

**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.

**Brittany Mangelson 00:33**

Hello, everyone, welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson. And I will be your host for this Fair Trade episode. And our Fair Trade episodes are where we talk to someone who is a convert to Community of Christ and we just hear about their faith transition story, what led them to Community of Christ, and their general thoughts on their conversion. So I'm really excited. This episode has been a long time in the making. I've got on my friend, Erin Hook and she and I are both moms living in the midst of a global pandemic and all of the scheduling conflicts and juggles that come with that has pushed this podcast back a little bit. But we're finally sitting down and recording. And I'm very, very excited. So Erin, I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself in just a second, but just to give the listeners a quick overview we have had Erin on before she was part of a panel discussion, where we talked about online children's ministries, and we we decided to have her back and talk about her faith transition story. She lives in Delaware. She's the mom of two kids. And she is currently in her first year at Community of Christ Seminary at Graceland University. So I'm really excited Aaron to hear more about you and your story of faith. So welcome. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself, just your basic information of who you are.

**Erin Hook 02:00**

Thanks, Brittany, I'm so glad to be here, again, and I have been married to my husband for 17 years. His name is Bart. And he's very supportive of everything that I'm doing with the church and in the church. My daughter is 13 years old. Her name is Hannah. And my son is 10. His name is Noah. And he was his prayer was included in one of the podcasts that we did. I'm living in New York, Delaware, it's a college town. And before I started homeschooling professionally, I was a registered dietician, I actually still am, but I'm not practicing. And I was the Meals on Wheels director for our local Meals on Wheels program at our local senior center. And it's a program that's near and dear to me. And I still try to stay involved with that by volunteering. But because of COVID, we haven't been able to do that. So we found a creative way, where me and the kids, we decorate Meals on Wheels bags, and we drop them off to the senior center, and then they deliver the food and the bags that have been decorated. So we're really happy that we can still give back to the community even though we're stuck at home.

**Brittany Mangelson 03:29**

I love that you not only have a history of volunteering in the community with your kids, but that you've also found a way to continue to do it in a way that is safe in the midst of the pandemic. And I am also glad to hear that your husband's supportive of what you're doing with the church. And yeah, I'm just I'm excited to have this conversation. So I usually just say, you know what, what did faith look like for you growing up and wherever you want to start telling your story we are open to so So were you engaged in church life as a kid? How important was God or spirituality in your home? Just what was the place of either God or religion in your life growing up?

**Erin Hook 04:16**

Okay, so my parents were not religious. We didn't go to church. My mom was raised in a Catholic household. And my dad's family was Christian, but they were not practicing. So my parents decided that they would allow my sister and I to figure out what we believed on our own. And I really appreciate that yet at the same time, it was really difficult because I didn't really have the tools or really the support to kind of figure out what I believed so um, I do have memories of being a very young probably preschool age, and I was really drawn to the children's Bible. And I would pick it up and I would look at it. And I would look at the stories and the pictures. And I just was always drawn to that. And I even wanted to get my own. But I wasn't allowed to, I asked my parents, but they kind of suggested something else instead. And I was able to go to church with friends. And most of my extended family was Catholic. So at that time, I was more comfortable going to Catholic services. And I kind of grew up thinking most people were Catholic, I didn't know that there were other Christian religions. But as I got older, and I went to more churches with friends, I did start to see that there were differences. And when I was about 12 years old, I went to one of those, like, "take your friend to church" events. And I really liked what I was experiencing. And the ministers asked if anyone wanted to be saved, and I wanted to be saved. And so here I was, I was saved. And I was excited. And I went home, and my parents were really upset. Because I didn't have permission to do that. And I didn't go back to church with that friend. So um, so even though they were supportive of exploring religion, I sometimes received them messaging that Christianity wasn't okay.

**Brittany Mangelson 06:41**

So do you think that that was because of their own upbringing? But maybe they were hesitant? Do you know if they had negative experiences with the faith community or just the theology that they were unsure about? Or do you know what was at the heart of that inks for them?

**Erin Hook 06:58**

I think for my mom, growing up Catholic, she had a lot of questions. And maybe when she asked questions, she was told not to ask those. And so I think that now she would probably describe herself as more spiritual, not religious. Because I definitely grew up with realizing we celebrated Christmas and Epiphany and the Easter and the seasons of the year. But there wasn't like, diving deeper into what those men it was more of a surface celebration or observation of the holiday. So. So there were, there were elements that were included, but nothing that that really resonated with me as far as what the meaning was, I didn't really understand the meaning at one point, I said, if we're not Christian, then why do we celebrate Christmas? I didn't really understand as I started to understand Christianity better and the meaning of holidays.

**Brittany Mangelson 08:09**

Yeah, that's really interesting for you to pick up on that. The fact that so many of our secular holidays are grounded in religion, and clearly a mix of a lot of different traditions and paganism, etc. But they you would question like, "Well, why are we doing this? If we're not Christian? This is a Christian holiday!" That's, that's pretty good. So as you continue to grow, did you feel I mean, clearly, if you had a friend that took you to church that wanted you to be saved, did you feel pressure, social pressure to continue to go to church, or from other friends? I'm not fully aware of the religious climate where you grew up,

and so you know, in Delaware, but I just didn't know if there was a social pressure that was added to it. Or if it was, like, driven by you.

**Erin Hook 09:07**

Yes, it was, um, definitely an inner experience that I was trying to experience. So I was asking my friends, can I go to church with you, or tag along with family members when they would go to church. So I did not feel any pressure from anyone else to go to church. It was something that I wanted to experience. So after the experience that I had, where I wanted to be saved, and then starting to get these feelings like, Oh, well, maybe that's not the right thing. I wanted to please my parents. They had shortly after that divorced, and so I would visit my neighbor. His name was Andy, and he was Catholic, and I would go to church with him and as his mom. And she ended up giving me a Bible not because she was pressuring me to read it, I was asking questions and she said, I, I've been waiting for this moment, just a second. And she went, and she got a Bible that she gave to me. And I read it several times. But I didn't go to church enough to really understand what I was reading and the history behind it and things like that I didn't do Bible study or anything like that. So, um, I would say that she was someone who was influential in my Christian understanding and helping me to fill a need that I was searching for. Then when I was in college, I took the biblical and classical literature class, that was my hope of being able to understand the Bible better. And it was a really good experience. So shortly after that, I started looking into churches more deeply, figuring out what people believed, and if they were in line with what I thought I was reading in the Bible.

**Brittany Mangelson 11:23**

So what was that experience? Like? Because so many people that I've talked to have had some sort of have experience with religion. And so it might paint Christianity in a certain way, right? But if you don't necessarily have a solid foundational understanding of what a Christian community looks like, or how to interpret the Bible, etc, I feel like it would be really overwhelming to start looking into churches, because there's such a variety in Christianity. So how was it to just sift and sort through all of those, I mean, I don't know if you did you attend churches? Or did you talk to clergy? Or I mean, what did that process look like?

**Erin Hook 12:07**

So I did, I attended churches, um, and sometimes I would feel like the way that I guess they were delivering the message just didn't feel good to me. So I wouldn't go back to that particular church. Sometimes I felt like the message I was hearing contradicted what I was reading in the New Testament. And so I wouldn't go back, I would read some literature that the churches provided, like when the Jehovah Witnesses would come door to door, I would take their literature and read over it and see what I thought about it, I suppose. Maybe in the early 2000s, I was leaning toward Catholicism, because it was just something I was so familiar with. And after my husband and I looked into it a little bit more, we decided it wasn't a good fit for me. And I also had trouble with the professing faith. As far as like the Nicene Creed goes, I realized I was looking for a church that that was non creedal that allowed members to have questions or not necessarily be dedicated to a particular state statement. So. So that was one of the things that I ended up looking for, as the experience of searching progressed.

**Brittany Mangelson 13:49**

When you're a spiritual seeker yourself, and I know this from experience, and you're having kids, and maybe they're starting to ask questions, or they're getting invited to church, from friends, or whatever it may be, I mean, how did you, how did you navigate that? Because I know for me, I always imagine that I would be the parent that would have all the answers. And so when I was going through a faith transition, when my kids were really little, and I realized I had zero answers, it was it was difficult for me to know how to communicate that to my kids, like, oh, now we're trying this new church. And so I'm just wondering if you had a similar experience or how you were able to go on that very intense journey yourself while also being a mom? Mm hmm.

**Erin Hook 14:34**

Yeah. So I did have a what would be considered a conversion experience when Noah was born. So that was in 2010. And when he was born, he had respiratory issues and he was taken to the neonatal intensive care unit. And I was also having problems I was in the high risk maternity ward. And I was under observation. And I was in and out of consciousness. And luckily we had hired a doula that's a woman who helps you when you're, when you're pregnant when you're delivering after you have the baby. And so, while my husband was with my son, and the Nick, you, Wendy stayed with me, and she was kind of my voice and help support me when I had to make decisions. And during the experience, after all these tests were done, it turned out, I was supposed to have a blood transfusion. And at that point, she was a mom herself, and she ended up having to leave to go take care of her children. So I was alone. And I was afraid. And since I had never really learned how to pray, and I didn't know what to do, but I just I was so feeling so alone, I ended up envisioning Christ. And I prayed to God, and I apologize for any wrong things that I've done in my life and how scared I was, and that I wasn't ready to die. And I please allow me to be a mother to my children, and I promise you, I'll be a better person. And the room just changed. For me, it seemed brighter. And I had this like feeling that God loved me, and cared for me that God was not punishing me and was waiting for me to find him. And, and I promised that I was going to find a church that I was going to worship God that, you know, I was going to finally commit to really finding a faith community that I could live out the, the teachings of Christ and, and be a good person to everyone. So it was just a really powerful experience. And shortly after the blood transfusion was canceled, and my vitals improved. And I was able to hold my son The next morning, he was released from the hospital a day earlier than they had predicted. So that experience was just a really huge life changing experience for me, no one in my family ever talked about anything like that being a possibility of happening. And I even I struggled with it for a while because I thought it was an something I might have imagined that, you know, it didn't really happen or that it was a dream I just had, I did struggle with it for a little while. But I did embrace that, you know, that, that it was a real experience for me. And so that's part of the driving force. At that point where I was really dedicated to finding a faith community.

**Brittany Mangelson 18:21**

Wow, I, I definitely have had those moments as well. And some of them are tied to the birth of my kids. And I think that, you know, no matter what, what anyone says about a spiritual experience like that, like you said, it was yours. It was the truth for you. It's what happened to you, it was your reality, it was your lived experience. And to just be able to sit there and God's love and be released from the stress, and it sounds like there was even, you know, a little confession going on. And I like, oh, that just pulls on my

heartstrings because I know how vulnerable and helpless someone can feel. And you know, I had two babies in the neck you as well, and you just feel so hopeless and vulnerable. And so I'm really glad that you know, you thought to pray, meditate, even if it wasn't something that came natural to you, even if you didn't feel like you knew what you were doing or maybe weren't worthy of it or whatever, you know, whatever insecurities you want to name, but that you were still able to move through that experience and to feel God's love. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. From there just, just keep goin!

**Erin Hook 19:41**

So from there, you know, I really felt this fire to find a faith community. And we ended up first going to the Unitarian Universalist Church. And we actually went there for a while and I consider it now like my migration bridge into organized religion because I didn't really, I think go long enough to any church, that I felt like it was a home. But while we were there, it was kind of a routine to go. But I realized that I didn't feel like it was a home for us, the spiritual home, everyone there was really nice and supportive. But and, and they do have a focus on all religions, like all are welcome. And all religions are basically discussed and also incorporated into their religious services. But I felt like Christ was really missing. And, and so we started looking again, we went to the Episcopalian church, I revisited the Catholic Church with my grandmother, we went to Christian Science, I ended up they didn't have one near us, but I went to a Unity Church online for a while, and the kids liked going to the other churches, but my daughter really, really missed the the class size of her Sunday school, there were quite a lot of children in the Unitarian Church. So then it became a goal of mine to find a thriving church with a thriving children's program. And I was discussing with a friend of mine who is a member of the Church of Latter Day Saints. And she recommended after our talk, she she said, Why don't you reach out to the sisters at our church, I think you might find that it's what you're looking for. So I called and the sisters came over, we had home visiting, I think that's what it's called, or home lessons or something for several months. And I had lots of questions. And they taught me how to pray. And they took us on a tour of their ward. And my kids liked it. It looked like there were, you know, kids there and they had a basketball court. And they thought that it would be a lot of fun to go. But after I looked, and there were things that I really liked, I liked the continuing revelation. I liked the emphasis on family. And that it was it did have a thriving children's program. So they recommended that I read the Book of Mormon, and they gave me a copy. And I can't remember I have it here. They recommended that I read Moroni chapter 10 verse three, about, you know whether this is true, and whether they're the true church, and I read the Book of Mormon twice, and I was praying about it, praying about it. Not really getting any answers. And then one day unexpectedly, I was in my son's room. And I heard a voice that said, "Keep searching." And I thought it was my husband in the hallway playing a joke. And I you know, open the door, and I looked out and he wasn't there. And so I went downstairs and he was working on his computer. There was no way that that was him. And I asked him and he said, No, it wasn't him. So I took that as a sign as a, you know, answer to my prayer. And I go online, and I looked up churches, churches, like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and then I found Community of Christ. And then I was searching through the website and I sent a message to our pastor. And his name is Jim and I sent Jim this really long, detailed email, like, what do you believe? And what do people wear to church and it just like all kinds of questions, and he answered all of them. And he, I think the end of his message said, Why don't you come in and check it out for yourself or something like that? And and we ended up going the next week, and we basically haven't missed a week of church Sunday.

**Brittany Mangelson 24:35**

Well, I have, I know the listeners can't see me right now. But I have a very large grin on my face and it was just getting bigger and bigger as you are telling your story. I do not think I realized that you investigated the LDS church to that degree. So because I'm nosy I have to ask, was there a breakup with the ward? Like with the missionaries with the women in the ward? I mean, did you have to say, "Hey, thank you for the Book of Mormon, but I'm going to keep searching" or what was that like?

**Erin Hook 25:13**

So there, they were very, very nice. And there was a period where I said that we were looking into Community of Christ. And I think they came by twice after that. And I welcome them and we, we talked about it, and I talked about our church and what we believed and that yeah, ended up being okay. So I did invite them to come to church with us, too.

**Brittany Mangelson 25:46**

Oh how did that go down?

**Erin Hook 25:51**

They didn't. (laughter)

**Brittany Mangelson 25:56**

Wow, what a story. So I, it's my understanding that your congregation and or mission center probably does not have as robust of a children's ministry, maybe a typical LDS board. And I must say that, you know, I live in Utah. And so we took our kids out of a primary, the children's organization, where there was 16-17 other kids their exact same age that just lived in our neighborhood. And the primary at large from 0 to 12, had over 100 kids. And so when we left that, and came to Community of Christ, and there were other families, other children that were filtering in and out, but we were the only ones that were consistently coming for several months, and it was a big deal. Because so much of your social structure and the framework of you know, when you're when I think of parenting, I truly do believe that parenting is a village. I mean, it takes a village. And so when I would think of the builders of my kids of framework, and moral grounding, and all the things that, you know, I want to instill in them, it was, it was resource light. So I'm wondering, especially because you said that having a strong children's program was important to you what that aspect of the transition was like,

**Erin Hook 27:30**

it was really difficult for my daughter, because she really, since we homeschool, a lot of her friends were from church. So having moved into a new church that only had one other child, other than her brother. It was really hard for her. So however. So the feeling that I got when I went into the church for the first time was we walked in, and when we walked in the sanctuary, I just had this overwhelming feeling that we were in the right place. And when I sat down, I said, Please, God, let the message resonate with me, you know, because I had this good feeling. Yet there were only probably seven people for the we were there for Sunday school. So there are only about seven adults there and no children. And at that point, it just, it didn't really bother me. I think I was wanting something or expecting that something would happen if the group was larger. But I was talking with my husband after the experience. And we decided that it was actually better that it was smaller that we had more intimate



relationships with the members of the church, and that the kids could have these friendships with adults, they didn't necessarily have to have a spiritual relationship with their peers. When we went to church, and even the other day, I called our pastor and my son said to his friend on the phone that I was getting ready to call his friend from church. So friends of all ages, they don't have to be young children. But that need is being filled when we go to reunion. And when we were going to mission center meetings, they were able to connect with other children. And we went to another congregation about an hour away where they knew some of the kids to visit. So we went and they were able to reconnect with them. So with the internet, it's nice that they're able to stay connected even though we're not physically together. The adults in our congregation are really helpful. and creative with coming up with things for the kids to do for Sunday school, and I see that my kids are really learning. So the the fact that there aren't many other kids isn't an issue anymore.

**Brittany Mangelson 30:17**

Yeah, I can relate to that 100%. And I love that, that your little guy called the pastor, his friend that that's, you know that he's, he's including another adult figure in his circle of friends. And he's not shy about it to his peers that are his own age. I think that's rather adorable. So I'm curious what you were curious about, especially since you had been a very persistent spiritual seeker, and had learned a fair amount of a lot of other religions. Particularly, I mean, clearly, my background has me stuck on you investigate the LDS church. But I'm wondering, you know, what were you curious about? Were you were you trying to figure out the differences between the two churches? Or did you just like, take Community of Christ identity and run with it? What were what were your main questions as you were learning about Community of Christ?

**Erin Hook 31:19**

Okay, well, so when I was investigating that LDS church, I ended up getting this book called "The Converts Guide to Mormon Life." When I read it, I realized, well, there were a lot of expectations of the members. And so there were things that I wasn't comfortable with, like I was told, when I asked about some of the things in the book, the sister said, Well, if you receive a calling, you're really you're expected to take it, you don't really say, No, you just feel the call or the position. And that really had me concerned because as a homeschooling mom, and we're busy in life, and then to have these expectations where I might be spending many hours a week, fulfilling some church duties. I, I just wasn't really comfortable with that. And so when I looked into Community of Christ, it was in the summertime, and they typically had Bible study on Wednesday evenings, but since it was summer, they were going to take the summer off. And they agreed that we could use the Wednesday night time period, to answer any questions that I had. So I, I had questions like, so what do you believe? Do you use the Book of Mormon scripture? What do you believe about it? And the church members who attended would basically go around in a circle, and they would give their own testimony about what they believed, and they had varying answers. And I was so surprised. And I loved it, I loved that they were able to have their, their own opinion and not be told that they were wrong, or that they're, the belief was not acceptable to the church. So I really appreciated that. And I would ask questions about do you expect your members to do missionary work? And what is the nature of the calling? And priesthood? Obviously, I saw that there were women, priesthood, and I saw that online. So I was curious about that. And one of my family members knew through our discussions that I was looking into Community of Christ, and they had gone online and did some searching about it and asked questions like, you know,

do you have to wear temple undergarments? And, but they didn't use that word. They said magic underwear.

**Brittany Mangelson 34:21**

Fair.

**Erin Hook 34:26**

So I did, I ended up asking some of those questions as well, things that I hadn't really thought of. But um, so some of my family members extended were concerned that that we might be joining a cult or that it wasn't a Christian religion. And so I did have a lot of questions. I think they, we might have met probably five or six times devoted to asking my question, answering my questions and you Also one of my questions that I had looked back at my questions. One of them was, like, the the future of the congregation like, is the congregation at risk of closing down? Or what is the membership like and? And when I got to that question, I decided not to ask it. I felt like at that point that I was totally committed to this church. I was asking about baptism, which I had never been baptized in my life, but I was very eager to be baptized. And I figured that it would work itself out if there was a problem with the congregation staying open. Because I was concerned, I think we have about 20 people a week who attend some.

**Brittany Mangelson 35:50**

Yeah, this is also relatable because I had a lot of those questions too, even down to does your church dictate what underwear you wear? That was, that was something that I had to look up. And, you know, for me, I wanted to know, why not, and figure that whole process out. And there was concern about the congregation and the size and the future. And, you know, what does it, what does it look like to be Community of Christ? What is my level of commitment? And you know, I had young twins and a newborn baby, and it just, I 100% relate to everything they said. And I feel like I definitely bombarded the ministers here with a lot of questions. So yeah, you're in good company, or we're in the same company with a lot of others. So ah, so what I so you said, By the time you got to that question, you just decided to not ask it. And you were already asking questions about baptism and officially joining. So I'm curious if you can name a couple of things that kept you coming back, because it sounds like even though, if you had this list of expectations, or this list of requirements or hopes that a church community would be this little congregation didn't meet all of those, and yet, you still went back? So I'm wondering if you can maybe voice What was it that kept you coming back to that little group?

**Erin Hook 37:27**

Yeah, so I'm having my, um, my understanding of the New Testament, and acting as the hands and feet of Jesus. When I went to church, for the first time, we were very invitationals, greeted at the front door and led into the sanctuary. And that really touched me because it was like, they were just so happy that we were there that they we didn't just walk in on our own and try to figure out where to sit, but that they cared that we were there. Whereas when we went to another church that highly prided themselves on being Invitational didn't know our name for weeks, you know, when we had gone. So it was just like, it was a really nice and pleasant experience to be so nicely greeted, and then I didn't know it at the time. But I'm one of the first couples that we spoke to were Ron and Ana Lee Baldwin. And they would sit in the Pew in front of us or beside us and talk to us and engage with the kids. And



probably by the second time we had gone on a Lea was a seamstress. And she had made some dresses, and she said she had one that was probably Hannah's size would "Would it be okay to drop this dress off?" And so we said, "Please, yes, that would be great." And they came to our home and engage with the kids more than gave Hannah the dress and she felt really special having this handmade dress given to her. And over time, I realized that the Baldwin's were actually sitting next to us being Invitational their normal seats were actually closer to the front of the church, but they were set I felt more comfortable sitting toward the back of the sanctuary, so that if the kids were being loud or needed me that we could go out of the space so so there I would call radical. invitation and hospitality was one of the things that really touched me because I felt like they were actually practicing Christianity as I understood it. And it wasn't just just them, the pastor would sit near us and answer our questions if we had any questions and tell us things that were going on in church and inviting us to lunch afterwards. And so, we had an experience that at the other churches we would go to, they would basically say, this is our church. This is our program, this is where things are. And then that was it. So they were really interested in us and supportive of us. And when I asked, you know, my first question about the Book of Mormon, and then they decided to have the study group, which went on for weeks, so I just felt like they were really acting Christ like, and it was what I wanted for my kids to see. I wanted them to experience that, and so that they would also learn how to be that way with others.

**Brittany Mangelson 41:23**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. It, it goes from preaching or believing the right things to actually practicing what you preach. And by treating people with that radical hospitality, like you said, and in the way of Jesus, by becoming Jesus's hands and feet, I think is really, really important. And once again, I feel like I can relate so much, because, you know, I, I had felt like such a throwaway in our other community, and then to actually have people rearrange their schedules, their lives, drive miles and miles to visit us in our home answer any question we have share their own stories of faith and their doubts and their frustrations and things like that, it really made me recognize that it's not necessarily about the size or dogmatic things that you need to adhere to or agree with. But that actually being a Christian is a way of life. And so it sounds like your congregation really embodies that. And what I'm hearing is that some of those, some of those things that you had hoped to find in a faith community maybe became less important because the the love and the relationship that you were able to find within that community kind of overshadowed some of those other things. So yeah. So I'm, I'm curious, maybe just a little bit more about logistics, how long did you give yourself to explore or investigate or whatever word you want to use? How long were you part of the community before you actually became a member? And then what was that? Like? I mean, by the time you, you join, did you still have any hang ups? Or any doubts or frustrations? How did that all shake out?

**Erin Hook 43:17**

So yeah, I was, um, we started attending in June, it was on Father's Day, and I was baptized in January. The reason it took so long was because our baptismal font was broken. So I did take the, the baptism and confirmation class by doing the workbook. I think I finished that by maybe October or November, and I was having dreams about being baptized. So I was kind of like, I really wanted to get this done, I really wanted to do it, I and I ended up being baptized in our pastors hot tub, because we weren't able to get the baptismal font fixed. And I was kind of resistant about it, because I, I, I always have these ideas of how I think things should be and how I want them to be and I just thought it would

be really spiritual to have it in the sanctuary in a baptismal font. And then when it became known that it would be a while before the font can be fixed, I, I thought, Okay, I will, I will go ahead and trust that this is the right way to do it. And it turned out to be a beautiful experience. We were outside, it was the middle of winter, a really cold and everyone who could come was there and the The sun was coming up right over the trees as the baptism started, and the light was shining on me. And I felt like Christ was present in the moment of my baptism. And it was just really meaningful to me. So that experience, kind of impressed on me that I need to be open to things that are different than what I expect. And my confirmation was the week after so.

**Brittany Mangelson** 45:35

Did that happen in the sanctuary?

**Erin Hook** 45:37

Yes.

**Brittany Mangelson** 45:38

At least you had that! Again, I really, I relate to those twists and turns where you're like, actually, this is not how it's supposed to be whether it's, you know, a different timeline, or, yeah, just different circumstances that that things come up. And I definitely have some of those along my journey as well. But I'm glad that you took it as a learning opportunity to be open to Oh, yeah, different ways of life unfolding, I guess, what an adventure. So I'm glad, though, that you had that experience in the hot tub.

**Erin Hook** 46:18

And they just put so much effort into making the space. really lovely. It was really nice. And so we were able to go to World Conference. And on our car ride home, my son told me, he wanted to be baptized. And so, so I just from the time that we started going to church, which were Community of Christ, which was in June of 2018, by April of 2019, I had been baptized, my son was talking about being baptized. And then, soon after we went to reunion and I went to the women's retreats, it was just like, we had all this activity that we can do all these connections and invitations to connect with the divine. And it was a huge period of growth for us. He was baptized in June. And my daughter was just baptized in September.

**Brittany Mangelson** 47:27

Awesome. So when they went to World Conference, were they able to do the Conference Kids?

**Erin Hook** 47:35

We actually had to leave before they were able to do that. So I think we were there for maybe three days. And then we came home.

47:44

Still though it had a good impression on him. That's awesome.

**Erin Hook** 47:51

Very powerful.

**Brittany Mangelson 47:53**

Yeah, yeah. I know, my kids have absolutely loved World Conference too. And even just being, you know, because they do feel alone and isolated in our small little congregation. And so even being in a place where there's so many people, and I know that lifelong Community of Christ, kids feel this way, too. It's like, Whoa, this is our church, rolling up and seeing all the people and clearly is a different experience if you're not in Independence, and don't have a robust congregation, so or even if so, I mean, filling the auditorium or even the temple sanctuary. that's a that's a cool experience, no matter who you are, no matter where you're at, in the church. So yeah, it's pretty great.

**Erin Hook 48:37**

Yeah, they're already talking about going back. So

**Brittany Mangelson 48:42**

Awesome. Awesome. So you've shared a little bit about what church or what your life has looked like since you joined. But I also know that you are in seminary, so if you want to share maybe a little bit about that. And then just in general, what what does your involvement with your congregation and or mission center look like now?

**Erin Hook 49:09**

Okay, so I'm with seminary, I'm doing the spiritual leadership concentration. And I'm, I find myself being surprised a lot by where the Spirit is leading me. I feel like I'm moving in the direction of spiritual companionship. And so I had considered doing the Spiritual Formation and Companionship Program. But I ended up deciding to do seminary because I did receive a call to the office of Deacon and I have given the message for the worship service and I just felt like I needed to know more before I could be in a role of that magnitude. So, so far, the experience has been wonderful. I'm in the second class. And I've learned so much already. I feel like it's really filling a need that that I had, that I didn't know that I had. And and now that it's happening, I'm feeling more confident. So I really had a problem with my confidence and the thought that I could actually be in a leadership position. So it's really helping a lot with that.

**Brittany Mangelson 50:47**

Yeah, once again, I relate to that, I think that when you, well, I can speak for myself. For me, when I was welcomed into this community, and then presented a call to priesthood relatively soon after we joined. I can relate like, Oh my gosh, there are people that have been in this community for their whole lives. And I'm suddenly seen as someone who's supposed to companion with some with other people and prepare the space and prepare the way and participate in worship service. And it's, it's a little bit overwhelming there. It was, for me, it was a little overwhelming. And so yeah, the desire to go to seminary was definitely high, high on my priority list. And so yeah, I'm glad that you listened to that, that sense of call and I love that you're going the sorry, what did you say it was spiritual leader or leadership? Okay, that that development is a post Brittany's time in seminary, and so I'm a little bit jealous. Get to live out your seminary experience in a very concentrated way. I think that that is a brilliant addition to it. But yeah, yeah, that sounds really exciting. And I mean, not to put more pressure on you, but you could still do the Spiritual Companionship Program at some point.

**Erin Hook 52:10**

Yes, very true. Yes. Yeah, well, and speaking about the calling that took me a really, well, I think it was a while for me to, to say yes to, I considered and discerned and prayed for probably five or six weeks about about that. So congregationally, I've been helping with the prayer for peace. And I've been helping, when there's a need for someone to help with handing out the bulletins and using the microphone for when people express their need for prayer. I've also helped on the mission center level, we have a ministry, online called Church Nerds Unite, which you are a guest on. Thank you for that. And I haven't been able to be as active as I was with seminary. I'm spending a lot of time during the week studying and writing papers and taking notes about everything that we're learning. So I haven't been able to be as active as I hoped to be. But I keep thinking maybe when this class is over, I'll be able to start helping with the Church Nerds Unite again. We typically have a church member who leads the adult Sunday school classes. And there was a time where he needed a break. And I led one of those for a few weeks about the lectionary year. So I also delivered the morning message on Sunday. So

**Brittany Mangelson 54:06**

they're keeping you busy? Yes. Well, I think that that's one, well, I would say plus, with a smaller community that you can be as involved or take a backseat to the degree that that you're comfortable with. So I know for me, that was a bit of an adjustment, but being able to, to participate at the comfort level and taking into consideration your capacity and your family and all those things is clearly important. But it sounds like that you have found things that really allow you to participate and be part of the community while strengthening it and still being able to be yourself and a mom and all the different hats that we all wear so it's good. It's really good.

**Erin Hook 54:58**

And also through COVID, since we've been staying at home since March, we can't meet. We did an online Bible study and fellowship. And so I helped lead that to get it going. And now that I'm busy with seminary, one of the members is taking it over. But it was a really good way to connect, especially in the very beginning, when it was someone certain to have the ability to still get together and pray together and do Bible study.

**Brittany Mangelson 55:36**

Yeah. When I think of those early days of the pandemic, I really have, I can feel the anxiety, swelling in me, because there really was so much uncertainty. And so I really admire the the members and leaders that were just able to say, "Alright, this is what we're doing!" and to put things online and to be able to create that sense of community. Because yeah, I don't think any of us, at least, me certainly did not think that this was going to go on for this long, but I am very impressed that so many congregations and so many groups, were able to just take what we've been doing and figure out how to do it at a socially distance digital format, yeah, that's been one of the greatest things that I think has come out of this pandemic. So yeah, thanks for thanks for being part of that.

**Erin Hook 56:30**

Thank you.

**Brittany Mangelson 56:33**

So Erin, I do want to thank you for sharing your story. I, I have learned a lot about you and a lot about your faith transition into Community of Christ. And there's a lot more common ground, I knew there was going to be some common ground, but there's a lot more than I realized. So I'm, this is a question that I asked everybody. What are your hopes for Community of Christ? I know that, you know, I've mentioned a couple times that you had this idea of a church that you wanted to be part of, and raise your family and, and it didn't necessarily meet all of those boxes. But I don't know if those are still priorities, or if you have other other priorities or other hopes and dreams for Community of Christ. So why don't you tell us a little bit about those? Where do you see the future of Community of Christ?

**Erin Hook 57:27**

Well, I really hope that we're able to reach more people. And I think now that we've gone online because of the pandemic, that that is a possibility that we've we've invited friends online, and with my daughter's baptism, which happened online, we had family members and friends join in. So hopefully, that will highlight that we are a very spiritual and very inviting, and Christian community, I would like people to feel and experience the transformation that I've felt by joining our church, hi, I feel like I've become over time a very spiritual person. And this church really fills my spiritual needs, through the spiritual companionship and the opportunities for spiritual direction, and the support of our leaders, that they're approachable, and that they're supportive. I really hope that people who look into our church can experience that and that they will feel that transformative experience that I felt. I also, our church is not one that is like a check off the box and you make make it to church and fill some obligations. People really want to be at church. I think it really fills a spiritual and religious experience that they're looking for. So I hope that that comes through for other people who might be visiting or looking into the church online.

**Brittany Mangelson 59:27**

Yeah, I I really think that that that is so important that we understand that our message is relevant and that we can and should be reaching out to more people, as well as this understanding that we do want to be together in community. And I think that that's one thing that the pandemic has taught me is that, you know, my kids, they miss going to church, they talk about it, and we've done online stuff, but We were chatting a little bit earlier before we recorded and there is a real online burnout with these kids. And so for me seeing their desire to be in community together is a good reminder for me that that, yes, our message is relevant and that we want to be there. This isn't an obligation, my kids aren't obligated to be there. But they genuinely find value in community. And I think that that's, that's not necessarily how I've always looked at organized religion. And so it's just good that that that seems to be a pretty universal theme in community, you know, the community aspect of it is italicized, or bolded, or underlined, you know, I mean, we enjoy being together, which is always good. So, thanks. Thanks for highlighting that. All right. Well, I always wrap up these interviews, just asking if there's anything that I left out or anything that you would still like to say or leave us with, you are under no obligation to say anything else. But I always like to give the opportunity. So is there anything else that we didn't get to that you would like to say?

**Erin Hook** 1:01:13

Just I'm extremely grateful for the Community of Christ. I never in my wildest imagination would believe that I am, where I am today. And it's in large part because of Community of Christ and the supportive members and leaders in our church.

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:01:41

Once again, I can relate to a lot to what you said, I think that it's so interesting how much overlap there is with these faith transition stories. And I just hope that the listeners and the especially the lifelong or longtime listeners, really hear the message that seekers are interested in Community of Christ, and that there is a sense of sanctuary and refuge and growth that comes through grace and generosity from from everyone in the community. So, Erin, this has been great. Like I said, I've learned so much about you. And I'm grateful for your willingness to share your story. I'm sure that other people will relate to it as well. listeners, this is Brittany Mangelson. And again, this is a Fair Trade episode, which is all about faith transition stories. We have, gosh, at this point, probably a couple dozen faith transition stories. So I invite you to go listen to those and we will see you later. Thanks so much, Erin.

**Erin Hook** 1:02:49

Thank you.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:02:59

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