

Katie Langston 00:17

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Mike Hoffman 00:59

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Mike Hoffman. And we are doing Coffee at The Swarm today. And today I have with me Megan Byrd, who is a senior at Graceland this semester and majoring in allied health. I'm really excited to talk to her about her experience at Graceland. She's been part of campus ministries for the last couple of years, working as this Sunday morning worship coordinator, and then the student pastor and she's also the congregational financial officer here at Graceland this semester. So we're really excited about that. So. So Megan, welcome to the program. What would you like to share?

Megan Byrd 01:45

Hello!

Mike Hoffman 01:46

What would you like to tell us a little bit more about yourself?

Megan Byrd 01:52

So like you said, I'm an allied health major, I did come to Graceland, originally as a nursing major, but changed right before my sophomore year. And I'm still, like, very interested in health science, but I decided I like the movement science better than the like, clinical treating someone in and out variety. And I liked that. I looked into being physical therapist and I like that you get to see your patient through the rehabilitation process, rather than just treat them immediately and they want the immediate things and have it gone. That was something that changed for me here at Graceland. I've been a member of Shalom for all four years. And it's a house that I enjoy being a part of very much. I found some of my closest friends there, I was actually lucky enough to become very good friends with my roommate, which doesn't always happen. You don't always people best roommate in college. Fortunately, that's how it worked out for me. And she's amazing. And like you said, I've loved being a part of campus ministries for years. You know, getting to grow in my faith.

Mike Hoffman 03:15

Well, I know you came from the south west Missouri area. Where did you Where are you from originally? Or where did you grow up?

Megan Byrd 03:24

My hometown is Carthage, Missouri, where my whole life so a lot of people held hostage because of Precious Moments.

Mike Hoffman 03:32

Yeah, Precious Moments. chapel, isn't it? Yeah, okay.

Megan Byrd 03:36

Yes. Sam Butcher is the person that opened Precious Moments and they've got this beautiful chapel with a lot of paintings done by Sam. And they also have like, another building where they saw the dolls, they have like, life reenactments with the dolls and stuff. Actually, the Precious Moments of Carthage is not doing the best right now, but he has another one. Sam open another one in the Philippines and he spends a lot of time in the Philippines.

Mike Hoffman 04:12

You sound like you know him personally, do you? I mean is that?

Megan Byrd 04:16

Somewhat, um, the land that he built Precious Moments on he bought from my family. It was my great grandparents farm. So he bought the land from them and the building behind there was all like, the parking lot was where the farmhouse used to be. And then the building behind is all, was all my family's land. And then there's a underground house down the street from Precious Moments that was eventually about by Precious Moments also and that was my great grandma's house that she had originally built. She was quite the hoarder before they tore down the farmhouse, she took out all the toilets, doorknobs, sinks, everything and then put it in this underground house that they built after selling the farmland to Sam. And then when they moved out of the underground house because I think now it's like a bridal boutique. It's been a few things over a few years.

Mike Hoffman 05:25

Yeah.

Megan Byrd 05:27

She took out all the doorknobs, toilets, sinks, anything, fixtures, anything she could get a hold of. And I remember as a kid being at her house that she moved to, I don't know if it was directly after moving out of the underground house she built, but it was the same trend every time she moved. I remember her garage full of all of this stuff. And if you ate at a restaurant, she would keep the containers and use them for like family events if someone came over she want to send you with food and use them. And my, my great aunt dated Sam Butcher's son. So I more know of him than I, through family than I know him personally.

Mike Hoffman 06:22

Right, right. But it sounds like your family is pretty well connected to that whole movement they're in Carthage. And so yeah,

Megan Byrd 06:30

They've been there for a while. A lot of them have moved away now is my great grandma and grandpa, my grandpa great grandpa my grandmother passed away after selling the land, their kids were very young. They still have six kids, and some of them are great. I know one thing is Oh, actually most of them are back in Carthage. Yeah.

Mike Hoffman 06:59

Well, that's cool. It's cool. So. So you grew up in Carthage. So what was your church experience in Carthage? I know a little bit about it. But

Katie Langston 07:10

I was not raised in the Community of Christ. I actually wasn't raised in church at all. Unfortunately, my mom struggles with feeling welcome at church because her family background, does not the healthiest and her mom did not take her to church. And she didn't and then as she got older, she wanted to go, but she's one of those people that feels like she didn't know a whole lot about the Bible, so she wouldn't fit in. So it just made it a little uncomfortable. And my dad, his family's is one of those like churches, where you are and how you live. And his mom was sick for most of his young adult life, so they didn't really, like go out to church a whole lot. So I hadn't been raised in a church. I didn't, but I wanted to be a part of one you know, like, I was very curious about God, and what he could do for me. So I think I was about eight when I started traveling around to different types of churches and stuff. I specifically remember I was baptized in Carthage Church of Nazarene and I visited my grandpa's church hard a few times, and there was a Pentecostal church, who a friend from school introduced me to and I had trouble like, fitting in I felt like maybe fitting in isn't the right word. But I was there to like learn and develop a relationship and that these different places, I felt like it was more about going through the motions, and doing worshiping how these different places had decided to worship rather than building your personal connection with God. So it I had a hard time like finding my church home. Which is funny because my introduction to the Community of Christ was through Roger and Patrice Sacry. They started a youth group called C Five; Community of Christ Carthage Children's Choir.

Mike Hoffman 09:35

Oh, I've heard it called C Five. I never knew what all the C's stood for. So

Katie Langston 09:41

Yeah, Community of Christ Carthage Children's Choir. So Roger and Patrice were actually neighbors with my uncle and aunt who I'm very close to. And I known them for years and years and years and they

kept saying you should join C Five! You should join C Five! And I kept putting it off, but then my, when I started junior high, I think I was about 11 or 12. I started going to C Five and I got introduced to a church that, you know, more aligned with my worldviews and stuff. And I learning more about the Community of Christ eventually became a member. I was confirmed right before I turned 16. So what I loved about Community of Christ was we travel all over with C Five. We went to different churches, and we performed for them. They actually came to Graceland one year.

Mike Hoffman 10:50

So maybe that was your first introduction to Graceland then through C Five.

Megan Byrd 10:56

Yeah.

Mike Hoffman 10:57

How old were you? Do you remember?

Megan Byrd 11:01

To Graceland?

Mike Hoffman 11:01

Yeah, when your C Five group came to Graceland come over.

Megan Byrd 11:06

So when I came to Graceland. I'd already been introduced the campus.

Mike Hoffman 11:10

Okay.

Megan Byrd 11:11

So that was the year before my freshman year that C Five did a service for Graceland. I think that Humberto Tinsman was the Sunday morning worship coordinator. And he had previously been a part of C Five so he knew about us, and he invited us.

Mike Hoffman 11:29

That was that was during my tenure here, then I do, okay, I do that. So alright.

Megan Byrd 11:35

And then before that I had come to Spec with all my friends, so that's when I was first introduced to Graceland.

Mike Hoffman 11:46

That's very cool. Okay, so when you made the decision to come to Graceland as a student, what, what were the factors there? What made you decide to come to Graceland?

Megan Byrd 11:58

Well, I'm a first generation college student. So it is very nerve wracking for me. And anxiety inducing because I had come to college with the notion that maybe it wasn't smart enough to get through it. And I told my mom this last night that I think if I had gone to different schools, I probably would not have continued on with college, I might have dropped out because the community and the support systems that a person has, like, installed through our university are very, very important to me. And they helped me develop and grow and I don't think you get that in a lot of other schools. So I had said that the community was the most important driving factor for me coming here. At the time, I was originally going to be a nurse. Their nursing or our nursing is really good. That was another factor. I didn't even really look into other schools. I just applied to Graceland and hoped they would let me in.

Mike Hoffman 13:20

And they did.

Megan Byrd 13:21

I worked really hard on getting scholarships, and the TRIO program has been great for me providing resources.

Mike Hoffman 13:35

So the TRIO program is this federally funded program here on Graceland, a lot of other universities have it, I just want to make sure anyone listening to the podcast will understand that this is a sort of a student support service that not every university has that I think I obviously haven't worked at other universities that ours seems to be a top notch program. I mean, it's it's for first generation, lower income students too. And it just offers a lot of support for students that, you know, to be quite honest, I think I would have qualified for it when I went to school. Actually, Megan, as you were sharing, I didn't realize our stories are so similar. I mean, I didn't grew up going to church. I you know, I sort of applied to, I went to Missouri Western and St. Joe but, but I didn't even know Graceland existed at that point because I didn't join the church until I got to college. So it as you were sharing, I could just empathize with you a lot about some of your experiences. So yeah. And I remember the anxiety about applying for colleges and thinking, how do I get in and what do I do because I was a first generation student as well. So let's talk about your experience at Graceland now. So you're, you're a senior, you're in your last semester this fall. How would you describe you know, I don't know, if all of our listeners would be familiar. But there's this term out there called the Graceland experience, you know? So how would you describe your Graceland experience? I mean, is it, you mentioned a little bit about your house. But yeah, what else would you say about it?

Megan Byrd 15:15

And I can't agree some that two, or maybe three most important factors to my experience were outside of class, where my house, campus ministries and the choir program,

Mike Hoffman 15:31

Yeah, okay.

Megan Byrd 15:33

And a lot of those overlap based on like, who was doing what, and I think in most immediately, I got the most support for my house. And it was very easy for me to become involved, because there was just some really awesome people on Shalom. And everyone's very open to sharing this experiences with me and very welcoming. I think the Residence Life, I guess I would say mantra is you belong, because you are here. No, there's like, no other qualifications. You don't need to know your family background, your ethnic background, your religious background, you simply belong, because you're here, and I think they do a very good job of acting on that. Campus ministries has always been really important, because at the time I came here, Community of Christ was very important to me. Because I love the church's out view, and especially the camp experiences and how we share Jesus with our youth. And so to be a part of Campus Ministries, and to learn and develop more, so I can take that back to the camps that meant so much to me, and back to my congregation that meant so much to me, meant a lot. And I just really like working with the people in Campus Ministries. Because I think Mike, you did a good job of establishing this like, communal environment where everyone can just talk with each other and be open and there's no like stress involved with it.

Mike Hoffman 17:26

You've been a bit a big part of that your time here, because we've had an exceptional group of students go through, I just feel very blessed about that. But, you know, it's, I do agree with you, I remember the first semester I got here, I just felt like, students were much more stressed out than I remember being you know, and of course, I'm, that's been many, many years ago. So I just thought, you know, let's, let's reduce the stress everywhere we could so I'm glad that you've been a part of that because I think that's been an important thing for your honesty and involvement in campus ministry has been really appreciated. So. So what do you plan to do after you graduate? So you're majoring in allied health? And you've mentioned, you know, shifting from nursing, but are you what are your plans?

Megan Byrd 18:19

So my goal is to graduate from Graceland, I previous requisites that I need to get into physical therapy school, and my outlook on physical therapy is I really enjoy maintenance of health, because I have experienced mental health issues. And I know that mental health can become very much visible. And I've also worked as a CNA. I graduated from high school with my certified nursing assistant license. So my freshman year I worked in the nursing home, here in Lamoni and you just see how much taking care of your body and affects how you live in your older life. So I'm really interested in the rehabilitation,

maintenance of health because there are so many people that come to the nursing home who are away from their families, and isolated especially right now during COVID. I'm sure mental health is not very well because you need that connection. And as you get older in all your relatives and friends and stuff start to pass away that becomes harder and harder to achieve. So I see how important it is to take care of yourself. Because the better you take care of yourself, the easier it is to connect with others. There are so many like handicaps that you can experience as you get older that kind of diminish those connections like not being able to walk or talk, whatever it is, I care a lot about, you know, just maintenance of health and being able to live a healthy lifestyle, because they also think that affects how you live spiritually. Yeah, I really just physical therapy, and I mentioned seeing people through the rehabilitation rather than a lot of times as a nurse, you see someone out, like the worst part of their lives. That can be very stress inducing and, you know, it's very uplifting to see someone throughout the rehabilitation and have watched their recovery and felt that connection to them, rather than the alternative, but I do think there's a lot of grace and, you know, strength that comes from being a nurse as well as just, I had a different outlook with what I wanted to do with my career.

Mike Hoffman 21:06

And it from, you know, as I know, you I know that you're into relationships and, and healthy relationships. And so that doesn't, as you explained that, that makes a lot of sense to me that, you know, like, I appreciate nurses, don't get me wrong, because they do incredible things. And I, you know, I guess for long term patients, they do develop relationships, but maybe not always, and you're talking about helping somebody physically over the long term, and almost staying with them until they get to a better place in life. So again, it goes back to your relational sort of connections and emphasis. That's why that's very good. It's good. I appreciate that. So turning a little bit here. You know, one of the, I wonder if, if any of this relates to like, your hopes for Community of Christ in the future? I mean, you know, you've mentioned about going back to your congregation, and giving back to to it. Do you have any thoughts about what your hopes are for the church in the future?

Katie Langston 22:12

Well, I really like a lot of what Community of Christ does. And I know, it's going through kind of a hard time right now, but I think my hope for the Community of Christ is outreach, like focus on outreach, and focus on love. You know, there's a lot of stuff that's going on politically, there's a lot of humanitarian acts that need attention. And I love that Community of Christ has been involved, and has been not like, not like other churches in the Midwest, they can't be. They're very open and their stance is love. And that has always meant so much to me. Because I don't think I have the right to choose to judge anyone, I don't think the church has the right to judge anyone. I think ultimately, that's Jesus. And I think, from what I've read in the Bible, and I may be wrong, but I think that Jesus wants us to have the opportunity to choose our faith in him. And so I think the best way to go about to reach out to communities to reach out to the world is to establish a loving, like you said, relationship. I'm really big into developing healthy relationships and stuff. So I actually got the chance to meet the people that run how that connects to Roger Infantry's. And I love the programs that they have going on. And World Conference has always

been amazing. And I don't know. I just don't know a whole lot of church at this churches at this world level, who allow people the chance to like, see how we run things and then vote for what we think is important and what we think needs to change, especially on a national level. I thought that was that's really cool, and something that we should definitely be proud of and continue. I'm trying to think because I think a lot about what I want for the church.

Mike Hoffman 24:45

What you've said is incredible. It's really important. And I appreciate your perspective. I mean, I don't know that I would have had your perspective when I was your age. So I do appreciate what you're sharing. I mean, it's like, very profound. And I don't know, is there anything else you'd like to share about Graceland, the church, your future, how it all works together.

Megan Byrd 25:13

I think it definitely all works together. Because Graceland has taught me this community outlook that I was really craving, I got a little bit of it with Community of Christ. But that group of friends that I developed, were so close knit that I hadn't really had practice in teaching out and you know, inviting others. So that's something that kind of grew with my time at Graceland and learning how to talk to other people, and really started to grow my development of learning about different cultures and understanding of how different people live. Because we do have such a variety of international students. And Graceland has a lot to do with our relationship with the church. Because Community of Christ, the church is very different in many different places that you go based on like the congregation, how closely they align with the world church's stances and stuff like that. So I actually received a calling to be a priesthood member, I was called to the position of priest. And I think that has a lot to do with how I want to live my life as a physical therapist, should I get accepted, as just a human being, I think there's a lot that we can learn to do to develop our lives. Because right now, I'm just thinking a lot of like all the humanitarian issues that need attention and what I can do, as a human being, I think, like, living my life filled with more love, and understanding and capabilities for outreach is super important. And I really believe that improving things on a smaller scale will make a very big difference on a large scale and bring more people to the church. I don't think people like having religion shoved down their throats. So I, I've thought a lot about the best ways to share my experiences because they've meant so much to me. And I think they can make a difference for someone else, too. And I think the best thing I can do is to show them love, to show them compassion and to be outright you know, like, very forthcoming with my faith and my relationship with God and how I got here.

Mike Hoffman 27:59

Well Megan, thank you for this opportunity to talk to you. I think it's been a tremendous, tremendous interview. Thank you for sharing time with me. Megan Byrd, a senior at Graceland. We so appreciate this, Megan, and wish you well going into the future after this semester. Thank you.

Megan Byrd 28:22

Thanks, Mike. Bye!

Josh Mangelson 28:32

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