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Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

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

Robin Linkhart 00:33

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Project Zion Podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And today we are celebrating Pride with two members of Harmony board. Harmony is an organization founded by Community of Christ members 35 years ago this year. It's a community welcoming lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual persons and their allies. And we're going to hear more about that later in this interview. Our guests today are Linda Stanbridge and Tyler Mars. Hello, Linda and Tyler. Thanks so much for being with us today on Project Zion Podcast. (Hey, Robin. Hi, everyone.) So I want to give our listeners a chance to get to know each of you better. So please tell us just a little about you, like how are you connected with Community of Christ. Maybe what brought you to being part of Harmony and now serving on the board. Linda, let's start with you.

Linda Stanbridge 01:40

Thanks so much. My name is Linda Stanbridge. And I use the pronouns she/her. I live in Michigan with my husband Kurt and our two kids, Arbor and Emmy. And we live at a Community of Christ campground, Bluewater campground in Lexington, Michigan, which is right on Lake Huron. I came to Community of Christ in my late teens in the Flint, Michigan area, which was the Flint District at the time. And that's now the Michigan Mission Center. And I serve as the Mission Center Invitation Support Minister, which is cool, because I see so much overlap between those two roles, MCISM and the Harmony chaplain, because they're both so much about, you know, invitation and hospitality. And as far as joining the Harmony board, I really have to credit my very own ride or die, Parker Johnson, for opening my eyes really just to how much work there is to do, and how much Harmony has to contribute, you know, to this vision of inclusion and welcome and hospitality within the church. And so it's been pretty amazing journey so far.

Robin Linkhart 02:42

Thanks, Linda. Tyler, tell us about you.

Tyler Marz 02:47

So hi, everyone. My name is Tyler Marz. I use the pronouns he/him and I live in Salt Lake City, Utah. I currently work and serve as the Latter-day Seeker expansion minister. And my connection with Community of Christ is a bit unique. I am a convert to the church as of about five years or so. And I was a part of a wonderful congregation that introduced me to what it meant to be a truly welcoming space for all. And with that sort of naturally came information about Harmony. And I learned about their retreats.

And so I started being involved with Harmony as just simply a member attending their retreats that they had at the time a few years ago. And now I serve as an at-large board member. I've been doing that, I believe, for the last two years or so. And it's been a great experience. I served with the board through their transition from GALA to Harmony. And it's been quite an exciting experience just to see how things have changed and we've developed and grown.

Robin Linkhart 03:49

So June has become the traditional Pride Month in today's world. And you know, although many of us are very aware of Pride events in our community, we may not be as clear about how Pride came into being so Tyler, could you help us out with a quick overview of how Pride got started?

Tyler Marz 04:11

Sure. And I want to preface this without leaving out a bunch of very important details. So I invite you to do a bit of research on your own because it is quite a dynamic beginning. But to give sort of a brief overview, many of our listeners may have heard of this place called Stonewall in New York City. And the riots occurred there in the 1960s. And but unknown is that for nearly two decades prior to that in various cities across the US, riots and demonstrations and protests were had by various groups in the trans, lesbian and gay communities. What happened at Stonewall was merely a catalyst for the first Pride parade and commemoration of those, those pretty horrible events that happened. Many queer individuals stood up against the police that weekend in 1969, against the unjust laws and unfair treatment that was happening. This is what would spark the parades and Pride events held across our nation and the world.

Robin Linkhart 05:23

Thanks, that's really helps us kind of understand how Pride got started. So now let's talk a little bit about Harmony. Harmony is really interesting because Harmony began as GALA (gay and lesbian acceptance) started by members of Community of Christ in the 1980s. And as I shared in the intro, this year marks 35 years since GALA started. It was really a grassroots movement. It met, various folks just met in a member's home in the Kansas City, Missouri area. They really had to kind of function under the radar because LGBT was still pretty stigmatized, kind of a taboo. They weren't really sure how other members of the church might even react if they were aware that LGBT people were meeting together. They needed support. They listened to each other's stories. They wanted to find a pathway to acceptance. Certainly wanted to advocate for LGBT inclusion. Education was important, but they were just starting out and really trying to find a pathway to be full members in Community of Christ. And, of course, that movement continued to grow. They became officially organized. They came out as an organization, showed up at different conferences that Community of Christ held over the years. And then, of course, in 2012, we had our first national conference and in 2013, a national conference of Community of Christ in the USA and more nations since then. About the early 2000s, GALA was supporting work among the welcoming church movement in the USA and beyond. And GALA endeavored to support an emerging group in Community of Christ called The Welcoming Community Network which was part of that much larger Welcoming Church movement. And so we kind of had these two parallel organizations which

worked out really well, had mutual endeavors, and so forth. But not too many years ago, I think the board kind of had this vision of How can we maybe bring these two organizations together to mutually benefit from journeying side by side, and actually as one organization. So the vision to merge Harmony was born and in 2019, at World Conference in Independence, Missouri, Harmony launched their new merger and organization branded as Harmony. Harmony provides advocacy, education and resources for queer voices in Community of Christ with a shared vision of full participation. We all know that even though the National Conference fully affirmed and voted for full inclusion for LGBTQIA+ in the USA Community of Christ, we know that that is a journey of becoming and Harmony really endeavors to walk with all of us to deepen our understanding of one another and to really live into what full inclusion looks like. The purpose of harmony is to affirm the dignity and worth of all persons without regard to gender, race, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation. So Linda and Tyler, from your perspective, what are some of the critically important advocacy that harmony has done on this amazing journey with Community of Christ?

Linda Stanbridge 09:39

You know, I think one of the most important things that the organization has done is kind of elevate what the LGBTQIA2S+ community already does really well, which is storytelling. There's a lot of history of storytelling within GALA and especially at retreats. You know, and along that same line, publishing our two books, Homosexual Saints and Touched by Grace, I think really allowed of, a lot of other people in the church to kind of enter into those stories in a really personal, really intimate and such a vulnerable way. But a way that was really familiar to Community of Christ. And because those, those stories are so personal, I think the type of sharing that has happened within GALA and Harmony is actually justice work because it's ultimately what changes hearts and minds. And Harmony has carried on that tradition in a lot of ways. And we certainly do in Sacred Pause because we focus so much on those vulnerable connections with people in small groups. And we're continuing to grow our presence in Europe this year, and hopefully into next year as well with some more Sacred Pause experiences there. And we've got a few more ideas on how we want to continue to grow that, but I think just you know, the risks that people have consistently been willing to take to talk about who they truly are and to invite other people, you know, into that story is, has been a huge part of the advocacy that the org has always done.

Robin Linkhart 11:09

How about you, Tyler? What do you see as being really key in that journey?

Tyler Marz 11:15

I would say it's our providing a safe space to connect with fellow LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, however, you're connected with Community of Christ. And while I recognize some congregations are welcoming and embrace individuals with open arms, others are in the works of becoming more welcoming and hospitable, they might still be the only queer individual in their congregation. And when we provide an online space and a space in general, for individuals to connect, worship and commune together.

Robin Linkhart 11:50

I really love the way Harmony has stepped into the center of the church becoming fully inclusive and recognizing, I don't know about you all, but it just seems like we learn more about human sexuality and gender, and just all of that every month, almost, it seems like we understand more. And we understand the spectrum of diversity along that continuum. And the need for us, even though, you know, we raised our hands and said, Yes, we want to do this, the need to just continually be on that process of becoming and learning and loving each other and look at ourself in the mirror and say, you know, how am I falling short here? What am I not seeing? How am I not loving the way God calls us to love? So it's, gosh, I don't even know if we would, well, I'm certainly would not be where we are in Community of Christ without the work of Harmony. So, we talked about the fact that GALA became Harmony and Welcoming Community Network is now all under the same umbrella. The last time we did an interview with Harmony was in July of 2019. So Tyler and Linda, we would love for you to just kind of update us on all the latest things going on with Harmony. And since July 2019, we've been in the middle of a global pandemic for over a year now. So just tell us what's happening.

Tyler Marz 13:30

So, when we merged as organizations between GALA and WCN, we made a really conscious effort to combine the best elements of both organizations. We've really tried to live into the question of How, how can we provide ministry and events where our membership now spans the globe. We're not just a US organization. We have members in various countries throughout the globe and Canada, South America, Europe. And so some of those things that we've done, especially during the pandemic, is that we've really looked into, what does online ministry look like and trying to bridge and make connections to people that are spread out all over. So we've developed Sacred Pause, which is our online worship. And last year, sort of in lieu of holding a retreat, which we normally do annually in person, we had an online webinar with a pretty well renowned a sexologist Dr. Jill, and she, I believe this was spread out over four weeks, and we had various topics that were discussed, some more vulnerable and perhaps even taboo, but it was, it was a great time for us to, to ask those hard questions to learn about those things that we maybe might not be so comfortable to, to, to look into on our own but as a community, we, we were able to do that together.

Linda Stanbridge 14:55

Yeah, I think those are really great examples. We've brought in a few guests ministers, too, with Sacred Pause. We hired Laura Beth Buchleiter who is a trans woman. She's a minister and she offered some, some Sacred Pause ceremony for us around Easter time. And we're going to be doing, of course, lots of exciting stuff during Pride, or, you guys are probably going to get sick of Harmony during Pride. We're sponsoring a lot of different worship opportunities. We're going to be involved, we're gonna have a mixer that Dylan Weaver is working really hard on as well, plus the Sacred Pause Europe and regular Sacred Pause like Tyler mentioned. But I think a lot of it is coming out of sort of refining, you know, who Harmony is having gone through the rebrand and learning how needs are changing because of the

pandemic. And because we're getting a little bit more global. So, yeah, I think it's, I think we have a, a pretty, some pretty exciting stuff that just kind of continues to grow out of this, this constantly emerging.

Robin Linkhart 15:58

So tell us a little bit how Sacred Pause got started, because, if my memory serves correctly, it started after the pandemic began. Is that correct?

Linda Stanbridge 16:10

Yes, I think we hosted our first in March of 2020, which was right around the time that most states in the US were starting to have stay at home orders. And I think we recognized pretty quickly that there was going to be a lot of isolation that was happening. You know, a lot of college kids were being sent home because it wasn't considered safe to be in the dorms, and there was really a lot of growing concern about people being stuck, you know, in homes that were not affirming, and just having less, less support than usual. So we thought it was going to be a one time kind of online get together and we hadn't really done anything like that before. But I think most of us left that night just in tears having connected with people who have shared experiences, people who know what it means to have to be vulnerable in a community. And there was just such a depth of sharing that happened. And the Spirit, really, the presence of the Spirit was really felt. And it just became clear to us that this wasn't going to be a one time need. This is something that once you've had it, you don't, you don't want to give it up. And it's really just grown and changed over the last year or so.

Robin Linkhart 17:21

And that's the last Monday of the month, generally in the evening, right?

Linda Stanbridge 17:26

Generally it is, yeah, and it's at 8 p.m. Central Time in the US. Sometimes we move it around and this month we moved it for Memorial Day and we'll likely not meet in December. But typically, that's where you can find us. And if you have Facebook or Instagram, we keep it updated there as well. And you can also sign up for emails to be included on that. We love to have volunteers, we love to have guests. It's a pretty incredible experience. So if you haven't checked it out yet, we'd, we'd love to have you. And June is going to be the perfect month to join, too, because, of course, we're going to go a little bit over the top for Pride. We're gonna' dress up and we're gonna have a little bit of extra fun.

Robin Linkhart 18:01

It's gonna be fantastic. And then Europe started a Sacred Pause and Harmony came alongside them. Do they do theirs once every three months? I'm not sure I'm up on that schedule.

Linda Stanbridge 18:14

Yeah, we don't have a super set schedule right now. I think this, we're gonna' have one in June, of course, for Pride. And I think that will be our third gathering. So we're shooting for kind of every three-

ish months. Like I said, we're still really growing and learning because the needs in Europe are different because the context is different. And so we really rely on our members and friends in Europe to, you know, help us provide the best ministry that we can. And so this month it'll be, well, it'll be I think it's June 27 is the Sunday and it's going to be with Community Circle. They're going to be leading it with us, so. And we've had an opportunity to gather with Unity as well through the European Sacred Pause. It's really given us an opportunity to build, build out our community quite a bit.

Robin Linkhart 18:56

Yeah, it's amazing. I love seeing that global community come together.

Linda Stanbridge 19:01

And just hearing all those languages, you know, just sharing such affirming sentiments, and it's a pretty special experience.

Robin Linkhart 19:09

So I want to spend just a little bit of time talking about the Building an Inclusive Church training component. And first, a little background on that. That was, that's a Lutheran organization that kind of houses the Building an Inclusive Church training resource, but it was an ecumenical effort that wrote that resource together. And as I mentioned in the intro, GALA was aware of the Welcoming Church Movement across the USA and beyond and definitely wanted to support that. And in early 2000s, in GALA, the members were beginning to reach out and connect with this ecumenical effort to really put something tangible together. Something that could help congregations regardless of what denomination it was to share this journey of discovering how to build an inclusive church and one of the board members, Meredith Bischoff of GALA, represented Community of Christ and actually was part of the team that wrote the first Building an Inclusive Church resource. So it's really fun when you pull that down online to see the 2009 edition Community of Christ, Meredith Bischoff and lots of other denominations. It's a resource that's been updated and expanded in 2013 and 2017. And it's really a great resource that can be adapted depending on your denomination focus and where you are on the journey. So, for example, we know many denominations are not at this point in time, fully affirming and inclusive of LGBTQIA+, but Community of Christ is and so we can adjust some of those sections that kind of help a denomination walk through some of the things that we walked through and tailor it to our specific needs. I was really happy to be able to visit French Polynesia in February of 2019 and teach in Tahiti where they're beginning to discern the potential possibility of having a national conference in French Polynesia, so large sections of it we had translated into Tahitian and French, and just a great resource that really outlines a pathway and a journey. It's not a, you know, one or two week, we're gonna sit around a circle and decide we're welcoming, but just that process of building a foundation through conversation and listening and building relationship and storytelling which has been so important to Harmony since the beginning. And then living into that and making an intentional decision as a congregation that we want to learn, and we want to be aware, and we want to hear stories, and we want to understand how we can be better at this together. And, of course, finally, you know, a vote, when the

congregation has gone through this journey that might last, you know, nine months to two years, depending on, on how they need to walk with that. And then the celebration and that coming out in the community, so to speak, that we are officially a welcoming congregation. And as Harmony has helped Community of Christ understand, that's the beginning of the journey, not the end, and how to continue as an inclusive church to be an advocate, to provide education in your community, and to walk with people as that supporting presence. So, this, this year, Harmony has really had a focus on the resource training program, Building an Inclusive Church, and paired it with, I would say, a renewed intention and effort to support Community of Christ congregations who want to become a welcoming congregation. So tell us a little bit about that and, and how Harmony's utilizing the resource and kind of what the board is doing to help connect congregations who want to be officially welcoming congregations?

Linda Stanbridge 23:57

Yeah, great questions. Tammie Lay leads up our Welcoming and Affirming Congregations program. She kind of coordinates that. And we have several volunteers that will facilitate walking with the congregation through that process and the BIC training is part of it. Because we're asking that of others, all of the Harmony board also took the BIC training, which was a really good experience. And, like you mentioned, because BIC is not sponsored by Community of Christ, I think it really kind of helps to just enrich our understanding of where other Christian communities are at, you know, outside of our own denomination and to continue to, to better understand the type of support that we can find for ourselves. And I think it helps hold us kind of accountable to, you know, the rest, the rest of the Christian tradition, and just continuing to grow, you know, our understanding. We want to make sure that, you know, if we're expecting something of others that we kind of also expect that of ourselves and one another. And I think, you know, like we've talked about earlier, we never want to assume that we've arrived as a board or as a congregation or as a national church, you know, becoming welcoming and going through the BIC training, these are kind of starting points. You know, it's, it's the beginning of an agreement, it's not a finish line. It's sort of creating a covenant and a starting point to continue to grow. So, Tammie has worked really hard on updating those resources. And then we worked hard together as a board to be sure that we were walking that same path that we were asking others to do as well.

Robin Linkhart 25:38

Tyler, do you have anything to share about your experience going through that training and how you've seen the, Harmony utilize that resource and adapt it for use in Community of Christ?

Tyler Marz 25:51

Yeah, so when I took that training, and when I read the resource I really appreciated it's, it's sort of broad overview and that it didn't make any assumptions on where congregations or groups were starting from. It assumed that you were starting from zero. That you had this, this idea that you wanted to be a more inclusive and welcoming congregation. And so then implemented steps and for you to go through to assess, you know, what kinds of questions does your congregation have? Where are they at in being inclusive and being a welcoming space. It has you form a core team so that there's direction and

leadership a bit in going through that process. And while sort of the end goal is, of it is creating this welcoming statement, it definitely shares that it, that's not the end, like Linda mentioned. That it's, there's ongoing education, and there's always things to learn with regards to becoming a more hospitable space for, for everyone, as well as maybe breaking down and understanding some of those misconceptions about human sexuality and its intersection with religion and spirituality.

Robin Linkhart 27:11

Thanks so much. So let's take a little time and return to this topic of pandemic. Certainly none of us had this on our planning calendar as we began 2020. How has this pandemic impacted the journey and trajectory of Harmony? As you said, you hadn't been that long after the merger, not even a year into the merger yet when the pandemic hit full force, so as you look back now, and of course, we'll have the further we get on down the timeline, the more kind of historic reflection we can have as we look back, but from this juncture, how would you describe the impact the pandemic's had on the work and trajectory of Harmony?

Linda Stanbridge 28:03

Speaking a little bit from the role of chaplain, I think I joined the board in January of 2020. And then, you know, two months later, by March, it was like, you know, stay at home and, and everything's so intense and different. And I'm really proud of how the organization was able to just kind of switch gears and rethink everything. And we had, you know, no board retreat last year, this year. No regular fall retreat like we would have had last year. And so it did give us kind of an opportunity to reevaluate some needs. I think, for me in my role the, I really did not previously understand the depth of the spiritual need of, of the community. And I think, because people were open to connection, and were seeking connection, so much more because of the pandemic, we were really able to work really hard on helping people heal spiritually, and meet together and just share in new ways. And I don't, I don't know that we would have done that had, had the pandemic happened. And while I don't like to give the pandemic credit for anything good, because that's, I've refused, but it's been a really cool experience to watch God working in Harmony and how, you know, even out of all the depths of our despair, how just these amazing, amazing things keep happening. Tyler mentioned earlier that we were able to hire Dr. Jill, who is an expert sexologist, very well known, we would never have been able to have her, afford to have her come in person, but she was learning how to navigate the pandemic, too. And so we were able to, you know, bring her in and do these online trainings that were accessible to so many people. If we had done something like that at an in person retreat, it would have been available to such a smaller community. So I think in a way it really helped kind of fast forward opening ourselves up to a broader community. It's helped us, you know, fast forward helping out in, in Europe and growing our efforts there. So, again, I don't like to give the pandemic any credit, but I'll give all the, all the glory of that to God, that's, it's been pretty amazing to watch that Harmony do that transformation.

Robin Linkhart 30:20

And Tyler, how did you experience the Harmony in the midst of pandemic?

Tyler Marz 30:28

You know, I think, well, I generally don't like to speak for, or generalize, I recognize that the pandemic was, no one expected it and the amount of, I don't even know quite the word for it, the amount of maybe negativity or angst or, or unknown was just a thrust on all of us in such a way that we had never expected. And so I think once we, once, maybe our emotions settled just a little bit with that, we, we realized that just as much as we were isolated, and all the things we were doing, so was everyone else around us. And so how could we provide ministry to these people? How could our organization be being meaningful, and perhaps, you know, some of us who maybe weren't laid off from our jobs, how could this give us greater purpose throughout the day when we didn't really have much else to do when we were stuck at home? Kind of like Linda, I don't like to give the pandemic credit for anything, but I am kind of grateful in the avenues that it sort of pushed us out of our comfort zone a bit to, to engage in ministry in new and different ways and to create a sense of community that I feel is stronger than it's ever been in Harmony.

Robin Linkhart 31:40

Yeah, for sure, Harmony was very open and aware of the needs of the people and the opportunities that we had with Internet and some of the resident giftedness on the board to kind of step into that gap and walk into it and to be vulnerable side-by-side with everyone else in the midst of, of so much suffering and disruption. So Tyler, I'm gonna' pick on you for just a minute. Tell us what's coming up for Harmony the last half of this year.

Tyler Marz 32:19

Oh, so we do have quite a few events planned for June coming up. And you all will see more information about that on Facebook and various places. We'll do, we'll make sure we do a great job of announcing those things. But because of the pandemic, we're a little bit fluid about what's happening in the late half of the summer and the fall. But I'm happy to mention a couple of those things that are coming up next month just to give you a little bit of a teaser. We are doing a bit of a t-shirt, a Pride t-shirt campaign. And I won't release the design yet, but I've seen it and it is awesome. There's various services where either members of Harmony or board members of Harmony are preaching particular Pride Sunday's worship services. Throughout this month, there's a few mission centers that are holding coming out monologues. Like we had mentioned earlier, we're big on storytelling and everyone's journey and so that will be happening, as well, as Linda mentioned, there's the Sacred Pause Europe services happening as well as our own at the end of the month, and a bunch of other things. So stay tuned for all of that. We'll get that out to you.

Robin Linkhart 33:33

That sounds super exciting. And I can't wait to see the t-shirt. You guys are really good at keeping secrets, I must say. (Half the fun.) So you all have really had a front row seat and a lot of ways as Harmony walks with people all over the world and people who are at different points in the journey.

Sometimes people who haven't even come out yet, as well as those who don't live in communities that are very supportive, maybe even in families that struggle to support them. How have you witnessed the transformation of lives and even communities as a result of the ministries and work of Harmony?

Linda Stanbridge 34:22

You know, we've talked a lot about Sacred Pause. And I think it's been amazing to see how it's, in some ways, you know, a safe landing place for people who are maybe loosely related to the church. It's been an entry point for some people, which has been pretty amazing. And, Robin, you've been amazing to work with when we do have people who are new to the church and just want to know more. We've had an incredible opportunity to connect people, even people in teeny tiny towns in the middle of nowhere, you know they, they stumble upon us because, you know, all the miracles of the Internet. And to be able to get them connected to congregations and people we know are affirming using the network of the leaders that we have that are supportive and you know, allies and members that we know that we can count on. But then also seeing some people return to the church a little bit through Sacred Pause because Harmony, because GALA did the work and feels like a safe and reliable place to see people, you know, opening up to things that are new or opening again to things even that are old, and, and have felt too hard for a long time. I'm, I'm very honored that, you know, people trust me with this part of their spiritual journey. And Tyler and I have had such an amazing time planning these things together. But just seeing people on different points of their journey finding sort of a safe place to be themselves and fully be themselves. It's been it's really been amazing to watch these networks come together to support people.

Robin Linkhart 35:56

How about you, Tyler?

Tyler Marz 35:57

I have to say, I love watching the congregations that choose to embark on this process of becoming more welcoming and engaging in this program. It's, it's just, it's such a joy, especially when I see congregations that I've never heard of before that are embarking on this process. It's, to me it speaks to this, this greater image of being inclusive, being welcoming and living out our, our motto of worth of all persons. They're truly taking that active and conscious step to doing that.

Robin Linkhart 36:34

It is amazing to witness transformation in the lives of people and how even individual lives transforming impacts all the relationships connected with that one life and see that ripple through community. And I love reading the names of the congregations that are beginning to go through the process. It's, oh, wow, it's just such a joy. So as you look to the future, what, what are maybe some of the challenges you see? And what are your hopes for Harmony, Linda?

Linda Stanbridge 37:12

You know, I think the church is still a challenge for Harmony. We have so many congregations that we still need to make connections with and inroads and continue to create safe space, safe spaces within the church. Tyler and I both live in a nation that's had a national conference. You know, we have those safe spaces. But we're aware that you know, even within a church that's had a national conference doesn't mean everybody's affirming. We still have to do a lot of networking to make sure that people are safe when we send them to congregations. So we know that we have a lot more work to do in figuring out how we can best support congregations and keep encouraging them to go through this welcoming and affirming program. I think that, I think there's a, a lot of opportunity and challenge there both, but Harmony has continued to carry on a lot of the best parts of GALA. And I know that that is a manageable thing. But we've got lots and lots of work to do. We've got tons of congregations. And that's just really, you know, a lot of opportunity there. I guess my hopes for Harmony are kind of a two part thing. I hope we continue to be this safe landing place that we've, we've talked about throughout, you know, throughout this interview, and that as we continue to kind of transition back to whatever this new normal is going to be that we continue to be willing to reinvent ourselves, you know, as things change, and as needs change that we just continue to be, you know, open to where the Spirit is calling us to kind of walk with the church.

Robin Linkhart 38:44

Thank you, Linda. Tyler, challenges and hopes.

Tyler Marz 38:51

You know, as I tried to think of challenges, it's really hard to know what's going to be around the corner. But I think if the pandemic has taught us anything is that we're certainly ready for whatever comes. As far as hopes, I hope and know that we will continue to develop resources for individuals, congregations and families for added education, continued growth and becoming more welcoming. And if I can put maybe just a little plug for our readers is that our website is, has been developed over the last year or so to really embrace some of those resources and highlight some of those programs that we're offering. So if anyone would love to check that out, it's harmony.lgbt. And we have some pretty, pretty robust book resource list that I'll just throw out there. And we're constantly seeking, requesting and seeking new additions to that list. So if you all know of anything that has been meaningful to you in your life with regards to sexuality, gender identity, and religious and the intersectionality of that, we certainly welcome those.

Robin Linkhart 40:00

No doubt some of our listeners are thinking about now, All right. How can my congregation or my friends and I, how can we get involved with Harmony and the work that Harmony is doing? So what can you share with our listeners to help folks begin to explore the possibilities? Tyler?

Tyler Marz 40:21

You know, I'll just have to say, we're always seeking volunteers, and new perspectives on things. We, we embrace diversity in all, in whatever way that comes. So you know whether you have attended a Sacred Pause service, and you think now maybe I'd like to be involved in that, you're more than welcome to reach out to us. We also have a number of committees, as well, through the Harmony board that's involved in various aspects of running the organization or the ministry that we involve, that you are welcome to serve on. And you're more than welcome to reach out to us about that.

Linda Stanbridge 41:03

Yeah, and I would just add too, you know, if your congregation is welcoming and affirming and you've gone through this program before, reach out to us, we really want to hear from these congregations. We want to be sure we're up to date and connected with congregations and know a little bit about what are some of the challenges and joys that you continue to find so that we can learn how to continue to best support congregations. I know, like I said, I also work as the MCISM, so I know congregations are changing and have changed over the last year and that we're going to continue to go through that. So stay in touch with us and let us know, you know, how we can, how we can continue to support congregations as well.

Robin Linkhart 41:43

Thanks so much Linda. For those listeners that don't know what the MCISM is, Linda is the Mission Center Invitation Support Minister for Michigan. So that's an exciting role. She is an, a minister extraordinaire to be sure. So here's the question I love to ask everyone in every single interview. Is there anything that you want to say that maybe I didn't ask you about today, Linda?

Linda Stanbridge 42:12

Um, I kind of wanted to add, I guess that, you know, as we're getting ready to celebrate Pride, this is also a really important time to talk about intersections of oppression, and privilege and power. And, you know, this is something that we've talked a bit about on the Harmony board that we need to continue to challenge ourselves on how to be more inclusive. And just remembering that at the intersections of oppression, remembering the BIPOC and AAPI struggle for justice is also an LGBTQIA2S+ struggle, and especially for folks who find themselves at, you know, these intersections of minority identities. Like I said, we need to continue to grow as Harmony and as the Harmony board, and the church, too. So as we get excited about celebrating Pride, let's just remember to celebrate the full community and know that, you know, the more diverse we are, the better we are, and the stronger we are. So that's just something else to be thinking about as we are examining how we can really value the worth of all persons.

Tyler Marz 43:19

You know, Linda and I must have been on the same wavelength when it comes to intersectionality. But I just want to say that if there's anyone here that is listening, that is struggling to understand how their

sexuality fits in with their spiritual life, or a family member or someone that you love that is struggling with that, that Harmony is here to help provide a safe space for you to ask those questions and to see intersectionality of those two things at work. And I know that Linda and I are here to chat if anyone ever needs that.

Linda Stanbridge 43:52

Yeah, thanks for adding that Tyler. That's really important.

Robin Linkhart 43:57

Thank you so much, Linda and Tyler, for being with us today. You really have helped all of us understand not only more about Harmony, but about how we can be supportive of LGBTQIA2S+ where we live and beyond. And a very special thanks to all of our listeners. If you would like to hear more about stories celebrating diversity and other stories about LGBTQ+, look up some of our episodes. Number 206 with Ginger Farley and Ellen Fiscus give you a in detailed background of the history of GALA. Episode 23 with Aaron Kavanaugh, past president of GALA talks about her story. And Episode 207 Harmony with Jerry Dale and Parker Johnson talking about the merger Harmony launched in 2019. And as both Tyler and Linda shared to learn more about Harmony, check out the website at harmony.lgbt. To find out how your part of the world is celebrating Pride in 2021 go to gaycities.com/events/pride. And internationally you can check, check out iglta.org/events/gay-pride-calendar. We don't want you to miss a single opportunity to participate in Pride this year. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care. Bye bye.

Josh Mangelson 45:59

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