

**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.

**Brittany Mangelson 00:34**

Hello, everyone. Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson. And I'm gonna' be your host for today's episode. And today we are doing one of my favorite episodes because it is a Chai Can't Even where we talk to young adults. Or I guess maybe I should just say millennials, because I'm not sure if we're considered young adults anymore. We're just adults in Community of Christ. I've got my friend Dan Gregory on to share his story and experience with Community of Christ. So Dan is a Seventy that lives in Minnesota. And he, I know he's got a good story. And I know that he is engaged in really important work. And I'm just really, really excited to have him on the podcast today. So Dan, welcome, and why don't you introduce yourself?

**Dan Gregory 01:25**

Well, thanks, Brittany. So good to be with you today. And yes, I was thinking the same thing about am I still a young adult? I'm 35 right now and that, it feels that I still don't have adulting figured out, but, you know, certainly not as young as I would like to be the gray hairs are showing a lot. Yeah, so I live just outside of Minneapolis. I work for a nonprofit organization that develops affordable housing throughout the Twin Cities, and is really engaged in interfaith work with that, which is really amazing. I love getting to see that I lead communications for them. I grew up in Western Michigan, which is where my parents and one sister still live. My other sister's out in California. So I'm kind of right here in the middle, and dating wonderful guy. I've been seeing him for about six months now and just really enjoying where that's going. So yeah, as you said, I'm a Seventy in the church. I'm proudly gay. I use he/him pronouns. And I have worked for the church before. But, again, currently, I get to work in the nonprofit sector living out the values of Community of Christ in that way.

**Brittany Mangelson 02:39**

That's awesome. I am really excited that you found a way to pair skills and everything with ministry to your vocation, which we're going to touch on just a little bit in a little bit. But yeah, thanks so much for being on today. I'm really, really excited to get to know you a little bit more, which is one reason why I like these interviews, because I did not grow up Community of Christ. And so hearing the experiences of people who are about my same age that have walked with the church longer than I have is just something that I find really interesting and inspiring. So thanks for being on and sharing your story. (Absolutely.) Okay, so we always start these interviews kind of at the beginning, just whatever that means to you. I'm curious if you grew up Community of Christ, which I'm thinking you did, but if there's some sort of conversion story that you have, or, you know, did you attend camps as a kid, and I'm

always fascinated at how children who grow up in Community of Christ are treated in their congregation, whether you were like, mentored by people or felt like a burden to the congregation, or if you feel like you were part of the community, just what was you growing up in Community of Christ like?

**Dan Gregory 03:53**

Yeah. So, yes, I did grow up in, in Community of Christ. And, and my family on both sides goes way, way back. And that was always something that was really cool to learn about growing up; to hear the stories of people from across North America who have made this faith tradition their home. And so that was really an essential part of my formation. I was really lucky. We moved to Western Michigan, when I was six or seven. And we found a congregation that just adopted us and literally from day one, they loved us all. And there's a lot of kids in our congregation growing up. And so I had a lot of peers of people who were going through similar experiences as me trying to, it was an interesting bridge time for the church because, you know, this was the early 90s we were coming off the, the difficulty that the challenges of coming to ordain women in the priesthood, of understanding what the Temple meant, and kind of this new formation, this new identity as a denomination. But we weren't quite into that yet. So still a lot of, of streams, a lot of threads that were still carrying over. But I grew up in a place where there's so many mentors who really valued me and my voice, even from a really young age. And there's so many of us who still minister within the church from that congregation. I think primarily because we had people who asked us questions, who wanted to know what faith meant to us, who were willing to share why this tradition was so important to them. But they also didn't hold on to this idea that it had to be their church, right, but that it could be our church. And so really investing in me and taking the time to get to know me as a person. And to help develop my leadership skills from a young age. We had youth-led youth groups, which was really, really cool. There was a few older youth who had kind of pioneered that just before us, but then also a really robust camping program. You know, there's lots of leaders who stepped in every year to provide amazing development opportunities for us. I grew up going to Camp Manitou, which is no longer part of the church's ministry, but in Southwest Michigan. And those were some of the best experiences for me. I'd kind of cloistered off when I was hitting fourth, fifth, sixth grade. Looking back, I realize that a lot of that was because I was starting to come to this awareness that I was attracted to boys. And but I didn't have the words for it, right? I didn't have any kind of a structure to sort through that. And so, you know, I kind of turned in on myself, but it was through camps, it was through the youth program, through people who just saw me as Dan, that I was able to kind of reclaim a sense of who I was, and how I wanted to be myself in the world. And that was incredible. Some of those people have been with me on this journey the whole time. And all the ups and downs, all the big questions, all the faith crises, all those kinds of things, just willing to kind of take my hand and say, Hey, I'm here. I think that's one of the best things about growing up in a, in a smaller, more intimate setting, is that people really want to get to know you. And they're there through the thick and the thin of it.

**Brittany Mangelson 07:51**

I absolutely love what you've said about the people, the adults in your congregation, not seeing it as their congregation, but it was an "our". So all of you, and the fact that you had youth-led youth programs. And it sounds like just really close relationships with the adults, and then just different age groups of youth and young adults in the congregation as well. I think that that is so important as you are coming to understand who you are and who the church is and who God is. It sounds like you were really, really well supported.

**Dan Gregory 08:27**

Absolutely. Yes. And, and, you know, sometimes that was painful for them, right? Sometimes, there were, were things that we wanted to test, that we wanted to try that they weren't as comfortable with, but they still gave us the space and then we were able to debrief it after, right? Like, okay, well, when you said this, it kind of threw me for a loop. But let's talk about what that means, right? And, and I think that that was the thing that really set these mentors apart, is that they, they, I can't remember an instance, they might have, but I can't remember an instance where they shut things down, right? Where they said, No farther. And, and they let us grow and they let us express and they let us breathe our faith, which was so essential.

**Brittany Mangelson 09:20**

And so unique. I don't feel like many people talk about their home congregations that way. I mean, people can love their home congregations they can love the ministers that they worked with, but usually it seems like there is a, Okay, y'all are off the, you know, you're off the train tracks right now. You have to reel it back in. But it sounds like your ideas, your direction for mission and ministry were really well respected which I, that can be difficult for adults to kind of let that control over, hand it over to a bunch of kids. So, that's, that's really cool to hear.

**Dan Gregory 09:57**

Yes, yes. Well, and even, so I was, I was ordained as a priest my first year of college. I was at Graceland. Had been called through my home congregation. And at college, you know, I really started to challenge other aspects of my faith. I really started to take the foundations that I'd been given and look at them from a different direction. So I came back with some of those ideas. And when I would first start preaching in my home congregation, you know, you could see some looks on, on people's faces of, Whoa, what's that? What does he mean by this? And to their credit, they still stayed, right? They still loved me. They thanked me for providing the ministry. They, you know, said, Wow, that was an interesting idea. I was challenged by that. But, but that ability to, to grow and for them to, to love me into that, even as we started to have some really different ideas as to what the church was called to be and how we were called respond. They never let me go, you know? They still said, We love you. We know who you are. We, we want to see you grow. And, and that validation, it just means the world, right?

**Brittany Mangelson 11:22**

Yeah, for sure. It's super, super empowering. And the ability to allow you to, to grow and make mistakes and pursue the things that you want to pursue. Again, I just don't feel like a lot of youth get that or at least they don't verbalize it or can't recognize it in their adulthood. So it's really cool that you can. I'm a little struck by you saying that you went to Graceland and then came back with new ideas. So are you saying that Graceland radicalized you? Like, is that

**Dan Gregory 11:55**

In some ways, yes. In some ways, no. Right? And, and I think that this is the, it's this strange dance that I think that we should be more comfortable with as Community of Christ. It's, we, because so many of us have foundations were already laid when I was a youth, right? There's so many of those threads that I, when I started to come to new understandings and started to read different authors and started to see that some of the, the things that I had been taught weren't entirely accurate. It was still picking up on those core threads and saying, I'm not leaving those behind. I'm seeing them in a different way. And I'm weaving something new out of them, right? And so yes, there was, I made some pretty hard pivots, coming in, into higher education, coming into the Graceland realm, and, frankly, right being exposed to broader aspects of the world. But I think that it was a lot of those, those core tenants, those core pieces that were nurtured in me, as a child, as a high schooler, that were able to come to fruition in a different way rather than feeling completely contrarian, right?

**Brittany Mangelson 13:23**

So I work with a lot of people who go through faith transitions, and it's generally one denomination to another. But what I hear you saying is very similar language to what I hear the folks that I work with, saying. This idea, you know, the, the maybe the theology, or whatever you want to call it, that you were taught, the things that you were taught as a youth might not be exactly how you once thought they were, and opening yourself, yourself up to different authors and veins of theological thought, challenge your faith, and yet you were able to come to a place where you weren't necessarily leaving it all behind, but that you deconstructed to some degree, and then rebuilt a faith that was healthier for you. That's what I'm hearing you say, which is just very interesting. Because again, that's the language that I hear in the ministry that I'm involved with all the time. So . . .

**Dan Gregory 14:19**

Yes, well, and I think you know, frankly, that it's, it's something that most of us do in our lives, whether or not we recognize it, right? And, and I think that one of the challenges that we face is that when a lot of young adults come into that time of life where you tend to do those things, many people aren't prepared to walk with them in that, right? And, and so that deconstruction can often not lead to reconstruction. It can lead to a alking away which there's whole cycles arounds, how we kind of self assure that, Well, you know, they, they were destined for this anyway. They were, you know, wrong. They're off on the wrong path. We did the right thing, those who remain, right? But instead I think that it's, it's this really good invitation to say that we're constantly deconstructing. We're constantly as a people, as a movement we have baked into our DNA, sometimes it becomes a recessive gene, but it's

still there, we have baked into our DNA, this desire to challenge the status quo, right? And, and so I think it's about claiming that and I was really fortunate to have a community that wanted me to claim that impulse, to claim that, that pushing back and that going deeper, and that, Ooh, maybe let's explore this different path. But still gave me space to do that within Community of Christ. That still said, You're not separate from, you're not rejecting if you do this, but you are fulfilling, in a way, what we hope to be as a faith movement. And so I was able to, to ask those really hard questions, and to set aside a lot of other things, in order to pick up new and better and deeper perspectives.

**Brittany Mangelson 16:28**

So Dan, I'm wondering, as you are going through this process of, of deconstruction, and you're ordained a priest as a freshman at Graceland, I don't know when you officially came out, but how did that all collide with each other? Where were you on the journey of discovering who you were, and coming to terms with either your place or lack of place in Community of Christ? How was, how was that journey for you?

**Dan Gregory 16:53**

It was a hard journey. I, there was one member of our youth group in high school who came out. And, frankly, it was, it was handled not the best way. There was support for him as a person, but also kind of the, Are you sure, right? That, that question that a lot of queer people get. Those who love them, but aren't quite ready to understand yet. And so watching that, I wasn't secure enough in my own identity at the time to be able to kind of push back or stand within myself. So watching that, and knowing the ministry that I wanted to provide in the church, I kind of clamped in my sexuality. I'd, you know, said, Oh, well, it's, it's just a phase. Or I'm not really attracted to men. Or, you know, all those kind of ways that you justify to yourself. And at the time the, the church wasn't officially welcoming and affirming of ordained ministry, or same sex, same gender relationships. And so throughout college, a big part of my deconstruction was with this background of knowing that I'm gay and becoming more and more comfortable with it, and the questions that that would lead to. The, Well, if I know that God loves me, and if I know that it's okay for me to be gay, even if the church doesn't yet sanction it, what does that mean for my understanding of authority within the church? What does that mean for my impulse toward others who are marginalized? What does that mean, for the questions of how relationships play out, right? Like if I fall in love with somebody, and I know that it's love, and the church doesn't sanction that, how do I stay true to that, right? I mean, it's all these kind of questions that, that roil things up. I was called to elder while I was at Graceland coming into my senior year. And at the time, there was a lot of conversations that were going around as to whether or not we should affirm the ordinations of LGBTQ+ people in committed relationships. And I had to make a decision to say, Yes, I still wanted to be part of this faith tradition. Yes, I felt that God's call and the church's call, frankly, within my life to be an elder was right. And that, for me, I needed to continue to step into ministry based on who I was and what I would be able to offer. But then it was still several years, probably four years, five years from when I graduated to when I came out. And, you know, I came out to my family. I came out to close friends. And almost all of them within the church and all of them saying, Dan, we love you as you are. For some it

was a harder journey than for others. And some said, yeah, it's about time. Thank you for finally realizing what we've known all along. Part of one of the things that I regret though, is I didn't come out until after the National Conference decision in the USA. I was working full time for the church. I was already ordained as a 70 by that point, and there was a lot of fear in my own heart to step into the forefront of it in order to claim who I was, and risk not knowing how the church would affirm that, right? Once the decision was made, I knew that I needed to come out, I knew that I needed to be one of those who said, like, Hey, yep, there are people who work for the church, not even just who are ordained or who are providing ministry, but who work for the church. And in, in the spaces where I was in, I was ministering in Iowa at the time, there was a lot of people who were really questioning the decision, right? And to be able to say, You don't have to agree with this, but you need to know that I've been ministering alongside of you, we've grown this trust and this bond, and I'm gay, and does that change anything for you? Right? And for some it did. For others, it was a good growing opportunity. But it, it continues to shape, you know, how I respond in my ministry, the places where I choose to invest my time and not invest my time, and to also lift up. I didn't have any role models as to what it meant to be gay in faith period growing up. And I know that, like learning the history, I know that there's so many other people who were doing that and who were providing role models across the church. But I don't want any of our youth to have to go through that, right. We need those examples of people who say, Yep, I'm here. I'm proud. I'm willing to be a safe space for you to talk.

**Brittany Mangelson 22:31**

Wow. I, I cannot imagine how emotional, nerve racking, scared, I mean, I could think of a million words, you must have felt knowing that this church that you had devoted your whole life to, that you had been ordained in multiple times, that was also your employer, knowing that there was a national conference that essentially debated the worth of your ministry, the validity of your ministry, the validity of who you knew you loved. I just, I cannot even imagine that. Having everything on the line, right, like your church family, your history, your family history, your employment, your ministry, your sense of call. That's a lot. And then to have the decision made, I think that, you know, I've talked to enough people that, that I understand that it was not a smooth transition. That, yes, there were people that were celebrating, but there were people that were definitely not celebrating. And so like you said, you were in relationship already with people that did not support the decision. And so again, you're putting your whole self, your whole personhood on the line to be rejected or accepted in a way that a lot of ministers don't have to do. That's a lot. And I just want to like, underscore and bold, that that's a lot.

**Dan Gregory 24:02**

It is. It is. Well, and it was one of those spaces where, and I was so grateful that staff who, who were my bosses, I guess, at the time, were incredibly supportive. I was out to them and, you know, they said like, Hey, we're in this with you. Like, we'll figure out whatever we need to do. But I had come to the space with like, I'm not leaving the church, right? Like this is, I, I'd looked at other denominations. I'd have, had a couple of kind of faith crises before that where I looked actively at denominations that were openly affirming already. And I'd, I've decided like Community of Christ is stuck with me. But to come

to the space of saying, I would set aside my priesthood in order to be authentically who I am until the church is ready to accept that, it's, it's both incredibly heartbreaking and freeing, right, to, to know that this thing that is, is important to be able to perform sanctioned ministry within the body that you love is, is so critical. And to know that there was peace, that there's people within the church who would hold me, who would still see my ministry as valid if the decision had gone the other direction, is just mind blowing to me. And, you know, frankly, it's, it's one of those moments where it continues to challenge me as I look at the issues that we face as a denomination today, right? And, and as I continue to push out and say, Where are the voices that aren't yet accepted who could be feeling the weight or similar to what I was feeling? And, and I'll be really honest, that continues to cause me to dig deep and say, like, Okay, where are those places where I am defending an indefensible in undefendable, indefensible status quo, right? But I think that's the, the journey that we're on as a people is that if we are committed to these core principles, if we're really saying that these are the things that matter to us, the lines that we draw in the sand are going to keep getting erased and keep getting pushed. And, yeah, we're likely to draw new ones, but God's gonna' keep coming along and be like, Nope, let's push that one a little bit farther. And, and that I want to be one of those who's committed to that, that ongoing growth and development and, and, frankly, adventure, right? It's, we come to so much this from our own experience, and to know a taste of what it's like to be on the line, to be rejected, to be questioned, to have people say horrible, horrible things to you in confidence thinking that you're straight. And then to be able to share communion with them days later, right? It's it is a challenge.

**Brittany Mangelson 27:29**

Dan, I just, oh, you're giving me so much to think about because I think I, I have some understanding of what it means to have a church reject your ministry. You know, being in a church that did not ordain women growing up and not having role models of what quote unquote, this looks like. Or feeling like I had to hide part of who I was, or my sense of call, that, that I relate to. But the part that just, like, sends me over the edge with sympathy and empathy, and just all the feels is that you were already living this way. You were already ordained and everything and people were coming to you as if you were straight, saying horrible, homophobic things. And you still stayed with the community. I mean, that's, that's a big deal. You still brought ministry to the community. Not only did you just stay with the community, but you brought ministry to them, with them, for them. That's really, really admirable. And it's something that I, that is the part that I cannot relate to. So again, I just want to like underscore bold, italicize that, that is very admirable. And that takes a lot of grit. I don't know how else to describe it. But man, that would be really, really tough. So from here, Dan, just continue your story. I know that it's your story with the church and with your employment and taking you different places. So just just keep talking.

**Dan Gregory 29:10**

Yeah. So after, after a while, I was asked to move up to the Twin Cities, and at that time I entered bi-vocational ministry. And so it needed just a little bit of time to kind of settle in and get to know people, but just fell in love with the community up here. There's several congregations throughout the cities. All of them are amazing. All of them with their own unique personality, which I find fascinating in

Community of Christ. Like we are, in some ways, so similar from congregation to congregation, and then each one has just this unique flair that's like, Oh, that's what makes you you. So I really resonated with the Apple Valley congregation which is a suburb of the Twin Cities. A lot of youth, a lot of young adults. It was originally started as kind of a Koinonia, as a Zionic expression called La Paz, so The Peace, where a bunch of church members bought a bunch of lands, built their houses there and built a gym where they could have multipurpose things going on. But really this idea of living together in community. So that's part of the Apple Valley's congregational DNA. And after a stretch, was invited to serve as pastor, which felt like a really cool step in, in my journey, and was able to step into that with the full support of the congregation and did some really neat things together. We started looking at participating in Pride. The Twin Cities Pride is the third largest in the United States after San Francisco and Chicago, oddly enough. And so what we really wanted to do was to show up, not to convert people, not to say like, Hey, you need to come to our church. But to help in part of the celebration and to give resources back into the, the queer community. So what we did was we set up a booth and said, Hey, come sign a card in support of an LGBTQ+ youth who is experiencing homelessness. We're going to donate all the cards, and we're going to donate \$1 for each card that's written from our congregational funds to a local organization that provided housing, provided shelter for them. And it really was this good moment for us to consider what does it mean to be in mission, right? That it is less about us and it's more about joining what God is already doing in the world and to stand in solidarity with a community that is so often marginalized. And so many people would be like, Wait a second. You're a church and you're doing this? Because, you know, there was other churches who would show up at Pride and would have great booths doing great things. They're mostly, Look at everything that we're doing in our congregation, rather than We want to help make your Pride celebration be incredible. And we were joined by the other congregations in the area. Lots were really great support. And it was a really beautiful expression of congregational ministry. We continued it for a couple years. We only stopped because of COVID and because Pride hasn't happened. Frankly, after a couple of years, I realized that much as I love, I'm very much a visionary person, I'm kind of like, Okay, let's cast the idea. Let's, let's see, you know, where God is calling us, where we need to discern together, but I'm a terrible administrator. My poor congregation had to put up with a lot of just oversights and, like, Ooof, we could have done that better. And so I decided I needed to step back. I was also about to go through divorce at that time. And so I needed to focus on, on myself and on, on that relationship and to just pass by it as I could. And so, but continue to provide ministry and I was, we've, we've shifted into all online. It's been a big challenge for us, but also a great opportunity to dream together. To say, You know, what are some of the things that we've always known that we needed to set aside, but we couldn't quite let go of, that we couldn't quite bring ourselves to, to actually laying over there. And, oops, surprise, a global pandemic comes along and we have to. But it's been this great opportunity just to dream together and to kind of center in on a new way of doing ministry that's about relationship, that's about, you know, deep conversations. That is about less the high church model and more the, How are we being as community together. So it's been an amazing journey. And again, just a group of people who's loved me, who's pushed back on me when I need to be challenged and who has helped me to come to understand dimensions of life that I hadn't gotten to experience yet. So, really loving the, that expression.



**Brittany Mangelson 34:29**

I love hearing you reflect on your ministry with the congregation and then this idea that you are a visionary, that you cast the net out and then, but, like, as far as logistics and things go, maybe not your best or you know, administrative stuff. I can relate to that. I have a lot of really big ideas. But then I'm like and now what, you know. I know where we need to go. I know I, I can see point zero or whatever down the road, but it's just like all the middle steps that I'm like, okay, Can someone help?

**Dan Gregory 35:03**

Yes. Well, and I think that, like, that's the beauty of, of the way that Community of Christ is structured, right? Like if we were living it out perfectly, that's why the diversity of priesthood voices and member voices, and the, you know, all are called principle is so essential because we can say, like, Hey, here's the dream, here's the vision, and somebody else can say, You know what, I can pick that up, I can run with that. And somebody else can say, You know what, I can provide the support of ministry to that, and when we're all working together, and not trying to do all the things ourselves, gosh, what an amazing opportunity that is. When you get it figured out, Brittany, please let me know that best scenario.

**Brittany Mangelson 35:54**

And the thing is, is that this is why I am a firm believer of community, you know, people, I've been asked a lot, if since my theology's changed, or I take things a lot less literal than I did, or I don't believe that my salvation is held in Community of Christ, right? Like, I, I don't think I have to have a faith community to be loved by God. (Yes.) But I really like faith communities, because like you said, when we put our minds together, when we put our skills together, our interests together, the way our brains think together, we often can get in sync and really, really amazing things can happen. And so recognizing that you don't have to be the one that A) has the vision, B) has the resources, C) has all the ideas of how to implement the vision and the follow through and all of that. No, like you can spread it around and everyone gives what they can and where they are best fit. And then suddenly, you have a really great final product. (Yes.) So it's really cool.

**Dan Gregory 36:56**

It's that blessings of community in everyday life, right, is to say, Here's, like you said, Here's what I can bring and somebody else saying, Here's what I can bring because I can complement that.

**Brittany Mangelson 37:07**

Yeah, yeah. Well, which does lead me to my next question of what are the benefits that you see of a religious community in the world? But then, so also with that, you know, what keeps you engaged continually with Community of Christ? Because, again, to be clear, like you haven't had an easy road with it. But, yeah, what, what keeps you engaged?

**Dan Gregory 37:29**

Yeah. So I think the benefits of religious community, there's so many, and a lot of them are ones that I, I really don't want to say out loud, because it holds me accountable. But I think that having a group of people who know you well enough to hold you accountable to who you want to be, can't be understated. So often, our relationships are so transactional, there's so fleeting, there's so one dimensional, this part of my life, this part of the world. And to participate in a religious community is to say that I'm going to allow myself to be surrounded by people with different perspectives and different ideas, and, and different needs. And I'm going to let myself be shaped by that, and, and also express my own values within that, right? And so it's this, this sense of accountability. One of the mentors that I grew up with, she would say, that you cannot be a Christian alone. And that always really stuck with me. And the more that I've journeyed with it, it's been one of those nuggets that's just carried through in that I can't practice forgiveness if I'm not in a place where there could be tension or even pain. I can't practice gentleness unless there is opportunity for me to lash out. Right? And all of those, those values of the fruits of the Spirit can only be nurtured, can only be developed when we're in community together. And if that's the kind of person that I want to be, if I want to be faithful and loving and peace centric, and you know, all those, those things, those words that we tend to throw around, but if I really want to embody those, I need people to help me practice them, to help remind me of them, to help hold me to account for them. Say, Dan, you weren't gentle to me today. Dan, you hurt me. Dan, I need you to say you're sorry, right? And it's really easy in our broader culture to just walk away from those situations, to just say, Well, fine, you don't agree with me, I'm gonna' go off and do my own thing. But then we're constantly moving from, from group to group to group, but not really learning anything new. And so I think that the beauty of a faith community is that it helps me practice the world that I want to see. It helps me embody the values that I hold so dearly, and bring them into a better expression. And that's a big part of why I've stayed with Community of Christ, right? Like I, there has been trauma inflicted on me, inflicted on many, many others throughout the years by individuals, by the institution, by the theology. And we can't shy away from that, right? We can't overlook that. And at the same time, the thing that continues to appeal to me is this vision of who God is, of who we're called to be, of what the world can be. And, and it's this awareness that we're a people who are never really content with where we are. That, like, as you look back at the whole faith tradition, from day one, it was this wrestling with like, Whoa, things aren't right. How do I make it better? And we constantly, in our better moments, ask ourselves that and we keep pushing, and we keep saying, like, Okay, we've, quote unquote, solved this part of it, but now there's this whole other aspect. And frankly, that journey excites me. It keeps me alive. It keeps me pushing. It keeps me growing in my relationship with God. It keeps me centered in the work of justice. And of saying that, like, there is more we don't rest here. We don't say, we don't just dust off our hands and say, Okay, perfect. We've got it all figured out. But we're a people who wants to be on the journey toward the horizon, right? Like that imagery is so powerful. And I loved the way that the Doctrine and Covenants encapsulated it. But this understanding that I am better when I am in motion toward the God who is in motion. And I am better when I'm doing that with other people who feel compelled by the same drive and desire to be in relationship with that God who is calling us forward. And that covers over a lot of blemishes in Community of Christ.

**Brittany Mangelson 43:11**

So amen, brother. That was one of the best sermons I've ever heard. I mean, honestly. Thank you. Gosh, the listeners can't see me, but I just had this real big, dorky grin, and I was nodding hearing you speak, because it, it rings so true to my experience and my excitement for this movement, that we are a people that is on the move, and that we aren't content where we're at and that that's in our blood, and we can't sit and be complacent. And, like you said, we have to look to see where we are actively pushing people out. You know what it feels like to feel pushed out of this community. And so for you to then turn around and say, Okay, what other things are we missing? Where are our blind spots? Let's, Let's keep going. Let's keep working together towards peace and justice. That is really inspiring and it caused me to have a big, old, dorky grin on my face.

**Dan Gregory 44:15**

Excellent. Well, and I appreciate you saying that, like that, that it's always pushing toward peace and justice. Right? Because that's, that's one of those spaces where, where we still really struggle. We say that we are a peace church and then as these issues of peace and justice arise, we want to kind of throw our hands up and say, Oops, not our problem. Right? Or, No, you know, the church shouldn't be engaged in those kinds of things. And yet that, if those threads, right, that from a very young age, have said, No, that is the center of the gospel. That is what God has been about since the first breath was taken anywhere in the universe, right? Like, and that really challenges us as a people, because we have different interpretations as to what that looks like and how hard to push and the language to use around that. And how do we bring one another forward into that? And how do we also not be held back by one another sometimes? And that's, that's a really painful journey at times, but it's, it's the one that I've come to know and love and claim.

**Brittany Mangelson 45:34**

Yeah. It is good and it is challenging, which moves us into my next question. We have all this really, really exciting stuff that Community of Christ is involved with, our understanding of what, who God is, and how a community should function with things, with disagreement and being able to debate and sit next to people in the pews that believe and think differently. Those all come with, with challenges, but it's an exciting challenge. So as you think about being a millennial in Community of Christ, and as you think of, of the rapidly changing landscape of, we're speaking from a US context, but the Western World if you will, of younger people. A lot of them are leaving religion, and we as a church are struggling to, I don't know if I should say struggling, but I'll be honest, struggling to figure out how to best meet the needs of young people. What, what are some of those challenges or those needs that you think that we need to be aware of?

**Dan Gregory 46:39**

Yeah. Oh, there's so many. And I also have to recognize that I'm not a typical millennial. Right? And in a way, that's fabulous, and in a way, it's like, okay, understand the, even the language that you and I speak, right, is, is a different type of language. And so trying to, to be cognizant of that is really, really

important. But I think, as I listen, it's not just millennials who are asking us. I was actually having a conversation with a 55-year old woman, dear friend of mine, used to be my realtor, the other day about how she doesn't have spaces to have deep conversations. She doesn't have spaces to explore what she feels, what she is hearing--all those kinds of things. And I think that that's, that's something that a lot of millennials, young adults, Gen Z, whatever we want to say, is really looking for is a space to process through things, without judgment. Is a space to really be honest about the big questions of their lives and the ups and the downs. And, jeez, this world is in turmoil. Am I allowed to swear? Right? I don't know. I don't know if I can swear on this. But like, this would be rabid insert many, many words. You know, this, we don't have those spaces where we can question. And I think that that's one of the best gifts that Community of Christ is uniquely poised to provide is, as we've been on this journey, especially from the start of women in the priesthood, and all the way through to today, we've been learning better and better how to craft room for people to share and to disagree and to open up. And we don't do that really well yet, but we're getting better. And I think that that's what so many young adults are looking for isn't answers. Very few of us want answers. The older that I get, the fewer answers really seem to land and resonate with me. But the better thing is when I can sit down with people, and just say, you know, this thought has been nagging at the corner of my, my brain, and I need a space to share about it. Right? You know, this image that I hear about God in these other places seems really off to me. And I don't know what to do with that. Or, you know, I'm facing a major decision in my life and there's competing voices that are telling me to go different directions. How do I sort through that? Those are the kind of things that people are asking, and those are the places where I think that we as a community are uniquely poised to step in and say we don't have the answers. I wish that that was on every single of our church signs. We don't have the answers. We're committed to asking good questions. If that was the case, cool, I can retire my ministry and we'd be done. But that's what I'm looking for. And that's what I think so many others are looking for. And I think that a lot of this comes down to our shift as a church from being a rules based church to trying to be a principles based church, because then it gets back to responsible choices, right? Like, if these are the core principles that we've incorporated into our lives, then how do we choose in that? And it's rarely a either/or answer, right? It's always complex. And to own that life is complex, to recognize that it's messy, and that we as a church have indications, we have signs that can point us in a direction, but we don't have answers. But we're here, we're committed to be together on the journey wherever it takes you. That's a really powerful message that I think resonates with young adults and resonates with a lot of people of every age. So I want to see us do better at that.

**Brittany Mangelson 51:22**

Yeah, I completely agree. Again, I was just shaking my head in affirmation, because nodding my head and affirmation, because what everything that you have said, are the reasons why I have stuck with organized religion. And I think that it is so important to really recognize the potential that we have in ourselves as a community because even though we aren't perfect, even though we have a lot of room to grow, we still have consistently made choices on our journey as a people that indicate that we want to be better, that we want to do. And I, that's what I hear you, what I hear you talking about. And that's what young people want. And that's what we want. And that's what older people want. That's what humans

want. Like this is a human thing, right? So with all of this, and I'm, you know, thinking back to the beginning of this interview, where you were really intentionally loved into the church, mentored into the church as a, as a youth, how do you think we help empower our youth today to take this, this vision, this mission that we have as a church and to get excited about it? I don't know if you've done a ton, well, no, you did say that you've done youth ministry. So with working with youth how do you help empower them?

**Dan Gregory 52:58**

I think that it's getting to know them as an individual, first of all, and then trusting when they give you those openings as to the questions that they have, and, and the ways that they're wanting to grow as an individual, whether that's through a type of ministry or not. So much of ministry period, but especially youth ministry, seems to be about moving beyond a caricature of somebody and presuming that, you know, one size fits all, I'm really saying, like, I see you. This is who you are, or who you are showing yourself as in this moment, and I want to get to know you better. That listening and asking and putting yourself in a place where you can be trusted, right? Speaking your own vulnerability in front of or directly to youth is monumental. That was so huge when, when my mentors were saying, you know, here's some of the questions that I have about my faith, it gave me permission to say, Wow, I have questions about my faith, too. And so I think that, that it's that being very thoughtful about who you're talking to in the congregation, who you're investing your time and who you are asking to lead you and say, like, I see that there's something in you that I want to learn and grow from. Help me see it. Help me understand. Asking the questions. Asking, you know, what's going on in daily life. Showing up for games and plays. And, oh, my gosh, I, I did theater as a kid which not surprising to anyone, and band and choir and I always, every single play or concert there would be at least 5, 6, 7, 10 members of my congregation who would show up for me. And they would show up for the other youth in the congregation. And when everything else seems to crumble away, I could lean on that because I knew that they cared enough about me to take time out of their day to be present. And I think all of ministry has to start there. I don't know that I have more profound answers beyond that. But if we start there, and we're willing to set aside our own agendas as to what we think that, the, anybody, but especially youth, should be or should do or should say, or how they should say it. If we can set that aside and just say, I'm here. Let me learn from you. That can go a long ways.

**Brittany Mangelson 56:03**

Well, I think that's super profound. So thank you, thank you for sharing your thoughts from your own lived experience being a youth in Community of Christ, also being a youth minister. And then, like you said, just recognizing that these are things that everyone wants, regardless of the age group. But I do think that empowering youth is, is something that we have a great capacity to do. And I look at people who are in our age range, in our age group who grew up in Community of Christ, and whether they're connected to the church or not, at this point, they're all really good people, like, we're really good people. And that I also could recognize bringing my family into Community of Christ, that there was a really good chance that this community was going to foster and nurture them to be really good people.

Time will tell if the Mangelson kids are really good, but I'm assuming they will be. I hope they will be. (They're already demonstrating those traits, right?) Let's hope. Depends on the day. (As with me, right, like.) Exactly. (I'm not that great.) Unity in diversity, I guess, even, even resonates with the individual. So, Dan, you have shared so many hopes and visions of what we can be and who we can become as a community. But is there anything else that just really gives you hope about Community of Christ as we move forward together?

**Dan Gregory 57:44**

I think that, I mean, yes, there's so much that gives me hope. It can be challenging within the context of congregational life because so much of the way that we've structured our congregations is shifting. And that's really painful and that's really hard to swallow. But seeing how people say, But you know what, I'm sticking with this. Through the midst of that pain, through the midst of that turmoil, that in and of itself gives me hope. The way that we're, we're really stepping into some of the, the thorniest and most controversial and, and most deeply seated social justice questions of the day, not presuming, again, that we have answers, but saying we want to show up, we don't want to be left on the sidelines. That gives me hope, the way that I see so many people saying, You know what, we haven't tried it this way. Let's give it a shot. Let's, let's, you know, experiment. And finding that permission from one another to say, Yeah, I may not like this, but I'm going to show up. And I'm going to go along with you on the journey. That gives me hope. That's amazing. That's so incredible that we have people who are willing to set aside, and in my better days, I do this. On my worst days, I'm far from it, so let me claim that. The people who are willing to set aside their own comfortability in order to contribute to the broadening of the vision and the mission of Christ. Like, Brittany, that's insane. That's incredible. That's transformative. That's world shaking. And if we just keep doing that, if we just keep stretching with one another and saying, like, I've got you, right? It's, again, those threads of the power of community to hold one another. When we do that, when we embrace that that's our calling. Our calling isn't to preserve church buildings. It's not to keep programs functioning. It's not to maintain the, a certain level of decorum. When we claim as we so often do, I've seen it from the earliest days of my experience. But when we claim this understanding that, like, we're here for one and another, and we're here to participate in the cause of Zion. There's, there's no greater hope than that. Right? That's what it means to be a human, I think. And that's especially what it means to be a Christian. And this rebirth, this resurrection from shedding so much of that which would have inhibited us before and stepping into the horizons that are calling, and literally building the path as we go. That gives me hope.

**Brittany Mangelson 1:00:58**

Thank you so much, Dan. I feel like you've given us so many little nuggets to just chew on and sit with. I, yeah, I'm just really excited about so many of the things that you have said and the vision of hope that you have woven through your story throughout as you've told it, it gives me just a lot of energy going forward and trying to explain who Community of Christ is to seekers and my own kids. And to continue to figure it out myself, right? I really think that the direction that we are headed is the right direction. And, like you said, we're paving the path as we take steps forward together. So, it's scary, but exciting.

And, yeah. (Sometimes really scary and just a little exciting.) Yes. They switch places on, like, the value, the rank of value, or you know, yeah. (100%.) Oh, seriously. So I always like to end these interviews with asking you if there was anything that you wanted to say that I didn't ask you, or any last thoughts. I do want to thank you for being on today. I just feel very, like I said, energized and excited about all the things that you've shared so far. So, any last thoughts?

**Dan Gregory** 1:02:25

Well, first of all, thank you so much for the opportunity. It's always great to get to see you and just to get to share in these kinds of conversations, because I think this is how we get better as a people. I know so many people across the church who love these podcasts, who listen faithfully, who have stretched and grown with them. And so I need to just to say directly to all of them. Like, if you haven't had anybody else in your life, say it, let me be the one. Thank you for continuing to show up. Thank you for the people that you've already blessed on this journey. Thank you for committing to this weird group of people and the DNA that challenges us. I'm better for it. And there are many people in the world who are better for it. So, thank you. If nobody else tells you that today, I get to.

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:03:26

You are just the best. Can I just go on record and say that? You are such a delight. Thank you so much, Dan. And I think that, you know, when I think about how you talked about not having anyone to look up to in the church that you knew of who was out and proud and a minister and who you could model your life after, I just think of the amazing example that you are setting for people who are in the church now, for youth who are in the church who are coming of age, who are figuring out who they are. And there are now a lot of ministers that they can look to and see that, that this community does accept them, still has room to grow, I do want to underscore that, but that we grow by, by being in community together. And I think just the way that you verbalize that in this podcast has been really helpful for me and it's been a delight. Thank you.

**Dan Gregory** 1:04:24

Likewise. So thanks for the opportunity and for the amazing ministry that you and the whole team is doing. It's incredible to watch.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:04:39

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