ. And it really shows what a compassionate, caring church we can be. But I also think it's important to acknowledge that we're probably not perfect ourselves, and that we've probably made mistakes in the past that may have hurt other people. So I'm sure that as a community, we can also do with looking internally, ourselves, to identify or name and to try and correct some of the hurt that we may have caused unintentionally over the years.

**Andrew Bolton 32:18**

Yeah, I want to explore a little bit further, sometimes we call the heart of Christian faith, gospel. Anglo Saxon for good news. And the good news is, this is the very nature of God to love us, no matter what we've done. God gives us the gift of grace, forgiveness, and a fresh new start. There's a solution to all kinds of guilt, God's forgiveness, and the gift of a new beginning, that we can then learn, change and begin again. So this gift of a new beginning is very powerful. It costs God to love because that's the story of Jesus and the cross. It is not cheap, but God nevertheless loves us even when we've messed.

So I wonder can a strong theology and practice of grace in a loving community also help us find personal peace?

**Hannah Langford 33:15**

So I understand that there are many people around the world who have drawn upon their faith in times of adversity and struggle to give them faith, hope, and reassurance that God is with them, that they are loved unconditionally, that they can have that second chance, and that they will experience hope, enjoy this message that God loves us so much that He can love and accept us regardless, is very powerful. But to many people, it can also seem that it could simply not be true of them because of who they are inside the struggles they experience, or maybe the way that they have acted in the past. There are many stories in the Bible where Jesus demonstrates that the flaws that can make us human are not barriers to God's love, acceptance and plan for us. So if we think about the lady who was brought to the temple courts for being caught in the act of adultery, the teacher of the law and Pharisees wanted the woman to be stoned to death for committing this sin. Jesus show compassion, acceptance and love saying, at any one of you, who is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her. And we know from this story that indeed, no one threw a stone. The woman was not killed and Jesus encouraged her to go and leave her life of sin. to Jesus, the embodiment of God, models us many times throughout the Bible, just how real and available God's unconditional love is for us.

**Andrew Bolton 34:28**

Thank you for your thought about that. I appreciate it. Do communal activities help people find healing health, personal peace. So for example, church fellowship camps, we retreats, our worship services, our coffee mornings, youth activities. Do these help people in terms of mental health?

**Sarah James 34:51**

Yes, so absolutely they can. As long as there is acceptance and non-judgmental kind of feeling at the activity. So we know on an individual basis that being part of a community and taking part in these activities can definitely help personal peace. And the importance of this is actually acknowledged in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where he puts community and the things you get within that such as friendship, a sense of connection, love, and belonging, and as a universal need. And just after physiological needs, like food and shelter have been met. So I want us to take one of those examples and show you how something like a church worship service, whether it's in person or online, can give an individual opportunities to practice the five ways of well-being. So in the presentation, we took you through an evidence based set of five ways of well-being which are connecting, being active, taking notice learning and giving. And we tried to map how spiritual practices could promote well-being. But there's also another element of how communities can help enable this, all of these five pillars, something like the church worship surface, it could help people to connect by joining with like-minded other people and being able to attend different congregations worships, it can help people's well-being by encouraging them to be active. So sometimes I've taken part in church worship, where we've had to do dances to songs or a bit more yoga or something within the service, which can help promote that. It could help individuals and take notice and use time and space to meditate or center, whether that's through music, or just through silence at times. It can help people or give people up the opportunities to learn, and especially within the Community of Christ, where we're always encouraged to grow and listen to Scripture. The fifth pillar is about giving and so a church service can enable people to give their

time, talents and money. And again, that's a big emphasis from Community of Christ that they encourage people to give all three. So and that's just one example. I mean, we could go, we could have a whole podcast on this. So I think there's lots of things that we can do, from a community point of view that we do anyway. And but there might be dual reasons to engage in these activities. So obviously, to engage and people within with spirituality and faith, but also to improve our people's well beings and giving them opportunities to do so. And the other thing is that their community and can also give individuals a shared set of values. We talked earlier about the importance of value. So there's lots that a loving community with the right attitude and openness and non-judgmental emphasis can help people but of course, there are times when those community activities can also make people feel excluded and negatively impact their mental health.

**Andrew Bolton 38:14**

So something very powerful, I think about loving communities, as you say, in non-judgmental loving communities. There's also correcting as well self-correcting, open to feedback and apology and so on. So there's this idea in the New Testament that God first loves us and it's out of feeling love that we're able to grow in love. So that's 1 John 4:19. So you do remember your granddad Hugh? I can tell a story about your granddad Hugh who had a very powerful effect on me. So your granddad Hugh initially was quiet and shine when same match the love of his life was Muriel, his wife of many years, she became interested in Community of Christ, and the Community of Christ ministers would visit her. Now, when they came in the front door, Hugh, if he could, would go out the back door. So he didn't have to stay and listen, but sometimes he was caught, and he wasn't rude. So he would have to sit and listen. Of course not saying anything. And at this time in his life, he drank beer down the club, 8 pints a night. So whether that was once a week or not, I don't remember now. But he found that as he got to know these ministers, he found his capacity to drink, reducing until apparently, you ordered half a pint of beer, couldn't drink it. Went home and told Muriel. "Were the ministers because I want to be baptized." Apparently your grandmom at that point cried not believing what she was hearing. So he went on to become such a loving man. And so for instance, he lent me the money to go courting Jewel in Israel, and was later the minister at our wedding. And I think the love of the ministers Eric Row and Harry Black, and the workings of God's love and Hugh's soul awoken this great love for other people, do you think love releases the power to love in us? That when people are loved, that somehow triggers this response of wanting to love in return?

**Hannah Langford 40:39**

It's an innate human response to offer love. And I think that if we think about children, babies who are born, they are born, wanting to be given love. And as parents, usually, typically, they want to give that love. I unfortunately, work with people who, in those early years in those kind of initial few months, haven't had that loving, responsive parenting. And I can see the impact that that can have on children from a very early age, too. But if we look at the other side of that, about how important it is to be loved, which includes acceptance, somebody who knows you inside out, and somebody who can see you for who you are, but loves you regardless, I think it's really empowering. And it's a feeling that I think that is something that we can sometimes take for granted when we have that in our life. But for those who don't have that in their life, I think it's probably a really, really prevailing thing for them.

**Sarah James** 41:41

I think that question actually links back to what we were saying earlier about the great commandment about loving your neighbor as yourself. And the idea that you need to kind of experience love or be able to receive love and forgiveness, not before you can do it for others, but definitely enables you to do that for others. So, yeah, I do definitely think that a community can, a loving community can be that source of love and universal love. And I think that that sounds like a community that I want to be part of if we can give that to other people. And like Han said, you know, very grateful, and to have been brought up in the church ourselves. And we've always felt that. So it's Yeah, it's something that I really hope is that we can give to others.

**Andrew Bolton** 42:32

I did pay the loan back, by the way. But it was so generous of him. So I want to explore another idea in the present of some people, I feel a greater hole, this more peace of mind, a sense of deeper connection. And I felt that with both Hugh and Muriel when I was in that home, I love staying there, I always felt better, more whole. So these kinds of people helped me I think, understand Jesus better, how he could bring peace to the troubled and wholeness to the broken. And Jesus promises disciples the gift of peace, not as the world gives, but a deeper spiritual peace. So in your experience, the psychology so there's some people that you've come across gifted today at bring peace and greater wholeness into the lives of others? And what is it enables them to do that?

**Hannah Langford** 43:29

So in the Community of Christ, we believe that all are called all are worthy and are able. And it could be that perhaps some people to call in their gifts and talents are more likely to bring peace and their ability to share this with others. So when you actually describe this type of person, a person in the British Isles Mission Center came into my mind. And I think if I was to look at what sort of person they are, I'd say that they are empathetic, understanding, non-judgmental, calm patient, a good listener, they make and find time to engage and connect with others. They're comfortable sitting with some difficult feelings shared by other people in order to provide them with that emotional containment. And they have an ability to make themselves vulnerable in order to be able to make that connection with somebody. I think perhaps these might be some things which help people be better peacemakers to others.

**Sarah James** 44:18

So I think I would echo that because I connection between two people, regardless of your personality types, you know, is enough to give people peace of mind. And I think it's just about treating people as individuals. So there are definitely people out there who can I can think of who I would say, capture the love and peace and just make you feel better. But I don't know what it is about that. I think maybe it is a gift. But also that's not to say that other people can't give I think everybody has something to give and everyone can play a part in improving the peace of mind for another person.

**Andrew Bolton** 45:01

Yeah, I mean, it's funny how I, a little child can be that gift sometimes to people. Yes, so we can give it to each other. I thought, what you said Hannah about you had a good, thoughtful list of qualities but also vulnerability as one. And one person I'm particularly thinking of one of his gifts, is his vulnerable, so is not superior to me. He's also sitting on a vulnerable bench as it were alongside me. So I like that.

So Sarah, how can we as peace loving communities, strategically develop plans to promote well-being within church communities? In other ways to be intentional and planning for healthier communities for healthier people?

45:52

We can do things informally and I think lots of our church communities are already doing this. Such as being compassionate and being non-judgmental, and that is a fantastic start. But I do think we should start to think about a strategy and try to make it and embed this strategy to improve and maintain peace of mind. So as I said earlier, there is a Mental Health First Aid course. And this is something that church members could undertake. They're currently online, there are some free versions and paid versions, and that might give us more confidence talking about these issues, and helping us to recognize and to help others. And there's also a framework from a UK based mental health charity called Mind, and they pull together lots of resources about how the workplace or communities can help. And so I'm going to link that to the podcast notes. But I just wanted to take you through some top tips that they give for how how can we, as a community improve general well-being, and the first one is actually leading by example. So sending a clear message that well-being matters. And the second is about building confidence on mental health and being aware about practices and ways that people can seek help. The third one is about normalizing mental health and just giving space to take stock with people and yourself, about talking about people's well-being and what factors they can do to help. And there's lots more tips, and I just want to end on the final one, which we've alluded to, throughout the podcast, which is about treating people as individuals, so treating people with respect and offering support if we can, and just being compassionate in our responses to people.

**Hannah Langford** 47:40

I think we thought in, in our preparation for this podcast as well, that mental health is a really broad subject. And, and although mean, Sarah perhaps have some of these conversations on a weekly basis for lots of people who are within our communities or within our congregations, it may be quite daunting, to know where to start or to feel that you have the knowledge to even have these conversations. I think that's where some sort of kind of strategic framework, which has been offered by mental health charities is obviously evidence based, can help give us some security in some of these ideas, give a framework for us to map some ideas on to, but it also gives it credibility that actually the things that we are doing are in line with what mental health charities are encouraging workplaces or other organizations to do, and hopefully will give us the confidence that we're really moving in the right direction to support people's peace of mind.

**Andrew Bolton** 48:38

So we're on the edge, I think of improving things for lots of people. That's one I got from your, your webinar. There's hope ahead. It's very encouraging.

**Sarah James** 48:50

Yeah, I think a lot of that has been through the advocacy through charities think their mental health charity, I can only speak to the UK ones. But they have been incredible about bringing people's voices to the mainstream. And also the idea of you know, it can happen to anybody. So lots of celebrities, Stephen Fry, you know, lots of people that people admire making the decision to be vulnerable and

open and say, "Well, yeah, we are struggling with this as well." So I think that advocacy through charity groups has been helpful, but I think now we're at a point where awareness is raised it is definitely increased. Particularly in some communities, there are some communities that still haven't got that awareness. There's still a lot of stigma within and lots of communities and especially with the old age group, as well as lots of stigma there. Generally we're in the UK anyway, we're at a place where we've got better awareness but what we haven't got is the resources. And whilst there are treatments, known treatments, there are lots of overwhelmed services and, and to cut budgets and things like that. So I think that's where the other dimensions of personal peace comes in. Because you can advocate for those you can, you know, have actions around speaking to your MP about making mental health services a priority. And so yeah, so awareness is one thing, but we also need the actions that come with it.

**Andrew Bolton** 50:15

So let's bring things to perhaps a conclusion here. In summary, what do you think makes for healthy groups and communities that increases people's well-being and mental health? Can you list some of those qualities about healthy communities, good for people?

**Sarah James** 50:33

So I think this comes down to upholding the values of worth of people. And so in practice, that means being compassionate, being non-judgmental, not stereotyping, treating people as individuals, and actually being vulnerable and honest with people. And acknowledging that all are worthy, I think is what makes a healthy group and community.

**Hannah Langford** 51:04

I think that maybe some other things that I would kind of think about would be about having a shared sense of identity, a shared sense of belonging, and shared values, and everybody's accepted.

**Andrew Bolton** 51:15

Thank you, Sarah, what developments are going on in your field of neuro psychology that are very helpful for mental health in the future?

**Sarah James** 51:24

So there's lots of advancements, particularly at the moment in something called Big Data, or genetics, or brain imaging. And actually, what's the most hopeful out of all of this is that researchers have never been more collaborative. So Gone are the days where scientists are kind of working in their silos and maybe in competition, but there's been a huge emphasis probably within the last 5-10 years of having a shared vision and working together across disciplines, across nations, really trying to combine different approaches to help us understand mental health bit better. So I'll give you an example of something that's changed, there's been a huge revelation and in my work, so at the moment, I'm working on understanding early causes of dementia in the brain. And so we've got had huge advancements in different types of brain scans. So not only can we see the structure of people's brains, but we can see and how strong the connections are. And we can see where the blood and energy is moving to. And by doing this by learning how the brain works, normally, we can work out patterns there, perhaps they're associated with some warning signs that that person might perhaps be at risk of developing dementia.

So there's been a huge change for us, because we've been able to see that by scanning people's brains just when you know, when they're alive, we've been able to see that there is a window in the brain for about 15 years where there's changes starting to happen, and about 15 years before you develop symptoms of dementia. So before you have memory loss, so this is a window of opportunity, perhaps where we can intervene, where we can see that somebody is at risk, and before they have these symptoms. So that's giving us lots of hope, being able to visualize what's going on, and in parts of the body.

**Andrew Bolton** 53:22

So it's very helpful. And Hannah use you helping troubled people in your work in schools and families. So in your work, it must be very rewarding to see people get better to your help. Can you say a little bit more about that?

**Hannah Langford** 53:38

Yes, and I'm very fortunate I have a job, which I'm extremely passionate about. So I'm sorry, if I get a bit excited when talking about it. My role can take many different kind of approaches. So sometimes I can work with young people themselves, I always think it's really important to gain their voice. Because in the midst of all the dizziness and all the chaos, I think it's really important that they get to make some decisions about what's happening to them, or have their thoughts and feelings advocated for. So that's one element of my work, which I really, really enjoy. And you see how powerful it is for some young people to have an adult, listen to them, ask them questions and listen to what they say. And tell other other adults, you need to listen to what they're telling us. Other areas of my work can be working with families. And I find that really rewarding when the work that you have done with their child actually helps parents understand that child more I can help them and how all of these things linked together. Or perhaps that's why they have always been like that, or that's why they say this. And it can be really rewarding to see parents really find that somebody can understand their child and actually can find your way through this really tricky situation that they found themselves in to give them hope that change can happen. The ways that I do that our work is with, we'd call it capacity building. So working with members of school staff, rather than going in to say that I'm the expert, and I'm going to take my assessments, and then I'm going to do the work. And I'm going to walk away and leave a report of things for you to do, taking a very different approach where it's collaborative, and we work together. And we have prophesies together, we information gathered together. And in doing that you capacity build the skills and the knowledge and the ability of those members of school staff. So that actually, in other situations, they feel better prepared and more able to ask some of these questions, or to think about things a little bit more. So that then when I become involved, it could be that they've done many of the kind of the earlier steps themselves, they feel more empowered, they feel a greater level of knowledge. And you can see that, once you've been working in schools for a few years, quite often, you can see them say, well, we did this for this child, should we try that this time? And you say, yeah, that's fantastic idea, you know, let's, let's go with that. And when those ideas come from them, that you know that actually, you've been able to help support that school system, build their knowledge and their capacity to be more inclusive. And to be not more knowledgeable about children's needs, I find to be really rewarding and quite empowering for me as well.

**Andrew Bolton 56:16**

So we ask all our presenters this question, what would you do for peace? We'd perhaps think about what would you do for your own personal peace, your own mental health and well-being.

**Hannah Langford 56:29**

So something that I could do for peace is to share my time, gifts and knowledge to find ways to share peace with others, whether this is in a professional capacity in my daily life, or as a minister in the Community of Christ, I strongly believe in the worth of all persons, and how they're often people who struggle to see that worth in themselves. So to bring peace to them, I would strive to find ways to build them up, support them and empower them to help find a niche other personal peace of mind. I think in order for my own well-being, I find for me kind of connection is really important for me that that's something that really supports my well-being when I'm feeling not quite right, or if I'm not feeling 100% at my best. And I find just sitting down or making phone calls to people that I care about just having that phone call, or even being able to send a few texts to my friends maybe have not been able to see in a little while. One of my best friends lives in Wales. I live in Leicestershire now. So it's many hours away. But those connection points for me really helped me in times when I may be struggling.

**Andrew Bolton 57:36**

Yeah, it's not easy being Welsh in Leicester, right. Sarah, what about you? You've just moved back to Wales, so?

**Sarah James 57:44**

Yes, so for those who don't know, we're in the pandemic, and I moved from London, and back to Wales to be closer to my family and closer to the sea. So things from my personal peace of mind, I think is about kind of recognizing what works for you. And I think why hope this came across. And when we were talking about it in the presentation about you know, the five ways well-being or spiritual practices that can map on to well-being that is an individual thing. So you kind of have to find what works for you. So I think just being mindful of what works for me, and that's things like listening to music can really help me take notice, as well as learning new pieces, but also that those connection points, but also being active. And so now I get to go to a walk to the sea every day. And that's really helping my peace of mind. And that an answer to your bigger question about what would you do for peace, I'm going to change the tense to for peace, I will be an advocate for promoting protecting and restoring people's mental health. And I'm going to try to uphold my values that I align with and which come from the Community of Christ. I feel very strongly about it, which is the worth of all people. And I'm going to do this by being compassionate, non-judgmental, genuine and vulnerable.

**Andrew Bolton 59:10**

so thank you, Dr. Sarah James and Dr. Hannah Langford for joining us in this podcast in this series Grounds for Peace. You've been incredibly generous and doing both a webinar now podcast with us. This is Project Zion podcast and today, I was your host Andrew Bolton from Leicester, England. Thank you for joining us. May I enclosing ask you, our audience to consider this question personally to what would you do for peace particularly, what would you do for your own personal peace, your own mental health and well-being? Thank you.



**Josh Mangelson** 59:56

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