

Episode: 379 | Coffee Buzz | An Update with Stassi Cramm
Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:18

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Linda Booth 00:34

Welcome to the 20th episode of Coffee Buzz, a podcast conversation with a member of Community of Christ First Presidency. My name is Linda Booth, and I'm a longtime member of Community of Christ and a short time retired apostle and Director of Communications. In this episode, I'm talking with my dear friend, President Stassi Cramm, who wears many Community of Christ hats including counselor to Prophet/ President Steve Veazey and Presiding Bishop. And during our conversation, we're going to touch on a potpourri or a variety of timely topics. Welcome my friend. (Maybe we should call this podcast a peek into a typical Stassi day.) Perhaps so. Well, welcome dear friend. And, and typically during the month of May, I know you and other church leaders are preparing for in-person reunions, our family camps, international travel, and mission center conference assignments, but because of the, the global pandemic, what do the upcoming months mean for your ministry? I imagine it will be virtual.

Stassi Cramm 01:43

Yeah, so before the pandemic, my calendar was booked well over a year in advance. I'm sure you remember that process of really getting things laid out. But the challenge was trying to make sure I blocked out space for myself and for family. So one of the many effects of the pandemic has been a shortened planning horizon. We are all a bit uncertain of when we might be able to be physically together, and no one wants to plan based on online experiences only. As an example, I'm scheduled to be with the Northview Michigan congregation celebrating their new building in June. They lost their building several years ago to a, due to a major fire and are going to be moving into a new space. Of course, right now that is scheduled to be an online experience with only a few people at the new location. But with the great news from the CDC that has come out and the level of infections dropping in Michigan, it's possible that we might actually be able to be together. So flexibility has been the key. I'm really excited also, though, about participating in a couple of online reunion experiences with Greater Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountains. Their people are gathering from across states, so to be in person was considered not really a good solution at this point. So, at the risk of being too available, I do actually have some space in my schedule for people who are still looking for online ministry support. So people could reach out via email at scramm@cofchrist.org and see if we can work anything out.

Linda Booth 03:22

Ah, you guys need to take advantage of that. You know, I've been surprised that Zoom worships have increased my opportunities to preach all over North America, two to three Sundays a month. In fact, I recently preached in eastern Canada and the presider mentioned that you, Stassi, were the speaker the Sunday before. Many times different presidors from different congregations and mission centers have told me that they really appreciate Zoom because it allows them to invite speakers from World Church leadership. A few have even said that they're not sure they want to go back to worship how it was before. One pastor told me that even when they go back to in-person worship, they will provide

ways for Zoom to bring World Church leader preachers on the screen during Sunday worship. I imagine you and your colleagues in the First Presidency have talked a lot about the hows and the whens of returning to in-person worship and gatherings. Have there been principles that have guided you as you consider how and when to support in-person gatherings, online gatherings or perhaps even a hybrid of, of the in-person? If so, what were those principles?

Stassi Cramm 04:39

Yeah, that's a, a great question, Linda. As far as making choices to go back in person that's really being managed by mission center presidents so that the information that they're making decisions on is more locally based because as we can tell from just watching the news, what's happening with the pandemic is very different in different parts of the world. So it's exciting, in the United States in particular, that people are able to now start moving back to in-person. And so figuring out how much should be in-person and how much should be online is really an important question. Like you said, there's great opportunities for bringing people together with the online experience. So I think the short answer for those who are making decisions is always to consider who you are trying to reach with an event, and who you might be leaving out depending on how you plan it. For example, if your congregation has been online, and you're now moving back to in person gatherings, will everyone feel comfortable attending in person? It's not just about the fear of COVID-19. There are lots of reasons why online participation is more comfortable or more appropriate for some people. If this is the case, do you as a planner want to leave them out by dropping online experiences and only being in-person. On the other hand, maybe your numbers have grown with online worship, and like you said, Linda, maybe some are thinking we're just going to stay online. However, maybe there is a group that really wants and needs the opportunity to be in person. Maybe if your group stays online only, you will leave, lose those who have just barely hung on through online experiences and will go in search of in-person opportunities if your congregation isn't able to provide that. I really appreciated your last podcast, Linda, with President Veazey about mission now and after. That provides the foundation for making decisions, I think. Since most of us learn through repetition, I want to quote something that Steve said that I've kind of got posted on my desktop. He emphasized, and I quote, We need to focus on, on nurturing and multiplying Christ-centered, Christ-inspired groups of people in a variety of social and economic, cultural and physical settings, that are focused on developing deep, meaningful relationships that immerse the people involved in the love and Spirit of Christ. I think that's the heart of our calling as Community of Christ, as our name would say. And I would add, these communities, if they are truly Christ-centered and Christ-inspired, will always be inviting new people. They will be hospitable and inclusive, or they misrepresent Jesus as I know Jesus is, end quote. For me, this is a great summary of who we are called to be and what we are called to do. It puts meaning on our mission to proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love and peace as expressed through our five Mission Initiatives. So in answer to your question, the first principle is never to lose sight of our mission and what we are called to do. Our identity, mission, message and beliefs must guide all our decision making process. With this principle in mind, this leads us to the principles that guide the question of how we will live out the who and the what we are called to be and do. As you can imagine, I subscribe to a variety of blogs, newsletters, and other online sources to try to stay up to date on the latest research and the best practices related to how religions, and especially Christianity, are lived out in the world today. Everyone, and I do mean everyone, is writing about how to make choices about online, in-person and hybrid experiences. Two recent examples are the Alban Weekly from Duke University. They just

released a series of articles about the hybrid congregation. And the Lewis Center for Leadership released a whole podcast on imagining a hybrid future. I just bought a new book earlier this week called Fresh Expressions in a Digital Age based on the summary article I read about it. I haven't read the book yet, but I think it's going to be really informative about how to apply lessons from online experiences to a new world we are entering and to take advantage of the combination of both online and in-person. In addition to considering who you are trying to reach and who you might leave out, other principles to think about are what is the best way to use people's time and what is most friendly to the environment. In the past, most church meetings occurred in person. Although teleconferences were used some and Zoom was just getting started to be used, we hadn't really perfected the use of technology. I think the pandemic has really accelerated our learning. And now we have more options when we think of how we might get together. Let me talk about a specific example. In the past, the World Church Finance Board met at least once per year in person, and then maybe had one or two other meetings using teleconference. Even when we met in person, there was often a few people who did not have the time to travel long distances, so they would join by phone. These meetings were hard for them because we ran the meetings for those in the room, and those on the phones were just like spectators trying to keep up. As a result of the pandemic, we are now meeting three times a year all on Zoom and we design our meetings so that everyone online has a quality experience. People have said how everyone online has made the experience more equal for all participants. Going forward, most of our meetings may end up being on Zoom to avoid both the expense and the environmental impact of global travel. Of course, we will miss the chance to be together in person, but in this case, the benefits of Zoom outweigh the losses. If we do end up scheduling an in-person meeting, we will still offer Zoom for those that cannot physically be present. And now we know that we need to plan the meeting with both the in-person and online people in mind. I feel like I could just keep going and going on this topic, but I think the important idea is for people to know there are lots of helpful suggestions and ideas on the Internet. So the, the four big principles are, Who are you trying to reach? Who might you be leaving out? What is most efficient for people's time? And what is most friendly to the environment while still achieving the purposes of the gathering? I think the parting comment I want to make about this topic is that we are not going back. We are going forward into a new way of being together and we have new tools in the toolbox because of our experiences in the past year or so. We need to use all the tools we have for in-person and online experiences to live Christ's mission.

Linda Booth 12:38

Excellent guidance, Stassi, and you're definitely correct. We are going forward. Speaking about the near future, I took the opportunity to read through the adult study text which is entitled Let Peace Dwell Here that was recently released on the Community of Christ website along, and it, it goes along with children's, youth and worship resources for reunions or family camps. And this is an excellent resource. I'm going to share some of the adults study lesson titles just to pique the interest of the Coffee Buzz listeners. The first one is Scripture Inter, Interpreted through Jesus the Peaceful One, History: Share the Peace of Jesus Christ, Invitation: The Power of Nonviolence in the Hands of a Prophetic People, Discernment: Discovering God's Vision in a Complex World, and Spiritual Communities or Zion: People Deciding Peacefully, and that one's written by Prophet/President Steve. The intro is from, also from the First Presidency as is the conclusion which is entitled, The Exploration Continues. It really sounds good, doesn't it Coffee buzz listeners? I know this resource is a part of a series of resources created to prepare members and leaders for the next World Conference. Please remind us about World

Conference Resolution 1319 on nonviolence, on the guiding question for the church which is Are we moving toward Jesus the peaceful one? And give us some insights on this resource and how it can be used in congregational life.

Stassi Cramm 14:22

So I'm glad you got a chance to look at the resource, Linda. I have to say I got to plan the resource and organize it and recruit the writers. So I'm really excited for people to take a look at it. But before I talk about it, let's start with, like you said, World Conference Resolution 1319. That resolution had three resolved and the first one was a, a challenging the church to have discussions on the role of nonviolence. The second one was asking for resources to assist and guide the church's discussion about nonviolence and the third was for the presidency to present a report or a statement to the next World Conference on nonviolence. The guiding question you mentioned was posed by President Veazey at the end of the 2019 World Conference. So we continue to, to ponder and reflect on Are we moving towards Jesus the peaceful one? It has guided and continues to guide our conversations and resource development. In 2020, in many parts of the world, we did, went deeper in understanding who Jesus both was and is through Tony's book, Understanding the Way and the associated study guide that was developed. It was unfortunately in English only. There has also been English-only multimedia experience of Herald articles, short videos, and online Zoom discussion groups that have helped those participating with the exploration of Jesus the peaceful one. I'm excited to announce that the adult reading and discussion guide that you mentioned for 2021 reunion season is actually, has been developed in English, French and Spanish. It was, yeah, and we're really excited. It was written to help the church prepare for the next World Conference through personal learning, group learning, personal reflection, group reflection and discussions. As you said, four of the five articles were, that you mentioned, were written by people who participate on key World Church teams. And those World Church teams have been having conversations about nonviolence through the perspective of the team. So like the Theology Formation Team was talking about What does theology tell us about nonviolence? So those first four articles help us understand kind of just a glimpse into the nature of those conversations. And then President Veazey kind of casts a vision for the journey that we're on together. The material, although it was designed with reunions in mind, is really usable for individual study. It also is ideal for both small or large group study. As always, there is way more material in each lesson than can be adequately explored in a single hour. So I hope that people will have in-person study groups. I hope that they'll, you know, look for ways to gather online where they can get together with people who are beyond their own geographic area. I also hope that people will engage in conversations about the material with people who have different perspectives than they have because, really, there's a lot of perspectives on nonviolence and we need to hear all of those voices. What I really hope is that people will take seriously the presidency's request at the end of the material to send us their thoughts on what should be included in a statement on nonviolence.

Linda Booth 18:19

And so that statement will come to the next World Conference. And so speaking of the next World Conference, the First Presidency has announced that the 2022 World Conference will be delayed. And I know there's an article in the latest May-June Herald about that for Coffee Buzz listeners if you want to check that out. And also that statement online. But, Stassi, from your perspective and having been around that First Presidency table, tell us about the journey that you and your colleagues took that led

to this decision to delay World Conference. And I know that an online gathering in 2022 has been planned. And what might that look like?

Stassi Cramm 19:06

Yeah, so most decisions the presidency make are complex. Leading a worldwide movement is, is, is always complicated because there's so many different factors we have to consider. In the case of the timing on World Conference, the enduring principles were a really important part in guiding us. As a people whose story testifies of the blessing of community, we know the need to be together as a Worldwide Church is critically important. At the same time, we uphold the worth of all people and we did not want to leave like whole delegations of people unrepresented because of border closures due to the pandemic. We consulted with experts. We read briefings from government around the world. We looked at forecasts about the availability of the vaccination, and finally realized that there was too much risk of closed borders and high risk to certain populations if we met in June 2022. So we also reviewed all the decisions that needed to be made by the World Conference. And we felt like that a 10-month delay to April 2023 wasn't going to impact us too negatively about decision making, while creating just a little bit more space to allow the vaccination for COVID-19 to get more available around the world. So that's how we ended up deciding on April of 2023. As for what we will do in June 2020, that is still being worked out. We're really excited about online possibilities. We're forming a technology team with representatives from around the world to see how we might experiment with more interactive online gatherings beyond just one way transmitting. We know that that's really possible in some parts of the world. But we want our online experience to be accessible to everyone. So it's really important that we spend adequate time studying the technology that's going to be available to people in different places. Whatever we do, it will be a kickoff for the journey to World Conference in 2023. And I know it will be Spirit feel, filled because no matter how we gather as a people, the Spirit always blesses us, so people won't want to miss it. So I just would encourage people to continue watching for more information.

Linda Booth 21:57

Absolutely. We'll keep our eye out for that. And we've already heard about many roles that you have working on the text and working with the authors. So one of your roles is working with Graceland University and Community of Christ Seminary leadership. I'm thinking it's probably time for folks to start enrolling in summary, seminary, which is open to everyone and provides a great opportunity for ongoing disciple formation and, and really lifelong learning. So I'm going to ask you a series of questions. So who can enroll in the seminary? And why should someone consider seminary and I know you and I both gone through seminary, and I personally have been blessed in my ministry by that experience. What do you think are the benefits for you as a minister and a leader?

Stassi Cramm 22:51

Yeah, so before I jump into the seminary, I want to just take a minute to do a, just a shout out in general for Graceland University. I know to our graduating seniors around the church or to parents and grandparents and friends of high school seniors who are graduating, that some of them may still be trying to decide what to do in the fall because the pandemic really has disrupted schedules. So I just want to let everyone know that the undergrad programs at Graceland are also enrolling for the fall. Graceland has done a great job navigating during COVID-19 and they will be in-person again this fall. So for undergraduate people or people looking for undergraduate opportunities, Graceland is a great

choice. As far as the seminary, we're just so excited about the Community of Christ seminary. That program has been growing. The nature of their offerings is continuing to expand. For right now they offer master's degree programs and so a person needs to have an accredited bachelor's degree to actually enroll. And you can find enrollment details and start the process of enrolling by going to graceland.edu/seminary. Seminary is a wonderful way for a person to go deeper in their disciple formation. As you know, Linda, seminary equip, equips you to ask the important questions of faith, and to explore answers from various perspectives such as scripture, theology, experience, and history. From my personal experience, I can share that for those who are willing to follow the rigor of academic pursuits, the payoffs are quite literally priceless. You will feel better equipped to share in stories of faith, to preach the gospel, to explain your own relationship with God and on and on and on. Seminary education and formation is a wonderful way to develop disciples to serve. And you're right. The seminary is enrolling students right now for the new cohort that will begin in August. So if you've ever thought about going back to school and getting your master's degree in religion, now is the time. Don't wait. Check it out at graceland.edu/seminary.

Linda Booth 25:26

Excellent. And I hope Coffee Buzz listeners, if any of you are interested, please check it out because it is really life enriching and changing. Stassi I've, I've probably had at least seven Coffee Buzz conversations with you. And I've never once asked you for an update on Community of Christ finances. And I've really done that purposefully because sometimes people might look at you just as the Presiding Bishop and you're so much more than that as you bring ministry and leadership and prophetic insight into the First Presidency. But I got to, I'm going to ask you now about finances because the global pandemic has changed a lot of things. How has it impacted giving to local congregations, mission centers, campgrounds and world church?

Stassi Cramm 26:21

Yeah, we could probably do a podcast series on just finances. Of course, I'm not sure who would listen to it. For most people, I think they just want to know that the finances are being taken care of. But for those who really do want more details, I want to take this opportunity to say that the next financial update will be released in three languages in early June, after the 27 May Finance Board meeting. So with regards to the pandemic, unfortunately the financial impact of the pandemic has been disparate around the globe. Some places have had real difficulties in paying bills and maintaining ministries. Other places have had significant loss of income. Many of you may have read about challenges in particular countries about supplies and we have been using oblation funds to support key areas. I know we're getting a lot of inquiries now about India. So if anyone, you know, is wanting to support India, just give to Worldwide Mission Tithes or Abolish Poverty, End Suffering in particular. And we're working right now with Apostle Bunda Chibwe and Bishop Mark Euritt on how to provide support there. In the US and Canada, the particular impact has been really around closed camping programs and how that has created some really difficult decisions and challenges for campground boards. So let me share just a bit about mission tithes. Reporting an amount for mission tithes, as a, as of a specific date is always an estimate because local jurisdictions report contribution information over a really wide span of time. As an example, we just realized that in 2020 there was over \$100,000 reported that was actually related to contributions that were given in 2019 and earlier, so sometimes there's a lag in reporting. But based on what has been reported through the first quarter of 2021, Local Mission Tithes for 2020, so

we're still kind of looking at that year end, were just over \$16 million. Now, that was a decrease of about \$3 million dollars from the previous two years. So, so in other words, in 2020, we took in about 3 million less than 2019 and 2018. So we don't know how that reduction specifically impacted local budgets. On the other hand, this level of decline was consistent with the overall decline we've been experiencing in Mission Tithes over like the last 20 years. So overall, we feel like Local Mission Tithes did pretty well in 2020. Worldwide Mission Tithes were about 3.4 million less than the Local Mission Tithes. So in Worldwide Mission Tithes we took in 12.6 million in 2020. Now that was a decrease of about 300,000 from 2019. However, the minimum that we needed to receive to support the budget was 12 million. So the 12.6 was in our overall goal range and it was well above the minimum so we are so grateful for the church's ongoing generous support in what was hopefully one of the most difficult years of the century.

Linda Booth 30:09

Yes. Yes, that's, that's, that's good news even in the midst of the pandemic, even though it's not where we want to be, but it is, there's good news. So thank you Stassi.

Stassi Cramm 30:19

Yeah, absolutely.

Linda Booth 30:21

Having served on the Finance Board and sat at that World Church Leadership Council table for 23 years, I know that the Presiding Bishopric has spent considerable amount of time looking at future trends and giving. What has your research shown about trends over the next years. Let's say for maybe the next 10 years?

Stassi Cramm 30:42

Yeah. So the real concern for us is, even as we're seeing really excellent support of Mission Tithes, which is our primary income source for the budget, not our only income source, but well over half of our budget comes through Mission Tithes, we are really seeing a decline happening in very big ways in the next 10 years. And we have a concern that how we support the budget through general giving to Worldwide Mission Tithes is not a viable method in the coming years. Let me explain why. Tracking Worldwide Mission Tithes to particular contributors is really only possible in Canada and the US. So that what I'm going to talk about is primarily in Canada and the US. But based on the data that we have, for the past five years over 80% of Worldwide Mission Tithes were given by those 60 and older. So that's a lot. Over 80% given by those who are 60 and older, and each year, the percentage is going up a little bit. So in 2020, I think the percentage was around 85 or 86% was given by those 60 and older. So that means people in my age group, so I will, I will claim it, you know, I'm in the under 60 group. And in 2020, the contributors in Canada and the US who were 59 and younger, we only provided 13% of the Worldwide Mission Tithes, or around maybe 1.6 of the, you know, of the 12.1 collected in that particular group. So based on general research that we've been doing and that we read, like from Barna and Pew Research Center, and other religious, religious research groups, we believe that there is potential for disciples under the age of 60 to financially support ministries and services of the World Church. The research and conversations that we're having indicates that there is unrealized capacity in all the fields of the church. However, collectively we need to find new and innovative methods to financially support the church's worldwide mission that works in the various fields

of the church, excuse me, the various fields where the church is present. And we also need to figure out how to connect to people's passion so that they see the opportunities and are willing to financially support that. So, World Church leaders are using various methods to have conversations, to run surveys, and to try to gain insights as to how we might want to support the world wide ministries in the coming years.

Linda Booth 33:56

And speaking of surveys, it's possible that some of the Coffee Buzz listeners who live in the USA received an online survey. I know I filled mine out. Any initial results from that survey to help guide you?

Stassi Cramm 34:11

Oh, we are, like, waiting, and we're so anxious. So as you said, we did a large survey primarily for the USA, although of course with that online, we were able to get responses from other places. We've been working with a local consulting firm in Kansas City called Proof Positioning. People can Google them and go look at their website. They are still analyzing the data, so I don't have anything to report yet. But we did get a great response. We had 4,080 responses and of those 75% completed all of the questions. The other 25% will have the responses that they did create. So perhaps we will need to schedule a future podcast to talk about what we learned and then how are we responding based on what we learned. As we'll report to the Finance Board on 27 May, the World Church is in a reasonable and at least short term sustainable financial position. So even though we're planning for the long term, we feel really good about the short term, and the church's response with mission tithes and Bridge of Hope for the retirement responsibility. So we're really grateful for that and I just can't say enough how, how amazed we are at how the church continues to respond in the short term. And I do want to say that I'm humbled and privileged to serve as the Presiding Bishop as we navigate these sometimes very stormy waters of church finance. I probably could say more about surveys and church finance. I'll just remember, I'll just remind people to remember to watch for the financial update in June. And there will also be an abbreviated version of it in the July-August Herald.

Linda Booth 36:06

So Coffee Buzz listeners look for that financial update. And yes, Stassi, we'll make sure to schedule another Coffee Buzz where we can talk about what you learn from the survey and what that might mean for the future. Stassi, on behalf of the church, I want to express my sincere appreciation to you and your First Presidency colleagues for your pray, prayerful and prophetic leadership. I know the past few years have been very difficult for many members and for leaders, especially for you, Steve and Scott. Despite all the challenges, how do you keep faithfully going on looking to the future with hope?

Stassi Cramm 36:50

In some ways, that's a dangerous question to ask me, Linda, because it's like inviting me to preach. I do want to say how much I appreciate my colleagues. So, you know, working together with Steve and Scott is really a blessing to me. And I hope that, that Scott and I, in our counselor roles, are able to be a blessing not only to each other, but also to Steve in his prophetic role. And I also want to do a shout out for my colleague, Steve Graffeo, in the bishopric. I am, I'm blessed to serve with some very faithful and wise men. And so that, that really does help me. But I want to say a little bit more about just my own personal journey. I know you've been preaching a lot and you've probably noticed that we've used the

book of Psalms more this year as our theme scriptures. I'm not a huge lover of poetry, so in some ways, the Psalms are a little bit of a stretch for me. And so I've tried to use that to really push myself. And I've come to learn that there is a depth to the life experiences of the psalmists and their ability to capture all of the feelings of those experiences into poetry and song lyrics that can be interpreted and applied centuries later by me and you and all of us. It's miraculous how their ancient words stir and comfort us as we journey through life. It turns out that the book of Psalms does a fabulous job at speaking to the many aspects of life that people have gone through and that we are going through, the ups and the downs, the mountaintops and the valleys. In trying to grow in my own understanding of Psalms, I recently skimmed through a book by theologian Walter Brueggemann. It was called The Message of the Psalms. He explains that there is a pattern to the Psalms that is also seen in Jesus's life, especially when we think about crucifixion and resurrection. Of course, that's not the only way to read the Psalms, but it's a great way for Christians. He explains how when we use the lenses of crucifixion and resurrection to read the Psalms, we see the important phases of life represented in that book. These phases are orientation, disorientation, and then new orientation. This pattern is in Jesus's life, where there was orientation as he stepped into ministry, then disorientation as experienced the events of Holy Week, the new orientation as he rose from the dead. Similarly, the disciples experienced orientation as they chose to follow Jesus, disorientation when Jesus was arrested and crucified, the new orientation as they began to embrace their own calling following the resurrection and ultimately Pentecost which we will be celebrating at the end of May. As I explore the book of Psalms and my own faith story, I see that new orientation only comes after disorientation. Or in other words, resurrection only comes after crucifixion. The reality is that deep loss and amazing gifts are somehow inextricably connected. So, you know, I think that in many ways, I've experienced a lot of disorientation since joining the presidency and the bishopric. And there has been some really dark moments, some really deep valleys, and I know that there are probably more of those ahead of us. But the Psalmists teach us that we can name that negativity. We can name those difficult times. But the Psalmist also reminds us that we do not go into those times alone. We have colleagues and community that go with us. So, I know I'm finding myself moving through lots of different experiences, some because of the limitations of the pandemic, some because of the realities of my own life, and some because of the financial challenges and missional challenges of the church. But I am learning to find hope resident in that, in that movement from valleys to mountain tops, in that hope that the light of Christ breaks into the darkest of moments. So when the world as I knew it gets turned upside down and I go from orientation to disorientation, I look to the Spirit for insights and new orientation. I don't know. What can I say? I guess it's as simple as I choose hope in God's vision of shalom and am compelled to live into that vision and extend lots of grace for the brokenness that I have, that others have and the world experiences along the way.

Linda Booth 42:09

Thank you so much, dear friend. I choose hope, too. Your testimony reminded me of a book by Barbara Brown Taylor. It's called Learning to Walk in the Dark. And if I can pull it here off my bookshelf, I refer to it often. In fact, if I open it up, I have a paper clip here. And I just want to read this because I think it, it really focuses on what you've been saying. She writes, Here's some good news you can use even when light fades, and darkness falls, as it does every single day in every single life, God does not turn the world over to some other deity. Even when you cannot see where you're going. And no one answers when you call. This is not sufficient proof that you are alone. There is a divine presence that

transcends all your ideas about it, along with all your language for calling it to your aid, which is not above using darkness as the wrecking ball that brings all your false gods down. But whether you decide to trust the witness of those who have gone before you or you decide to do whatever it takes to become a witness yourself, here is a testimony of faith. Darkness is not dark to God. The night is as bright as the day.

Stassi Cramm 43:38

That's beautiful. I love Barbara Brown Taylor. What a wonderful quote, Linda. Thank you for sharing that.

Linda Booth 43:44

Yeah, so it really speaks exactly what you've said only just different words. So thank you, my dear friend. It's always (Thank you.) such a joy to be with you. And thank you Coffee Buzz listeners for joining our conversation. Please watch for next month's episode of Coffee Buzz. I'll be having a conversation with President Scott Murphy, Prophet/President Steve Veazey's other counselor.

Josh Mangelson 44:20

Thanks for listening to Project Zion Podcast. Subscribe to our podcast on Apple Podcast, Stitcher, or whatever podcast streaming service you use. And while you're there, give us a five star rating. Project Zion Podcast is sponsored by Latter-day Seeker Ministries of Community of Christ. The views and opinions expressed in this episode are of those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Latter-day Seeker Ministries or Community of Christ. Music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze.