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

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Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode of the Project Zion Podcast. This is your host, Brittany Mangelson. And we are going to be bringing you another episode in our Fair Trade series, which is all about faith transitions. And I know that I've said this before, but these are some of my favorite episodes to record because I love hearing the stories of faith transitions, and why people are interested in drawn to Community of Christ. And then just to hear, you know, a little bit more about their background. So today we have on my friend, Leslie Dalton, Leslie was actually just ordained an elder this last week from the time that we're recording in Salt Lake City. So she and I are in the same congregation together and it is a lot of fun, and Leslie's a lot of fun! So I'm really, really excited to have her on today. So Leslie, thank you for saying yes to this interview. And why don't you just share a little bit about yourself? Okay, well, Hello.

Leslie Dalton 01:31

I am a junior high English teacher. My family, we live in Utah County, and my family is about, well, I have I have a blended family. My husband and I've been married for a little over 20 years. And we have two sons and a daughter, and we have three grandchildren, which is a ton of fun. And I joined Community of Christ about a little about two years ago. And like you said, I was ordained and elder last week was super exciting. I grew up in California, so in the Bay Area. Moved here after I was married, so that's it. I enjoy knitting.

Brittany Mangelson 02:19

You do enjoy knitting! So Leslie, I'm super, super excited to talk to you about just the topic of faith transition. And a lot of the folks that we have interviewed for this series have come from the LDS church, but not a lot of people have had experience in church before the LDS church and then transition to the LDS church, and then transitioned to Community of Christ, a few people have, but I know that you have. So let's just start from the beginning, wherever that looks like for you, but because you have transitioned now into three different denominations, if you'd like I would love to touch on that a little bit. So when you were growing up, what did church look like for you? What did faith look like for you?

Leslie Dalton 03:07

So my parents joined a small Christian denomination in when I was a baby, so I don't I didn't ever know, not having religion. And it was pretty, it, there were a lot of similarities to the LDS Church in the sense that it was they had one true church doctrine. They had a president prophet. They had, yeah, so there were a lot of rules. And that's what I remember as a kid, right? Because I never really got to the point where I got the doctrine or I was, I was internalizing the doctrines. So the rules were all just super a super big part of my life. And so my mom was really attracted to the, to finding the truth finding the

one way. And she was also attracted to sort of that being special, right, like being part of the group that gets it, right? And she always had a kind of a thing about that she would, you know, we were all special and for, you know, talented, and all these different things, right? That was super important to her. So the church kind of fed into that. And so we and our, our observation was very similar to Seventh Day Adventists in some respects, and we celebrate all the Jewish Holy days, except for the fun ones I always like to say, because we weren't allowed to have fun from the perspective of a kid. And so we it was sundown Friday to sundown Saturday was our Sabbath and we did not do anything and we drove to church and we drove back and I just my dad just came to visit and I just took him to the airport yesterday and we talked a lot about you know, reminiscing about that life and I said, one of my best memories was trying to get them to stick around after church and talking with their friends long enough that the sun would go down, and then we could get to ice cream afterwards. So yeah, I mean, there, there are some fond memories of it. But there were just a ton of rules. And we prayed together all the time as a family. You know, we prayed before meals, and then my memory as we just observed these rules. So the Sabbath rule, then, you know, so that affected my growing up life like I couldn't be in. I couldn't be in sports that had things on Saturdays. I couldn't do, when I got into high school, I couldn't go to football games. I couldn't do like, I was in the music and I couldn't do a lot of them music, musical activities that took place on Saturdays. And so that part was kind of hard. And then all my friends were busy on Sundays with church, most of them were somewhat religious. And so they couldn't do anything on Sundays, and I couldn't be on Saturdays. And so we kind of missed each other that way. So I always felt kind of left out. So we weren't, we didn't celebrate any of the, you know, no Easter, no, Valentine's Day, no Christmas and we didn't celebrate birthdays. So, to me, it felt like a ton of rules we couldn't have pierced ears. Lots of men and women, you know, men were definitely, there was definitely a patriarchy. And we so women had to have their hair below their shoulders. And, you know, there are lots of rules on women, right? And so, yeah, that's what that's kind of what it looked like, for me growing up was was super strict, and I felt special, but it was also really constricting, and a lot of ways socially.

Brittany Mangelson 06:49

Yeah, wow, that's really interesting. I, I can see how maybe having a community with with a prophet with a central leader with the one true church feel, and teaching and vibes and all the things. But without that kind of global accountability, because it sounds like it was a small church, and just really centralized. And I think that it's probably easier for a tight knit community to kind of turn into themselves a little bit more with more rules and control and things like that. Whereas, you know, in the LDS church or the RLDS days where, you know, when we were still actively thinking we were the one true church, but there was still that global accountability where like, culture can still brush up against each other. But if you don't have that tension in such a small community, I can see how that was just, I don't know what there's a word I'm thinking of like, insular, like, it's just very, you know, very in on itself. So I was a kid, that would be intense and no birthdays. That's kinda sad.

Leslie Dalton 08:01

That was hard. I, you know, we would, we would try to figure out ways to get around things my friend said, invited me to a slumber party, and it just happened to be her birthday. And I was not sure about it. And, you know, it turned out to be a birthday party, and she was trying to help me, you know, help me sort of lie to my mom, by just telling me it was a slumber party. But anyway, stuff like that. And, you

know, like, that's a really good example of, of putting that kind of thing on a kid to see if they can find a loophole, right? And you're not thinking that your kids will be looking for loopholes, but they do, because it's hard to live like that. And then and so there was this constant feeling of guilt or, or superiority, like one or the other, right? And I don't know if that was really good for me. And it was actually it is a Worldwide Church. It's still around. But it's, but we didn't have a ton of contact with other congregations, right?

Brittany Mangelson 09:05

Okay.

Leslie Dalton 09:05

Um, and so it was insular in that in to the extent that it was like, the whole entire Bay Area in California, which is a huge area. So that kind of does make it you know, I mean, people are coming from all over the place. And there was that sense, but and I don't, I don't honestly know if I'm getting everything right, because that was a kid, but that's my memory of it, right?

Brittany Mangelson 09:33

Yeah. Yeah. Interesting. So then, how did you find the LDS church? what's the story there? Did your whole family I'm I'm thinking that your whole family converted, or at least a part of them, or how did that all happen? And how old were you and what are those? What's that story?

Leslie Dalton 09:49

So little drama. So I went to Japan as an exchange student, my junior year of high school and which is you know, a whole other story. But while I was there, my parents separated. And my mom who had a relationship with this person, that was LDS, and my siblings all joined the church, the LDS church. And so my dad never did. And, you know, you can imagine, there are feelings about that, too. But anyway, so when I came home, I had been gone, and I had not been in church at all for I had no spiritual life at all for that whole year that I was in Japan and, and the family that I lived with was a typical Japanese family where there's, you know, there's a little bit of Buddhism, there's a little bit of shintoism, and you do whatever, you know, whichever the best observances or death or weddings or whatever, you do that. So yeah, I had nothing while I was gone, and I really was liking it, and my family had pulled away from the other church, probably a year before that, because there had been some corruption exposed, and they were disillusioned, but they were still looking for the one true church. And so my mom finds this with this, this friend, who became more than a friend. And so they joined the LDS church. And when I got home, they said, so we don't want to pressure you, we would like you to go to church with us for six months, and just see what you think. And then you can walk away from it. And we'll never say another word about it. And I guess my mom knew that I would, I would buy in pretty easily. But I did take almost the whole six months, and there was this community there of like, normal people. And they seemed really normal to me, but also really focused and really just wholesome, right, this wholesome community of people and, and, and my friends in high school were drinking and they were some light drug use, and that kind of thing was happening. And so this community felt like, it felt safe to me. And so I, I liked that I liked the fact that they included me and everybody was so welcoming. I got to sing with the it in Oakland, they do a big production of the Messiah. So there's probably two or 300 people in the choir. And that, and singing was my thing in high school in college. So I joined that. And, of course,

you know how it is when you're here. When you hear beautiful music. It doesn't have to be classical or sacred. A lot of times you just have really strong feelings. And I just remember these feelings coming over me in a group like that. I'm not saying it wasn't the Holy Spirit, but it, but I felt really strongly and so that, you know, the missionaries told me that when I had that feeling that I would know that the church was true, and I should be baptized. So I did. But I really, I stubbornly held off until the end of that six months because I, I don't, I don't know. I just didn't want to do what my mom said. Or I didn't want to, you know, just fall into doing what she thought I would do. I wanted to prove her wrong, but I couldn't because I felt so strongly about being part of it. So yeah, so I was baptized when I was just, we'll use a familiar phrase, a few months shy of 18. And so, yeah, so I was almost an adult. And then I kind of went on my way after that. So that was about a little over 35 years ago.

Brittany Mangelson 13:42

Okay, wow, this is, this is so interesting to me, because I can see how at that point in your life, the LDS church would have provided the same, a lot of the same core foundation or structure with things like morality, and that, you know, chosen generation are believing that you're part of the one true church and that you are special, you believe that you have the truth. There is something attractive about that, like I totally get it, but then also being able to celebrate Christmas in your birthday?

Leslie Dalton 14:20

It's the little things. Well, and I was thinking about this today, too. Earlier, the LDS Church told me why I was keeping those covenants are really those commandments, right? They told me, this is what God wants you to do. And this is why and I never remember having that when I was a kid. We just don't do this. We don't celebrate your birthday. I have no idea why but we just don't and it's wrong. And you know, stuff like that. We don't go to the doctor and you know, because we trust that God will heal us. But the LDS Church seems so easy to me after that other church and I think that's it really funny because it's a high demand religion. And a lot of people don't think that it seems easy at all. But to me, it was just like, this is a walk in the park, right? So I'm not going to drink, you know, whatever,

Brittany Mangelson 15:12

You were liberated in the church!

Leslie Dalton 15:15

I could wear fashionable clothes and I can cut my hair and you know, I can help pierced ears and all this stuff that I couldn't do before. So it was great.

Brittany Mangelson 15:24

Those are big deals. And, you know, when you connect it to spirituality, and you connect it to God, that that's something I'm curious about, you know, what were your thoughts on God as a kid, because it seems like if you grew up with, within a church that didn't allow any piercings, or you had to have long hair, those things are, are probably what makes you worthy of God or, you know, it's pleasing to God, that you are doing these things or not doing these things. So going to the LDS church, did you feel like you your personal theology on God had shifted like your image of God? Because it, it was still rules based, but a lot more lacks?

Leslie Dalton 16:09

Right? Yeah. So. So as a kid, the focus really was on. And we had, I mean, we studied the Bible. So I've read the Old Testament a lot more than most LDS people have, because we, that was a big, that we studied the Old Testament more than the New Testament. But the focus was on preparing for the Second Coming. And so the second, the idea was that before the Second Coming, the Prophet would have a revelation or experience or whatever, we didn't talk too much about revelation, but he would tell us where to go to avoid the all of the carnage and disaster that was going to happen, you know, that we read about in Revelation. And so the, the idea was that you were keeping all these rules, and you are faithful, and you would be allowed to know the location of the safe place. Again, my memory could be faulty, but this is, you know, this is what I took away from it. And so it wasn't so much like earning your way to heaven, or it wasn't the focus wasn't so much on an afterlife, but it was really focused on, you know, getting to be with the people that were not going to be burned, you know, at the Second Coming. And, and, I mean, you didn't ask me to do this to talk about this weird church all day, but there were just so many interesting things about it, like, my parents sold everything, because any second now, we would be going, we would be fleeing, right We would have to drop everything and flee. And so we didn't need any personal possessions and so they never bought a house. They sold all their camera equipment, we never took pictures, because why have that stuff if you just gonna if you just leave it and run right. And so that was kind of that was a big part of it, too, is just not having any material possessions. Yeah, yeah. As I'm talking, I'm remembering more stuff, but I'm not sure I answered your original question. That the Oh, that's what spirituality would like? Yeah, yeah, we would pray. My mom would spend a lot of time praying, I lost a sister and, and that was, of course, devastating to my parents. And my mom didn't, she wouldn't talk about it. And she never explained this. But she spent a lot of time in her room, and praying and now as an adult, I realized that she was trying to process that grief and she just didn't have any other way to do it. And so prayer was a was a was very present in our lives. But I don't remember really praying on my own too much and I don't remember. I remember, you know, once in a while, we'll have that bargaining kind of prayer, when you're in a tough spot. But it wasn't really I don't remember any kind of spirituality, like the LDS church, where all of a sudden, your you know, the the Spirit is communicating with you constantly if you're worthy and telling you what God wants for you and helping you feel confident and helping you feel joy and, and so that was beautiful to me to be able to have this connection with God, if I was worthy of it.

Brittany Mangelson 19:28

Wow. I feel like we could talk about this forever because I'm so interested in it. I think that it's so important to be reminded just as people of faith that how faith can control someone's life like how a faith community can be so all encompassing and to the point of giving away or selling your camera equipment because why take pictures of our kids because the end of the world is right around the corner? AAnd, you know, not purchasing a home, like not everyone needs to purchase a home, but to make like big financial decisions based on this understanding of "well the end is near!" I mean, that's why a lot of folks don't really care about the environment or you know, I mean, there's real life implications of, of our theology. And so just hearing you talk about it, a lot of those are just coming, coming to my mind. And it all goes back to how you view God and how you view salvation. So it's super, super interesting. And I can really see how the LDS church would have been that community of liberation, that allowed you to fall back on the foundation of a one true church. And this is, you know, I think they call it the "covenant path" now, or whatever, you know, like the "holding to the rod", you

know, this way of living life that is true. And yet at the same time, in the LDS church, you're able to take your own spirituality in your own hands, and receive that personal revelation, as they say, and have that, that power. I can see how that would be really empowering to you, especially as a woman who I'm assuming the patriarchy was Yeah, even thicker in in your first church. So, yeah.

Leslie Dalton 21:25

When I came home from before I started going to the LDS church, where I came home from Japan, I said, I'm not interested in religion, I don't want any part of it in my life, and period. Don't talk to me. So I really was prepared to just live a secular life. And that took me by surprise, but yes. Good, coming back into a bold where you're special. You're right. You've got what you need. And you know why you're doing all this stuff.

Brittany Mangelson 21:57

Yeah. There's a lot of security and certainty and being surrounded by people who have that same level of certainty for sure. Right. So spoiler alert, it didn't end well, though. I mean, how was being Mormon?

Leslie Dalton 22:17

Well, it was super great for a really long time. (Yeah.) I served a full time mission. They sent me back to Japan. It was awful. Because, you know, I was getting rejected now. Before I went, I was an exchange student, I was a superstar. But yeah, so I did that. I got married in the temple. Had a girl, my marriage failed, my first husband left the church and I was not having that. And I didn't walk out because of that. But yeah, it it was just devastating to me, there is no possible way that you could be married to someone that wasn't LDS and keeping temple covenants because you're, the goal is to be together, and they don't want to anymore, whatever. And what do you How are you supposed to have a family with that? So anyway, I was I was single for about five years, I worked for BYU, I worked. So I was like, just 100% church all the time, all the time. I, I also worked for the church, doing freelance editing and writing, when they were first starting to put together mormon.org. I wrote a lot of the content for that website. And it's all different now. But so yeah, I was 100% in and I was super black and white. I don't know if I started out that way, but after 30 years, I was like this, you know, you got to be on the straight and narrow, and everyone else should be too. And I, it was miserable after a while. Because Because I was judging other people all the time, because I knew what it was supposed to look like. And we're trying to get to this Zion community. And we can't if people are letting their little girls wear a sleeveless dress to church, and I'm obviously a tank top now. But at that point, it was just scandalous to me that someone would even consider letting a three year old wear something that wasn't, you know, temple garment ready or whatever. And, and so I was just constantly with myself too, right? I wasn't like I was just being relaxed. I mean, I had lists on the mirror and all the stuff that I've listened to General Conference, and I would take all these notes and I would choose the top 10 things that I heard. That's what the Spirit told me to do for the next six months, and I write it on everybody's mirror and I would talk about it all the time. And you know, I'd be like quizzing them. I mean, I was intense and my poor kids, bless their hearts. You know, they tried and yeah, we did our best but, but I was miserable a lot of the time. My husband wasn't, you know, he wasn't being the patriarch. He's a super easygoing guy, which works out for me now really great. But at the time, you know, he wasn't leading his family and he wasn't calling people to prayer and Family Home Evening, I had to do all that stuff. And it was frustrating all the time. And after we were married about 15 years, maybe less than 15 years after the kids I'd grown

up. It was like, it just fell apart. For me, like, I didn't have the kids to like, drag to heaven with me anymore. They were on their own. And my daughter, my daughter left the church pretty early on, she's clear, and she obviously didn't feel like it was for her. And so I just, I didn't, I didn't have that purpose anymore, right. It was just me and my husband. And we were having a great time being empty nesters. And I didn't didn't see the point so much anymore. And I had experiences along the way. Like, when my daughter, my daughter's the youngest. And when she was a junior, I started thinking, What am I going to do when she graduates? I'm not going to sit around. So I was staying home with the kids while they were in school, because that's what the Prophet told me to do. I was bored out of my mind.

Leslie Dalton 26:39

That's what I was supposed to do. So I was gonna do it. And you know, I was, so I find all these volunteer things to do and throw myself into my callings or whatever, because I was so bored. And I would end up being gone more than I would have been if I had a full time job because I was doing all this other stuff to get out of just being at home. It just wasn't for me. So anyway, I received the inspiration that I was to become a seminary teacher after my daughter graduated, so I would need to I degree in English. And I would just have to go back for I think it was for a year to do the seminary teaching program, and then I could be a seminary teacher and that's what God wanted for me. And so I started preparing. And I started doing, you know, Institute classes, which are like seminary, and I, yeah, I, I went to sign up to be a substitute teacher and because I was six months away from liberation when my daughter graduated, and so I ended up talking to this lady before I signed up and she told me that if because I was divorced, I was never going to be allowed to be a seminary teacher.

Brittany Mangelson 27:49

What? I didn't know that!

27:51

Yeah. And I was like, wait, what I mean, like, my husband went off the deep end and left me when he left the church. I was faithful. I stayed. And she said, no, sorry. And she said, and so the three rules are you can't have gone through bankruptcy, you can't have been divorced, and you can't ever have been disciplined in any way by the church. And that was my second strike. Because I had been disfellowshipped A long time ago. It's at one point. So here I am. And like God told me to do this. And, and knowing that I wasn't gonna do it. What the crap God. So that was that was like the beginning of me going, What? Who's making these rules? Are they really inspired? Or you know, it was just a very, it was a chink in the armor. I guess, that started to make me think maybe it's not everything that it says it is. Though. That was hard.

Brittany Mangelson 28:53

Wow. I am, I am shocked that that's a rule.

Leslie Dalton 28:58

I think they changed it recently.

Brittany Mangelson 29:03

I know they recently changed because I thought about being the seminary teacher at one point as well. And you can't be a woman and have children at home or in childbearing years or there's something, there's a rule about it.

Leslie Dalton 29:17

That's why I waited till my grad, my daughter graduated.

Brittany Mangelson 29:19

Yeah. Never mind that. Every male seminary teacher I think I ever had was, you know, had kids at home. But that's another topic for another day. But no, I hadn't heard about the divorce rule that's actually kind of horrific. And I'm really sorry that that happened because I'm assuming that you had been thinking about that. And like you said, preparing you and taken classes you had gone through several of the hoops and to get to the point of wanting to be a substitute teacher and then be told No, I mean, that's, that's some hardcore rejection. That's awful.

Leslie Dalton 29:57

Yeah, I wrote a lot of letters that I didn't say and it's because then there's this whole, like, well, you need to figure out, you know, if the Lord told you to do it, and the Lord knew that this would happen, so there's obviously a lesson for you to learn, you know, figure out what it is. And that just seems so cruel now. But But yeah, I, I wrote a lot of letters, and then I would be like, well, they're just gonna say, you know, have faith, so I send it. Wow,

Brittany Mangelson 30:28

Yeah, this, this is not something that I realized. And I didn't realize that it was part of your story, either. And, you know, I just, again, want to drive home that when you are the the woman in a Mormon family, and you are the one that is driving things like family prayer, or scripture study, or getting the kids to church, and you know, you want to be involved more, you want to do what we would call ministry, and then you're rejected like that, just because of some arbitrary rule, that does not make a lot of sense. Even after your gender has already put you at a disadvantage and is already made you miss out on potentially years of experiencing this ministry. That just bites. I'm stuck on that a little bit. That's That's hard. That's really hard.

Leslie Dalton 31:18

It broke me. It really did. But I figured it out.

Brittany Mangelson 31:23

You did! So let's just keep talking. So yeah, how you said that that experience was kind of a chip in your armor. So what else we on the podcast and in exMormon land, a lot of times we use the analogy of the shelf, you know, you put things on your shelf. So what other things were chips on your armor? What else did you have to put on your shelf? And you know, what, what finally completely broke you with with Mormonism?

Leslie Dalton 31:51

Yeah, well, the woman thing. I felt pretty capable. But you know, having to constantly and I saw my mom do it too, because she was super strong. And my dad's pretty, pretty easy going. And she constantly was trying to shove herself into this position of subservience. And it didn't work. I remember one time, this is just a funny story, that you know, they would preach about this at our old church. And I remember hearing some commotion out in the living room after we had all gone to bed. And my dad, they had told the men to spank their wives if they got out of line. And so he had my mom over his knee, and he was paddling her, but it was so stupid that she was just laughing. And she was just cracking up. And he that made him really madder, because he's supposed to be bringing her into line, you know? anyway. So that's not how to get into line or get your wife in line. But, um, no. Anyway, the woman thing that's pretty big in my life. When I was in college, I worked with a lot of LGBTQ friends. And they told me their stories, and I just couldn't, I could not understand what was wrong with them, that there was nothing wrong with them. So I had been an ally for a long time and through that whole thing in California, California with Prop 8. That was Prop 8, right? After Hawaii legalized the same gender marriage. My sister and brother in law had gone lived in California. And they had gone through all that. And they had struggled. And you know, they were just like, "I know what some of the stuff they're telling us just isn't straight up isn't true. And I know that I just, we can't do this, we cannot pass out literature and we can't go on the corner and talk to people and say things that we know aren't true." And they just struggle because they weren't being faithful. And anyway, I saw that and I was just so grateful. I didn't have to do anything like that here, because I wouldn't have been able to do it. But those were the big things on my shelf. The race issue was also really big to me. I didn't see it too much because again, I live in Utah County and I didn't see racism in the church so much, but I knew that was there because I heard people saying it and I you know, so that was an issue. I mean, of course before the priesthood ban, you know, what was that all about? that bothered me. So when there were three openings in the Quorum of the 12 and I was so sure that this was going to be the time that they finally put a person of color into leadership because you know, one at a time you know, they just were replaced by white men and I'm like this is perfect. They'll put a person of color in and all of my because I cannot understand how God could possibly Want this church to move forward and continue to have just white men in charge? And so I was just sitting there waiting for it. I was gonna rejoice, right. And it didn't happen. They put three white men and and I just that that broke me too. Oh, Kate Kelly was before that, right? So Kate Kelly got me thinking more, that that whole thing. I mean, I wrote a letter for her. And I was thinking about, I didn't ever join Ordain Women but, and I didn't ever sign on to anything except for sending the letter for Kate. But I just I started to think this is making a lot of sense. And I, I feel it feels right to me that women should have more authority and more responsibility. And I mean, I was the Primary President and the Women President and I was about, you know, I did all those things. And I had responsibility, but every single thing I did have to be run by a man to make sure that it was okay. Everything! I couldn't have a meeting in the building if a man wasn't there. Not in the meeting just in the building, right? That kind of stuff was that started to really grate on me. I'm a writer, a professional writer, and I can write a primary program and my Bishop that is a handyman, has to tell me if it's okay or not. Right. That's weird. So, um, so yeah, so that whole thing, and then that when, when three white guys got called into the Quorum of 12, I, it I was done. I just went in my room starving, I couldn't talk. I just, my husband was like, I don't know what's going on. We were sitting there watching conference, and then she left. And, and I just said, This breaks me, I there's no possible way that God

wouldn't have called knowing how many how many people want to see themselves represented around the world, in the Quorum of the 12, how many people need to see themselves represented to keep their testimonies? There's no way God was part of that. And so therefore, what does that mean? So that's Yeah, that was the, my husband was in the Bishopric at the time. So in a way, that was great, because he would be really involved with everything and you know, running around doing stuff. And I would just kind of slip away after sacrament meeting and go home and read, read my own stuff. And so yeah, that was, that's when I started kind of stepping away, cutting back.

Brittany Mangelson 37:48

Yeah, man, I remember when that happened, and being shocked, and I was out of the church by that point. But the the optics of it, like it was so terrible. And if I remember, right, two of them were even from Utah. And I'm pretty sure that I had a family member say, you know, one of them had a parent or something from Sweden, so they were half. I don't remember if it was Sweden or not, but it was like, you know, one of them had a dad from Europe or Scandinavia, or something. It was like see diversity! They're still all white. And they still all spent the last 30, 40, 50+ years and Utah! That is not diversity! Yeah, but to have that hope. I mean, I don't mean to make light of it. Because to have that hope that there will be another perspective outside of just a Utah boy, to have that dash, and to see it in such a huge amount. I mean, three out of the 12 were replaced in that conference, and then to have it all just be more of the same. That's, that's tough. That's really tough.

Leslie Dalton 39:02

Yeah, it was, I started seeing a therapist, who was kind of in the same position I was, I'm not 100% sure, because she was super professional. And she never told me where she was at, but I knew that she didn't always go to church. And, you know, I did the garment check. So I knew she wasn't wearing them. But, but it felt like Well, no, it wasn't, it was like, every time I would come to terms with something, and I'd be like, okay, I can ride this out, you know, for the sake of my family, I can't leave my husband, you know, he had ancestors and Martin really handcart companies, you know, I can't leave him and I can't give him that. You know, I can't I can't take that idea of our eternal family away from him. And I can do it and I can I can affect change from where I am. I can figure out how to do it. But it felt like I would get to that point. And then something would happen November 15. November 2015 policy against, you know, children of LGBT parents. Every few months, something else would come like that. And it just felt like the it was like destroying itself from within, right. Like it couldn't sustain the lie anymore. And so, yeah, I just slowly started choosing a different way. So I, I started out, I felt like I still wanted some spirituality in my life. And I was like, well, I don't want to I, my husband was always my biggest concern because he was so sad, and super supportive and loving. And I remember the day that he told me, I was so afraid that if I left that our marriage will be over. And he told me, he was just shocked when he heard me say that. And he said, I love you for you not because you're at my ticket to somewhere else after you know this. And that was the sweetest thing anyone ever said. Like me, for me? That was really beautiful and it's it sustained us through a lot when it when it got hard, you know, with decisions I was making. But anyway, so I kind of had that to hang on to. And so I said, Well, I want spirituality, I'm going to, I'm just going to go to other churches, and I'm going to try to find Jesus, I'm going to see what is out there. I'm not joining another church. I'm not leaving this church, I just want to see. So I, I made a list of all the churches in Salt Lake area. And one by one, I just started visiting them. And some of them I really liked. Others I did not like. I sat through a couple of sermons that, you know,

talked about the evil of the gays and you know, feeling like I should just get up and walk out. But I didn't. But yeah, it was interesting. And I learned a lot. And I could see that, that people had found Jesus and in different ways. I did not go to Community of Christ, because I was super adamant that I would not go anywhere that was in the least way affiliated with the Mormons and, you know, connected at any point in history. And so I didn't go. And then finally it was the last church on the list. I'm like, my rule keeper. So I made a list. So I have to go. So what? It was amazing.

Brittany Mangelson 42:36

I wish I remember your first Sunday, but I honestly don't.

Leslie Dalton 42:41

You weren't there if everybody was at? I don't know, if they were at reunion, or there was the there was an LGBT camp. I don't I don't know.

Brittany Mangelson 42:52

The Harmony retreat? Maybe?

Leslie Dalton 42:54

Yeah, yeah, I think that's what it was. Because there were only about seven or eight people there.

Brittany Mangelson 42:59

Okay. Okay. I just feel like you've always been part of the congregation. So even, like, even pinpointing back to, you know, your early weeks. I don't even know what that looks like. Because it just feels like you've always been one of us.

Leslie Dalton 43:13

Well, that was like four years ago. That's a long time ago. Wow.

Brittany Mangelson 43:18

Yeah, you're right.

Leslie Dalton 43:20

But Carla talked with me for a long time afterwards, you know, and she was like, I get it. I get it. And I was like, you know, you go and you don't realize that they've heard the story a million times, right? I'm thinking they don't know anything about the Mormons. They're just, you know, and I told her, I went on a mission and all that. Yeah, I told her this, this whole story, not in this much detail. But she was like, Yeah, I totally get it. And there are lots of people here like that. And I just felt so relieved that I wasn't the only one. But it I left feeling great. I called my sister and on the way home and I'm like, that was awesome. I loved the message. I loved the whole feeling. Someone listened to me. Someone talked to me. They didn't pressure me. There's zero pressure. Nope, no. proselyting. And, you know, I was assured that no one would contact me without my permission. And that scared me because I didn't want to be part of that. So I didn't go back for like six months. I was like, No, I can't go back. I'm going to try the Unitarians again, something's got to click. So I don't have to return. But finally, I think it was like January. I just kept thinking about it and thinking about it. I'm really liked that church. I really liked

those people. And so I got my car and drove back and it was a super snowy day and the church was closed. And so I just sat there in the parking. I was like, I was kind of irritated. And then anyway, I went back the next week though, and it was fabulous. From then on, just felt like such a good fit. In fact, my husband said to me, I might be jumping ahead too far, but my husband said to me last, after my own nation on Sunday, I asked him how he felt if he was sad. When he when I was confirmed, he just bawled through the whole thing. And it was super sad and I told him, You don't really need to go, I know, you support me, I don't want you to go and be sad the whole time I want I want to celebrate, without worrying about you being sad. He's like, No, no, I want to go. Anyway, afterward, I asked him if he was sad. And he said, No, he said, I, I did cry. And he said, but I'm so proud of you. And I'm so proud that you are who you are. And I feel like this is a really good fit for you. So he kind of came to terms with it. Finally, I think. I mean, he's mostly been 100%. supportive and accepting but I think that was the first time he saw that it was the right fit for me at Community of Christ. So, which is

Brittany Mangelson 46:15

huge, because in Mormonism, if your spouse does something, it impacts them, right? Like it's you, your salvation is not in a vacuum. And it's interconnected to the person that you're married with, that, you know, you're married to. So that is, like, I can't understate how big that is, even to have, you know, low key support, but then to be able to recognize that this is a place that is a good fit for you. That's really, really admirable and important. It's, it's that's huge. That's absolutely huge. So pretty great. And he has cameras! So he made up for it. So lastly, I am curious about a couple things. So you were pretty adamant about not wanting to check out a church that had any ties to Mormonism, Restoration, Joseph Smith at any point along the way. And I know that that is a big hang up for a lot of people. It truly is. It made me pause for a while there. So how did you come to terms with that? How did you What was it that made you say, okay, there is this connection, but this is different, you know, what was? What was that transition? Like from going from like, Nope, not going there to then now you're ordained.

Leslie Dalton 47:41

So my very first Sunday, I think it was Pride Sunday. And when I was in the sanctuary for our worship, service, and the speaker quoted RuPaul. And I just started bawling. I was just like, really, you're not gonna sit here and quote, Joseph Smith all the time are talking about, you know, I mean, it's, it's right before the date that we honor the martyrdom. And usually, there's a lot of "praise to the man" stuff and where I'm from, and, and you're talking about RuPaul? Like, praise the Lord, like, anyway, so I just, you know, I, I was kind of on hyper alert for that kind of thing, and that Joseph Smith worship never appeared. In fact, a lot of people would say, you know, I'm, I feel triggered when we talk about Joseph Smith. So let's not do that. And we can still have a really great congregational experience, and we can still worship together. And we can still be disciples of Christ together without weather. I mean, Joseph Smith is part of the religion, whether you like it or not, but we don't need to talk about him all the time. That's not so relevant now. So yeah, so other people telling me, they felt they felt triggered, and then just not really seeing a huge presence. There is there's a picture of him in the office. And when I saw that, I was kind of taken aback a little bit, but I just I don't go into that much anyway. I don't know. It, didn't, it wasn't in my face at the beginning long enough for me to worry about it. And now I'm just like, Yeah, he's a guy that was part of the beginnings of the church. And I mean, he did some good things.

Brittany Mangelson 49:39

I was just interested to hear how you kind of reconcile that. And I don't mean to say like, get over in a dismissive way. But you're right. Joseph Smith, in the month of June is very focused on in the LDS church, and so to have that contrast of pride, month and RuPaul specifically, that sends a big signal about where our focus in our congregation is so that you can't get any more contrasted than that.

Leslie Dalton 50:13

Yeah. Not only not having not only having Joseph Smith be sort of not present all the time, but the absolute focus on Christ and following Christ and following the peaceful one, and you know, all of those things that are so important to me, peace and justice, and love. And that stuff is talked about 100% of the time, and so that overshadows everything else to me.

Brittany Mangelson 50:44

Yeah, that was gonna be my next question is What about your experience and Community of Christ brings you back? What what gets you excited about our messaging?

Leslie Dalton 50:56

Yeah, definitely those three things peace and justice, and, and, and love. And I mean, knowing that there was a big discussion, and people were allowed input on the peace resolution, right. And some people didn't agree, and it was totally fine for them to not agree, agree. And they didn't go back home. They weren't ostracized later. And that whole thoughtful, loving discussion of what about this? Or what about this, and I wasn't part of that. But it was, I was coming in right as that was going on. And I was hearing people talk about it all the time. And, and I knew what I was hoping for, you know, I mean, I probably should have been a Quaker or something I, I would be a conscientious objector, if I could, if I've been if I was being called on. And so that was super important to me. And the other thing is, knowing, I mean, I've worked with social justice issues a lot in college, and through my volunteer service, while I was trying to get out of the house when my kids are growing up. But I've worked with homeless people, and I've worked with LGBTQ people. And I just feel like we need more. We need more social justice, we need more things, I work with people in poverty, extreme poverty, and we just need to be focused on those people. And so, and the other thing was hearing people talk about because I, I did not, I, when I first came to Community of Christ, I was prepared to just be an atheist, and see if that worked out going to a church, and I wasn't going to be able to join it, because I was an atheist, but I'm hearing just being treated really gently with that, right? No one ever pressuring me to believe a certain way, or to believe in God a certain way, and allowing me the freedom to discover God again for myself. That that was just really amazing. And I'm so grateful for a place where I'm allowed to do that. And what if we were all allowed to discover on our own and without being told what to think and do all the time? What would we, what great things can we end up doing? Or what truths could we end up believing? If we were allowed to find that on our own, and I'm still, I'm still sort of searching but I have a much better concept of God in my mind. And I feel like I have a relationship with God and a relationship with Christ and they're growing. And that way, even though I didn't want that for a long time, it's kind of like my conversion to the LDS church, right. I'm like, I don't want anything. But then something came to me in a way that helped me recognize that it was going to be it was gonna make me a better person.

Brittany Mangelson 54:00

You just articulated something that I think everyone has to come to understand for themselves, that you are given the spiritual autonomy to rethink reimagine, rediscover, reframe, redefine God, and everything that comes with that on your own. And that is liberating. And it's terrifying. And it's a huge responsibility, and it's a lot of work. But when you can do it together in community, particularly with people who are in the process of doing that themselves, which I think if we're all being honest, we all are in the process of doing that all the time, or at least I hope we are. But when you can do it with a community that supports you, and can, you know, have some killer potlucks and tell jokes along the way, it just makes the whole process easier and more enjoyable. So, yeah, I totally get you. But it is it's overwhelming and just kind of testing the waters to say, you know, can I be an atheist in this community or an agnostic? Or can I want to, you know, can it? Can I admit that I want to throw a certain book of Scripture out the window? Or can I just not believe in this. And it's really vulnerable, especially when you come from a community or two communities that have been very black and white. And there have been really hard boundary lines of what you can and cannot do or think or say, it's just a whole paradigm shift. And so how you just articulated It was very succinct.

Leslie Dalton 55:40

And I think, too, I think that that would have been perfectly fine. In my former faith, likes to explore and learn and all of that, but I wouldn't have been given positions of responsibility, and I wouldn't have been given opportunities to serve in the same way. It I mean, at that point, you had to, I mean, back then, in that life, you had to prove yourself, right, you had to prove that you were super faithful and super righteous, and all those things before you were given responsibility. And to come in here and just be treated like, yeah, you're going through this thing, but that doesn't change what you can do and what you have to offer. Yeah, that's pretty cool.

Brittany Mangelson 56:28

It is. Yeah, it really is. So what have you been able to do in Community of Christ? What has your life looked like since you joined?

Leslie Dalton 56:38

Well, I've been able to teach. I taught some Sunday school classes before I ever was confirmed, I think, maybe? I took the registered youth worker, class before I joined. And so I was able to do to work with kids. I've, I've done stuff that reunion I've been involved in, in worship services, all the time, prayers, DGR, just everything. Um, I haven't. I haven't preached yet. But I will be preaching for the first time in August. So I'm excited about that, but yeah, I just everything almost. So yeah, I got keys before I was confirmed!

Brittany Mangelson 57:37

Keys to the building, you have all the power! Yeah, going from having to check to make sure that a man is going to be present in the building when you just simply want to hold a short little meeting to then be like, Yes, here are keys to the building. You are not the first person that is pointed that out? It's it's a big deal1 Big deal.

Leslie Dalton 57:57

Yeah. Just that trust, right? I mean, if I wasn't handed keys, the first time I went, I mean, I had to kind of, you know, prove that I was a little bit trust. But yeah, trusting that I will say yes to things that I can do. And I will not say yes to things, oh and I did the I did the VOA thing for a while where we served breakfast to homeless youth once a month. I took over that when that responsibility came available. That was before I was confirmed to I think and stuff like that, like, if I have an idea, I can just throw it out there. And if people like it, then maybe it'll catch on. If you know, and it doesn't, it doesn't matter what my authority is people listen to each other. They listen to ideas, and they judge the ideas based on their merit, not on the person's authority or, you know, position.

Brittany Mangelson 59:06

Yeah there's not that in our previous faith experience, there's not the same chain of command, or all the hoops that you have to jump through. It's really, at least in our congregation, and I know everywhere. It's a grassroots organization, you know, you if you have an idea, you can approach leadership, you can see if there's room in the budget or see if you can add it as a line item or whatever it may be to get funding or support. And I think that it's I've said multiple times on the podcast before that I personally was for sure able to do more as a non member and Community of Christ than I ever would have been able to do as a Mormon woman. And I say that so often because I think that it's so easy to forget what it feels like to not have your interest be supported by a community or to have your sense of call be supported by a community. And I mean, it doesn't matter, you know, membership status or whether I was ordained or not, you know, I could plan a worship service, I could be involved with something that is only there for limited people in other faith traditions, and yet, my interests were supported. And that was a way that I could give back to the community in a way that would not have ever been an option before. So yeah, it's just it's, it's really exciting. I think it's really exciting.

Leslie Dalton 1:00:41

It is!

Brittany Mangelson 1:00:44

So Leslie, because you were just ordained last week, I'm just interested in hearing a few thoughts on your ordination, your call to elder, just kind of what that means to you, what gets you excited about that ministry, that kind of thing?

Leslie Dalton 1:01:00

Well, I think the thing that I'm really grateful for is the, the opportunity, we have to talk that over with whoever we want, before we accept and for other people to know about it. And to just kind of mull it over for a while. That hasn't been my experience in the past. And the other thing that I that was really important to me, before I accepted was, I was nervous that I was going to accept a call to ordination, because I had wanted it before and I felt like it wasn't fair before. I didn't want that to be part of my decision at all. So I, I waited until I kind of got past that. And I knew that I wasn't just trying to stick it to the man, so to speak. And I also want to and yeah, I wanted to know more about what you do. So yeah, I'm just grateful for that kind of processing period. And taking my time. And I also didn't want to do it, when I was still on the books of the LDS Church. So I, and that was hard because of my husband's sadness, you know, that just severs everything. Not, doesn't sever anything, but it seems to in some

people's eyes, so I resigned my membership. And he totally, he's like, I don't know why you still belong to this church. And I said, well, because of you because I don't, I don't want to hurt you. And he's like, that's dumb. So anyway, so I did those two things. And when I felt like I was ready, and so I don't see myself doing, it's not like this big transformation or change for me. I just see myself kind of doing the same things, I'm kind of growing into more responsibility. But I do feel there's just a sense of, there's a sense of deeper responsibility, not necessarily heavier, although during that service, which was beautiful, and I was, it was so touching, but I did start to feel like a weight kind of growing on me. And I knew I knew all of the responsibilities, I knew what they were, they were saying before they said it when they were talking about, and you too, talking about the responsibilities, but I just felt like, now I have to I'm committing to do this, and I have to do it, I can't it's not just kind of an abstract idea anymore. But as we've talked about, you know, the Mission Initiatives, and I have some kind of a little bit of direction, I'm I feel like I'm just constantly in the back of my mind thinking about our congregation who's in it, who's in who needs what, and I don't always know, but I'm trying to be more aware of that, and what what kind of things we can do to help the congregation grow. I would love to see us participate more fully in the Mission Initiatives, and focus more on Enduring Principles, which we do, but a lot of what we do is triage kind of, you know, when people are coming to us, just broken in London, there's just a constant flow of people. And I love that we are a triage center. I love it. And I love being able to comfort people and be excited about telling them this is a place where you can find rest and peace and you can stay as long as you want. And that is beautiful about our congregation. At the same time, for those of us that have been here for a little while, I would like to find ways to grow so that we can reach out into the community more doing things like ending needless suffering, and you know, which I think we do some of that right in the sanctuary, right? We end a lot of needless suffering when people come to us broken. But yeah, more things like that I would like to see us do. And I know that there are people in the congregation that are ready to do those things, too, but it takes a number of us to get something going, right? A lot of things can't be done by oneself.

Brittany Mangelson 1:05:20

Exactly. And I know that that everything you just said reminds me of Develop Disciples to Serve, right. And that's, that's what it takes. It takes a community, we can't just wish away poverty or suffering in our local areas that actually takes action to get to get that done. And I really am totally on board with your vision with the Mission Initiatives and Enduring Principles. And I think that they're so universal. And they're so there's so much the values and the the drive for what a lot of people who are post religious or just, just just living in today's world, right? Like, these are all values that we all want. We all see. We all we find value in these core principles, and actually living them out and figuring out how to do that in community, I think is really beautiful. And I'm just super, super excited for your continued ministry and the fact that we get to work together as elders in the congregation. It's, it's fun. So. So Leslie, any last final thoughts, any hopes for Community of Christ at large? I mean, you've talked about hopes for the congregation.

Leslie Dalton 1:06:41

I just wish that more people knew about us and and I don't want to proselytize and I don't want to push myself on anyone. But I just think this is such a great place for growth and, and opportunities to serve. And, and we do so much good with the little that we have. I love that. And I wish more people were aware of us and yeah. So if that can happen somehow without knocking on people's doors.

Brittany Mangelson 1:07:14

I've often joked that if there was a message that would be worth knocking on people's doors, or it would be our message.

Leslie Dalton 1:07:22

Yeah.

Brittany Mangelson 1:07:24

I agree with everything you just said. And that is my ultimate goal, too, is just for us to grow in Salt Lake and for us to grow everywhere. Because I really think that the message of this church and the way that we view the gospel of Jesus, and the mission of Jesus is one that is relatable and timely and relevant. And I just get really, really excited about it. So, Leslie, I always like to ask on these Fair Trade episodes, if there's anything that you would tell seekers that are currently listening to this, so people who might be interested in Community of Christ that are maybe thinking like, ugh Joseph Smith, or ugh church or ugh Jesus, who are working through their own hangups, what what advice would you share to them? What, what would your message be?

Leslie Dalton 1:08:16

I think I would say, first of all, share your story. Because the chances are really good that you're going to find someone that gets you. And that's going to feel really good. And there's no obligation to stick around. But I would also say, to know that you can, you can sort of form your own faith experience, and you can go at your own pace, and you can go in your own direction. And it's not, I used to joke about the very beginning, when I first started going out, compared to where it came from, it was kind of the do what you want church, right? Just come and just be you and find the good and take it home and do something good with it. And that's not not true. But it's there's obviously more structure to Community of Christ than that. And there's more expectation for for its members, but it's not. But it is something that you can do in your own way, in your own time. And I think that's worth sticking around for at least for a while and and no one will ever expect you to make a lifetime commitment or stick around forever. But for your own personal spiritual growth, I think that there are a lot of opportunities here that you wouldn't find elsewhere and won't receive, you won't be obligated to do anything but grow yourself and you'll have opportunities to do some ministering and service on the way and grow in that as well. So yeah, Give it, give it a little bit of a chance and see if it meets your needs. I think it will.

Brittany Mangelson 1:10:10

I think that's excellent advice. Well, Leslie, thank you so much. This has been so fun. I've learned a lot about you. I've learned a lot about your experience. And I've just gotten a little jazzed about the direction that you're headed. I always like to leave all of my interviews with the question. "Is there anything else that you would like to say?" sometimes we breeze through our outlines or stuff comes up, so is there anything that you feel like you need to just get out at the very last second?

Leslie Dalton 1:10:46

I don't think so. It's always fun to talk with you. And this has been fun to kind of center myself. And kind of think about where I was and where I'm going a little bit more in a different way. So thank you so much.

Brittany Mangelson 1:11:01

Well thanks for sharing. I really think that these stories of faith transition are so helpful just to hear your own story reflected back in someone else. I know that I've thought of a lot of different connections, as I've heard you speak and so I really appreciate it and I know others will too. So thanks so much.

Josh Mangelson 1:11:20

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