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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.

**Carla Long** 00:34

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. And today I'm super excited to introduce to you Glenn Johnson, who is the Mission Center President and Mission Center Financial Officer for the Lamoni Heartland Mission Center. Glenn, hello!

**Glenn Johnson** 00:51

Hi, Carla. It's great to be with you.

**Carla Long** 00:53

I am super excited that you're here. Thank you so much for agreeing to be on a podcast with me. So Glenn, before we jump into our super exciting topic today, tell us a little bit about yourself?

**Glenn Johnson** 01:02

Well, sure. I'm lifelong member of Community of Christ, I grew up in Southern California, in a town called Downey about 10 miles from Los Angeles and was a Dodgers fan growing up. And then as the family all moved to Orange County became an Los Angeles Angels fan. One of my big passions is baseball. I'm someone who has always been engaged with the message and identity of Community of Christ, I have two things that I really hold central. One, the first would be sort of a belief that in God is creator. And then the second that God is love. And beyond that, everything else to me is sort of mystery and discovery and seeking. And, you know, let's see if we can figure this out. But I've done that in community and the community I've been a part of, in exploring all that is Community of Christ. So I've had a number of different roles that you are asked to take on when you're part of a community. So I was ordained to the office of priest when I was 19 years old, I was in the middle of my freshman year at Graceland and came home for winter break and me and was ordained. And then five and a half years later, ordained the office of elder and 16 years later as a high priest, and I've just always had these kinds of volunteer roles in the church as co-pastor and pasture and on the stake, High Council, mission center council, campground Board of Directors, that kind of thing, the things that were asked to do that take on an ecclesial role. But that doesn't mean that, you know, I'm the kind of person who thinks that I have all the answers, or the church even has all the answers, but rather that we're just sort of on this journey together, where we're trying to discover and know.

**Carla Long** 02:49

So you moved from the LA area to Lamoni. That's, I mean, with a few stops in between, and we're gonna hear about those. But that is quite a switch, Glenn. Quite a switch.

**Glenn Johnson** 03:01

Yeah. And I done that twice in my life. So the first time was when I went off to Graceland as a student. And that was literally moved to Lamoni. I lived there as a college student. And I remember driving from the Des Moines airport, to Lamoni and seeing all of these cornfields and, you know, forest land and things that just were completely foreign to me growing up in my community. And it was it was a big change. It was a it was quite an adaptation and living in a small town for a little while there and everything. But today, I actually live in West Des Moines and my office is in Lamoni. So I have a commute, which I only do one day a week at the present time. And originally we were planning to do it to eight days a week. But COVID is you know, sort of changed all that for now. But yeah, there it's a it's a big cultural change. Like I fell in love with Iowa the four years that I was here, I was at Graceland two years in and I lived in Des Moines for two years, and worked in politics, believe it or not, but just came to really appreciate the state of Iowa, the people of Iowa. And it's a great opportunity now to return. And you're right there was a moment in between. So I started working in my first full time position for the church was only two and a half years ago, when I became a full time pastor at the Niagara Falls Lewiston congregation and the eastern Great Lakes mission center. And that was quite an experience in New York. Western New York is very different. It doesn't meet the stereotype of what people from California think of as New York at all, because it's actually a fairly rural county. I lived in Lewiston, where, you know, there were also cornfields and lots of things around Lewiston is a historic village beautiful place just six miles from Niagara Falls. In fact, it's the birthplace of Niagara Falls and we were very close to Canada, which is I think part of the story here that I get to be asked to share because I literally as Pastor my, my desk in the pastor study was closer to the Canadian border in the Niagara River than the US border guards on the Lewiston bridge who were admitting people into the United States. So because once they got off the bridge, they had cars had to roll a little ways they were past the church. And there we were, you know, very, very close to the border. So Canada was a big part of the picture from the very beginning when I started that my position there in eastern Great Lakes mission center as a pastor for the Niagara Falls Lewiston congregation. In fact, Lach Mackay, Apostle Laughlin, Mackay who interviewed me prior to my accepting that position, told me that he was very interested in me learning more about what the church is doing in Canada, and Toronto is not that far away from it's just a quick shot over the Lewiston bridge. You know, we were so close to Canada one day, Carla, I was at a dermatologist appointment, I came out of the dermatologists office and got in my car, and I accidentally was in Canada. I mean, it's literally like you could drive out of the parking lot. And if you turned the wrong way, you were on the bridge to Canada. And fortunately, I had my passport with me and was able to just kind of explain it. What's your purpose here? Well, actually, I'm lost I made a wrong turn and I need to go home.

**Carla Long** 06:26

That is hilarious!

**Glenn Johnson** 06:27

But anyway, I know. I was kind of embarrassed. And then of course, you have to tell both the Canadian border crossing guards and the American border crossing guards on the way back. What was your business in Canada? Well, actually, I got lost. I just made a U turn. So anyway, Canada was close and and we were able to meet some really amazing ministers, Kerry Richards, the East Canada Eastern Mission Center President and Troy Roach, who's the full time Minister for Canada East Mission Center in charge of creating connection. And John Hamer, who many people know through the Ministry of Toronto Center Place as the pastor of the Toronto congregation and the Toronto center place ministry that he does a weekly broadcast that so many people are familiar with. And he's also very involved with sunstone and, and with Latter-day Seeker Ministries, and, you know, Community of Christ history and all that. And of course, Leandro Palacios is just this amazing spiritual formation minister and a great at leading meditation and all that. So I was fortunate to be able to drive up there about, I don't know, four or five times to see what was happening at Toronto Center Place on their weeknight activities just during the week and, and get a sense of the lectures and all of that. And then Apostle Mackay called me a second time and said that he and John Wight, the President of the Presidents of 70 and Community of Christ, we're going to be traveling to Canada and doing an exploratory visit to learn more about Creating Connection and what was happening in Canada East mission center. And they invited me and Ryan Pitt and a couple of other people to go along and learn more about what was happening there. And so that was really my first real exposure to to Creating Connection. But that transition from then from being a pastor where I was preaching 48 times a year and presiding 50 times a year. And so I was doing worship non stop and loving it I love that you know, I love public ministry. It's It's fun. It you learn so much when you have to preach on a different lectionary scripture each week, it was fantastic experience for me. But it was done in this little tiny environment with just a few people who were very beloved but we were the demographics were working against us. You know, the Niagara Falls is only six miles from Lewiston, but it's a six mile gap. That's just hard. You know, there's literally like a, the the hydroelectric plant that's in between there, and some wide open spaces. And so we were doing an outreach in Niagara Falls that was modeled after the work that Linda Read started out in California, of ministering to people without homes and bringing them love lunches on a in a sack lunch on a weekly basis and things like that. And that was all going really well. But I felt like as an act of stewardship, having a full time Minister for a very small group of people probably wasn't the best. And so I looked online and saw an opening for Lamoni Heartland Mission Center President applied for that, and then got offered the job of the Lamoni Heartland Mission Center President and Financial Officer which was a bit of a leap of faith on my part, but we I went ahead and I started here in January as a full time person and in 10 weeks COVID hit world changed.

**Carla Long** 09:59

Amen. It really, really did. And it continues to change. So Glenn, I have a couple questions, and you can tell me which direction you want to go. I definitely want to hear more about Creating Connection, and all about that. And I also want to hear about your life as a non minister, a non paid minister, sorry, you've been a minister for a long time and a non paid minister. So which direction you want to go, you wanna talk about Creating Connection, or your life as a non paid Minister?

10:22

Well, let's, yeah, let's talk about that being a bi vocational ministers, so people like to call it where, you know, you're working full time in the real world, quote, unquote. And then at the same time, you know, where is your heart, where's your passion, it's with that community that you're a part of, and, and the various roles that you play in that community. So all of my life, I have predominantly worked in the high tech industry or high tech sectors, specifically software companies. So I started off as a educational marketing segment manager, well, first in tech support and education marketing for the first PC, personal computer, computer aided drafting and design software company. So they had the very first program on a Tarok computer, which no one's even heard of. It's before the Apple personal computers are created. But I didn't work for them then, but we, we did things on the IBM PC, as well, eventually, and I was very involved in that. Then I worked for a company called Graphics on I was the first employee of this startup that eventually went public on the NASDAQ. So you know, you hear these stories about that, what that ride is like, and I experienced that, working in that company. And that was a amazing opportunity as well, because I got to be involved in multimedia, which is, you know, the combination of graphics and sound and interactivity before the internet started. And as anything, you know, that was widely consumed through the world wide web. So we created CD ROM. So I was the creative director for the Willie Nelson CD ROM, and CD ROM on Oliver Nick, Oliver Stone's nickson CD ROM based on the movie, I spent three weeks researching Watergate, with John Dean in the National Archives Building in Maryland. I mean, it was just lots and lots of incredible things in that part of my career. And then I eventually landed for 17 years at Magic Software, which is an Israeli based software company that allowed me to visit Israel 10 times, it provided a really rich extra texture to my ministry, and you know, being able to, to read a passage of scripture and have a sense of place. And where that happened was very helpful. And so I've been throughout Israel, literally, from the very top, by Lebanon, I've been into the Golan Heights near Syria, I've been all the way down to Eilat, which is on the Red Sea. And, of course, plenty of time in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and in other areas. So that in those 10 trips, I was very lucky to be able to see a lot of the country. So Magic Software is they offer programming tools. And I often found myself asking, you know, you know, here I am and marketing these programming tools, but you know, am I creating good in the world? Is it what is the purpose of my life? I mean, I understand, and my career in particularly I understand, for example, if you work in healthcare or education, you know, social services, that you know, you you can see the direct benefit to people of your work, and that's wonderful, but I, you know, what often asked, you know, is this useful? And I'd always come to the understanding that, well, yes, I'm contributing to the overall economy, you know, people's ability to do all of these different things to software helps aid everything. And then one day I, you know, I was Senior VP of Marketing, but I like to keep my finger on the pulse of the company. And so I would look at every lead that came in. And one day I saw a lead from Wim van Klinken, Community of Christ. And I thought I just met Wim van Klinken at World Conference, because I was a device steward. What is he doing on the magic software website? You know, why is he asking about programming tools? And I so, I called him up, which I normally wouldn't directly call a lead, but it was Wim. I know him and he's with the church, and so I called him and I said, then what's going on what, you know, I'm curious as to why you filled out a lead form? And he said, Well, you know, he started with the church as, well employment for the church as the mission center president in Europe, but then it was transferred to direct international headquarters. And of course, now he's got the title of CIO, Chief Information Officer of the church. But he said in his career prior to that, he was a magic programmer, and he developed car rental software and all kinds of things for different companies. And so he's an expert programmer, and I had no idea. And so it was really cool, because vim was in inquiring because it was time to create new Common Consent software to replace the old parliamentary Robert's Rules of Order system that helps to control the business at World Conference. And because we were coming into these new ways of doing things where we had five options, instead of just yes or no, the old software just wasn't gonna work anymore. So they needed something new. And Wim said, I can write it, I can write it in Magic. And he did he and he's written a variety of programs now to support what's happening in the church behind the scenes, like the ministerial reimbursement software that you and I would use Carla, for example, to turn in our expenses, is a is written in Magic, it's got the little blue Magic logo that I helped pick out, you know, contribute to the process of, of choosing that logo. It's just so funny, and it's ironic. But it, it helped me to see the truth of what I was assuming, which is that, you know, no matter what we do, if we do it, honestly, and if we approach it, you know, with a, with positivity in our work, and we give an honest day's labor, it all contributes to good and I could definitely see the direct benefit in the software that was created. So at the next World Conference, when the software was ready to go, Wim invited me on to the stage, before the conference sessions had begun, I got to sit there in President Veazey seat and see the software screen and how World Conference was controlled from up front. Wim gave me that, that sort of personal tour. And then also during the conference, I jumped up into the booth a couple of different times to, to see the view that they have from the glass booth and controlling all of the technology that's going on controlling the and communicating with the microphones and so forth, as well as running the Common Consent software. So as a lot of fun to be able to experience that. But then after 17 years, I found myself looking for work. And I made a big transition in my career.

**Carla Long** 16:58

Definitely a big transition. So let us cool story about working on the Common Consent software. And oh my gosh, I'm just astounded by those connections or coincidences or Christ, incidences, as some people might say. So that answer my question about when you are by vocational minister. My other question was about Creating Connection. So I've heard a little bit about this, but I'm not even sure what it is. Can you describe that?

**Glenn Johnson** 17:26

Yeah. So when I took that trip up several trips, to learn about what creating connection is, we found out that in Canada, they have this thing they call the three third strategy. And so it the second prong of the three third strategy is Creating Connection. And it's a way of being in community, with the broader community outside the church. And it calls us into a way of engaging in more meaningful conversations and activities. And it's a broad model. And it's a very flexible model. So when you describe Creating Connection, it isn't just one thing. In fact, that's why when I took those initial trips up to see what they were doing at Toronto Center Place, which is an extremely urban environment, I thought, well, this doesn't fit, you know, a small town like Lewiston, New York where I am, and I wasn't quite sure, you know, how we could ever do weekly Tuesday night lectures, you know, the quality that a John Hamer could deliver. And so I wasn't quite seeing how it how creating connection would apply. But then what I learned was that the creating connection is is very flexible model. And we didn't have to approach it as that type of activity. It's not a specific activity so much as it is a way of engaging with community. But it often uses meetup.com, which is a platform that brings people together in the real world face to face. It's a way of posting meetings or activities, and having people sign up for a group and then participate in that. So at the invitation of Apostle Mackay, I had a meeting with 70 Rob Hemmerling, in who's a member of the Buffalo Clarence congregation, he wasn't in my congregation, but the neighboring congregation, which is very close by. It only took, you know, a half hour or so for me to drive to meet with Rob. And we went met at a coffee shop and I asked Rob, I said, Rob, what what are you passionate about? What do you want to do in your ministry, and his response to me is that he really felt called in the central Buffalo area, the downtown Buffalo area. And we ended up then talking about the Creating Connection model, and the conversation cafe, approach of meeting in coffee shops and having conversations with people. And so that became a starting place and Rob led that group and I supported him as sort of the the backup individual because it was in you know, his area and it was something he was passionate about. And so it was a way for me to help facilitate. So if Rob had to travel, he you know, then I would back up and leave the meeting that week we met every Tuesday night for a year, we had a regular group of about 10 people, you know, maybe sometimes as low as six, maybe sometimes as high as 12. But typically about 8-10, people would gather for conversation, and we met, ultimately, at a Panera Bread in the Elmwood neighborhood, which is right near downtown, and it worked out really well, it was a opportunity to engage and meet people, and have conversations that you wouldn't normally have with someone if you just happen to say hello on the street, or even with friends that we've known for years. So the topics that we explored, were meaningful, and allowed us to kind of have a level of connection that's often missing in a social media, technology assisted world that we're a part of. So that was a great experience. And then when I moved to Iowa, at that point, I was sort of taking on a role as the coordinator in the United States for Creating Connection. And that was something that apostle Mackay had sort of asked me to do. And now that I report with apostle Linkhart, in the north central field, she's also encouraged me to pursue that role as sort of the US coordinator for Creating Connection, which is a way that a mission center or a congregation can engage in a new expression that involves the various aspects of the Creating Connection model, whether that's conversation cafe, or it could be any type of activity. So Creating Connection could be a drum circle, Creating Connection group could be a quilting activity that people get together with on a regular basis. And there are also other dimensions like a Creating Connection retreat, where you bring together various Creating Connection groups in your area, and you engage in spiritual formation activities, and you engage in learning activities, and, and various creative expressions as well. And so a Creating Connection retreat as possible. We had a Creative Connection retreat in Buffalo, that we held at the Elmwood Public Library. And we had an amazing group of people that participated in that, Carla, it was the one of the speakers that we had was the anchor of the local ABC television affiliate, Rob Hemmerling, is the director of new the news director for the ABC TV affiliates. So he had no problem recruiting one of his co workers to do that, to talk about us Canadian relations as in the Buffalo area, and sort of the greater cooperation that takes place there. And so with the peace bridge being part of the connection between those two areas, it was just kind of a cool topic. And then we also had another speaker, who had been the Secretary to the Bishop of the Archdiocese of Buffalo. And for those of you that follow the news, you'll know that that Bishop has since resigned, but at the time, the there was a news story that came through Rob Hemmerling affiliate, and was really engaged in discovering a lot of the abuse scandals that were taking place over many years, and how they were continuing to be ignored and undercounted, and unreported. And not only child sexual abuse, but also other forms of abuse, abuse of seminarians, abuse of women in their roles in the church, and so forth. And so, that is a very sad thing, but the individual who shared was a profoundly faithful Catholic, and someone who, who really appreciated the opportunity that this Creating Connection retreat provided to her to be able to share her story and, and why it was so important to her that the truth be told, and that her hurt faith movement, be able to heal itself and find the right path forward. So we were so blessed to be able to be a part of sharing in that experience, for example, and we have some other really great participants in that retreat experience. So Creating Connection can be both a group that typically would meet weekly have centered around conversation or activity, it can be retreats, and it can also be center places like the Toronto Center Place or the Barrie Ontario Center Place which actual physical buildings where people can gather and a lot of these activities can take place in the center place. You can even have a variety of product sales that take place up here in Canada. In the barrier, activity, they do a lot of sourcing of materials that are, you know, healthy and organic and locally grown and local artists and produced materials and that kind of thing. So that's sort of a neat dimension of what what they're able to do there in Canada. And the tax laws are a little different there, of course, but it's a it's a very flexible model and one that we facilitate. So we now have several groups here in the US that have formed. But COVID-19 has kind of put a damper in face to face meetings, which is really what this model is all about. So we're struggling through how to adapt that to online or to just sort of wait and see when things reopen how we can further expand the program.

**Carla Long** 26:04

Yeah, I mean, COVID is changed the way we do everything. So I don't want to simplify it too much. But it sounds like Creating Connection is really just an intentional community that comes together to support each other and build relationships. Is that a good definition? Or is there more to it?

**Glenn Johnson** 26:23

Yeah, I think it is. And and we're very transparent in terms of the way we bring that forward. So the creating connection is almost like a brand, you know, you'll have a logo you have when people participate, they, you know, they'll say, you know, I'm going to my creating connection group or meeting or whatever. But it's very clear that it's sponsored by Community of Christ, we list ourselves on the meetup.com website, for example, as as the sponsor of the activity. And so while it's not always overtly religious in nature, it's it's definitely a ministry of Community of Christ. And the one of the analogies I like to use is like the, the typical soup kitchen or, you know, food ministry that the church might provide. When people come through the line for food, we don't, you know, we're not throwing scripture at them, we're not, you know, saying, you know, get down and kneel and pray before you can eat this meal, we're feeding them because they're hungry. And and our experience is that in this world we live in today, people are hungry for social relationship and connection and meet in meaningful conversations. And that's the ministry that we bring. And so sure, we are always telling people that we're doing it as Community of Christ. But it's not, it's not the same as the conversation we might have in a Sunday school class where the conversation and experience that we would have in worship, so we can invite people to those activities when it's appropriate, but the main purpose is to pursue this sense of being in community and sharing with one another.

**Carla Long** 27:55

Um, so you know, I don't know if I totally understand. So you, did you say that there's like a three pronged approach to Creating Connections, whether creating connection is I miss better? Tell me more about that?

**Glenn Johnson** 28:06

Yeah, so in Canada, they, they have three, three third strategy. This is the church's strategy in the Canada East Mission Center. And so the first part of that strategy is Experiencing Congregations in Mission. And so that's basically the things that we've done as a church all along, you know, being the church in Canada, then the second aspect of their strategy is creating connection, which is definitely more about being in community. And then the third part of that strategy is the his new expressions. And I know you've had Project Zion Podcast on your expressions before and, and had a lot of conversation around that it's an important topic, I actually view Creating Connection as an example of a new expression. But in their strategy, they see and we actually talked about this, I participated in the Canada Mission Center staff retreats while I was pastor in Niagara Falls. And one of the ideas that we developed, there was the idea that from a Creating Connection group, you can actually spawn a new expression activity, which is more mission, specifically mission oriented, as well. And so we kind of, you know, got sidetracked I think, in March, obviously, but that that's part of the sort of long range vision that we at least discussed, for connecting those three parts of the strategy. So yeah, that's, that's where that three thirds strategy comes in.

**Carla Long** 29:38

Thanks for explaining that. And I have to tell you, and probably the listeners, the people who know me know that I am an extreme extrovert. And when I think about getting to sit in a cafe with people once a week just to talk like I get all tingly because I love that so much. Like I I miss, COVID has really been put a damper on my extroverted office. And I just I just would love the opportunity to just sit in a cafe and chat with people. And I would imagine even introverts at this moment in time, after seven months of COVID, would also be extremely excited to sit in a cafe and talk to people, I could be wrong.

**Glenn Johnson** 30:17

Yeah, well, that's, you know, that was the thing. And this was in Buffalo, and we were experiencing it was before COVID. But we did get a lot of people I would classify as introverts, including myself, by the way, participating in this and, and it's not always easy for all of us to just talk and share. And it's a little scary to some people, particularly in a deep and meaningful conversation, where you're really exposing you know, what you think about something or what you believe and feel and, and sharing maybe life experiences with one another. And that can be frightening. But what I've found is that the people who participate regularly many of whom were very introverted, loved it, it was a great outlet for them. It provided them a safe space. And safe space is a really important concept in we have a number of concepts of conversation that we bring to the meeting and we've worked, even in this last year, I've worked with Larry McGuire, and Apostle Harmon in further developing some of these concepts. And they're, they're looking towards using it in some of their blending it with some of the Discover your life and future. And so in their launching the Rocky Mountain Creating Connection group, the concepts were developed a little bit further, in terms of creating a model for sharing that really emphasized that safe space that emphasized the aspect and dimension of checking in at the beginning of a meeting just to sort of see how people are doing. So there are some new developments there, at least in terms of the way that I was approaching it with groups. And they also have these concepts in the way they approach in Canada, they have a set of sort of a covenant of conversation that people share with one another.

**Carla Long** 32:10

So people have been talking about this kind of ministry, not specifically Creating Connections for a long time. I remember when I lived in California, Larry McGuire coming up and giving a talk about third place ministry. And we all like actually left the retreat, and we did some third place ministry like it was really, it was really fun and interesting. And so I feel like that's the kind of vein it's in. So I think it's really awesome. I, I get really, I'm getting really excited when I hear things like that, because I honestly think that people are just yearning for authentic relationships. And we were on our phones, we're on our computers all the time. And those relationships, they can be authentic. But the face to face stuff is where you I think really get to know someone's heart. And I just think that's really important ministry that's being offered.

**Glenn Johnson** 33:03

Can I share a brief testimony about third place ministry?

**Carla Long** 33:06

Absolutely.

**Glenn Johnson** 33:07

So here I am, I'm in California, I'm getting ready to go to New York, and I'm going to be a church planter slash pastor, you know, can I really do this? Do I have the right stuff to make it happen, you know, and so I was I went through the LCM program, I was familiar with the concept of third place ministry. But I thought, you know, I'm gonna try this. And so I drove up to Camino where my congregation was, and I was about three miles from the congregation in a Starbucks, and I sat down and I just, you know, brought some books to read. And I was going to spend some time in a third place and see what happened. Well, I hadn't been there too long and in walks, one of our friends without homes who had been a part of the congregation, and I had actually lent him a guitar. And I think, you know, because of his life situation, not having a place to put his head, I think he lost the guitar somehow. And so he hadn't been coming to church, you've been avoiding church for months. And we had no way to to find him or reach him. And, and I was saddened by that. And so in, he walks into this Starbucks into this third place that I'd selected to put three miles from where the congregational building is just total coincidence, and, you know, quote, unquote, coincidence, right? And so I, you know, was able to engage him in conversation, and you know, invite him back into community and make sure that he really knew that I couldn't care less about a guitar You know, it didn't matter you know, I The reason I gave it to him was in hopes that you know, he'd be able to to get some enjoyment out of it, but it didn't matter at all. And and I think that was a healing moment and but I wasn't done there. You know, then what I after we I spoke to him I went, went back inside the Starbucks as we talked outside for a little while, and sat down there for a little bit longer. And Another man walked in and he was a regular at our congregation. He was a Coptic Christian family, they were refugees from Egypt, who, you know, they were from Alexandria where their church had been bombed. And, you know, they, they were living a life that, in the United States in this new world that they're a part of that was very much struggling, you know, he'd been an engineer and had a successful career in Egypt. And now, here, he was just struggling to make ends meet for his family. And, and we had this amazing opportunity to meet there in that cafe, again, five miles from where he lived, you know, three miles from our church out, we happen to walk in just at that moment, I have no idea. And then a little bit later, you know, I was able to engage with a young mother who had a child who was cranky, and when, you know, running around, you know, and, and was, she was having trouble dealing with a child, I could see, she was embarrassed, and, you know, and so forth. And I and I, I just showed her some kindness. And, you know, let her know that, you know, I thought it was great that she, she was there and had a child and I was able to share with her about the congregation and you know, where, where we met and all of that. And, you know, I always had business cards that I could share with people. So it was just this amazing thing of being in a third place and being able to share with people in a in a meaningful way. And when you when you approach it with intentionality, it's remarkable what happens because I think it opens our eyes and widens our vision, to see the possibilities in everything that's around us.

**Carla Long** 36:36

Well, that is that's a really wonderful story. And I do want to tell the listeners, when you do third place ministry, it doesn't always end up like that. But that is an awesome. And as a mother of a young child, thank you so much for being understanding and kind of that mother. I will tell you, it means a lot.

**Glenn Johnson** 36:54

Yeah, I have this weird thing where like, you're right, it doesn't always happen. I've tried third places ministry I mean, in in Niagara Falls loose. And I week after week after week, I was trying it was really hard. I wasn't having those kind of moments, like like I just described, but I had the same experience with the mission prayer, the very first time I learned the Mission Prayer was in Leading Congregations in Mission, they taught it to us, in the basement of the auditorium, I prayed the prayer, I walked out of the Auditorium, I was walking back to the Higher Ground to where my my room was. And as I got to the corner between the Church of Christ Temple Lot and the Stone Church and the Temple, this young man approached me and he said, "Hey, mister!" and as soon as I heard those words, Hey, mister, I knew what was going to happen. And I started thinking, you know, as we were talking and introducing ourselves and all that, where am I gonna be able to offer this ministry and I knew that the Square Pizza was up ahead, you know, a few blocks, but that we could walk there. And so at some point, in this conversation, he says, boy, I sure am hungry. And even though I just had a meal in the basement of the Auditorium, I said, Let's go to Square Pizza. And, you know, it was just this amazing thing of having, you know, prayed that Mission Prayer. And within minutes of leaving the building from offering that prayer, you know, steps really, you know, there was someone that I could minister to, so that that's always happening. When I first do it, I get this perfect example. See, it works. And then it's struggling thereafter to like, make it happen again, right.

**Carla Long** 38:24

I think that that is actually I think that happens a lot to people and one and 165 it says something like opportunities abound daily, if you just see them. Yes. So I think you're very good at seeing opportunities, Glenn. That's really cool. So I want to switch gears a little bit. And when you you move to Lamoni and became mission center, President mission center financial officer in January COVID, struck in March. Well, yes. So, um, how have you dealt with that whole deal with with helping out I know, you're like a computer guy. So you're that they were quite thrilled to have you as mission center president financial officer to try and figure out what to do now?

**Glenn Johnson** 39:07

Yeah, it's probably one of the reasons I was selected. I'm not a computer programmer. I'm more like a power user. But I have used, you know, technology to assist in, in marketing in you know, in quote, unquote, real world, but also in church. I mean, we're my first workshop on technology for congregations was back. I think it was in the 1980s. You know, so I've been to I've been, you know, passionate about this concept for a long time. But when we arrived in the mission center, I wanted to get to all of the congregations as fast as I could. And so in in 10 weeks, I actually visited 14 congregations. So I only preached five times. And we had to snow snow Sundays where you know, I would have been seven, but only preached in five different congregations, but I managed to get to nine other congregations just to have meetings or Just to see the facility and that kind of thing. So there were only five of my congregations that I've never been to. And I'm really saddened by that, because I just feel like I want to connect with people first, though, is the most important thing. And so we also were in a situation where our longtime administrative assistant, who served 40, some years, was retiring upon my arrival, in fact, they had a retirement celebration last November, but she was going to work part time for a while this year, and she ended up retiring entirely at the end of August. So we knew going in that we were going to be in a transition period from sort of paper based systems involving bulletin inserts, and printing things and mailing things out and that type of thing to a more electronic based form of communication, and use of social media to support our ministry and our mission and objectives in the church. And we the hope was that we could then use the funds that had been used to support a full time administrative position in a more missional capacity going forward. So we knew we were going to do that, but I had no idea that suddenly, you know, on March 12, President Veazey is going to tell us that the march 15 services couldn't be held in person. And I totally understand the reasoning why I'm not questioning that I'm just saying it was a shock, obviously, to everyone. And so here we are, we have no systems in place to deal with this, we don't even have a zoom account for the mission center, we don't have any kind of a mail program we didn't you know, we now have MailChimp, which is working out great for us. But we just didn't, we didn't have the lists, entered, you know, pulled out of Shelby and entered into the system and all the things that you have to do, just to communicate just to to make things happen. So on March 15, we, I did a brief homily on Facebook with a prayer. And we recorded that we shared that on our closed Facebook group. It was closed outsiders. We didn't have a Facebook page, our our website, which is completely dysfunctional. No one knows how to use the technology that's, that's running it. And so we're, we're in trouble. But we we by the next week, we had a zoom account, we started, you know, being able to send out emails. And we expanded the list because we had 418 email addresses, we had to enter into the system. So it was more than a week to do that, but me more than a week to do that. And we went but we eventually got it done. And I figured out how to upload the lists rather than having to type them in manually and all that kind of thing. Yeah, yeah, it's the technology is there, you got to use it. So So eventually, we've gotten to the point where technology is assisting what we're doing. It's not It's not what we're about. But you know, it was Marshall McLuhan, who ages ago wrote a book and said that the medium is the message, right? So the unfortunately, or just as a part of reality, sometimes the technology shapes the message and the content in ways that we are unexpected, and that we don't entirely anticipate. And I'm always embarrassed because it's frequent, that in our mission center weekly worships that, you know, people will will, you know, say thank you to me for, you know, making the technology possible and all that, well, I didn't write the software, you know, I just pressed a button to get the meeting started. You know, it's really not that big a deal. But, but I understand what they're saying people are appreciative of the fact that there's another way to do this, in this, you know, terrible time when, you know, there's a virus raging out there that puts everyone at risk, and especially those who have, you know, pre existing conditions and are of certain age, it's particularly dangerous, and a lot of our members fall into that category. So we have managed to take an approach where we I wanted to relieve our pastors and our congregations of a burden. And right at the beginning of COVID, we really didn't know how serious the crisis was going to be. And so I was imagining that our pastors would need to be involved in, in, in pastoral care ministries, where they were helping people deal with illnesses where they were helping people deal with just the challenge of getting food to their homes, you know, how can you get groceries delivered when you can't walk into a grocery store and that that type of thing. Fortunately, the grocery stores around here are really good at home deliveries. And so that hasn't been the crisis that I anticipated it might become, but we decided, let's as the mission center offer a weekly worship service and so from March 22, on we've had that weekly worship on Zoom and the congregations take turns in putting on the worship or I'll choose a presider from one congregation, a speaker from another and, and they take, they do the work of making that happen with me participating once in a while, but it's been really helpful that these pastors have not had to have a worship service ready to go every single week, knowing that gradually, they would become more comfortable with that. And we would encourage them to have their own weekly worship services. And I keep asking, you know, if we need to change the time of the mission center worship, and so far, everyone likes the 10 o'clock time slot that we're using, for the most part, but we also encourage those congregations to have midweek activities online zoom conversations, and just, you know, various kinds of zoom activities that they can do. Our youth are doing zoom activities. And then, you know, one crisis isn't enough for 2020. Right? So, you know, around animais, there, with the George Floyd crisis, and the, you know, obvious need that was laid bare so graphically by that terrible incident, it became obvious that we still have not dealt with the question of racial inequality in America, and probably in most of the world. And I knew that, but we have been on such an amazing journey of discovering what that really means, because part of my white privilege has been to not have to worry about that issue in my life, you know, and, and I've, what I've discovered is that, that that's not right, that I have a moral obligation to figure out what the impact of this issue is for everyone, including myself and others. So we, we had already prior to COVID, we'd formed the Lamoni Heartland Mission Center, Peace, Justice and Poverty Task Force and so that was one of the steps that we we wanted to take is something a new initiative here, and that is ongoing, and it's really solidifying even right now and becoming stronger. But then as soon as the George Floyd crisis hit, I made a call to Dr. Vincent Lewis, who was my predecessor as Mission Center president. And this was my first call within the Mission Center after COVID hit as well, you know, you talk to your, your mentor, your your predecessor, and Vince is uniquely positioned to, to help us face this crisis. Because of his life experience as an African American as a high school principal. He's now alternate member of the Iowa parole board, which is dealing very much with the lot of these questions of racial inequality, mass incarceration, and so forth. And so Vince is agreed to act as the lead of our Lamoni Heartland Mission Center diversity team, with evangelist Kris Judd, as the co-leader of that team. And they're just doing an amazing job. We've had a series of workshops, we had a big initial workshop, and then we're doing a series of workshops throughout the fall on topics like implicit bias, and microaggressions and white privilege and discrimination and racism, and so forth, that where we really are taking a deep dive into confronting our own life circumstances and attitudes here in Iowa, and we have one congregation in Missouri, I can never forget the Andover congregation, which is three miles over the border from lamona. In Missouri, and they spent some of our members there are down as far south as Bethany. Yeah.

**Carla Long** 48:52

You know, with, I think the taskforce that you've created is just incredible. And it makes me really happy to hear I was telling, you know, earlier before we started the podcast, that I'm from a really small town in Kansas, and I wasn't, I didn't, there was not a lot of diversity in my high school. When I was growing up, there's 37 kids in my graduating class, right, in small town, Kansas, but I don't think that we can hide behind those things anymore. We need to understand what it's like for other people. And I think that learning about those microaggressions and learning about our implicit bias is absolutely 100% necessary in order to make sure that we are really living the Enduring Principle of Worth of All Persons. So that's awesome, because no one really thinks about Iowa as necessarily being super diverse either. But it's really, really important to know those things. So I appreciate you bringing to light this and I appreciate Vinnie Lewis and Kris Judd for walking on that journey with you.

**Glenn Johnson** 49:56

Yeah, thank you. It's it's been it's been pretty remarkable to see how people have responded and have welcomed the conversations of, and we know we have a shared prayer group on Tuesday nights that's been reviewing a series of videos as well that are on on this topic. So it is not something that affects the church. It's a part of our ministry as a church to deal with what we've long said that we stand for, by, you know, a series of World Conference resolutions, you know, including the resolution that that led to the formation of Racial Justice Day as a part of our calendar every year and a focus of the Ministry of Community of Christ. It's so aligned with our principles of worth of all persons, and all are called and unity and diversity, which we uphold as some of the Enduring Principles of Community of Christ, that I just feel that we are fortunate, even in a state that's not as diverse as the entire country is. But there is considerable diversity here, you know, Graceland University, is is in Lamoni, Iowa, and that is the churches affiliated, higher education institution. And there's a lot of diversity Lamoni because of Graceland University, and de Moines where, where I live in West Des Moines, and you know, this Polk County area is a very diverse community, in many respects, not as diverse as, say, Chicago or, you know, other, you know, New York or Los Angeles. But there certainly is, and there's a increasing Hispanic population in Iowa, there's been a long standing community of African Americans in in Iowa, just not as large a percentage of the population. But we see that increasing diversity. But we haven't always kept up necessarily with this understanding that there's still an inequality, even and despite what we call Iowa, nice, you know, Iowans are generally very nice people. And so you don't see a lot of overt discrimination. You know, unless you know, you you're probably African American and have experienced that. But it's not that visible in in society here, which is good. But what we don't see and we're not aware of, and we're coming to terms with now is the fact that that there is a systemic disadvantage that is there that that we need to ask ourselves the question, how can we overcome it? And how can our systems of policing be adjusted to so that there's no racial profiling so that there's no resort to violence in an undue way. And so we as a peace church, as a church that stands for non violence, I think, have a really important role to play. And we're exploring how we can get more involved ecumenically in in being a part of the solution, even here in a state like Iowa.

**Carla Long** 53:12

Well, I appreciate hearing that so much. Thank you so much for sharing that. You've already kind of meandered into this last question I have for you, but what what's in the future for you? What's coming up for you?

**Glenn Johnson** 53:24

Yeah, well, I'm overwhelmed. Right now, to be honest, I'm working on so many different things. But one of the things that we're trying to pull together for 2021 is a peace and justice practicum. So I think I shared with you, you know, that I have a passion for patient justice ministries in the church. And we have had in the past a great program here called SALT, which is similar to leads or means and that type of program, which is an educational program, and I was thinking about how we could make those educational efforts, more peace and justice focused and, and have some practical application dimensions to them. And so we're designing a practicum that would allow people to engage in education, research, spiritual formation, and personal planning and collaboration around their own selected peace and justice issues in a practicum format. So we're really excited about it, it's going to mean that we're going to be taking, you know, offering courses on Gandhi and Tolstoy and, you know, maybe even Thoreau I don't know, but of course, Martin Luther King and of course, Hebrew sense of justice and the you know, and Jesus, the peaceful one and, and all of those things will be a part of it, as well as a variety of different justice issues. And Sacredness of Creation is a big component of that as well. So, it's a big, it's a big dream at this point, and we're trying to pull that together. and invite the people that we need to help us pull that off from around the church. Most of it will probably happen in Zoom In the beginning, as well as self directed studies, followed by eventually, you know, probably some retreat style experiences that we can take place in our beloved Guthrie Grove campgrounds here, which, unfortunately, are not open right now.

**Carla Long** 55:26

Well, you definitely have a lot on your plate, there is no doubt about it. And, you know, I would never ever ever wish this pandemic ever to happen ever again. But in some ways, it seems like it has kind of focused us in into what's really important, and because you cannot, maybe we are running ourselves ragged before. But it is, for me at least it's helped me to see things just a little bit more clearly about what my call is what I'm supposed to be doing here while I'm here and what my life's purposes. So I don't know if that's been true for you. But it seems like the in the lamoni heartland mission center, that you're doing some really, really good work that might not have gotten done otherwise, who knows?

**Glenn Johnson** 56:09

Yeah, I think in some ways, you know, I, I may have been here at the right time, you know, for dealing with this because of the fact that we've had to resort to technology and all of that, and, and some of the background I've had and my passion for peace and justice ministries is has dovetailed in well, but we just don't know what lies ahead. I mean, we also had the ratio storm here. And I've got five buildings that were affected by that, you know, five congregations impacted one of them. Probably, we if it was a car, we would say it was totaled. So yeah, we it. There's a lot to deal with. But we're pursuing ahead with mission. That's what matters most.

**Carla Long** 56:45

Absolutely. What that's what matters most. Well, Glenn, is there anything that you wanted to say that I didn't ask about? Or can you think of anything that we missed?

**Glenn Johnson** 56:54

I have no idea what we missed? I Well, I'll tell you one thing, part of this technology is dealing with copyright issues and dealing with the Community of Christ Sings and all that. And I would just for anyone who's listening, who might be looking for a way to find the list of hymns that are available that have recordings with voices with them. I keep a list of that. I'm happy to share it with anyone who wants to have it. So that's something we didn't talk about. I'll just toss that in as a sweetener here at the end.

**Carla Long** 57:23

That is very kind and I will be emailing you for that list, FYI. Well, thank you so much, Glenn, it's just been a great interview. I've really enjoyed learning more about you and learning more about what you have done, like help write the common consent software for the national conference that is so cool. And telling us more about Creating Connection. So thanks again for talking with me.

**Glenn Johnson** 57:48

Thanks. And I was a cheerleader for the common consent software. But I was happy to be able to watch what Wim did. It was all all the credit for that goes Wim van Klinken. Yeah, but thanks.

**Carla Long** 57:58

Well, I'm sure you're an excellent cheerleader. I too am a cheerleader. If you couldn't tell. Allright, well, thank you so much. Good. I really appreciate it.

**Glenn Johnson** 58:07

Thank you. Bye, Carla.

**Josh Mangelson** 58:17

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