

Josh Mangelson 00:17

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

Carla Long 00:33

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. And today I am super-duper, duper excited to be with two awesome, incredible women who I just, have inspired me throughout my entire career with Community of Christ. So, I am super excited to be with them. Before I tell you who they are, we're going to be talking about the evangelist blessing. The evangelist blessing is one of our eight sacraments and it is available to, well, anyone. You don't have to be a member of the church to have an evangelist blessing. So, if you're listening to this, and you're interested in what that means, and what that is, then you are in the right place. So, I'm here with Susan Oxley, and Kris Judd and I'm going to have them introduce themselves just so you can hear a little bit more about them. And then we're going to jump right into it. So, Susan, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Susan Oxley 01:26

Carla, it's just great to be with you. Carla and I worked together in California for several years and I just love her spirit and her humor and her positive attitude, and her way to engage people is just marvelous, and it's been years since I had a chance to be with her. So, this is so much fun. I really love it. I'm Susan Oxley and I live in West Seattle, Washington and I am an evangelist, have been an evangelist before I became an apostle, and then when I finished being an apostle and left the Council of Twelve, I'm an evangelist again, and it was like coming home. It was really wonderful. So, even through the pandemic there were ways I found to continue my ministry as we grew used to the pandemic and ways to communicate and get along. So, I'm really excited. I'm an oma, which is grandma in Dutch. So, I'm an oma to a wonderful 17 year-old who's going to Sarah Lawrence University on a scholarship, and three other grandkids, Ava, who's 12, and the twins, boys who are Leo and Adrian. And they've just turned 10. And I got to homeschool them this last semester and really, really enjoyed it. So, I work on a number of things, including the North American Climate Justice Team. And we've been doing a variety of webinars online about climate change and the sacredness of creation. So, I'll put a plug in for that. Look us up online, and we have some podcasts that we're doing and adding to this series based on the presenters that are doing our webinars. That's who I am, and some of the things that occupy my time.

Carla Long 03:31

Thank you, Susan. Kris, tell us a little about yourself.

Kris Judd 03:34

I'm Kris Judd, and I live in Des Moines, Iowa and I had the opportunity to work with Susan when I was a President of Seventy and she was an apostle, and we had a wonderful time together. And those years have bonded us as sisters and friends forever. And, of course, I feel the same with Carla, even though we've never worked in the same field or in exactly the same ministry at any one time. But like, as Susan

described, I love Carla's energy and intelligence and creativity and just passion for life and ministry. So, it is an honor and a joy to be joining with both of you today. I became an evangelist when I was serving as staff pastor for Community of Christ staff. And I had been serving, as I said, as a President of Seventy and then transitioned into the role of staff pastor but was still a seventy. And when the call to evangelist came, part of it felt very natural and real because even as a President of Seventy my intention was always for healing and wholeness. But then, there was this other part of me that was like, No! What about my ministry as an evangelist? So, in some ways, I am a "sevangelist". I feel like I'm an evangelist to, I still feel drawn to the margins, to the edges. And I love that this sacrament is open to people who are not part of the church because I think as that sevangelist, you know, that's where I find myself often most comfortable, is on those edges, and wanting all people to know that God yearns to bless them. I currently, my husband, Peter and I, we live in Des Moines, and we have my father, my 92 year-old father who's living with us. And so, I have served as a caregiver. And I've, but I've also taken up a new role, which is that of a private investigator. So, crazy, crazy, crazy. I am a pastoral PI, is what I call myself. And I am already sensing the ministry of the evangelist as I work with families of missing persons, families of people who, whose children have been, who have died. And so, it's interesting where God leads us. In terms of church work, I continue to volunteer as a member of the Spiritual Formation Team, and in particular with the Spiritual Formation Companions Program, which is a three-year program designed to train members or non-members in the area or the art of spiritual companionship. So, that's a little bit about me.

Carla Long 06:41

My goodness, both of you lead such interesting and wonderful lives. I too, Kris, feel like I'm a little bit of a hybrid. I'm a bishop, but I also feel like I'm a seventy. So, I call myself a "bishonary" usually bishonary, for the most part, which I think works out really well. So, let's just jump into what evangelist blessings are. Just in case someone who's listening isn't quite sure, they've never heard what an evangelist blessing, hadn't heard that terminology. So, super easy first question, what is an evangelist blessing? And Susan, why don't you take this one?

Susan Oxley 07:19

Well, an evangelist blessing is basically a prayer that evangelist offers on behalf of another person, saying good things about them, and about God's relationship with them. Blessing is, comes from benediction, which basically means "good saying", "good speech". And the Hebrews, way back when, were blessing all of the time. I mean, their prayers were primarily prayers of blessing, not prayers of petition, asking for things. It was saying good things. And so, they would bless God, say good things about God. They would bless one another. They would bless the day, bless the meal, bless the adventure they were on, or their endeavor, whatever. And so, their history, their heritage is one of blessings. And out of that, of course, came the special blessing that a father would give to children that basically provided an inheritance for them, not just land, or cattle, you know, sheep or something, but rather, the inheritance of the spiritual life that that father had lived and the inheritance of the relationship with God. And so, if you go back to the old patriarchal days, where the patriarch would bless the children with this special heritage of prayer of blessing, that's kind of what the evangelist blessing is all about. It's a senior, quite often a senior, not necessarily, because we have some very young evangelists, but spiritually, a mature person who offers a spiritual legacy and blessing to another person, assuring them of their relationship with God, of God's desire to do good in their lives. And to

challenge them to deepen that relationship as they experience God's blessings and respond to the gifts that God gives.

Carla Long 09:36

That is just beautiful. I actually wasn't aware that there was such a cool heritage behind those words. It's really cool. Oh, yes, there's one other thing.

Susan Oxley 09:46

There's one other thing I might mention. Jesus, before he died, gave a beautiful blessing to his disciples that's found in the Gospel of John and he basically says, you know, as God is in me, and you are in my love, then we together are in God and in God's love. And he was speaking about his blessing, his desire for them to love one another, to care for one another in love, and to bless one another with love, even after he was gone. And that really is also a pattern for the evangelist blessing. He was acting then as the mature patriarch, or evangelist of that kinship group, and giving them a legacy of love and blessing before he died.

Carla Long 10:45

I love that. I mean, since all of the sacraments are modeled off of Jesus's life, that makes perfect sense. Thanks for bringing that up. And Kris, what do you think?

Kris Judd 10:55

Well, I agree wholeheartedly with what Susan has so beautifully said. And in, you know, we as evangelists, we look at it, not just this prayer, although the prayer is perhaps the, at the centerpiece of it, but it's, it is really a journey of a blessing, that that journey begins when the person decides that they would like to seek that blessing. And I'm sure we're going to be talking about what that journey is like, or what the processes entails. But what I have found in my own journeying with others to a blessing is, the blessing begins right then and continues on, and ultimately ends up in words. But the whole process itself is a blessing.

Carla Long 11:48

Well, actually, that's my next question. So, Kris, why don't you just keep going? How, and then I'll ask Susan the same question, how do you prepare for an evangelist blessing? I'm assuming it's different for every evangelist just a little bit. But Kris, why don't you talk a little bit about how you prepare for a blessing or how you have people prepare? And then I'll ask Susan?

Kris Judd 12:06

Yeah, I think you're right. I think it is a different for every evangelist. And yet there are some common things. So, one of the blessings of the pandemic has been the opening of this sacrament to online preparation, as well as online sharing, because many of the blessings that I offer are with people in other parts of the country, and even of the world. And so, the preparation time, I mean, an individual decides, you know, they're, they're curious about a blessing, or they may visit the church website, on the evangelist page, and see, watch a video about a blessing or read something and it's piqued their interest. They want to know more. And so, they reach out or find out the names or references of some evangelists in the area, or again, because we are not limited to geography, it could be, could be

anyone. But my preparation, if I've received a request is, I talk to the individual and find out, why now in their life are they seeking that blessing, seeking this sacrament? And, many times, it's a time of transition in their life. Maybe it is they are going to school, or they are considering a move or a change in job or a change in family, perhaps before a marriage or before a child comes or they've ended certain aspects of, in their life. Maybe there's been a death, or a divorce, or a move. So, it often comes in times when there's some uncertainty and transition. However, a blessing can be offered at any time. And so, we'll talk about one's faith journey. What's their relationship like with God? What is, what are their hopes and dreams? What questions might they have? I think in the past, and Susan, correct me if I'm wrong, but in the past, there was kind of an aura about evangelist blessings or patriarchal blessings that somehow your future would be predicted, you know, as if the evangelist or patriarch had a magic eight ball, would shake it and be able to tell you what kind of job you should have, who you should marry, where you should live. Would you say that was true, Susan or...

Susan Oxley 14:33

Yes, that was very much the expectation in the old days.

Kris Judd 14:38

Yeah, which puts a lot of pressure on an evangelist. But we've moved away from that. That is not the expectation. So, a person comes with a desire to be blessed and the evangelist shares scriptures, shares conversation, mostly listens to what is stirring within the individual, and what their, again, their hopes, their dreams, what their images of God are like, what their relationship is like. And over a period of, whether it be weeks or months, sometimes my goal, even longer, just depending on the situation. The evangelist learns who this person is, and spends time in prayer, and meditation, reflection. And words begin to come, or images begin to come. At least that's how it works for me. And some of those I may share with the individual as we take this journey. And so, in some ways, the prayer that is offered in person, thus far those have been mine, in person with hands upon their head, in a space where we have identified as meaningful for that person, and it may be preceded by a song, a hymn, poetry, silence, a prayer, a candle is lit. And just the awareness of the presence of the Spirit with us. Sometimes the words of my prayer are affirmations, many times affirmations, many times, sometimes challenges. Sometimes words come to me from, I don't know where, that would not be of my knowing, of, not might be of my understanding that I share. And many times, it's, they are words of recognition of what the Spirit is already doing in that person's life. Because of the journey that we've taken, I've had the chance to witness that. And then, after the blessing, I provide that individual with a written copy, after I've edited it, listened to my recording, made sure that I got any additional things that came during that time, and provide them with a copy. A copy is stored at headquarters at church headquarters as well in Independence. And then I try to remain engaged in their life from time to time as a companion, furthering that relationship, and watching how those words of blessing are being lived out in their life.

Carla Long 17:29

That's wonderful, Kris, thank you so much. That was a wonderful explanation. Susan, what about for you? How do you prepare for that? And, is there any differences between Kris's and what Kris does and what you do or whatever. Just tell me a little bit about how you handle it.

Susan Oxley 17:46

Actually, in general, the process that Kris has described is very much like the process that I use. When somebody asks me to give them an evangelist blessing, the first thing that we talk about is, what does that mean to you? What are you asking me to do? What's your understanding? And sometimes they don't know. They want a special prayer said, and sometimes they want me to predict their future, or give them answers to specific life circumstances and questions, and that's what's prompted the blessing. So, then we have to talk about it, and talk about what God intends with blessing their life, and allowing them to make decisions and bless those decisions. So, you know, we talk about the purpose and the process, the preparation that we need to make, what an evangelist blessing is, and I give them homework. I ask them to do a timeline of their life, the major events in their life, and how that influenced them spiritually and whether it was positive or negative, and, you know, the main things that they want to share with me, and I ask them to read some scriptures and to think about them. I ask them to do at least one spiritual practice that is focused on the evangelist blessing, maybe journaling or prayer or whatever works for them. And then we set up a schedule of meetings. And we don't, we don't do what they used to do in the old days. They'd have a reunion and people would line up outside the tent of the evangelist in a line, and they'd go in and the evangelist would give them a blessing, one right after another, hardly knowing anything more about some of them than just their name and where they came from. And, as Kris said, it's the process that blesses as much as the blessing itself. And sometimes the prayer that is said at the end, although it affirms and encourages and can be used later as a reference, is not the most important thing. Sometimes the most important thing are the interactions that occur along the way, and the life situations that are discussed and reviewed, and placed in the light of God's Spirit and what God is doing in that person's life. I like to tell people, you know, a blessing is not a matter of us saying to God, "Okay, God, next Tuesday, four o'clock, be there, and bless this person." No, God has blessed each of us all of our lives, with life, with breath, with a presence, even if we didn't know God was with us. And God is blessing us now. And God will continue to bless us in the future. So, what we are doing is talking about all of that. How does God bless you in the past? What gifts has God given you, and trying to open a window on their life, so that I can discern what that blessing of God is like, and then put it into human words, which is very hard to do. We have to put spiritual things into human words, and it's a challenge. So, I like the fact that Kris, like me, sometimes is inspired by images that the Spirit places in my mind, because sometimes it's easier to explain an image in talking about a relationship with God, then concepts, or individual words. So, I take notes along the way as I listen to what people are saying, and I get their permission to take notes. I refer to those notes. I look at the timeline. I pray a lot. I pray for the person. And one of the most important things I've learned, and I learned this very early in my journey as an evangelist, is that I have to be, get to the point where I can truly love the individual myself before I can speak God's love in their life. And so, for instance, there was an individual who came and asked a blessing, not knowing that I had some problems with that individual, that there were some barriers between us that this person didn't know about. And I had to face those barriers. And I began the, I agreed, I began the process. But I kept putting off the final blessing. And, at last, I realized we didn't have anything more that was necessary except that I wasn't ready. I still had some things, you know, stopping me. And, in desperation one night, as we were talking, and this was maybe our fifth or sixth visit, I said, "Well, there's only one other thing that we really need to talk about. I wanted to hear your testimony of Jesus Christ, and I'll share mine." Because we hadn't done that. And so, we met at this person's home and I shared my testimony of Christ. And then the individual began sharing their testimony, what had happened to them and how they felt. And in

the process, suddenly, my vision cleared. I saw God's love active in their life. I saw how God was blessing them in that moment. And all the barriers came down, and I loved the individual. I could truly say to her, "You know, I, I love you as a person and as a child of God," and I knew then I was ready to speak the blessing in her life. So, that was a, that was an important lesson for me to learn.

Carla Long 23:55

What a beautiful story, Susan, thank you so much for sharing that. You know, it kind of goes back to the heart, I feel like the heart of Community of Christ. We have a lot of different hearts, but one of them is, it's all about relationship. And I truly believe that it is all about relationship, relationship with God, relationship with each other, the love between us all. That's where God lives. And I feel like that's what you're saying. I could be wrong about that, but I don't think I am. I feel like that's what you're saying and what a beautiful illustration. So, people who are listening to this might be very, very curious about how they could also get an evangelist blessing but they might not know any evangelists. So, what happens if someone really wants to get an evangelist blessing and they don't know anybody? Susan, can you answer that question for me?

Susan Oxley 24:46

Yes, most people who want a blessing have a connection with someone in the church who is a minister. Now, not everybody does. Sometimes they are connecting with the church through a person who is not a minister, but that's okay. Whoever they're connecting with, however they found, find out about any evangelists blessing, go to their contact person, the person that they know best in the church, and talk to them and say, "I would like an evangelist blessing. Can you direct me?" And usually that can be referred to the mission center president, or a pastor, or someone else on the mission center staff that is known. And they can point out the people who are evangelists that are closest to that individual. So, a person can sometimes simply choose a name on a list, and they have no clue who that person is, and so it's not always a great match. And so, it's good to just get to, a visit with the evangelist or a phone call and say, "Tell me about your evangelist ministry." Don't ask for the blessing first. Say, "You know, I understand you're an evangelist. What does that mean?" And listen to the person talk and see if there's something in what they say about their ministry that connects with you. And if there is, then you can ask them about the evangelist blessing. If not, then what you can say is, "I'm interested. Can you tell me who some of the other evangelists are? Are they all like you?" Or, you know, do they have different churches they go to? Or, you know, I mean, ask just some general questions, and then listen as they talk, and if somebody's name seems to stand out, or what is said about that individual stands out then connect with them, and ask them the same kinds of questions. Because you need to feel comfortable with the person who blesses you, and they would like to feel comfortable with you. So, I, that's one way. Now another way is to contact our church headquarters, or the mission center president directly, and ask about evangelists in the area. We do have some brochures, some fliers that talk about evangelist blessing and what an evangelist is and does. And so, you can ask for a brochure. And if they don't have it, they'll get it for you. They'll make sure that you get one of those. And that is a big help. They have an Evangelist Office at the Temple headquarters in Independence, Missouri. So, as a last resort, if you can't get anybody else on the phone, call the Evangelist Office, and they can connect you to somebody in your area that would be happy to talk with.

Carla Long 27:51

Thank you, Susan. That's, that's very comprehensive. Kris?

Kris Judd 27:54

Yes, I was just gonna add to what Susan had shared in terms of connecting with the Evangelist Office. I currently serve as the secretary to the evangelists. Jane Gardner is the Presiding Evangelist. And so, if you were to, a person was to get on the church website, you know, cofChrist., www.cofchrist.org and look under, I think it's under ministries, and then under priesthood, and then under evangelist, there is, there's a whole page that is dedicated to people who are seeking what, seeking a blessing, what it is, how do you prepare for it? And there are some contact names on that page, Jane Gardner, as well as myself, and so, yes, write to us. Let us know, and we will help direct you to the people in your local area that can be a resource for you. And again, as Susan said, we have some beautiful brochures, not only in English, but in French and Spanish as well. So, we want to make this blessing available to as many people as possible. And I agree, Susan, it's kind of like your hairdresser in a sense, in that, you know, your hairdresser or the person does your hair ends up knowing a lot about you. Typically, if you're like me, you talk and talk and you listen, and you listen. And it's important that, you know, if you don't like that person that's styling your hair, ultimately, you might need to find a new one. If, it's important that you and the evangelist connect and click, and you'll get a better blessing and possibly a haircut out of it if you're lucky.

Carla Long 29:40

Wow, I want to sign up for the evangelist haircut duo. That sounds great. I could use a haircut right now. Yes, Susan?

Susan Oxley 29:49

Yeah, I'd like to add one other topic to this. I'm not sure that you had intended for it to come up, Carla, but I just want to add one more piece to this. In the old days, the evangelist blessing was a one-time, good deal. You only did it once and you never could do it again. And so, whatever was said in that blessing was it for the rest of your life. That changed as life changed and people's needs and journey took on different aspects. We began to find that people's, people sometimes lived a journey that kept changing through the, through their maturing ages. And so now we have the life blessings, ongoing life blessings, that can be offered after the first blessing has already receded into the past. So, and those too, like the evangelist blessing, can be recorded, you know, with a written copy and electronic copy that are kept and archived, and you can go back to them and refer to them often. So, one of the things that I have found also in preparing for a blessing, if it's a second blessing, or even a third in someone's life, a lot of times, I will ask them, if it would be possible for me to read their first blessing. And then I review it with them. And quite often, we will find that the language in that first blessing is old language that referred to a lifestyle that's gone, but with a little bit of creativity, can be interpreted in images that refer to the current life. So, for instance, a woman's blessing that says things like, you know, your, you will be a helpmeet to your husband, and your children will be blessed, and you will find multiple gifts and ways to help your children grow spiritually. And this is a woman who is now say, 50, her first husband has died. Maybe she's never remarried. And her, she maybe only had one child, and that child is gone and never was in the church, and she's going, this doesn't fit me anymore. But if you change husband, to Christ, if you change the idea of raising children, in terms of physical offspring, to people in

a congregation, and you change, you know, the idea of a child's spiritual development into the process of spiritual journeying with those in a congregation, then she finds that the council given in that blessing, referring to all those things, is really very accurate in terms of her commitment to Christ, her role as a pastor now in the congregation, and the way in which she relates to, we're back to relationships, and helps nurture and expand the journey of the people in the congregation as she uses her gifts and talents as a minister, which was not even possible when that, you know, blessing was given way back when, when she was 18. So, what I'm saying is that sometimes those old blessings, if you just, you know, interpret it as images and symbols for what's happening in life now, they'll find that there's still a lot of relevance, in those old blessings, and then you can go on, expand and build on those in a second blessing, and talk about the additional love and blessing and calling of God in that individual's life beyond what the old one says.

Carla Long 34:13

That's wonderful. Yes, Kris.

Kris Judd 34:16

Yes, I know, there are people that have had a blessing and because of moves or because of disorganization, like me, or because of whatever, have lost that first blessing or lost a copy of that. And if that's the case, they can contact the Evangelist Office, and the assistant who works with us will be able to secure a copy and provide that for them. So, whether it be because, as Susan's describing, they're working on a continuing life blessing or ongoing life blessing, or they just want to remember what was said in that first blessing. So, I just wanted to lift that up in case that ever becomes an issue for our listeners.

Carla Long 35:08

That's very helpful. I really appreciate, I'm sure some people will very much appreciate knowing that, although somehow, I got my evangelist blessing at least 20 years ago when I was living in Australia. And that thing has followed me around. Like, I always know where it is, which is crazy, because I've lost any number of things in 20 years, but I always have that evangelist blessing. I'm not sure how I've hung on to it. But that's helpful. Thank you. So, Susan, you're talking about these new avenues of blessing. Kris and Susan, you were talking about these new avenues of blessing that you can get more blessings in your life and that's something different than what was before. Are there any other new avenues in the evangelist blessing world? Is there something that might be different that people who knew about evangelist blessing a long time ago might not know about now? And I'm thinking about one in particular, I'm thinking about congregational blessing. I know that's a new avenue of blessing. Are there other types of things that are also happening?

Susan Oxley 36:08

Kris, you go ahead, and you've been more involved with congregational blessings than I have. So, let's hear about some of your experiences and how people who are interested in that would begin that process.

Kris Judd 36:21

Right, and then you can follow up with the other kinds of blessings that are now available that have been expanded through recent scripture. I've been involved in two congregational blessings and in both cases, I was a member of a multi-person team. In the first case, first congregational blessing, I was the only one of the four evangelists on that team that was not a member of the congregation. So, I was an outsider that was invited to come in and be a participant in that process. And, like the preparation for the individual blessing, it was a process. The evangelists, we met with the congregational leadership team, and various teams. We met with the youth. We met with the priesthood. We met with members in their homes, those that were willing to schedule a time for us to come in and visit and just listen again to their experience of God in this congregation, their hopes and dreams for the congregation, their sense of what God was doing, and inviting them into, their history with the congregation and how it had changed over time, how they had been changed. We engaged in communal spiritual practices. So, we had themes by, which we, you know, there were messages given, sermons given, worship experiences planned for. There was a congregational retreat in which we explored what having a congregational blessing could mean. And again, developing those relationships and paying attention to really listening for what God was already doing and, kind of, paying attention to where the Spirit was moving, even outside the congregation, in the community, and what that might be inviting them into. And ultimately, we had a beautiful worship service that involved the physical blessing of touch, because that's one of, the symbol for evangelists blessing is that of hands. So, when you're doing an individual blessing, sacrament of blessing for an individual, it's easy to place your hands on their head, or if that's not comfortable on their shoulder, but typically on their head. When you've got a congregation of 100 to 200 people, you know, how do you do that? So, you've got to be creative in ways. And so, in the one, the first blessing, it was a matter of, in each member of the congregation came up, and I'm trying to remember what they took, if it was a matter of bread and juice, as in communion, and we touched their hands as we gave that to them. I don't remember exactly, to be honest, but there was that element involved. Every member of the congregation then received a copy of that blessing. And I know that congregation then has returned to visit it, almost like a, kind of a touchstone, to say, you know, how are we reacting and responding to these words that were given to us, of affirmation, of challenge, and the invitation. In the second blessing experience, which happened almost like a month after the second one began, and these are, these are involved processes, so, at least for the congregations that I was engaged with, they were, they were, they took well over a year. For smaller congregations that may not be necessary, but for these, it did. And we, again, traveled with, we had a five-person team. None of us were members of the congregation. There were no evangelists in the congregation. So, we visited that congregation on a rotational basis for a year, just coming in, being with, being with at various types of services or events, traveling with, conversing with. One of the things that happened in that blessing process was a healing service. And this was a congregation that was pretty large. And, you know, with large congregations there can be, kind of, cliques involved. And those cliques can create wounds in and of themselves. But during this healing blessing, or healing service, excuse me, during the healing service, the evangelists, we were positioned in the room with a member of the congregation, an elder, and people came to us and sat in a chair, shared with us the burdens on their hearts. We offered the sacrament of laying on of hands for healing. There were places for children. There were places where the children could go and talk with adults that were gathered together and just receive words of blessing in the mat, in that, at that time. The other thing that was very, two other things that were very special about that process, one of the members was a very talented artist. She created a book that the

congregation, each member received, that had scripture, that had reflection questions, that had artwork, and took us through a number of themes in preparation for that. That, in and of itself, was a blessing. The other thing that was really significant was that congregation continue to visit the words of the blessing each Sunday, each week, for an entire year. So, it was not one where it was just put on the shelf," Oh, we did the blessing. That's great." But it was one that became a living document for the congregation. And it, one in which that congregation grew in their relationships. Those walls of the cliques, you know, they were challenged and encouraged to look at each member as family and as friend, and they took it seriously and had, received many blessings as a result of that process and the result of that prayer of blessing.

Carla Long 42:59

That sounds pretty wonderful. That's pretty awesome. I'm really glad that that avenue is opened up for people and congre-, or I mean for congregations because congregations can become, and I know this isn't gonna fix it, but congregations can become toxic places and can become places where things are unresolved, and things, and there are times when maybe an outside person needs to help bring those things to light. Not that that's what an evangelist does. They don't do that. But it could help in that process. Yes, Chris.

Kris Judd 43:28

One thing that was very interesting about one of the two groups was that when we approached, I believe it was the priesthood, about the opportunity to have a congregational blessing, their response was, "Why? There's nothing wrong with us." So, there's this idea somewhere that a blessing is given when there's a problem, when there's something wrong. And I would just want to say, God is wanting to bring blessing or to, we want to announce the blessings in all people's lives, regardless if there's a problem or not, because we all live with, like you said, there are congregations that can become toxic places, unfortunately, because we're human beings. And if we're not doing the inner work, of looking at our own patterns and our own woundedness we can carry that on to others. But yeah, there's, there doesn't have to be a crisis in order to have a blessing. It is a matter of just wanting to connect with God in a very special and sacred way.

Carla Long 44:35

That is very helpful. Thank you for saying that. You don't have to have anything wrong with you in order to ask for it. That's what you're saying. So, what other avenues or what other, you know, what other, what else is opening up in the evangelist blessing umbrella?

Susan Oxley 44:53

Well, there's a variety of possibilities now for an evangelist blessing. For instance, a couple who is getting ready to be married might ask for a couple's blessing to, you know, just remind them of their individual journeys, but also their journey together with God as they move into marriage. Couples who are already married, or who have chosen to live as common law, a couple without benefit of, of the sacrament of marriage, might also ask for either a couple's blessing or a family blessing that would involve all the members of the family. And in that case, the evangelists would visit with not just the parents, but all of the kids and find out about them, what their interests are, what their concerns are, what their vision for their future is like. And then all of that is, that they listen to, helps inform them about

the way God is working with that family, and what God's greatest hopes and dreams and vision for that family is like, and that is an, expressed in a family blessing. There are times when a leadership team might ask for an evangelist blessing, which is more than just saying, "Okay, we're getting ready to launch a new fundraiser. Would you, you know, would you say a prayer for us?" No, I'm talking about a leadership team that decides to go on a discernment journey about where their leadership team is going, and how the relationships in that leadership team can be enhanced and develop and reflect more of Christ's spirit as they move forward. And so, again, they would work for several weeks, months, perhaps even a year, with the evangelist, exploring different avenues of that leadership team and their vision and their hopes and dreams, and then have a special blessing for all of the people in that leadership team. You could, in the same way, a small group, or, you know, a specific task force might be blessed. One of the things that has really empowered some people, is a special blessing for transgender couples, or couples, other couples in the LGBTQA+ community, who feel outside the normal stream of lifestyles and acceptance in the world. And an evangelist can speak God's love and God's acceptance and God's love as a blessing in their lives, in very special ways. I have had some requests that I've had to, kind of, redirect a little. I've had more than one person ask for a blessing on their house, especially if it's a new structure. And so, I'm, I say to them, you know, I'm happy to come and speak a prayer of dedication for your house, but it would not be a sacrament of evangelist blessings. We can always pray, and evangelists can always pray every, for everything and everybody. That is not a problem. It's whether it qualifies as an evangelist blessing in the sacramental sense. And quite often, when people ask for, like a blessing on their house, or a blessing on their office, they don't care that much that it's not a sacrament. What they want is for God to be with them in that space, for that to be a sacred space in which God's purpose and vision is carried out. And so that can be done in this simple prayer. The other thing is that people have asked for blessings of, an evangelist blessing for their dog or their cat, and God cares about every animal. God's Spirit flows through every part of creation. But the sacrament of evangelist blessing is designed for human relationships with God. And so again, I'm happy to say a prayer for an animal. I have even been the pastor at a county fair on the day when they brought all of their animals to the arena and I got to bless the animals with a general prayer, and then I went around and blessed each animal individually, because it was a small county fair. And it was a wonderful experience. But even though I'm an evangelist, that was not a "evangelists blessing" in the sacramental sense. It was just a wonderful, wonderful prayerful experience for all of us. And God blesses and acknowledged and accepts those in the Spirit in which it's given.

Carla Long 50:14

I, I'm not sure I had any idea that there are so many different kinds of blessings that were available. Thank you, Susan. That was a really good walkthrough, what is available. Kris, did you have something you want to say?

Kris Judd 50:23

It was just to, I know we have visited with evangelists who have offered prayers of blessing at various events or things and we've, we've talked with them about what's the difference between a blessing, a prayer of blessing by an evangelist and the sacrament of evangelist blessing. And so, there are four components to the sacrament of evangelist blessing. One is that there's a period of preparation by both the evangelist and those that are receiving the blessing. That's a, that's one of the criteria or expectations. The second is that there is a prayer of blessing that is offered and that there is a written

copy that is given, made available to the individual or recipients. And then finally, there is an expectation of an ongoing journey with the individual or recipients by the, with the evangelist. So, there are many times, as Susan said, evangelists will offer a prayer of blessing that is sacred, there's no question about it. It is a beautiful gift and experience. But unless it has those four criteria, the preparation by both parties, the prayer, the written copy, and then the ongoing journey with, it doesn't meet the, what we are talking about is the guidelines for the sacrament of evangelist blessing.

Carla Long 51:55

That's very [inaudible], Kris.

Susan Oxley 51:57

Yeah, and if I can add to that, I just want to stress something that Kris referred to very briefly earlier, that is that when the sacrament of an evangelist blessing is completed, I always schedule at least one, and sometimes two or three meetings with the person afterwards to talk about the blessing. You know, what did you hear in this, that I might have, have missed that you have questions about it? Are there things that we need to clarify? And sometimes I will go back to God in prayer about something that is raised, and we may even add a little codicil or a paragraph to the evangelist blessing based on that feedback, and that visit that we have after this, the evangelist prayer has been given. And that becomes part of the written record, too. Sometimes we talk about it, and then nothing is added to the record. It doesn't always happen. But I wanted to mention that there is follow up, and a relationship that's been developed with that person. And so, that's an important point to stress in any evangelist blessing.

Carla Long 53:12

Yes, I'm so glad that you mentioned that. Thank you for that. So, I have, I've learned a lot. And I'm super grateful to both of you. You two are a great team, by the way. I've learned a lot about evangelist blessings, and I've learned, and I hope that our listeners have too, I'm pretty sure, I know that they have. Was there anything else that you wanted to add before we call this podcast to a close, anything else you wanted to say that you didn't quite get a chance to say?

Susan Oxley 53:40

Well, I talked about...

Kris Judd 53:41

Oh, go ahead, Susan.

Susan Oxley 53:44

I just need to say that I talked about having ministered with you earlier, because you were the moderator for our podcast. And I totally skipped over the fact that Kris and I have had a long and beautiful ministry relationship when she was the seventy working with me in, as an apostle, and that, you know, her ministry as an evangelist, this builds on that seventy ministry so well. And, but in the seventy ministry already, she had the heart of the evangelist and the compassion, and the love, and the sensitivity, and the listening ear for people, and that's what made her such a good seventy. So, I just wanted to add that, you know, Kris is just very dear to me. And it's a joy to share about evangelist

blessings together now, and we do, kind of, hit the ball back and forth between us. What I forget to say, she picks up on and shares just exactly like we had it all choreographed and planned.

Kris Judd 54:53

Yeah.

Susan Oxley 54:53

And so, it's great. It's lovely. I've enjoyed this very much. Thank you, Carla, for bringing us together for this.

Kris Judd 55:00

Exactly, thank you. And thank you, Susan, for those kind words. And you know, I think what the truth of, that we've shared all the three of us is that that Spirit that connects us, that string that connects us from one heart to the other, that love of God, it doesn't go away. It just continues to bless us, even when we live hundreds and hundreds of miles apart and see each other so rarely. The one thing that I would just close with, I think, is that as you approach, if you're considering a blessing, be it for yourself or your congregation or your family, trust that the one who will be offering you words of blessing, cares for you, and loves you, as Susan said, comes to that point of love, but know even more that the one whose blessing you are seeking, is delighted to be able to share words of affirmation, words of love, hopes and dreams. Just know that you will not encounter any, you will not encounter bad things in a blessing. Don't be afraid. Trust that comes out of a place of deep love for you, and it delights your Creator in being able to share that with you.

Carla Long 56:33

Well, that is a beautiful place to end. Thank you so much, Kris, for saying that. And thank you again, Susan Oxley and Kris Judd, for being with us and for sharing your expertise. And what easily comes through is your love as, for people as an evangelist, and I know that anybody would be blessed to have you, either one of you, as their evangelist. So, thanks again. I really appreciate it. And yeah, see you later.

Kris Judd 56:58

Bye, bye. Thank you.

Susan Oxley 56:59

Thank you, Carla. Thank you.

Josh Mangelson 57:07

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