

## 355 | Steamers and Sodas | Oklahoma Online Youth Camp 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** 00:33

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. And today you're listening to the series Soda and Steamers. And it's all about kids activities in Community of Christ. And I am super duper excited to be welcoming Paul, Shelby and Michi onto this podcast. They were the directors, they might correct me on this they are the directors have an Oklahoma youth camp last year during the pandemic. So in 2020, summer, during the pandemic, and I cannot wait to hear what they did about that. Because from what I have heard, they've done some pretty awesome things. So, Paul, Shelby and Nietzsche, Hello, and welcome. And I'm gonna let you introduce yourself. And let's go in that order. First, Paul, then Shelby, then Michi.

### **Paul Miller**

Hi, my name is Paul Miller. And I was the junior camp director, along with my wife, Jeannie Miller, who is not here today. But it was a great time and I'm looking forward to telling you about it.

### **Shelby Moses** 01:31

Hi, my name is Shelby Moses, and I am a member of the Oklahoma Mission Center here. I was the sort of like overall camp director for the Oklahoma mission center for a few years. And I sort of stepped aside and gave it to our commander in chief, Cynthia Thetge. But I'm sort of still an ad hoc member of the directors team. They couldn't get rid of me. So, I was sort of the logistics planner of the 2020 camps last year.

### **Michi Elwell** 02:00

And I am Michi Elwell, I have been involved with the Oklahoma Mission Center youth camps with a senior high for the past couple of years.

### **Paul Miller** 02:13

So, I can already I already know that Shelby is excellent and logistics. And because she's the one who set up this entire podcast for me, usually scheduling is the hardest part of any podcast. But she set it all up and she had an all going so I think what a lot of people wonder about online camps is about those logistics. So, Shelby, could you tell us a little bit more about what that look like? How that looked? All that stuff?

### **Shelby Moses** 02:37

Yeah, so we kind of work as a core directors team between all of us, so that we have some cohesiveness throughout the summers, usually anyway. So, starting out, you know, we, world church made that announcement, we can't have camps at our camp grounds. So, we got together as a core

members team again, and we were like, "Okay, so what are we going to do?" So, we met as directors to kind of just discuss and organize everything. And ultimately, we took kind of like semi regular activities that we would do at camps, but the themes and everything, and we just broke them up throughout the summer. So, we had seven weeks of activities outlined, some to do at home and some to do on scheduled zoom calls with us. We can talk about specific activities we did. But we had some devotionals, some scripture, spiritual practices for the kids to do with the themes. And then we had some like different fun activities for them to do. And we asked them to send pictures in for us so that we could share them and kind of like stay engaged that way. We're really fortunate as far as logistic wise that our mission center leadership will literally do anything for our youth. So this whole experience was funded by our Mission Center and free to the kids. And we made a camp packet for them, which outlined all the activities week by week, what they should be doing. And we also packed the kids camp kits with all the materials that they would need for these activities. And we did a couple of like, socially distance and safe pickup days, and then we mailed some of them out too. I would say like advice for us and others going forward was just like, make sure to do this with plenty of planning time ahead, get those registrations, in kits built, and mailed out, and then a plug to for one of our camp directors that's not on the call with us, Jen. She's really she's one of our gurus with like class and devotional building. So she kind of helped us a lot with this planning process, but she also runs our vacation church school, for our littles in our area. And so we did like the exact same thing after we did camps for junior through Senior High kids. We did it for all of our littles too. So, we did the registration, Jen, like did the packet building and so we just had stuff all summer for all of our youth. And I think for the kind of year 2020 was we had a lot of a learning curve to do as far as logistics and planning went, but my hope is that we definitely serve the kids do the best we could and like they felt that they were connected and loved.

**Carla Long 05:04**

Oh, I have to say I am massively impressed! Seven weeks. So just so I get a better idea in my head, you said that you you met on zoom sometimes. And then you had like, at home activities? How often would you meet on zoom? And how long would those zoom calls be? And was there any kind of order to those zoom calls? Yeah, I can talk about that there was a little bit of our planning stage. And we met three times before we mailed the kids out. So and we, you know, those calls varied in time, obviously, typically, when we get on we, we get to brainstorming, and it's a couple hour meeting, usually. But, you know, Shelby kind of brainstorm to this thing all up. And she says, I got a great idea. And we started meeting after that, she put a lot of the details together. And we just kind of helped with the, you know, refine some of it and smooth out some of the bumps that were there. And but it all came together well. But we only met three times ahead, because of all the work Shelby had already done. And it was just laid out so beautifully. That's, you know, it's a good resource, you know, for people to see. So, after the kits were mailed out, you know, we've met on Zoom every single week with kids, and different age groups. So you know, we had seniors in one area, and they did theirs before the junior and junior high. And we group those, and we had planned on having breakout rooms. But, you know, those meetings went went pretty wel and pretty smooth. There's some lessons learned in that, obviously, and I'll talk about those later. But it's kind of how we started out our meeting. I'm just I'm, I think that this is incredible what you've done. I've heard of some people do this for like two or three weeks, and they're like, we're done. That's too much, but seven weeks, and it can it shows how deeply you want this youth ministry to work. And I, from the bottom of my heart, I just want to say a great big thank you. I know how much youth ministry changes so many lives. So thank you for keeping this up, even in the midst of

a pandemic. So the Community of Christ has a lot of rules to follow when it comes to youth worker registration, things like that. So how did you make sure that the children were safe on the calls? or? Yeah, how do you make sure they were safe on the Zoom calls?

**Michi Elwell** 07:24

So mainly, we, of course, followed all of the normal staffing protocols, those that are involved and needed to be with, you know, youth worker registration and all that. There's usually a parent, or grandparent in the room with the kids. And we had a small group of staff participants for these activities. But, of course, whenever if, if we were to have broken up into the different room, Zoom, like Zoom rooms, the breakout rooms, then we would have, you know, had staffing for that, too. And then, of course, the registration process was like normal and pre camp and included all the photo activity and waivers for the kids for like photos and safety things for the activities and stuff like that. And then of course, when we're on the call, we're always trying to follow the zoom professionalism. Of course, you let them know everybody can see you, you know, don't be saying anything you wouldn't say to your parents or grandma, you know,

**Carla Long** 08:34

Wear pants, for instance.

**Michi Elwell** 08:36

Wear pants, don't go to the bathroom on the call. That kind of thing.

**Paul Miller** 08:43

Yeah, I heard about a couple of instances where the kids really wanted to stay involved. But they also needed to go the bathroom. And the mom had to like grab it out of their hands be like, "No, no, no, you do that first. And then you come back on the call." Yes, those are important things. And I think that photo waiver is super, like, absolutely, absolutely important, especially since you posted pictures of the kids. And I think that's easily forgotten. And actually, unfortunately, easily forgotten. And it should not be that photo waiver is really important. Thank you for bringing that up. Anything else that you want to say about making sure that we were following the youth worker guidelines for Community of Christ.

**Shelby Moses** 09:22

I will say we just have that system set up here, so about every other year. So we go through that whole process of like, kind of the recertification going through that world church class, and even if you've had the class before you go through it again. So we just kind of have on record if a staffer comes in, they say I want to be part of it. We have a really quick check process to make sure that they are registered.

**Carla Long**

And it's is super good thinking. Because there are times when I'm like, Oh, I really need a teacher. I really want this person to do it. Oh my gosh. They're not youth worker, certified. So jumping through that hoop immediately, that's smart thinking well done Oklahoma, well done!

**Shelby Moses** 10:06

Oh, we know exactly where to go to, to get into the Shelby system to check that, so.

**Carla Long 10:11**

Oh, you are on fire! Gosh. So, I know that you did some really awesome things. And I actually can't wait to hear about the activities. We've gone through the logistics, we've gone through the youth worker stuff. Tell me what you did? What made it awesome. And give me some ideas for our youth here in Salt Lake. So, what did you do?

**Michi Elwell 10:33**

Okay, so some of the activities that we had involved things like bubbles, and scavenger hunts glow in the dark, ring, tosses can't there's I can't even I can't Movie Night, where we had them get their own snacks, whatever they wanted. And campfire, we didn't do a campfire activity, which is pretty cool. That probably was one of the better ones. Along with those activities. We had devotionals that were sent out with the packets that had you know, like a scripture for them. And it's something to think about type of paragraph for them to read and pray about and that kind of thing. Yeah, it was just something for every week, and couple activities a week.

**Paul Miller 11:24**

So some of the things that Michi left out accidentally, it's been a little bit and so while you were while she was talking about I wrote for looked back at my sheet, and it's like, we had a sidewalk chart art contest. Some major impressions, did puzzled knights and dice games. There was origami tutorials, you know, just like all kinds of things that you could do toilet paper roll build challenge. And at that time, we didn't know there was gonna be a shortage. So we did not hoard. Okay, we did not encourage hoarding. None of that happened. So it is not Community of Christ's fault. Especially not Oklahoma's we had to recreate a work of art. So and that was one of the best things and I think, actually, Michi's husband did an incredible one. So you can explain that a little bit. Just you can give it some context. Remember what he did? Yeah, so

**Shelby Moses 12:18**

We also had staffers, I think the adults had just as much fun with these activities as they you could and, and like recreate a work of art, you had to use things at home, use yourself whatever it was, and Michi's husband just took that and like, went with it.

**Michi Elwell 12:38**

So there's a picture of Mary holding her baby Jesus. And you know, they have the nice robe type of garb and the blanket type swaddling clothes for the baby. And I was marry. And then we took this picture with me with my arm around Jerry. And he was the baby with just the well, we he had like the blanket swaddled around him and everything. But then he took the picture and he shrunk himself down. So it's like, this massive guy who's 6'7 and now shrunk down into to fit into a five to why this arm.

**Carla Long 13:21**

That sounds hilarious. That is brilliant. I love that idea.

**Shelby Moses** 13:26

And one of our one of our kids tried to do the creation of Adam, you know, like where the fingers are touching. But they had Germ-x in between the fingers.

**Paul Miller** 13:37

Kids are so clever. I love it. I love it. So you said some other things in there that I want to I want to ask a question about what's the nature impression? Is that what you said, Paul and nature impression?

**Carla Long** 13:47

Yeah, I can kind of expand on that one too. So that kind of went, so the devotional or scripture, we tried to tie them in with the activities as much as possible. So if they did something in the devotional, or did something special, like it just followed into their activities, so that week, we did, I think the theme was Connect With the Earth or something like that. And their devotional that week was to do a spiritual practice and like, go on a neighborhood walk. And so you know, they had to just like sense God's energy and presence and everything that surrounded them. And then the activities that followed that were a neighborhood scavenger hunt and a nature impression. So while they were out, they collected like pine cones or leaves or something. And then when they brought them back in their kit, they had paint. And so they could dip that in paint and do like nature impressions. And so we got some really cool pictures, you know, we had just like different I don't even know how to explain it. It was so beautiful. Like the pine cones, they would dip it in different colors of paint. And it would be like just this work of art that they created from something they got from their neighborhood.

**Paul Miller** 14:51

I cannot even tell you, I'm not an artist by any stretch of the imagination, but even I wanted to do that. That is so fun! So I haven't ask you this before, but like, are you okay? If people contact you about some of these activities? And okay, okay, that's great. So maybe at the end, we'll make sure you give out your email address just in case.

**Shelby Moses** 15:11

Yeah, and we could also just share it, we could share the packet, I don't know if we could link it into the bottom, or anything like that. But we can share the packets so people can even see what we did each week.

**Carla Long** 15:21

That is very kind of you. Yes, we can definitely do that. Thank you so much. So some of the other activities sounded great. So you had a sidewalk chalk thing, so it was a little competition, or you just make, make whatever you wanted to make, how that worked out?

**Paul Miller** Right, I think it worked really well, you know, we had people would, some of the kids would go out, and they would do whatever, whatever kind of art they would want, you know, some of them had siblings, so they would do separate ones side by side. And we would, you know, we would get all the pictures, and then we would, we would staff would kind of vote on them on, you know, whether or not necessarily if it was the best art, but it was the most creative or, you know, just making sure everybody's represented, you know, and then there's those that are a little tough because they live in a

rural area, and they don't have a sidewalk, and they don't really have a driveway. And so they did something different, you know, when it, but they made a huge attempt, you know, to be creative, and figure out how to get that done. So, you know, stretching kids minds, is important, you know, teaching them how to how to entertain themselves a little bit and how to be creative with, we gave him a starter kit. Yeah. And then they went from there and had to develop, fully develop it, you know, so that's, that's amazing to put them in that situation. And then, you know, tying that all back to creation itself, you know, with the nature walks and things just, you know, it's just great the way the thing came together. But we had some other things we had colored. What was it the best hair?

**Shelby Moses 16:49**

Yes, we had a wacky hair contest.

**Paul Miller 16:52**

Yeah. And my daughter, photoshopped a lizard on my head, but that's some of the adult's, that we would put our pictures out there to, you know, to inspire the kids a little bit, you know, so they would actually do their hair. In some cases, you know, where they would, you know, put it into a fancy hairdo or yeah, I don't remember some of the others, I remember some of the different styles they would do, where they would Mohawk it, or they would do something, something fun and entertaining. So they got into those pretty well.

**Carla Long 17:25**

And this is all the at home activities. I mean, like Paul Michi and Jen also did the zoom activities where kids got onto a zoom call. And we did like a trivia night or a game night. And just like were able to connect with the kids. So I don't know if they want to expand on that. But those were pretty fun, too.

**Michi Elwell 17:43**

To add to what Shelby was saying, I did like the Scattegories thing, we'd have a game night with Scattegories. And they seem to love that pretty well. The competition especially between these two brothers was just amazing. And they're so funny, and the banter and everything, of course. It's just hilarious. And then I really enjoyed Paul's try and draw this with your feet type of activity.

**Shelby Moses 18:10**

Yeah, we had a we had a coloring night with the junior kids. And Paul turned it into like a little competition.

**Paul Miller 18:22**

You know, I, the funny thing is, I came across those on my phone a couple of days ago. And I'm like, What were those pictures? And now that you say that I remember I, you know, the kids were like, hey, we're gonna do some, some stuff. And you can kind of tell some of the boys were just like, Oh, you know, we're gonna color we're gonna draw. And so I'm like, Yeah, but we're gonna do different. And so I had them put their pencil, I think in their mouth, and held the paper down, and they had to draw a picture with their mouth, you know, with their pencil, Michi. You know, so that was that was that was quite fun and it but it pulled them all in and they enjoyed it a lot, you know, just anything different creative. This goes a long ways with him sometimes. And the other piece was, I always have to throw in

a dad joke here and there. So we did have a whole evening, where we did a section of the evening was just about dad jokes and having the kids tell the dad jokes. So we would tell some, they would tell me I just, you know, the main goal, keeping them connected to us making sure that we're still here for them. And they know they they can have fun with us and when you know, don't forget our faces because we'll be back in camp again. You know, so let's, that was I think one of the main thoughts about stretching this out over seven weeks, you know, seems like kind of a long time, but it kept that engagement through the summer.

**Carla Long** You know, I I'm so glad you brought up that connection because camp is for me, it is all about connection and you live for those silly moments. You live with those moments with the banter like Michi was talking about Like the silly moments Paul's talking about while you draw with your feet or draw with your mouth, and you can just laugh together. So that connects, I'm so glad you found a way to keep that connection. It is. It is life giving. I remember going to camp as a kid and I would look forward to camp all year long. So it sounds like what you've really built here is something that is super, super special. I am just so impressed and excited for all of you. I know it's been a long time ago, that you're that you're thinking about this. But you've talked about a lot of things that worked really well. Is there anything else that you can remember that worked really well, that other people should definitely do?

**Shelby Moses** 20:40

Yeah, I have a few points, I guess. So what worked really well, I think for us was the packet in the kit, just kind of having all that pre made ready to go. It just really made things run smooth. So everyone was on the same page, they knew exactly what to be doing that week, the materials were provided. So like parents didn't have to go out and try to find these dice or puzzles or things like that it was all provided. And I will say the kids that showed up, consistently all had grandparents and parents involved. So definitely like figure out how to have that relationship ongoing throughout the summer. We had, I'm sure parents were tired of them. But we had a couple email blasts that went out every week, I had a remind. Yeah, that's a teacher tool I use it's remind it's a safe texting tool to text kids and parents. And so like for the chalk art contests, I was like, "Hey, it's due tonight, make sure to get your pictures in" and then we would vote on them and things like that. So that's another way we kept involved with parents. Because if you're involved with parents, the kids will be involved too. So we did have that email engagement that I mentioned. We asked kids to send in their pictures since we weren't with them being able to take pictures they sent them in. And we post them if we had their photo release. Good activities were the campfire, like kids always love songs, we had a couple staff members that got on and did a Zoom campfire with us. And our activities were aimed at kind of the multi age appropriateness. So there were some modifications between like the boxes we packed for senior kids and junior kids. But ultimately, they all got coloring books, they got a packet that was just friendly for all groups to follow. So we didn't have to do a lot of modifications. And everyone could just be kind of doing the same thing too. And I think the last thing is just have a strong directors team. So we have a really good core group. And we work well together. And we know how to play off each other's strengths. And so if you have a good core group, things will be good.

**Carla Long** Well, I mean, everything you said is super, super important. It requires a lot of organization, though, a lot. So just be super, super organized is what I'm hearing. And I think that

strong directors group cannot be understated. Having a group of people that care deeply for kids, and cared deeply that kids connect with themselves connect with each other connect with God is just incredibly important. All those things. So it sounds like everything went perfect. And nothing ever, ever, ever went wrong.

**Shelby Moses 23:14**

But we had some learning to do.

**Carla Long 23:17**

We're not perfect. So, but what didn't work out so well?

**Paul Miller 23:23**

Yeah, well, you know, I can kind of tee off of some of the things that things that Shelby said, you know, we learned early on, remember, this was we did this in July of 2020. So the kids had stopped school. And they didn't really start school, it was the middle of summer. So what we learned early on was that like, if they didn't have a parental figure involved with the Zoom stuff, they were a little disorganized. You know, some of them didn't know where their camp kit was, like, well, I saw it, I know we got it and but they put it away somewhere I didn't know where it was, you know, so it would take you a minute to dig it out. You know, so just low relocating some of those things, just like anything else at home, with with the schools right now, parents or or, you know, the guardians, whoever is going to be the the caregiver at home, it needs to be involved with some of that stuff. You know, there's a the kids want to have fun and it's important for to help them just be prepared, I think is the word I'm trying to look for. So just helping them be prepared for the session. Make sure they don't lose track of time, make sure you're not, you know, driving around, oh, when it's time for the meeting. You know, we had some kids that did meet and they were they were on a phone in the car. But they didn't want to talk with us because they were in the car. And there's other things you want in the car. So we were on mute and they were paying it they were watching but not not not really involved or engaged. So that was kind of a thing or something that we would say dedicate the time instead of aside special, you know, to devote to this. So I think we did pretty good on participation, you know, started out and it kind of be kind of decreased as we went on. So that's one of the things we talked about, even this year, if we, if we have to do this again, this year, we might consolidate this into a couple of days in a row, maybe two or three, you know, days, like a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, for a couple hours, and then do it maybe three times through the summer, you know, several weeks apart, just to, you know, not not worry about where they're on zoom so much, you know, they do need a break, because they've been doing it through school. So just kind of thinking through that, you know, planning ahead and putting ourselves in where the kids position is, what is their perspective? Luckily, we have several teachers that understand that the Zoom drag, if you want to call it that, of just I'm tired of being on the computer, which you never thought you'd ever hear kids say, but I think we all do our parts pretty well. And the organization, like you said, there was some, it was a little bit rough, like the first day was a little rough. So we thought, as we talk through this, probably wouldn't hurt the staff to do a dry run the first day of how we would carry this through on zoom, you know, how would we interact, who's going to speak when, who's going to carry what part, it's a little difficult when you don't know what all kids are actually going to join the meeting as to how that's going to go but at least being prepared, you know, if this, then that, you know, then we can you can move on? It would have made a big deal. I talked about some of the rural areas,



connectivity was a problem for some of the kids, you know, we would they would freeze up. It would be sparse. Every time they would try to say something, you know, we would it would break up in the middle. And we couldn't understand it just it was a little bit sad, because they're trying to be engaged and we couldn't make it. So, you know, we know since then, and school, I think people's personal infrastructure has gotten better. A lot of people have upgraded their internet services. So we're hoping that's not as big of a deal this year. But we're thinking about asking those questions with registration if we're going to do it this year. But I think overall, I don't know, did I miss anything, guys? I mean, I think those were kind of most of our learning curves, you know, there's always things you can do better. And one of the things that I appreciate about Shelby and the whole team is after it was over, we had another meeting and talked about what could be better. And we wrote it all down. You know, we always jot this stuff down and things when you talk about so we we've met talked down and then this year, we'll review that before we get started again.

**Carla Long** You know, that's one thing I think Community of Christ Camping program is top notch. I think we do it really, really well most of the time, but that's one thing we don't do well is evaluate and come back. So that's, I think it's a super important step that we miss almost every year because you're like, oh, I'll remember, guess what you ain't gonna remember. I'll remember! No, no, you won't. There's a lot of stuff that goes on year to year that you're not going to remember. So just having that evaluation and saying this is like maybe we do need a script. Maybe we need and Paul talked about this, Shelby talked about this, Michi talked about this, boom, we got it. And things like that. And oh, man, I was one of those rule kids. We didn't have a paved driveway. So I totally understand. And I don't think my parents got internet till like, 2005 I totally. I totally get that. And by my parents. I mean, the whole town where I grew up, get internet like 2005 Well, I've just really enjoyed this podcast. Um, is there something that I missed something that you thought I was going to ask and didn't ask or something else you wanted to say?

**Shelby Moses** 28:44

I'm good.

**Paul Miller** 28:46

Shelby's good.

**Shelby Moses** 28:48

Paul can definitely talk.

**Paul Miller** 28:51

Well, the one thing I didn't think I thought you were gonna ask him You didn't just I thought you might want a dad joke.

**Carla Long** 28:56

Yeah, that's how I was gonna end!

**Carla Long** 29:01

All right, well, then we'll hold it to the end. Okay, well, we're really close. So get ready with your dad joke. So I am, I must say, again, thank you so much for being willing to share your resources. I think that a lot of people. I mean, I don't know what's gonna happen this year. We're recording this in February 2021. So and we still don't know what this year is going to bring. So I'm really grateful that you have those resources that you're willing to share for people in case they want to use them. And I just really appreciate all the work that went into that because the kids of Oklahoma are very well served. I'm super excited and, and happy for them. And to finish us off. Paul, can I please have at least one dad joke?

**Paul Miller**

Yeah, one of the things I remember is that my dad, he hated the idea of having a beard and then one day it grew on him. (laughter) That's that's about what I get from the kids too.

**Carla Long 30:04**

That is literally the best way I've ever ended a podcast. So thank you so much, Paul. Thank you. And thank you Michi for being willing to share your knowledge, share your excitement, and I know for a fact you're an inspiration to people. Thank you so much.

**Shelby Moses**

Thanks for having us, too.

**Michi Elwell 30:24**

Yes, thank you.

**Josh Mangelson 30:34**

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