

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, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson and I'm going to be your host for today. And here's the thing, Project Zion listeners, this is the first podcast that I have filmed or recorded face to face in well over a year. This is what the vaccination does for us! When you are vaccinated, you can be with other vaccinated people! So I'm here to record a What's Brewing episode with Jason Eyre. Now Jason is actually one of our main editors for Project Zion. So if you've listened to gosh, anything on PZP, you've listened to Jason's work. But we are turning the mic on him today. And we are going to talk about a project that he did through work that had to do with a pandemic and getting kids the internet and the way that he lives out mission through his job. So Jason, welcome. Why don't you introduce yourself a little bit to us?

Jason Eyre 01:32

Well, thank you, Brittany. And yeah, I think this is this might be the third podcast I've been on. I know I did one with a panel and then you interviewed me about my story back when we were starting some of the I can't think what the series is name?

Brittany Mangelson 01:45

Fair Trade?

Jason Eyre 01:46

No, this is before Fair Trade, like clear, clear back a few years ago, and it was the liturgical calendar. It's the one Karin did.

Brittany Mangelson 01:54

Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, Jason's an OG PZP'er.

Jason Eyre 02:00

Old school there. Anyway, I'm really excited to be here today. My name is Jason Eyre. And I've been a member of Community of Christ for a couple of years. And I've been a seeker for about five years, five and a half now. Wow. Time's flying. But I'm here today to talk a little bit about a project I did in my professional life. And in my professional job, I'm the Technology Department Coordinator at Murray City School District. Murray City School District is a small school district of about 6000 students covering the community of Murray, which is in the heart of the Salt Lake Valley. So so think Utah, think Salt Lake, think Murray. And it's just this great little place, the middle of town.

Brittany Mangelson 02:43

Yeah. So you work with schools, like you said, and I don't know if our listeners have heard, but we are in the midst of a global pandemic. And when that happened back in March in the United States, schools were moved online. So being the Technology Department Coordinator, that was a massive task. And being the person that is essentially in charge of helping teachers and everyone get online in an entire district is a huge, huge deal. I know as a parent, the the back side of it, and I did not my kids do not go to the district that you work in. And so it was done very differently in my district. And I was always very jealous of the people that were in Murray district, because of your efforts. And I will see, to put it in perspective a little bit. Your efforts have gotten you national attention. You've been all over the news here. But then you've also been was a Good Morning America or the Today Show?

Jason Eyre 03:48

The Sunday Today's Show, we were the, were the Sunday feature back in January on the Today Show with Willie Geist, I've noticed that NBC News and their parent company Comcast have been very cognizant of the problems that families are having. And and to be quite honest, when our schools went into closure last March, that's the first thing that we did was reach out and give our parents information about the Internet Essentials Program that Comcast has, and tried to get as many families that could, that could afford that connected through that when we found that we connected all but about 13% of the families that live in our district. And it's funny to hear you talk about the district we live in because Brittany and I both live in the same community. And, and our school district didn't send Chromebooks home, they offered one per family and they the internet in our neighborhood just completely slowed down. And I even had to use an extra hotspot I had from work sometimes to connect to meetings. And so it was interesting because we went from this world where schools were a thing and where the kids were in school to all of a sudden something happened that we never thought we would see And we were all sent out for for distance learning. The story I'm telling today is about us building our own cellular network or our own LTE network. And we decided to put radios on our school buildings that will go out into the community has short distance. And then we can give our students hotspots or routers or gateways that actually connect to our network and help them have an experience at home just like they're in the school. And it's been interesting to see where that experience has led us that the story starts actually about the time that my faith transition started back in 2016. And I was living down in southern Utah in a town called Panguitch. And I was working in a different school district, it was the Garfield County School District. And we had just got a new superintendent. And he asked me to send the Chromebooks home with the students. And so what we did was we had a one to one program. That's what we called in the education industry. And we sent the Chromebooks home with the students. And we found that when those Chromebooks went home, that some of them had a great experience and got on the internet and worked. And if you know anything about Chromebooks, they have to have the internet to work. But a lot of those Chromebooks went into households that didn't have internet, or had internet, but it wasn't fast enough for a couple of kids to be on at the same time, and then people to watch Netflix and those kinds of things. And this was in very rural communities and South Central Utah. And the one thing we noticed that was almost every one of those students could walk out on their front porch, and they could see the school building. But yet they lived a mile or two away from the phone office. And with DSL and other technologies, their their connections were so slow that their Chromebooks couldn't see our filtering. And this wouldn't work when they were home. And that's what led me to try and look for a solution that would get the internet from the school out into their houses.

Brittany Mangelson 07:02

Yeah, because I remember when, you know, COVID hit and realizing that everyone's schooling was going to be online, I immediately thought of a conversation I had with you right before the pandemic, and House Church here in Utah County. And we were this was literally what a week or two before the world shut down. And COVID was already on the west coast of the United States. And I think I was in deep denial about what was about to happen. And I think that you had more of a realistic view, because you were like, what would you do? What would we do if, you know, we had to stay at home for two, three weeks? What would we do if we had to stay home for a month? And I remember thinking like, there's no way. There's no way that's going to happen. And then lo and behold, literally the next week, we were all at home, and immediately thinking how lucky I was to have the internet, we had an extra laptop, you know, we had two laptops at my house, we had an iPad. So I had one kid on the laptop, one kid on the iPad. And then the other kid just sort of waited for their turn. We ended up going out and purchasing cheap Chromebooks because we could we and I figured you know, there are kids in our school that would not that have multiple kids at home. And if the Chromebook that we could borrow would better go to another family when let's do it. So we went out and bought you know, \$70, cheap Chromebooks and, and that's what we had to do. And we, my kids were online for about six months. And so the backdrop of all of this is just this understanding and realization that weighed heavily on me thinking of all of the kids in Utah, that don't have access to the internet that don't have access to technology. And yet, they're still expected to show up every morning for school online. So I'm curious how you organize this so quickly. I mean, I know that it was it was a process to get to where you are today, but just tell us a little bit about that.

Jason Eyre 09:11

Well, the story moves northward for me in 2017. I went to school like school, I went to work for the Murray City School District. And I immediately one of the first things we did when school started in 2018, was have a Chromebook with every student's name in the district. And fortunately, we had we had some budget money and we had some state grants that helped us we had a three year plan and we were able to escalate that up to a year. So in 2018, in Murray, every student had a Chromebook with their name on it. In 2019. We sent them home with the students in the high school. When we started school in 2020, we liked the program. Everyone was scared that it might not work in an urban area like it had in a rural area, but it worked. And in 2020, we sent them home with our middle schools students as well when the school year started. So fast forward to march. And it's interesting you were talking about our conversation at House Church, what a great memory back when we go to church in person.

Brittany Mangelson 10:12

We were so naive!

Jason Eyre 10:14

My heavens, I never ever dreamed that what happened, would really happened. But our plan in Murray was that each student had a Chromebook with their name on it. And the good thing is those students had been using them since the first of the school year. But in our elementary school, those Chromebooks were in carts. And so we had a plan, we were going to have a we had a snow day. And

so we're going to do a snow makeup day, thinking the pandemic would never happen. And we would take those Chromebooks out of the carts and actually send them home and bubble wrap bags with the kids for a few days. And we would all go through the experience. And it would be there if anything ever crazy really happened. And that's funny, you were talking about how the West Coast had it. And New York hadn't really started yet in March. And then all of a sudden, one of the professional basketball players on our basketball team on a Tuesday night comes on to TV and says he's tested positive. And then that seems like that's the first that we heard of this happening in Utah. Two hours later, all of our schools were emptied. Fortunately, I was able to send a person to each school. And we were able to get all the Chromebooks handed out. So that was a pretty called a traumatic experience. In hindsight. We thought we would see the kids back in school on Tuesday or Wednesday. And then that Friday, the governor closed schools in Utah for the rest of the school year.

Brittany Mangelson 11:41

Yeah, I actually my Facebook memories, you know, recently have been about that. And they made me cry. It really was a traumatic time for kids. And, again, as a parent, I, my heart just went out to all these kids who never got to say goodbye to their friends never got to say goodbye to their teachers. We have really, really good teachers that year, and my kids just never really saw them again. And it's really sad. But being able to have technology in their homes, have computers, provided kids some sense of normalcy, kept them connected to their school and their teachers to some degree. So as traumatic as it was, I am glad for school staff, district school staff. And yeah, that we're able to to get things going. So keep going.

Jason Eyre 12:40

Well, the I have to take my hat off to the teachers, there was a lot of work and our teachers had done a great job of using technology in the classroom. And we've done some training on blended learning, which is where the teachers teach and recorded, and then the students watch it while they're with them. And then they watch what students would get it and don't adapt and help. And all of a sudden, we were in this distance learning. And our school buildings were all closed, we locked the doors, the teachers taught from their homes as well. And, and we saw a few things happen. My job changed quite a bit. I went from helping teachers teach in their classroom, to helping teachers teach from home and helping students stay connected. I have a team of six people that helped me and they we all came to one central office, we changed our phone system around so that we could do phone in tech support. And then the kids who had broken their Chromebooks, so we didn't know about, they brought them in. And we fixed them all centrally from one place as well and had a bunch of broken screens and little things like that. But we learned that without the device and without internet connectivity that students couldn't connect. And I learned a lot from other families. The program that I had always worked on in the rural district and our vision that we had had for the network that we eventually built was to help economically challenged students. But what we realized when we closed our schools and sent students to only learn from home, we realized that there were a lot of other challenges in kids lives like some students were learning English. Some students were from immigrant families, and their immigrant culture may not even be to be online. We had students that were in an apartment building that had WiFi, but they'd never used it because that wasn't what their family did. And then we also had families with three or four and being in Utah, five, six or seven kids. And this internet connection that they had just used for Netflix and maybe a couple of kids with all the kids going online at the same time, we had some parents that

were starting to struggle. The other thing that the pandemic did that none of us ever done. vision was brought mom and dad home and isolated them their weather in quarantine or to prevent exposure. And so suddenly everybody was home. And and what we found in the larger families was some of the smaller kids were getting kicked off and, and mom or dad had to do their job or they couldn't pay for the internet connection. And so we started seeing kind of this prioritization happened in people's lives. And we did get some hotspots from Verizon, who was the cellular company and sent them to some of our students that were, were really struggling. Comcast, as I said, a little bit earlier helped most of them. But we still saw some gaps.

Brittany Mangelson 15:43

I cannot imagine the logistical nightmare, because in my own home, it was a nightmare. And I know in my own little neighborhood, it was a nightmare. And there was a lot of networking among parents and but but having the understanding, being faced with the reality that that's happening throughout your entire district, and just not knowing what kids have support at home, what kids don't, who falls below, you know, like low on the priority scale of who needs the internet first. And I do have a question. And yeah, maybe this wasn't like district wide, but were your teachers teaching live like face to face, virtual courses, you know, on zoom?

Jason Eyre 16:24

Our teachers learned zoom very, very quickly. Unfortunately, working with Community of Christ and doing forward with community, which is a Zoom service, I had a couple of years of zoom experience, and knew I could support them on Zoom. And so we quickly moved them to that platform, zoom removed their restrictions on their free accounts for education and supported our teachers with that, on our teachers began teaching live. One of the decisions I had made was we gave our our teachers Microsoft Surface computers. And so they actually have the chalkboard with them, and they could write on the screen. And our students really liked learning math that way. They felt like their math teachers were teaching them just like they did in the classroom. The other subjects, it took them a lot longer to get used to being online and to move online. But as much as possible, our teachers were encouraged and they did teach on Zoom. What we learned was not all the students could be there on zoom at the same time to receive it. And back in the closure last year, we didn't have a lot of places to record it and put it up. We ended up doing that when we got ready to do this school year. And we're doing that a lot more now. But this was just such an unexpected closure, things happen so quickly. But what we did start doing was trying to make sure our teachers started looking for their students out in the online world, so to speak. And we started getting notified of students who weren't connecting. And, and that's when I started making some arrangements and things. That was March, April, and May everyone did the best they could online. We all finished up the school year. But nobody knew what would happen in the 2020. school year.

Brittany Mangelson 18:06

Yeah so did you just in your position in your job, did you just think, okay, we have option A, option B, option C, like, did you even know how to prepare?

Jason Eyre 18:18

Well, we, we were happy with what we had done. And our State Board of Education actually recognized us for, for being not just progressive, but actually being the leader in the state of Utah for having devices in the kids hands. So went home that day, we had put a plan in place and we were able to execute it. What we did do, we realized that students were not going to be playing outside all summer and socializing like they normally would. So we actually made a decision to leave their Chromebooks with them over the summer. And we took some of the software that we would use during the school year like software that teaches them to read or Zurn is a program that they used to do math and things like that, we actually took those applications and bought an extended subscription of them, and encouraged our students to take them and use them over the summer. And we hope that some of those kids were lonely, at least have their Chromebook there's a companion to to give them some learning opportunities. And so that's how we approach the summer break.

Brittany Mangelson 19:20

I think that's really important because in quote/unquote, normal times, there already is an education gap. You know, kids don't retain everything over over the summer. And I'm not like a person that's overly concerned about the academic success of children just because I do kind of think all works out and let kids be kids over the summer. But you're right during the summer of the pandemic, kids aren't necessarily with their peers like they are and if they can connect online with someone, I know that my kids they were still emailing, you know, through the little Google Classroom. They were emailing their friends. And that was really important for them. So I, I appreciate that you kept the technology in the hands of students and trusted them and trusted that they would use them for social connection and for academic connection. So yeah, What did it look like going into the fall?

Jason Eyre 20:17

So in the fall, the governor made the decision that as many students could should go back to school in person, and we totally agreed with him. And we did give our parents the option of doing online learning or hybrid, or fully in school. We had about 20% of our students elect to be online only. And then we had the principles match hybrid. So whenever got an exact number on those, but we still had a lot of students learning online. We also had some rules around when a certain number of years 15 students in a school tested positive, that school would have to go into a two week closure. And we had that happen a couple of times. So kind of getting back to the network side of the story that the the Chromebooks the kids kept the Chromebooks into the school year. And we actually were able somehow to buy some new Chromebooks as part of our refresher program. And we ended up sending them home with our first and second graders, so that they could have a Chromebook at school on a Chromebook at home. So right now, actually kindergarten through second grade, they have two Chromebooks assigned to them if they're in school, and if they're online, they just have the one. And if they have the hybrid, they had the two so that they could learn either place. And fortunately, we haven't, we didn't have to go on closure, we did find that the kids weren't spreading this, like we were worried, which has been kind of a relief for us. But in the United States, the the the solution to this from our Congress and our government was to provide Care's Funding. And then the state legislature directed some of those things that happened in Utah, we were told that we should use it to build up our Wi Fi networks. And I negotiated a pretty sweet deal with our WiFi vendor Extreme Networks, and use the extra money that was left in the budget to actually purchase the LTE equipment. We first build an

LTE network at that Murray High School in April of 2019. So I thought about it clear back in 2016. But it took about three years for some newer programs to come into place. The technologies called Citizens Broadband Radio Service, or CBRS. And what happened was in the past to get frequencies to use with cell phones, and LTE and other technology, you would or Verizon or AT&T, or T Mobile in America would spend billions of dollars for this and we didn't have billions of dollars. And so the government took some of the military use frequencies and made them available in what they call the shared spectrum model, which means people could use them in in different places at a lower power and pay a few months, a few dollars a month, excuse me, per radio. And so what happened is we took something that 10 years ago would have cost millions, even billions of dollars. And we were able to spend about a few 10s of 1000s of dollars to buy the radios themselves, and then start actually serving out in our community. The first generation of radios came out last fall and they only reached maybe a block from each of our schools block in Utah's fairly good distance, but it's not covering our community. And we use the Cares Funds to buy those radios and then when negotiated an upgrade to the second generation, which we're going to be out in a few months. So this would have been the August timeframe, we started installing those. The pandemic caused some issues that we weren't ready for, like we had a hard time buying Chromebooks, Dell ran laptops, almost everything that used computer chips, I mean, even now they're not building cars like they used to because they can't get the supplies. And that causes those second generation radios to take longer than anticipated. In fact, I actually had two vendors that I had purchase orders for who went out of business, their their manufacturers went out of business and they weren't able to deliver them to us. We finally put a plan B in place and in December, right the week before Christmas got six of the radios of the 25 that we had wanted to use. And we started putting them up. And so I use some some database technology to do what's called heat mapping. I geographically coded our students addresses into GPS coordinates and used mapping software to look at them. And we looked at economic need, and we looked at families of households of three or more, and we superimpose them and that showed us where the first radios were going. We were pointing at apartment complexes, we were pointing at places where the immediate need was the greatest. And then we would start filling in the rest of it. We decided that we should do a little bit of public relations with this and and get the word out to our parents. But we're involved with some statewide organizations and there's plans to do a lot more of this around Utah. And some of the was done with cares funds that way as well. And so we decided to hold instead of a ribbon cutting, we thought we would do a cable connecting, and we had a brand new governor who was very interested in this technology, and engaged with with the types of efforts we were undertaking. So we decided to have this ribbon connecting, and we invited our governor to connect the ribbons. That was in mid January, we did a press release, I'd never we have a public relations person who does a great job at the district. And he had sent all this out. The real surprise, this press conference was set for Thursday at nine o'clock. Tuesday afternoon, we get noticed not from our local news stations, but from NBC News that they want to send a crew out. And the reason they wanted to send the crew out was we were one of the first places that was vaccinating teachers. And that was taking place on Wednesday afternoon, until the NBC news crew came out Wednesday, we took them in, let them visit some of our classrooms, and let them see what the pandemic learning looked like they spent some time with one of our online teachers. And she showed him how she had the kids and zoom and kids in the classroom there at the same time and those things. And and then they about midday asked me to go out on top of our building, and stand by one of the radio towers that we just use these little six foot and this little six foot towers, and had me show off one of our radios, and then they actually also covered and

interviewed the governor. And we were really quite surprised to get national press attention out of this. And our normal press conference went on and all the local news stations covered it as well as the local newspapers. And then it really started to take off. One of the things that we've been trying to do was, the term is really to close the homework gap, that that digital divide is what the industry has named that we actually found a way very creatively in our community to do this. And since then, we've installed we've got six more radios we're putting up this week. And we've started sending gateways out to parents. We've had 180 students connect to this last month, through our network, with the hybrid students, the online and everything. And we have a few 100 more gateways to get out to our parents. But it's been a really neat experience. The, thinking back to Community of Christ and thinking to the phrase that keeps coming, it's the mission prayer. It's "help me to be ready to respond." And in fact, we bought shirts for our staff that said Pandemic Digital Learning response team that, that when the pandemic happened, we realized that there was no proactive planning that ever was able to understand the scope and breadth of what we really saw happen. There's never been another time outside of maybe 100 years ago that this really close schools for that period of time. None of us, we were all vaccinated against polio when those things and never had any understanding even most of our administrators aren't even old enough to really go through what our grandparents went through with that. And so what we had to do was just be ready to respond. And and it's interesting how that, that mission prayer has really taken a new focus in my life. And I look at things with it very differently. And and I'm very proud that the some of the good work we were doing for good reasons, led to a better response for parents in our district.

Brittany Mangelson 29:13

Yeah, gosh, so many thoughts. So you helped kids, yes, but you also helped families because like you said, parents are working from home and there's in Utah there's young kids all the way up to college kids because a lot of college kids moved out of dorms and back homes and home and this touched all of that. And when I think you know in Community of Christ, we talked about mission, and it's how we live our faith. It's how we take our understanding of abolishing poverty and ending suffering,

Jason Eyre 30:05

congregations in mission!

Brittany Mangelson 30:07

Yes, you know, just because just because you're in a secular job doesn't mean that that can't spill out that your dedication to mission initiatives can't spill out in the second world. And I think, too, that we so often focus on, on the parents or on the college students or on the people that are going into the office or whatever. And the whole time during the early days of the pandemic, I just the kids. And once we realized that kids can't spread it as much as adults do. I still felt like the the mental health of the kids or the social connection of the kids, it just is kind of an afterthought in so many conversations, because they aren't high high risk for COVID. And so they just kind of have gotten put on the back burner. And so I know that our district not to throw our district under the bus, but we did not do as well have a job as your district did. Again, we live in the same school district, our kids go to the same schools. But the Murray School District, I was very impressed. And I will say jealous. How connected those kids were able to be because I saw kids suffering all around me. Yeah. And, and nationally, you know, you would see pictures of kids sitting in parking lots of McDonald's getting off their WiFi. And, you know, this has

been, like he said something that nobody prepared for and realizing that there's no adults in the room. And I did air quotes there of like, there's no structure to to help guide us through what happens if we all get put online. And so I'm just assuming that that was a very overwhelming process to know that you and your team are responsible for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of kids really 1000s

Jason Eyre 31:34
6000 of them.

Brittany Mangelson 32:10

at the beginning of the pandemic when everybody was online, but you still continually have hundreds of kids that engage every single week.

Jason Eyre 32:22

You know, I like to think of some of our efforts have been like the parable of the 99. And going and finding the lost sheep. We've spent a lot of time this year in our school district, studying how the kids are and aren't using the Chromebooks. If we can't see them logging into their Chromebooks, we actually have people that go call the parents and social workers that go out and help make sure those students are engaging. And I think that that is so interesting how some of those, you know, where's your Spirit leading me today? The God Spirit, and in the Spirit of service in the Spirit of hope, just because it's my job, and I'm getting paid for it doesn't mean that I can't in a secular way, bless people in their lives. And and I'm really happy to say that our efforts to help people be found to help kids to learn, to to help education to take place, is so important because being able to read and do math and write, those plays so much into abolishing poverty and ending needless suffering. That that needless suffering, I almost want to drill into that, that, that not being able to write "others" you. Not fully being able to read is is considered a almost a disability. And there's and it's one of those targeted things. Working as a professional in education, I did learn that having students read on grade level by third grade is one of the most important things we have to do for our students. Because their statistics have correlated that if they can't read on grade level by the end of third grade, that there's a very high probability they will not finish high school. And so that's why these targeted efforts, this response, this finding the lost ones, making sure students can engage. The other, another term that I learned as I went through some professional trainings was the term intersectionality. And I didn't realize how things stack up. When we're, the term we usually use is equity. We're trying to fix equity problems so that those kids that that not just equal but some kids need more help to get to where the other kids are at. And in that we had to focus above equality and to equity as a way to help close these gaps, not just the homework gap, but other learning gaps and other disabilities and other challenges.

Brittany Mangelson 35:11

Yeah, I thought of that when you talked about the map, and you put everybody's address and GPS and figured out who has the most kids at home? Where are the apartments where the people that need it most? And you actually, I think you call it like a heat map? Like you actually could physically see where the need was.

Jason Eyre 35:30

You could color it like a rainbow when the red the heat? Yeah, the highest concentrations were red.

Brittany Mangelson 35:36

Yeah, I absolutely love that. And how would it be if we, if we use the system, for more social programs of like, these are people that don't have health insurance or you know, whatever it may be. And we're able to,

Jason Eyre 35:49

I almost wonder if God has a heat map? This is where we need to be led to this is what our response needs to be.

Brittany Mangelson 35:57

Yeah.

Jason Eyre 35:58

Sometimes you can feel that you're being led in certain places. And I think that sometimes we can fill that out ourselves.

Brittany Mangelson 36:10

And I absolutely love that you were so poised to be in this position. But this story, like you said, started way back in 2016. Yes, in 2016

Jason Eyre 36:19

It's something I'd worked on for years. And then we thought in about three years, because the LTE technology and the CBRs only became publicly available in January of 2020. We've been practicing within in April. And during the pandemic, they sent us an experimental radio, that took like a Wi Fi access point has this all the way around antenna that just goes everywhere. They let us take a focused antenna and try it and we hung it in the wrong places. And we did everything wrong, in hindsight, but we've learned from it. And so now we're aiming our antennas right. We're reaching, we're using antennas that we can beam the signals a little bit farther. And with the heat maps, we know how and where we need to be on them. And so it's turned out to be just an amazing experience. The interesting thing is, as we continue to have more Care's Funding come, I cannot believe what a role I'm playing not just as that guy who's always on the news, or as on the Today Show or has been on TV, but people all around the country are reaching out to me. I cannot believe the amazing people that are fighting for this type of thing and trying to close the digital divide in places like New York and Rhode Island and Michigan. And all over this, all over the place. It's I, it's strange to find myself as a pioneer, and in many ways as a leader. But I am happy to take what skills I've had, and what I've learned and try to have a positive impact not just on the students in my district, but other people that I can help around the state and around the country.

Brittany Mangelson 38:00

Yeah, I was gonna ask about that if you hadn't had any. Like, what? What did being on the news bring to you? Did it bring more curiosity? Were you contacted by other people? And it sounds like Yes, you were.

Jason Eyre 38:15

So in the internet world, we have what we call a denial of service attack. That's where more people or more traffic's coming at you that you can handle. I feel like I kind of had that happen in January. The today's show had a difference. There was one day when a tech director called my secretary in the morning and she's like, he would love to help you, he just doesn't have time. The afternoon, the superintendent called us as and said, "I'm the Superintendent and I need to talk to him!" We tried to get him a little bit of information. And I'm recording podcasts like this with UEN with other organizations to help get the word out. We have a user group that we do trainings, and we post them up to the uen.org website, and things like that, so that so that we can try as much as possible to get the word out. I've been surprised about the Salt Lake Tribune, the Desert News did well, really neat written articles, the Christian Science Monitor actually featured us. It was really interesting because district leaders get these emails that are sent out every day. Last Thursday, the networking side of the it's called COSN in the Consortium of School Networks actually featured a picture of one of our students with their Chromebook and talked about our story in their email blast to everybody that this district is solving the digital divide. And it's something that's been a known problem for many years. And I don't claim to have the only solution, but I do have a solution. And the way that we've done it can be replicated and we have partners in business. I'm actually doing a webinar this Wednesday that's going to go nationwide. The first day over 150 50 people signed up to see it, I'm a little a little nervous for it. I'm finding myself kind of being the person on this MultiTech who makes some of our favorite products. Their vice president said that I am the de facto face of education and private and LTE networking. And I my personality is to just kind of be a little bit bashful. I blush a little bit, but at the same time, I've realized I've had to own that, and that I need to own it, the world needs me to own it. And if I can help take my influence in what little knowledge I have, and what things we've learned, and we haven't learned and what vendors we've been able to get to work together to make all this happen. I'll do my part to change the world. That's where God's leading me today and I might being ready to respond has been a blessing, and joy and hope in other people's lives.

Brittany Mangelson 40:57

Yeah, all over the nation, like that's, I am just when I first saw that this was getting picked up by local news and then very soon after that national news, I have to admit that I was just beaming with pride and joy because we have worked together for so long in various church, groups,

Jason Eyre 41:18

Online ministry, everyone in our congregation all the sudden looked to us like, if we're going to have church, it's going to be you guys helping us and and this Zoom experience that we've had for a few years is become the Zoom experience a lot of people are using

Brittany Mangelson 41:34

Yeah, yeah, it's true.

Jason Eyre 41:35

I do hope we get to go back in person soon. I miss seeing everybody I know.

Brittany Mangelson 41:40

Me too. But it is what you're saying is true. And I think that in Community of Christ, you know, we had been doing this online thing, trying to build legitimacy with people. And suddenly, folks didn't have many other options. And you're right, people did look to the Salt Lake congregation. And I remember calling you and saying, look, I was preaching on Sunday, but he's not comfortable coming because he's well over 70 and I, I just called our Mission Center President and I think we're going online. And we did! We did, you know felt like dead before world church even called it so. I think that being proactive. has helped you in this situation.

Jason Eyre 42:25

Yeah, for sure and, and house church, we were able to move House Church online, that's actually technically where my membership is, I consider myself a true seeker and, and really find connection in in that side of this, of this experience, so to speak.

Brittany Mangelson 42:44

Jason, good stuff. And I've known that you've been busy. And I've (laughter), every time another podcast comes out with you or another article, I have thought like a whole course we got to get him on PCP podcast that he helps edit. But I also wanted to give you just a little bit of space, but also take advantage of this. And, yeah, now that we're both vaccinated, it's it's good to sit in the same room with you! It's exciting.

Jason Eyre 43:12

It's, it's, we've been through a lot. People have been through a lot. I still, as I look back, I cannot believe how prophetic some of the things that we were working on with online church, working with our filled apostle with Robin Linkhart, to have the First Presidency and others consider doing communion online and how important that was a year and a half ago. And then, and then they listened and responded to us and made that available. And now that's the way that communion is happening around the world. And then all the other ordinances and things I was one of the first people to be ordained. And I did receive the priesthood last fall. And I was ordained in an online service. I actually went to Carla and Kuzma's house and we had very, very strict rules. And I sat outside and they rushed out in ordain me and rushed back in. And, but it was, you know, my ordinations recorded with us wearing masks in the pandemic. It's very much, I'm glad that you're able to do more of that online. It was really touching when you're able to confirm Evan Sharley and and have that happened online. He was someone who had been an online church with us and was such an amazing experience by itself. And his episode was just put up a month or two ago to listen to on the free trade series. But it's really amazing to see how we've been able to respond as a faith community and keep the mission going.

Brittany Mangelson 44:52

Yeah, exactly. And I think, you know, we're all learning as we go and we all are adapting to the tools that are available to us as we go. And when I think of you and your journey with your school district, and how that's just spilled across the nation, it almost seems like it was this giant puzzle where like the pieces were there, the technology was there, but you needed to wait for certain things to align. And but you were like keeping your eye on the puzzle pieces. And then suddenly pandemic hits. And you're like,

I think that we could make this puzzle work. And then you started, you know, I'm a very visual person. So I'm just like, envisioning you,

Jason Eyre 45:32

The second generation radios got manufactured. And they reached, we have some students that connect as far out as 1.3 miles from our school consistently and, and usefully. And so for a small district, because we have about a three mile by three mile footprint, we have lots of trees that block the signal. So we have to do lots of radios, but we've got it covered. And it's a great feeling to know that if we do have to go into another unexpected closure, that our response is going to be that much better next time.

Brittany Mangelson 46:04

Exactly. Jason, this is so good. I'm just I'm so proud of what you have done and how you have seen it as a mission of, a ministry of mission of peace and justice, and that you've been able to live your faith in this way. And again, just to make it clear, in Community of Christ, we talk about mission, this is what we're talking about. We're talking about lessening the gap that separates us as people. Yeah, bridging that gap. And technology in the pandemic is a massive, massive gap and one of the most important things that people have access to. So yeah, any other final words, or?

Jason Eyre 46:48

One other interesting experience for me is, we found there's this big church building in the middle of our school district that was blocking a lot of our signals. And so we were able to negotiate a memo of understanding and get permission for that church building to connect to their building, and then put radials on their building to get closer to our students. And it's been interesting to talk about how a faith community and the school district and the secular community can bless each other in in so many ways. And I think that's just such a great model for us. We don't have to be these little islands, if you will, of automation, or these little islands that don't speak to each other. As we come together in tree community. We do bless people's lives in secular in spiritual in so many ways that I love the thought of closing those divides that you're talking about. And it's it's been a great experience to be able to firsthand, being on the front line, kind of be aware, so to speak, and be able to, in nonviolent ways make it all happened.

Brittany Mangelson 48:00

Yeah. I don't think I realized that the church, because I knew you were doing work in a church, but I don't think I realized that it was in the way of blocking the signal.

Jason Eyre 48:10

Then we're gonna help them with their streaming on Sundays. So yeah.

Brittany Mangelson 48:13

So it's mutually beneficial. And clearly, I mean, not to speak for the church, but clearly, they would want their neighborhood to have access their kids to have access to the internet as well, so.

Jason Eyre 48:25

And they do, and they feel a much bigger part of what we're doing in our community as well. And, and I love that. Yeah,

Brittany Mangelson 48:32

I do too. Well, Jason, thank you so much for telling this story. Like I said, I mean, I almost feel like I'm sitting down with a celebrity now because you've gotten so much attention for what you've done, but it is so, so deserved. And again, I think that what you have done is showed an option, like you said, for others to do the same. And the fact that you are supporting others and mentoring people through this model of what you've done is just really meaningful, because what you're doing has not stayed within the Murray School District. It's gone all over the place, or is in the process of going all over the place that I'm just really, really excited. And again, love that that's a way that you are living out your faith. So thanks.

Jason Eyre 49:23

Well thank you, Brittany.

Josh Mangelson 49:32

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