

**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, everyone, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long, and you're listening to the "What's Brewing" series. It's a series that talks about all the good mission stuff that's happening all over the church. And I am really excited to be with a panel of people today from the Headwaters Mission Center. They're a volunteer group of people who, I'm not even kidding, folks, make it happen. And they're going to tell us how they do that. And I'm really excited to hear. So, we have five people on the podcast today. We have Matt and Chris, and Serena and Colleen and Karen. And I'm gonna let them introduce themselves to you. And I'm gonna say, I'm just gonna go with Colleen, you're first. So, Colleen, tell us a little about yourself.

**Colleen Hancock 01:14**

My name is Colleen Hancock. I live in Rochester, Minnesota, and I am the pastor here. And that's...

**Carla Long 01:26**

Alright! I know, Colleen, I know what being a pastor is like. It is tough work. And it's not just this. It is a lot of work. I get it. Thank you. It's good to have you here. Karen, what about you?

**Karen Hill 01:39**

I'm Karen Hill. I'm part of the Mission Center Presidency Team. I live in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota. So, I'm kind of on the western part of the mission center. And I am the, like I said, Co-Presidency Team with Chris.

**Carla Long 02:00**

Thank you so much. It's wonderful to have you here, Karen. What about you Serena?

**Serena Sato 02:04**

My name is Serena Sato and I'm from Madison, Wisconsin, and I am the Gathering Ministries Team Coordinator. We'll talk more about what that means later.

**Carla Long 02:14**

Yes, I'm looking forward to hearing about that. And next we have Chris.

**Chris Davidon 02:19**

I'm Chris Davidon. I live in Dubuque, Iowa and attend church in Lancaster, Wisconsin. So, way down on the southern part of our mission center. And I serve on the Mission Center Presidency Team with Karen.

**Carla Long** 02:33

Good deal. And, last but not least, Matt.

**Matt Davidon** 02:36

My name is Matt Davidon. I live with Chris down in Dubuque church in Lancaster. My role for the mission center is a little bit. I am the Mission Center Council Secretary. So, I take information in meetings. I'm also the Mission Center Tech, dude. So, my job is to make sure that all the technical things are moving on. And I also serve as the pastor of the Lancaster congregation, so I've got a few different hats to wear.

**Carla Long** 03:03

You have a ton of hats to wear. My goodness. Yeah, tech dudes are like the most important dudes right now in this pandemic. So, thank goodness for tech dudes. Thank you, Matt. So, everyone, I'm really curious how it's been working in the Headwaters Mission Center, because you're an all-volunteer team. And so, I want to hear what that looks like. Some people think that you have to have paid ministry in mission center leadership, but you're telling me that's not true. So, tell me a little bit more about how that works.

**Chris Davidon** 03:34

Well, we have a presidency team, as you heard with our introductions, so Karen and I work together. We talk through things and we, communication has been really key in how we interact with each other and what we do. But we have a lot of help, too, and a lot of support. And we have our financial team, is also mostly volunteer. There is one caveat in there. So, we have two people on the financial team, but one of those people, she's been our, she does our bookkeeping and things as well. So, she is part-time paid in that role. But they're a team. And then we also work closely with our Mission Center Council, which includes our Mission Center Invitation and Support Minister. We have a newly added Youth Ministry Team. And we have our Gathering Ministries Coordinator, which is Serena, and she'll share a little bit more in a minute about what that is. We have a Spiritual Team, as well. And we have course our Financial Team. We have our tech dude. And we have our Cluster Ministers. And so, we have four Cluster Ministers. Our mission center is divided up into four different clusters of congregations, mostly geographically oriented. And so, Colleen represents one half those. And I can have her share a little bit more about what that looks like. And in her ministry.

**Carla Long** 05:08

Yeah, I'd love to hear about what that looks.

**Chris Davidon** 05:09

Oh yeah. And then Karen wants to talk.

**Karen Hill** 05:14

I just want to say something. Chris and I do a lot of communicating back and forth with each other. Sometimes starting to text as early as, while it used to be 6:30 in the morning, we delayed it now until almost eight. But we do text a lot during the day. We email. We have phone conversations. And it's just, to make it work you have to communicate.

**Carla Long 05:37**

I'm so glad you said that, Karen, because you're absolutely right. And I really appreciate knowing that there's a really tight connection there. I knew there had to have been, but I'm really glad to know that. Thank you so much. Colleen, did you want to talk about the Cluster Ministry? Is that right?

**Colleen Hancock 05:53**

Sure, we have five congregations in the Central Cluster that I'm kind of leading. Three of those are in Wisconsin and two are in Minnesota. I would have to say I would just double back on what Karen and Chris both have said about the communication, because we have the communication from their leadership, we have meetings monthly and I call, text, email, visit. We have even met halfway in the pandemic with masks on to talk across a parking lot with one of the congregations. And I keep, when I know what's going on with them, I make sure that I take notes, sometimes call them back next week. They're scheduled for a pre-op appointment, and I call and find out who they have on their prayer list within their congregations. And we actually, the Zoom meetings that we've had, since the pandemic, has strengthened that. We have so many people with so many talents, and so many gifts, who are willing to step up. So many people that weren't able to gather physically before that are willing on Zoom. We have probably a tighter connection within that cluster and some additional congregations that have joined in with us for worship twice a week. Like, back in the old days, we used to have prayer meeting on Wednesday nights. We have that again. And we have Sunday morning worship. We have people stepping up to preach and sing songs on recorded, record themselves or send a video, and just experiment with new ways to do that. And under normal circumstances, part of the traveling ministry that we do here, and my husband and I and a couple other people in the mission center have, I would say that, after we started doing it, the mission center recognized that as an important thing to do. So, they have supported paying for gas or mileage or if we have to stay in a hotel, that type of thing. The mission center does pay for that. Honestly, we were doing it before because we wanted to. And our congregation here in Rochester is so focused solely on hospital ministry at Mayo. So, we are in a unique position where we don't have a building here, where we can travel throughout the mission center. And that has been such a blessing, such a blessing to meet new people and get to know them. And it's become more like a family. And the volunteer part of it? So many people are so willing to step up and do those kinds of things and just get some different perspective and somebody new in to say something and or sing a song for them during their service or whatever they want us to do. That's what we do. And that really has also strengthened our cluster too. I would add that between the pastor support meetings, the educational things that Chris and Karen put in front of us, we have so many choices. And so many people have stepped up to do things within that realm of, I want to learn about this, or I want to learn about that. And I've texted Karen even late at night. And I haven't done that with Chris so much 'cause she's got kids at home, but with Karen, I even will text her late at night and say, "What do you think about this?" Or she'll text me as they're driving through and say, "What's the roads like in Rochester?" And there really is a tight communication within the groups.

**Carla Long 09:29**

That sounds like that might be, so far, the key to why this is working out so well, which is really cool. And I agree with you. I think that this pandemic has been really, really hard in so many ways. But you get to see so many different people and I know in Salt Lake City, at least, we

always have visitors stopping into our church and stuff. And now they can stop in and it's not so scary. They can just, like, have their little name on the screen. We don't even have to see their face and so, like, there's so many different ways that they can explore what it means to be in Community of Christ right now. So, I think this pandemic has been helpful, I guess, is the word I'd use in a lot of ways, but also still so hard, still so hard. That was a wonderful explanation of cluster. Okay, go ahead.

**Colleen Hancock 10:13**

I would just add one thing, or a couple things. Even with the Zoom, we have discovered not only can we do virtual Reunions, but we've had Halloween costume parties, we had a virtual online potluck, and a contest of hot dish versus casserole. We have had a virtual Christmas Pageant where we mailed costumes to people, and they dressed up and took pictures of themselves, and then we merged them into a pageant format. And it, a lot of people wouldn't do that under normal circumstances. But we sure had a lot of volunteers this time.

**Carla Long 10:50**

How wonderful and I've said it before, and I'll say it again, I think potlucks are the reason I became a minister. I love them so much. They're some of my favorite things. Well, I've actually never been part of a cluster congregational group. So, but now I kind of want to it sounds really fun. It sounds like a lot of fun.

**Colleen Hancock 11:09**

Yes, it is!

**Carla Long 11:12**

So, what else is going on? Chris you mentioned a whole bunch of stuff at the very beginning?

**Chris Davidon 11:17**

I did. So, we'll ask Serena to share a little bit about what Gathering Ministries is.

**Serena Sato 11:25**

Sure, I can jump on that. Gathering Ministries is basically what we call our camping and retreat program. So, several years ago, as we were going through some changes in our mission center, a group of people got together to really think about, like, what does this mean? And what do we want it to mean? And what would be most meaningful? And really put in a lot of great groundwork to think about just the purpose and the direction that they wanted it to go. And this focused heavily on youth and what we wanted to provide for our youth, but it is not only youth. So, Gathering Ministries Team kind of thinks high level, you know, but then also gets really down into the details, because we're helping to facilitate all of the youth camps, as well as retreats. We'll help maybe add on some activities in addition to the mission center conferences and things like that. So, we make sure we find directors, help the directors find staff, make sure they have the tools and resources that they need. We have a whole binder of information for them that we keep updated every year. And just work really closely with them. So, we'll have organized the directors retreat for training once a year to make sure that everybody has the most up to date information. And then just again, just support them in their efforts to provide ministry through our camping program in particular.

**Carla Long 12:44**

As well as the communication, what I feel like I keep hearing is a lot of trust in people. You know, you have to trust a lot of people if you're gonna be a volunteer, because you have your whole lives, your work lives, your family lives and your church life. And so, I love the idea of a director's retreat. We did that when I lived back in California. And I think that is so important. You know, you say this is the information directors, that you need to have. Now go be creative. Go make it the best camping experience that people have ever, ever had, and go for it. So, I think that is a really wonderful way to do it. What did your camping program look like last year during COVID?

**Serena Sato 13:24**

Sadly, we weren't able to do any of the events in person. We had so many plans. We had, of course, Junior Camp, Junior High Camp, Senior High. We had a senior high trip planned, and then a men's retreat, a women's retreat, a young adult camping retreat, a ski retreat. So that's our typical kind of grouping of what we offer within a year. We're hopeful that this year we'll be able to offer some of those in person events later in the year. And, for now, we're planning accordingly.

**Carla Long 13:54**

Chris, did you want to say something?

**Chris Davidon 13:55**

Yes. So, while we weren't able to offer Senior High Camp or Junior High Camp, the Junior Highs, our camp directors, which is Serena and her staff, actually met with our Junior High kids throughout the summer. So, like, they would just do virtuals and meetings twice a month, I think. Is that it? And Senior High also had a few meetings in the summer as well, virtually. But then, for Reunion, we, as Colleen had alluded to earlier, our Reunion director was willing to step up and offer a virtual Reunion experience. We had Stassi Cramm was our slate as our guest minister for the week, so we didn't want to lose out and miss out on her ministry. So, we had a fantastic virtual Reunion. Our director mailed each registered participant a box of goodies. So, they got a box of goodies in the mail related to things that we were doing during the week, and children's activities, and crafts and things, and it was a really fun experience. And we realized that we had people tuning in that had never been to an in-person Reunion with us. And realized that we do need to continue to offer some kind of virtual component to our Reunion experiences. So, that is a further challenge that we are going to do this year. But I am anticipating this being a continued experience, at least to offer some type of virtual components that people can log into if they're not able to attend Reunion in person.

**Carla Long 15:31**

I think that's super important. And I think that's another thing that this pandemic has taught us, that there's so many people out there who may not be able to leave their house for whatever reason, and we really need to do our best to minister to all persons, and not just the ones who are mobile and can get out and do the things that we all love to do. I think that's a really important lesson for all of us. It sounds like you have a really healthy camping program. And nothing brings more joy to my heart than hearing a healthy camping program. Camps are, like, my best

memories as a kid. And I know it's true for so many people. Okay, so wow! So, we've heard about Cluster Groups, which is super important, and I already want to be part of a cluster. We've heard about camping programs, and I really want to go to camp now. What else are you gonna make me want to do?

**Chris Davidon 16:16**

Log into Zoom? I don't know, I was gonna have Matt share about his tech stuff, so...

**Matt Davidon 16:22**

One of the things that we found out during the beginning of the pandemic was, okay, we need to pivot pretty quickly from in-person to Zoom. So, one of the things that, interestingly enough, our mission center, we are a geographically large mission center. So, it's Minnesota and Wisconsin, parts of northern Illinois. And because Chris and I live in Iowa, technically parts of Iowa as well, and North Dakota, we found that, even before the pandemic, we needed to figure out a way so that people didn't have to drive for four or five hours in order to see each other, in order to come together. So, we were planning on creating what at the time were called tech centers, which was centralized locations within closer proximity so that people can go and be there, and then utilize Zoom, or its equivalent, to video conference in to other places. That mindset was in process before the pandemic started. So, when the pandemic started, everybody's, well you just need to do that for everybody. And so, our mission center switching from in-person to Zoom was pretty fluid, actually. And we actually set up so we have a once a month mission center worship service, I get to be the host of that, and people call in from all over including outside of our mission center. And then the other thing that the technology has allowed us to do is really connect up. So, one of the things that we realized is because we're now so geographically diverse, the distance between us in Zoom is a lot narrower. And one of the strange side effects of the pandemic is, whereas before, and I can speak to this now, this is, we're recording this now in February. It's been really cold. We live in the north and weather is a thing, like, it's an actual thing. So, in previous years that was always a challenge to have any kind of get-together or gathering in the January February timeframe, because you might have to cancel because the roads are impassable. Well, we've never had to cancel anything on Zoom because of roads. And the Lancaster congregation, I can speak to, we have had to cancel church previously because the roads are terrible. And this year, in the rare instance, we've never had to cancel Lancaster church, which is like kind of a thing. We haven't had to do that this year at all. So, technologically speaking, it is a bit of a challenge. So, you need a tech person to be able to manage all of these things, or someone at least comfortable with handling tech. Ideally, that person has a decent internet connection. And we found that with our mission center, it works pretty well. The mission center worships have a pretty good attendance. Everybody really appreciated. We see a lot of folks that can't come to church on a normal basis. We see a lot of folks that aren't necessarily within our mission center. So, one of the strange developments out of the pandemic is we've come a lot closer as a mission center than we have previously. And I want to add some things that all of these fine folks previously have forgotten as far as Gathering Ministries. We also have a fair number of retreats, leadership style retreats, training retreats, and those things. And those were always kind of a challenge before to try to find a venue and to do all these things. And we'll explain why they're a challenge for us to find the venue in a little bit. But with the Zoom, our mission Center has been involved with the term, "Discover and Live". So, it's a new process to try to understand where God is calling us as a mission center, and as leaders, and

we have transitioned those to being online. And because of that, we've gotten some really good ministry from people that we don't normally get to see. And those events were often some of the most difficult because they're a smaller set of folks and the weather kind of is a struggle. So, we've been able to do all of those things in addition to what we normally do. And I think with the pandemic we've actually done more in the virtual realm than we would have otherwise done. So, that's kind of where we're at technologically is we get together. So, we do a lot of that get together stuff. And I'd ask either, Karen, tell us what else you do on a regular basis to communicate, I'm taking your job, Carla, to do what you do on a regular basis to communicate with the pastor's that we haven't done prior to pandemic?

**Karen Hill 21:12**

We started doing a monthly Zoom meeting with them so that we could update them on COVID graphs. And my husband actually, he's helps Matt with tech stuff. And it helps that Chris Knight each have our own tech person also. He developed a spreadsheet that every day, I go to the COVID sites and I track where the building is located, what the county cases are. And then there's this trend line graph. And every month, we send it to the pastors so that they have a clue as to where they are. But we also get to update them just if they have questions. We also, when they get to the spot where they want to do a reopening plan, we are willing to help them with that and keep them up to date on those aspects of it. But it's also just nice to be able to see what all the congregations are doing on a monthly basis, because some have really stepped up and are going above and beyond. And it's nice to be able to hear them kind of brag about themselves a little bit too. But it's also nice to be able to support them in whatever way they need.

**Colleen Hancock 22:33**

I would add to that, Karen, that by having those monthly meetings. It's not just an informative connection for all of us. But it's also can be personal. What do you have going on in your life? How can we support you? We know you're going the extra mile with job, family, and church stuff. So, I think that's been an important connection too.

**Carla Long 22:57**

And I think it goes back to what we were talking about before is that, you know, in order for this, all of this to work, and really, truly all over Community of Christ, in order for this to work, since we have 90% lay ministry anyway, we have to have that connection, and we have to have that support. So, I'm really happy to hear about the monthly pastor calls. I think those are super important. I do want to go back to something that Matt said. You know what you're talking about how you haven't missed a Sunday yet because of bad weather. I think that kids everywhere are mourning that 'cause they'll never have another snow day ever, ever again. Because everyone's so good at Zoom now they don't have to worry about snow days anymore. And that is really sad for me too. Snow days were the best. So anyway, it's a good thing Matt, and not so good thing all at the same time. And it's cool that you're having leadership retreats, you're still having leadership retreats. I think that's pretty wonderful also. Any way that we can support our leaders and let them know that what they do is super important and that we desperately need them, I think is a good thing. Well, this is sounding really good so far. What else am I missing?

**Chris Davidon 24:12**

I, let me, I will speak to our Spiritual Team because we, they're not represented here in this panel, but they are important to us in the ministry that we're able to offer. It's currently, it's a team of three, I'm thinking four, yeah, four people. We have evangelists primarily, one is an ordinand on that team. And they also provide the spiritual support. So, they're praying, right, for and praying for the needs expressed in the mission center. They're connecting and making connections with people as needed and provide a very important presence with us on our council and with the, kind of, being able to support and hear some of the needs that are going on in the different clusters and being able to reach out. And in non-pandemic times they would travel and provide ministry that way. But doing phone calling and writing letters and emails and support of folks has been an important part of our ministry, right? It's not just administrative. It's not just planning and leading things, but it's that spiritual component as well.

**Carla Long 25:25**

Oh, thanks for saying that. I appreciate knowing that as well. I mean, it's all the doing stuff is super important. But the being stuff is really, really important, too. So, you've talked about how big your mission center is, and it encompasses what, like six states or something like that. That's a nice big mission center. How many?

**Chris Davidon 25:45**

Four?

**Carla Long 25:46**

Oh, just four? Oh, well, I tried to make it sound much bigger. Darn it. Well.

**Colleen Hancock 25:51**

Five if you count Iowa.

**Chris Davidon 25:52**

Yeah, if you count Iowa it is five. And a very big, they're very big state,

**Carla Long 25:58**

Very big states. We're not talking like, no offense to Rhode Island, but we're not talking about Rhode Island here. We're talking about big places. So, it's a huge mission center, really, really big. So how do you address building those relationships across the mission center? I know you've already kind of talked about that. But if you can, I want to hear a little bit more about that. And, you know, talk to me a little bit more about those education moments that you have for pastors and priesthood and how do you communicate all that stuff? I know, it's a big question. Sorry about that.

**Chris Davidon 26:27**

Okay, I think I'll speak to a little bit more about the Discovery and Live Your Future, because that has been, we've been on that journey for a year and a half. Originally, we were going to have two retreats a year. We've had one in person because when it started. And so, we've been working with President of Seventy, Larry McGuire, on that. And Richard Betts has also been working with us on that. And so, last year our second retreat was right on the cusp of, it was



supposed to happen, then didn't, like, it was like a February/March thing that we were supposed to have. And so, we ended up having just like a short opportunity, like a couple hour, I think experience in April of last year. But then we had another full retreat in September, like a day long. And then we just had another one, the back in January, right? The end of January, no, beginning February. And so, it is it's not open. It's open to people beyond just our pastors. So, it's anybody that was interested in being a part of the journey. And we've got about 40 people that have attended retreats with us on that. And we're using the Mission Prayer and focusing on the themes of Awaken, Risk and Bless. And I know that I think there's been some Project Zion Podcasts on this as well. So, you can probably delve a little bit deeper with some other folks on that. But we are in the middle of our Risk, the Risk area right now and learning more about what that means for us, and focusing on what it means to build authentic relationships? And what does it mean to take risks in our discipleship? And probably one of the more practical things that we have implemented across the mission center is just a lot more spiritual practice, and missional practices. As every time we gather we are doing those and focusing on that. And then, so, it's a kind of, we've got the corporate level of that, and then the individual journey as well. And what does it mean to risk something new in our ministry and our relationships as moving forward. And so, it's been a really important part of our discipleship as a mission center and being able to come together and focus on those. I don't know if anybody wants to share more about it.

**Colleen Hancock 29:13**

I would just add one thing, Chris, we have just, after a year into it, we have also, and I think this was the plan all along, broken down within the Cluster Groups in the mission Center, the people that have been a part of the Discover and Live Your Future program, are meeting in smaller groups now to take what we learned in those retreat times and how do we apply what we've learned to not just our personal lives but within our congregations and brainstorm ideas on how can we make this actually work? So that's been interesting. We've had two meetings within the small clusters after the retreat and it's, they're really kind of more getting into the meat of what it means on a day to day basis.

**Carla Long 30:00**

That sounds wonderful. That's wonderful. Awaken, Risk and Bless. That's what that's the three. Right? Sounds really good.

**Matt Davidson 30:07**

So, I want to speak a little bit more about the geography of our mission center, because you ask an interesting question, Carla. And the reason why it's an interesting question is because there was a time pre-pandemic, where our answer would have been very, very different. And I want to speak a little bit about that time, because having Minnesota having Wisconsin, northern Illinois, eastern North Dakota, and a smidgen of Iowa, what we found, we had to come together. And the question of building relationships across the mission center, it really came down to creating opportunities. And that's where our Gathering Ministries team was so important and vital, is create opportunities for people to come together across the mission center and gather in one space. Gather in one space, see each other face to face, eat with one another, break bread together, and share. And what we have found is the more often that we did that, the better the relationship building became, and the more opportunities that we created to do that. And that was why that team is so important is to create those opportunities. That's where getting together,

that's how we supported each other. We've had a lot of good success creating educational opportunities for the whole mission center to come together. Development of pastors and all of those things where we have Discovered and Live is a great example of getting people in one space together. And it was intentional. I can tell you that pre-pandemic, it was pretty difficult to get everyone together. It's for my family, it's a six and a half hour drive to Duluth, Minnesota. For folks in Rockford, Illinois. It's a six, six-ish hour drive to get up to the Twin Cities. It's just difficult. But we made it a point in our mission center to say, no, we're going to do the things, which kind of meant we needed to find locations in the geographic center. One of the nice little points is if you look at our geographic center of our mission center, it's actually close to the Wisconsin Dells. So, if you have heard of the Wisconsin Dells, they're a huge waterpark area. So, we've found and have partnered with a campground, actually right in the Dells as one of the places that we use to get together and visit, not a Community of Christ camp ground. But that has helped facilitate us and I want to kind of put a seed of there has been some difficult decisions that we've made as a mission center that have allowed us the flexibility to be able to go outside of our Community of Christ environment to meet together. But what has been important for our mission center is that we do come together as a full mission center and visit with one another and creating those intentional opportunities to do that.

**Carla Long 33:18**

I appreciate you saying that a lot. Because there are times when we just hear about the good and easy and wonderful parts of what it means to be a church. And I am a little bit glad to know that there are some hard decisions to be made because it's not all good and easy all the time. And some people listening to this might be thinking, well, what am I doing wrong? You know, but no, it's not that the Headwaters hasn't been through rough times. And I and you have to, and you have to continue to work your way through it as well. So gentle and wonderful listeners, it's not always easy. There is work to be done. And I guarantee that we've all done it. And this mission Center has definitely done it together. Also, Wisconsin Dells, water parks and cheese. Like, is there anything better than water parks and cheese? I want to go for sure. Thank you, Matt for explaining that a little bit better. That's a really big commitment to drive six and a half hours to one way to get somewhere. Yes. Coleen,

**Colleen Hancock 34:18**

I was just going to add on to what you were saying, Matt, one of the things that I've appreciated is the compromise within our mission center too. Like for mission center conference, we would do one year in Apple Valley, which was closer to the western side and the next year we hold it in Madison, which is closer to the eastern side. So, people don't have to drive. One group of people don't have to drive eight hours to get somewhere each year. It's kind of a back and forth. So, we trade off the long drive times.

**Carla Long 34:47**

That's smart and very kind, very kind. My goodness. Okay, so what else? What about else about these education opportunities and this communication and growing and building together? What am I missing?

**Chris Davidon 35:01**

Well, I do want to have, say one more comment about with COVID, right? Because it has really caused us to be able to think about our educational opportunities differently. So that even when we are able to meet back in person again, and have those Gathering Ministries opportunities, right, and Discover and Live, and those things that we want to meet in person for, and those are important to us. But yet, we can still throw in additional educational opportunities on a weekend and do that by Zoom, and, you know, some other things by Zoom, and be able to provide additional opportunities. Like we were, we kind of added, sort of at a last minute, we added a financial workshop coming up in March for estate and charitable giving, planning. And we would have never even thought to add something like that in the past. But this is like, well, let's throw that in. If people are interested and they can come and join and have that opportunity. And so, I think I anticipate those kinds of things continuing to happen down the road, and so that we can continue to offer educational opportunities. We have done in the past as well, like temple school classes for the mission center, if we've got a number of folks that need to be ordained. We've done preaching workshops. And just a variety of different things. Karen, did you have something?

**Karen Hill 36:27**

In November, I think it was, we did the Unconscious Bias workshop. And our mission center was kind of the hot spot of the racial justice issue last year. I mean, there was a lot of hotspots across the US. I don't want to describe it bad, but we had the George Floyd incident here in Minneapolis, and then we had the Kenosha event. And it was just a good time to connect with Kathy Cackler-Veazey and her team. And so, we had our own Saturday, I believe it was, workshop with them last fall. And some of the congregations are going to follow up with that and do some stuff on their own as a result of it.

**Carla Long 37:11**

So many opportunities that might not have been possible before for a lot of different people. And so, I, that's wonderful to hear. Thank you so much for sharing that.

**Matt Davidon 37:21**

So, one of the things I also wanted to bring up because we live in such a geographically diverse mission center, we have a lot of folk that are not near a congregation. So, we have a lot of smaller-ish congregations. But even with that we have a lot of people that are completely isolated from a Community of Christ congregation. And a strange side effect of that is they have found a home with Red Wing. Red Wing has managed the shift to online very, very well. And they have been the landing place for a lot of our displaced and distant folks. So that now we have a congregation that is virtual, but with that virtual congregation, all of those folks that have been disconnected and not able to go to a close congregation now can go to Red Wing. And they've really built a really good, healthy, vibrant, online congregation with people that have been yearning to connect for a very, very long time. And now they have a place. And it's only because we have found this new environment that has allowed us to do that.

**Colleen Hancock 38:39**

That, I will just say the Red Wing congregation would be lucky to get six people on a Sunday morning, in person. We now have 30 to 40 people every time we gather. And everyone is engaged. Everybody wants to be there. It's amazing.

**Carla Long 38:58**

That's incredible. It wasn't each one reach one, it was each one reach five. That's awesome. Well done. Very cool.

**Karen Hill 39:04**

And, sometimes they have their adult children that live in another country, like Italy, and Bolivia. They join in. We have our Canadian friends in Thunder Bay and his son in Kitchener, Canada. They join in.

**Carla Long 39:21**

The world suddenly got very small, didn't it? That's very cool, very cool. So, what about, like, communication strategies? I keep hearing about amazing communication between all of you. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

**Chris Davidon 39:35**

Well, fairly early on we realized, well, we've got all these virtual things going on, we need to communicate them somehow. And not everybody's on Facebook because we do have Facebook page. We were kind of using that and occasional emails that we would send out, and realized that we needed to start something a little bit more regular. And so, we, I started sending out a weekly newsletter email that just would list the things going on. Like, for example, letting people know where they can tune in online, right, originally, trying to get those resources out there, and communicating things that were going on in the mission center. And so, that has morphed into an every week thing that I have continued on. And so, we do send those things out. And it has been nice to kind of have one clearing house to be able to get that information out to our members on that list. And then that also gets sent out to our congregational leaders, who also then forward it on to their congregational memberships. So, we are hopefully getting the word out as best as we can. We do also have church updates that we use to try to share prayer requests and other things. That is another option and another avenue for us to communicate what's going on in the mission center.

**Carla Long 40:55**

Yeah, having that one thing that goes out to everyone, and you know people at least have the information, it's such a relief to me. Because sometimes I just put things out there on Facebook, on our page or on our group, and I'm like, well, I don't have any control over it anymore. I hope that they see it. It's a little bit stressful. I totally understand that. So, a little while ago, Matt alluded to some, sometimes there's been some tough times, and I wonder if it has something to do with your campgrounds. Am I right or am I wrong? Right? So, your mission Center does not have any campgrounds that they own right? No campground, which blows my mind. So, can you talk a little bit more about what it's like to have a camping program with no campgrounds? And, you know, just kind of fill me in on what you do. I know, I've already heard a little bit about Wisconsin Dells, but I'm sure there's more to it than that.

**Matt Davidon 41:47**

So, Carla, I'm going to kind of walk you through how we got from where we were to where we are because I think the journey is an important story to share. Because when we, prior to being mission centers, there were two districts. There was the Minnesota North Star District, and then there was the Wisconsin District. Each district had their own campground. Each district cared deeply about their own campground, as many districts around our church had or stakes around our church had it before we went into mission centers. Every one of them had their own campground. When we were joined together as a mission center, now the mission center had two campgrounds and one was on one side of the mission center, and the other was on the other side of the mission center, both pretty distant, give or take from the center, the geographic center of the mission Center, which made it very difficult for some of us living on the periphery to be able to travel to. I mentioned that was a six and a half hour drive to Duluth. It was a eight hour drive to one of our mission center campgrounds. Whereas my wife and I live in Dubuque, Iowa, Guthrie Grove, not Guthrie Grove, Cedar Valley Grove is like 45 minutes from our house. So, it's go to our mission center, eight hours away, or 45 minutes to a different mission center. But there was a group that got together to discuss the issue. And that group consisted of five people that were for keeping our campgrounds, five people that were against keeping our campgrounds and then five people that did not have an opinion about keeping our campgrounds. And we shared with one another the value of the campgrounds that we have, the value of campgrounds in general, and what that means to each of us and what it means to have sacred space and what it means to share that sacred space with people. And I was on that team. And one of the things that we found out from that team is sacred space can be found anywhere, there are people. Any place that you get together, you can have that sacred space, but we were struggling with is the only understanding of sacred space was our experience with our campground in Minnesota or our campground in Wisconsin. And that was our understanding of sacred space. As a group, we decided, and this is gonna sound crazy, but we decided to not use our campgrounds, not sell them, keep them but not use them. So, for a couple of years, we had campgrounds and we did not use them. And instead, we decided as a mission center, we were going to have one Reunion, not two Reunions with that alternating sides of the mission center, but one Reunion where everyone could come together and share with one another. And we were going to do this not once but twice to see what an experience together was like. As we went through that journey, we realized that we really do like being together and that sacred space can be found wherever we are. Interestingly enough, the Reunion grounds we rented, reunion grounds from an outside group, the folks at the association retreat center, it was in Osceola, Wisconsin, which is a little bit outside of the Twin Cities on the Wisconsin side, and we found that while meeting there, it, we felt the connection. We felt the connection of our mission center. And because we have experienced it in that way, that is what helped everyone understand. And we did a kind of a journey together. We decided to sell both campgrounds. And so, as an experience, out of that, we sold both the Eagle Lake and our Oak Hills campgrounds. Now, I want to also point out, there was a grieving experience out that came out of that, because it is not easy letting go of something that there's so much energy and effort that goes into that. And I want to say to you, you listeners out there, it was not an easy thing for the Headwaters Mission Center to do and there is still grieving that occurs when we remember these campgrounds. But we moved together out of that, and what we said is, we said if we're going to sell our campgrounds, we want to make it easier for people to get together. And this is probably the interesting side effect that has happened.

Well, we sold our campgrounds, which kind of gave us an endowment. It gave us a camping endowment, and we use that camping endowment to help offset the costs of camping outside of Community of Christ campgrounds. So, when we went to this outside group, we didn't, and this is gonna sound crazy, Carla, but we didn't have to do dishes. We didn't have to do KP. We had many, many of us had, like, motel style rooms with our own bathroom. We didn't have to clean those. We didn't have to cook. All of that stuff was taken care of and we could just be and enjoy. And we felt we can do this. So, as a mission center, we went through the painful process of letting go but we found we can do this in other places. So, the reunion we have, you know, we've got 160 to 170 folks that go to reunion. And so, we needed a place that can house all that. For our leadership conferences and pastoral connections, that was a smaller subset so we could find more local, more centralized venues. And there is a campground, JCC Perlstein, which is literally in the Wisconsin Dells. Like, you would never know that it was there but it's literally within the Wisconsin Dells. And we've been journeying with them together, and that's been a really great experience because they are Orthodox Jewish. And so, we've had some really great conversations with the rabbis there, and we've had some really great experiences of God and the Spirit in a place that is not Community of Christ. And it has been a good experience. So, what does camping look like when you sell all your campgrounds? Well, it means something different. It means you got to find the Spirit with the people in the place that you are. It's not always easy, but it is there. When you sell your campgrounds, then you have an endowment to possibly do more of them. We can do a lot of our gathering ministries that we talked about. You heard that list. It was a long list. And part of that is because we had the financial resources to deal with it. Now, fast forward, right, COVID hits. COVID is turned everything on its nose. One of the things that we struggled with, and it's a minor struggle, but one of the things that we struggle with is well, we had deposits down with all these external venues. Okay, so we had to have the conversation about canceling. And then what does that deposit means? One of the things we did not have to deal with was, we have these campgrounds and we can't use them, but we still need to keep the upkeep. And that has been something that I know that other mission centers have struggled with. But we have a whole different set of struggles. What does camping look like? It looks much the same, except we also have to find a place to stay. That's really the biggest difference. But it's been working well for us, I believe. And I'll let the rest of the panel share but I wanted to share a little bit of that background, Carla, so that you can hear where we're coming from.

**Carla Long 49:44**

I do want to say something that, Matt, you brought up for me. When I started going to a campground that, where you didn't have to do KP, and you didn't have to do the dishes, and you didn't have to clean your rooms, I remember walking around like the second day I was there thinking, why do we have so much more time? And it gives you so much more time together. I mean, it doesn't, meals don't take three hours, right? Because you have to wait till the key people are done. You can be together more. And it was an amazing blessing because I was pretty blown away by how much more time you had together because you didn't have to do those things. And, I mean, KP's fun, blah, blah, blah. But what a blessing to not have to do it. I'm so jealous. Okay, let's continue talking about the camping program, because this is, that was a really good background, Matt. I understand a lot better now. Yeah, let's keep talking.

**Colleen Hancock 50:37**

I was gonna follow up with what Matt said, the interesting conversations we've had with the people at Perlstein being different denomination. And I think that we did that with the Association Retreat Center, too, and became really close with the staff that did work there, the kitchen help, and you could request certain foods, and they would do their best to accommodate people. And if you had a problem in a room, you know, you just, you know. They had people that were just all over the place all the time, There was always someone you could contact. I felt like, they also cared about us. I can remember one time when there was a tornado warning. And this, I mean, we knew what it was. So, people were gathering in the tabernacle, but the staff members were knocking on every door and making sure everyone was taken care of, any elderly needed help. And, I mean, that when Matt talked about the Spirit being there, the Spirit was there.

**Chris Davidon 51:38**

So, we can speak to pros and cons, right? And to be honest, like, one of the struggles is, and Matt did kinda, I think, mention it briefly, but finding a venue that can meet our Reunion needs is particularly, it is hard. We have been in the same place we had been for several years, because of one of the big reasons, and part of it was it had become kind of a sacred space for us, but also the, it's just hard to find a good place that can accommodate them, the multitude of ages, and abilities, and the sheer numbers of people that we have with Reunion. And so, that is, that was an interesting struggle. And we are looking actually at a potentially a new place this summer. But it took a lot of searching to do that. So, what we'll see if that, if we do end up having in-person Reunion and what that looks like in the new place. The other thing I wanted to mention is that it, not having campgrounds frees us up to not be locked into a location. And I say that and I'm thinking about senior high. And we've had Senior High camp in our mission center. We've also traveled to Michigan one year for senior high camp. We have done, part of our rotation is that we offer mission trip. So back in 2016, we went to Peru. We took our youth to Peru. We've done, this year, this coming summer, we're looking at doing a mission trip to South Dakota. And hopefully that will also be able to take place. Who knows? But that is the current plan. And so, we are able to offer those and think outside the box, as far as what kind of ministry we want to offer our children and our youth. And so, I think when we own your campgrounds you tend to be a little bit more locked in to thinking, okay, this is this is where we have camp. And our horizons have grown with what that can look like.

**Serena Sato 53:53**

I'd like to mention just another interesting thing that we've wrestled with. We have a camp space that we use for some of our youth camps, again, Wisconsin Dells area, and it's great. They have lots of activities for the youth, like a ropes course. There's canoeing across the road. You know, it's really great in a lot of ways, but we found that we had significant theological differences. This is another denomination run organization. And so, that was really interesting, because there was this dynamic of, will they let us come back? And then, if they let us come back, do we want to go back. So, but I think that's good for us to wrestle with and to talk about together and to also be able to have dialogue with them about. So, some of those interesting things come up that I think wouldn't have come up otherwise.

**Carla Long** 54:42

That is so interesting to hear. Because I know when I was looking for a church to rent in the Provo, Utah area for our little group, I really thought that through and I'm like I don't necessarily want to rent a church that it goes, is saying things about our theology that we wouldn't want to say. You know, like I would. So, that's a really interesting point to bring up. And I think that's super important. I thank you for doing that. Even though they had a ropes course, and canoes. I, oh, that's really hard to weigh, darn it. I totally understand

**Chris Davidon** 55:15

Yes, it really is.

**Carla Long** 55:18

Anything else about the camping program? Well, I just think that you have all done an incredible job. I know that you know this because you hear it all the time. But I just want to say how, for me, I know this takes a ton of work. And it takes a ton of organization. And it seems like you are working as a well-oiled machine. So, that is really cool to hear. Thank you so much for being willing to be on the podcast and chat with me about it. Was there anything else that you want to say before we sign off?

**Chris Davidon** 55:52

I do want to say something. So, I have been on the mission center presidency team for, I think this is my fourth year. So, 2018 is when I came on. And I want to give thanks to the people that laid the groundwork and the people that went before us. So, and, you know, we did have a paid mission center president for, you know, up until I'm not sure what year, Karen, do you know what year?

**Karen Hill** 56:22

2015, I believe.

**Chris Davidon** 56:24

So, we've been all volunteer leadership since then. And you know it, but it's kudos to him and all the leaders that kind of set up and put these support pieces in place that we are able to make it work, so.

**Carla Long** 56:42

We all really stand on the shoulders of giants, for sure for sure for sure. Well, thanks again, all of you. To Matt and Colleen and Chris and Serena and Karen, for being willing to discuss all the good work that you're doing and thanks, yeah! It's just been really great to learn more about how you do a volunteer leadership in the Headwaters Mission Center. So, thanks so much.

**Chris Davidon** 57:03

Thank you, Carla.

**Serena Sato** 57:04

Thank you.



**Matt Davidon** 57:05

Thank you, Carla.

**Josh Mangelson** 57:05

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