

414 | First There Were Two: Women in the Twelve  
Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson 00:17**

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

**Brittany Mangelson 00:33**

Hello, Project Zion listeners. This is Brittany Mangelson and I will be your host for today. I am thrilled to have on a dear, dear friend who is no stranger to the podcast. Today I'm going to be talking with Linda Booth, a retired apostle and the retired Director of Communication in Community of Christ. She's also a grandmother, a skilled artist and a host on Project Zion Podcast. Linda hosts our Coffee Buzz episodes with the First Presidency and our Coffee Connect episodes which are short stories from Linda's life and ministry. And on top of all of that, she's also been a guest several times before she was a host. One thing our listeners might not know is that her service of 23 years on the Council of Twelve Apostles in Community of Christ was absolutely historic. Linda was one of the first two women called on the council together at the very, very, very beginning of women's ministry in the Council. So, today, we are here to talk about that. Uh, what it was like to break that particular glass ceiling in church history and serving in a way that no woman was able to do before. So, I am absolutely thrilled. But before we get into that, Linda, hello, it's so good to see you.

**Linda Booth 01:55**

Thank you, my friend. It's so good to see you, too.

**Brittany Mangelson 01:59**

So, let's have you introduce yourself to our listeners a little bit. I know that they probably know a lot about you. But is there anything else that we should know before we get into this conversation? Are there any updates you would like to share? Just, just say hello to the people.

**Linda Booth 02:14**

Well, hello, hello all the listeners on Project Zion. Uh, I'm just a regular ordinary woman who, uh, God chose to do something and provided the way and the means and the confidence and the presence to allow me to do what I believe God called me to do. So, um, I, my life has been joyful and filled with wonderful experiences of meeting people in different places, in different cultures and different walks of life. And when I struggled with this call, I kept thinking, I went back to Jesus's life and thought, Well, if I just am in the midst of the people loving them, and it's going to be okay.

**Brittany Mangelson 03:02**

That's so beautiful. And I am so glad that you said yes, so glad that you said yes because in many ways, I feel like it's changed my life completely. So, thank you, Linda. So, Linda, I think you've shared before at some point in the five years of recording Project Zion, like I said, you've been a guest several times. But can you remind us where you were with the church when Section 156 was brought to the conference? Really quick, for the our listeners, Section 156 was the section of the Doctrine and Covenants that brought us the ordination of women as well as the building of the Temple. But Linda, I'm

wondering what your initial feelings were about the ordination of women? And did you have any idea that it would impact your life? Well, first of all, when that call, or it was approved by the conference, so delegates at the World Conference, the, the revelation or the inspired words were presented to the, to the conference, and it was voted and I was in a car driving to Lawrence, Kansas, which is about, was about 40 minutes from where I lived. I was finishing a degree in communication in math and journalism, mass communications, and I was driving into the student parking lot, um, and the news came on, the hourly news that the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, that those delegates had approved the ordination of women. And I remember pulling into the parking lot, parking my car and crying because I had anticipated that moment and I was rejoicing in the wonder of what it meant for the church. Uh, in some ways, I thought about my own life, but quite honestly, I was crying for the, just tears of joy of all the congregations that would be blessed by the ministry of women, and the leadership that women would provide. I attended a congregation, Olathe, Kansas, that was very, uh, open to women's ministry. And while we were not given roles of presiding, we were able to speak in the congregation and so I had had a, a lot of experience planning worship services and, and doing leadership kinds of things. But now, this would open up a new vista for women, uh, to really be able to, uh, bring the God-given talents to congregations and to the church. And so did it impact my life? Well, of course it did and it, it impacted all the women's lives. And, and, and in some cases the women were delighted. And in some cases in our congregation, women were concerned. And in some cases in our congregation, even some women were opposed to the whole idea of women, uh, serving in roles that they had always traditionally seen men do. Yeah, I know that just hearing so many stories from folks that it was such a divisive and painful and joyful time. I mean, emotions were all over the place and to be, uh, closer to the Center Place or closer to Independence, I'm sure that the feelings and opinions about, about this with people that you, you love and you've served with and you've worked with were, were probably just all over the place and, and just a really high intense emotional time. So, I just, my heart goes out to everyone that lived through that and had to navigate those relationships in this, in this new way. But it sounds like your congregation was relatively progressive if they were allowing women to preach and things and to speak and to be part of services. And, um, yeah, so to have that leadership, budding leadership skills being planted in you, but then to have it opened up to a new way with ordination. So, (Yes, yes.) so let's talk about your journey with ordination. You didn't just jump to Apostle. Can you give us a brief overview of the offices you served in, what roles you've had, that kind of thing?

**Linda Booth 07:30**

Well, I first need to tell you about a non-priesthood call. And I know that sounds odd, and it was quite odd, but it was also very disturbing. So, after the, uh, inspired council was given for women to be ordained, we knew in our congregation that there would be women called to the priesthood. And I, I guess I always sensed that I would be one of the first because of, uh, the opportunities I had in that congregation to bring ministry. But I received a call from our pastor. I need to tell you about him. Uh, he reminded me of my grandfather so, I, I had this, uh, unusual connection to him which was, uh, different than really my relationship with him, but the way I viewed him because he looked so much like my grandfather. And he asked me to come to lunch and I was excited because the previous pastor, uh, had been the one who had invited me to do all kinds of ministry. And this pastor had never asked me to do anything. And so I was excited because I thought I'm going to, I'm going to suggest to him to have a, uh, congregational retreat. And I was going to offer to lead that. Well, we sat down at lunch and he

proceeded to tell me that he would be calling women in our congregation to priesthood and to be ordained, but he would not be calling me. And then he said the reason he would not be calling me was because he thought I was running for priesthood office. And I was, I was crushed because when I had been invited to participate in services I did so, I thought, with a humble nature and with a desire to provide the ministry that the people needed. And so I went home and I told my husband and he was furious. And he said, How dare he give you a non-priesthood call? And I, I cried. I just cried all the time. And at night, I would wake up in the night and cry and think, I must have in some way, um, offended God or, um, God must have been upset with me. And, and that what I had done before was not what God wanted. And I went to church one Sunday, it was communion service, and I reached for the emblems and I couldn't take them. And it's the first time in my life when I felt unworthy to do so. And, so, I went home and I knelt beside my bed and I just cried out to God. And these words came to mind, Do not allow your hurts and frustrations to separate you from the people you're called to serve. And, so, in some ways, that was a healing experience. So, that was my first experience with an ordination call which was not a call, but was something that gave me the experience of, which really helped me in later ministry to know that I should never allow my hurts or feelings to separate me from the people that God had called me to serve. So, that very same pastor, uh, about a year later, did call me to the office of Elder. He said that the reason he called me, he did eventually allow me to do the family, the congregational retreat, and they, they had a, a World Church minister come and the World Church minister pulled our pastor, my pastor aside and said to him, You know, she has a call. Uh, is she not an elder already? No. And so he called me to Elder and I became an Elder and, and then I became a pastor of the congregation. And then I received in the mail, which is kind of strange, a letter, uh, from an, an Apostle saying that I was called to be a High Priest. And, and so, uh, I was ordained to High Priest and then I began to be invited to teach all these priesthood, High Priest courses in the Greater Kansas City, Missouri area. And, and so I would be, uh, teaching all men--I don't remember ever having a female in my class--I would be teaching them about what it meant to be a High Priest which was really kind of, um, amazing if you think about it that a relatively young woman, uh, teaching Temple School classes for primarily men, mostly men, all men on how to be a High Priest. And, so, I was a High Priest, uh, for several years when I was invited to serve as a counselor to the President of the High Priest Quorum. And, um, and so that was, that was my journey through ordinations. Wow,

**Brittany Mangelson 12:23**

Wow. What a beginning, though. I'm really impressed that you did not let that completely deflate your sense of call and your sense to serve because that's a really harsh thing to say, one of those things, it's like, Okay, sir, you can think that, but maybe keep it to yourself?

**Linda Booth 12:41**

Well, it was, it was really, it was really hurtful. I mean, because I really thought I disappointed God. And, and, um, and it was, of all things, it was something that never should have occurred. But if it was, it did help my ministry in that it did help me to understand that, that those kinds of things do happen in ministry. You do get, you know, people do say things sometimes that are very hurtful. And but you can't allow that to defer you from the calling that God has given you. You just can't.

**Brittany Mangelson 13:17**

Yeah. Can I ask how your relationship with him was once you were ordained? Did he apologize or have (Oh, no, no, no, no, no.) any understanding?

**Linda Booth 13:27**

No, no, no, no, no, no, he would never, never would have done that. He was a very authoritative, um, man. He, no, he wouldn't have. Uh, but he did call me to Elder and it was because the World Church minister had encouraged him to do so. And he actually, um, you know, was supportive, uh, when I became, uh, the pastor. Uh, kind of a hands off kind of way. But he, he, yeah, he, but we never were close friends, obviously. And I, I did forgive him for those hurtful words. But he never would have apologized. No.

**Brittany Mangelson 14:10**

Wow. This story is very inspiring. So, thank you for sharing that. That's, that's really tough stuff. But also the reality that so many ministers, men and women, uh, go through. So, the fact that you did not let that stall your sense of call is, is really inspiring. So, let's talk about your call to the Council of Twelve. I'm curious how that call was presented to you. Did you suspect that it was coming at all? Did you have to wrestle with it and struggle with it? What was that process like?

**Linda Booth 14:43**

Well, yes, my call came in the springtime of 1998. And I need to back up to 1994, um, when I had been, I told you I was the counselor to the High Priest Quorum and, and that 1994 World Conference was a special conference because the Temple was going to be dedicated. And, uh, so there was a lot of celebration to it. And that was the first World Conference where I, as I served as the counselor to High Priest Quorum, I knew that I was going to need to preside at, uh, several of those High Priest Quorum meetings that occurred during those world conferences. And I was concerned about that, knowing that I, there were very few women that were High Priests at the time. And, so, I was very prayerful about it. And then I also worked on my, uh, Robert's Rules of Order because that's something that the High Priests did, you know, they did to, to bring legislation forward. And, and, um, and my idea of that quorum was that it was mostly older men who had, who had done a lot of church work and had done a lot of, um, legislative kinds of things in their congregation and, and I was, quite honestly, a little intimidated that I would be, need to stand up in front of them and lead those Robert's Rules of Order meetings. And, so, I went into that World Conference in 1994 filled with prayer and Spirit and the conference was fabulous. And when I stood in front of those High Priests, I really felt the authority, God's direction, God's presence. And, um, and so the last Sunday of that World Conference, we were going to dedicate the Temple, as I said, and there was people, it's going to be in the Temple for the dedication, but then all the other people were in the, the Auditorium, which is the building just across the street from the Temple, and six, you know, 6,600 people in that building, that's where I was going to watch the dedication. And so as I was walking through the foyer and all these people are crammed into the space and they're talking, there's different languages, you're hearing, so walking through that I, I, I can only describe it as hearing a voice. It really wasn't a voice, but this knowledge came to me. And it was, Begin to prepare to serve as my Apostle. And for some people, they might think that would be exciting. But for me, um, I walked out of the Auditorium, didn't attend the dedication, I got in my car, and I cried all the way home. Half hour drive home and I cried and I said, God, you can't make me do this. That was somebody else's message. You know, I don't know enough. I don't, I, I just can't do it. I can't

do it. And, and if, that message was for somebody else, and, and I just kind of discounted it and then I told my husband and he laughed and he said, You don't have to worry about it. You know, you don't even work for the church. You're, you're going to be okay. But those words kept, you know, coming. They were in my head and I, I had this list of reasons why I couldn't do it. I mean, it was extensive. And, um, I wrestled over, literally wrestled with God for two years. And finally I just gave up. I just surrendered and I said, God, if this is what you want me to do, then you have to promise me and I had, had a list of promises that I needed from God that, that if I stood before the people and didn't feel as if I had words to speak, that God would give me the words; that if I got on a plane traveling to someplace where I didn't know the people that God would need to go before me. On and on and on, I asked for these promises. And, so, I, I, so for two years, I, I wrestled with it. And then I got a call, um, from Grant McMurray asking me if he would meet me for lunch and I did so and that was just to ask me to come to work for the church. And he gave me two choices. I could be a pastor for a large congregation in North Kansas City. Or I could come and be Assistant Director of Communications. That was in 1997. And as Director of Communications, um, uh, I would be officed out of the Temple. I asked him which role he wanted me to be in and he said he would prefer that I would be the Assistant Director of Communications. So, so I went to work for the church leaving a job I loved, um, with the promise from the superintendent of schools, I was director of communications for a large school district in, uh, in Kansas, uh, with the promise from the superintendent if it didn't work out, I could come back in three months and get my, my original job back, but I knew I wouldn't be going back to that job I loved. But, uh, so I get this call from Grant McMurray and, and I knew that, that probably is what he wanted me to talk about and so I went into his office and he sat, um, across from me, uh, looking out the windows down in the meditation garden. And he said, I have a call for you to serve as an Apostle. And Brittany, you know, if I hadn't had that experience four years before, I would have just been flabbergasted. I, I wouldn't have known what to do with the call. I wouldn't have known what to say. But because of that experience four years before and aft, having wrestled with God and knowing that God's promises are true, I was able to say yes. So, I did wrestle. But it was ( . . . ) not right when he gave me the call. It was, I had wrestled for many years before that.

**Brittany Mangelson 20:56**

Linda, thank you so much for sharing that story. I know that it was probably such a jarring experience for you. I mean, it sounds like it was, but to have that time that you could wrestle with God, figure out all of your quote unquote, excuses, like you said, of why you couldn't do it, or shouldn't do it. But to be able to process that and work through that. And then when the call came, you were ready to go. What a blessing that is. What um, what a good way to start your ministry in the Twelve because you had already grown in confidence and grown in your rootedness of this sense of call. And you were able to, to say yes, which is really, really exciting. So, let's, let's talk a little bit about what that transition was like. Um, I'm curious to know how you were mentored into that role. I know that so many of those first women that were ordained felt like they had to play catch up for generations of lost time with the church because all men at least had some sort of idea that they could be ordained at some point. And women and girls were just simply treated differently. So, do those feelings resonate with you? Did you feel like you were, uh, mentored and accepted into the Council?

**Linda Booth 22:16**

Yes, I, I felt very welcomed into the Council of Twelve, into the Leadership Council. I, I felt there was never any, any thought that I, anyone was upset that Gail or I would be ordained as the first women in the Council of Twelve. In fact, we were welcomed into that Council. It was in other places that I felt as if there was a lot of reticence and that I needed to prove myself and I needed to prove that I could do what God was calling me to do. Was I mentored? The kindness of the members in the Council of Twelve would answer any questions. But I didn't, hadn't worked for the church as an appointee or as a World Church minister. And so when I came in, I really, I understood that there were men all around me in the field who were like, Why, you know, they wanted a woman, but they, the only way for them to rise in the organization was next step for many of them was to be called into the Council of Twelve. And I remember at the conference where I was ordained, a man that I had known for many years, uh, who was a World Church minister who passed me and said, um, something like, uh, There's no one else least deserving. And he just kind of walk by. And, and I knew that, I could feel, I could actually feel his hurt, being hurt. He probably thought he was going to be called into the Council of Twelve and here was this relatively young, I was not yet 50, woman who had no field experience, who was being called into a role that he was perfectly prepared to do. And I went to, my field was the central field, so I had five stakes and multiple districts. It was a very large complex field with lots of, uh, ministers, male ministers, and I served as a supervisor for I think it was 42 males. And, and so to come into that role with no experience, and how does anybody mentor you for that? Right? I, I, I could go to my colleagues in the Council of Twelve and ask them questions. But how do you then go into a field of all men and then begin to supervise them and direct them in mission. And, so, I went into it prayerful obviously, but I also went into it with a great respect for each one of those men and what they had to offer me and to mentor me and not, while I didn't ask for them to mentor me, I spent the first year or so listening, getting to know them, building relations with them, discovering their giftedness, encouraging their giftedness. Uh, I also, uh, because I lived in my field, uh, I ended up, uh, having lots of preaching assignments. People wanted me to come into their congregations to preach. And, so, quite honestly, at one point, I looked at my calendar and realized that I had said yes to every Sunday that first year and into to the next Sunday, which was totally ridiculous. But you had so many people wanting you to come and speak because you were the first Apostle. You were an anomaly. You were like this unusual something. And, um, one of my skills is in speaking. And so I did, I did go into the congregations, uh, and travel in, in my field to different places in order to be in the midst of the people so they could get to know me and I could get to know them. And building those relationships with people in the pews, as well as the ministers that served with me, was very important to me that first year. So, the mentoring was just being thrown right in the, to the midst of it. There's, there's no way you can really prepare for something like that. At least I don't know how you could have other than the fact that you had to really have a strong sense of call. I remember little men ( . . . ) walking up to me after the service and saying, you know, I had some real questions about this, but I think it's gonna be okay. Um, you know, I even had women do the same. Um, but, you know, people know if you love them, and I did love, I do love the people. And in return, they loved me, which was, also helped me in that transition period. But it wasn't easy to be the first woman. And I didn't focus on the fact that I was the first woman. I focused on providing the best ministry that I could, uh, to the people. And that's how, that's how I approached it. Not that it was something fabulous that I now was an Apostle, but humbly that I was a servant minister.

**Brittany Mangelson 27:56**

This is making me tear up a little bit, Linda I, uh, hmm.

**Linda Booth 28:03**

Well, in that first year, too, Brittany, the only way I could describe it is that I felt like I was, had stepped out of an airplane, not an airplane on the ground, but like at 30,000 feet. It felt like, I don't know, it was just, it was, uh, it was just extremely, um, difficult, but wonderful, too. Uh, I don't know how to describe that first, that first year. I remember one time Dave Brock saying, I don't know how long he'd been in the Council, but when he was called to go in and serve as the Presiding Evangelist in the church, he was sitting around the table in the Council of Twelve, uh, council room and he said, as he was, you know, telling us how much he had enjoyed serving with us, he said, You know, I just now feel like I'm starting to understand my job, or his ministry, as an Apostle. So, it's something that, that continues, uh, to grow within you, that understanding of what it means to serve as an Apostle. It's not something that you can be mentored really or, or or be prepared for. You just have to go into it with faith, believing that God will help you, uh, on those mountaintop experiences you'll be aware of, but also in those times when you will work through very, very difficult situations.

**Brittany Mangelson 29:32**

Yeah, and having the added pressure of being one of two women entering into this role, uh, there's, there's not that built in camaraderie of understanding what it means to be a woman who is in the field working with folks who, some of these folks probably voted against 156 and maybe they stuck around with the church and, um, that's something that clearly no one can mentor you through. And you just have to be a pioneer and push through it. And, like you said, serve the people, love the people, uh, not focus on the thing that makes you historic, right? (No. No.) That's probably what people are bringing to their interactions with you. And so there's this underlining pressure to, you know, with the little old men that would come up to you and say, like, I had my hesitations, you know, so you know that they were coming into this experience with some level of bias. And you just have to show up with your whole heart and serve the people and hopefully show them that this is going to be okay. Like, that's, that's just a big weight to carry. And I'm, I've seen your ministry, I've heard you preach, I've seen you be with the people and so I know you do it well, which is part of why I was tearing up. Because it's not easy. It's not easy today. But I can only imagine that it was not easy in the late 90s. So thank you so much for sharing.

**Linda Booth 31:02**

You're welcome. I, uh, something just popped into my mind, a memory. After I was ordained at that World Conference, um, which was earlier in the week, and then, you know, you have a week of, of conference to go. And one night I was driving home, it was dark. And I, as I was driving home, I passed by a, a restoration branch. And I need to explain what a restoration branch is. It's a congregation made up of ex-Community of Christ members or Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, who split from the church when women were ordained, uh, and who believe that they are now the one true church, but they have no women ministers. They have no women participating in services. And as I was driving past this restoration congregation, which I've driven, driven past, you know, hundreds of times before, I had this impulse to drive into the parking lot. There in the dark I sat in my car and I said a prayer. And I didn't even know what the prayer was about. Within about two months of my ordination,

I got a call from a woman whose cousin was a restoration Elder. And she asked if I would be willing to meet with this restoration Elder. He was a pastor of a restoration branch. And I said, Well, yes. I mean, which was a little brave when I think now that a woman Apostle, newly ordained, would go to meet with a bunch of restoration Elders. But I went to a congregation in Parkville, Parkville Cong, Parkville, I think that was the name of the congregation in Blue Springs, Missouri. It was one of the congregations that had remained in the denomination, Community of Christ. But they didn't have women in the priesthood. And so, uh, they had not, they were allowed to be remained in the church, but without following, quote, the rules of calling women. And, so, I, I met in that congregation with about eight men. And we sat around a table and we talked and we prayed together. And when it was time for the meeting to be over, I can remember what we talked about. Uh, the restoration Elder, uh, who had been pastor of a restoration branch said, You know, I like you, Linda. And I said, I like you, too. And he said, Can we meet again? And I said, Sure. And so we started every month meeting, and we called, I called it, let's see what did I call it, the Restoration Reconciliation Committee. And when, we met for about a year and we decided we were going to have a hymn festival. And we, in faith we, there's only a few places they would meet. They wouldn't meet in the Temple. They would meet in the Auditorium. The Auditorium holds, you know, over 6,000 people. We said, Well, that's pretty big venue. They, we said, Well, no. So we planned this restoration hymn festival. And when I got there, there were already people arriving. And there were over, there were over 3,000 people that showed up. And the hymn festival had both men and women reading scripture and we had Jesus' image, different images of, of Jesus Christ on the screen above as people were entering, because we're all focusing on that, what we had in common was that we believed in Jesus Christ. That was the center of, of who we were. And when I left, there was all these people when I left, I left like an hour after the service, there were still people standing in the aisles because, you see, those people, because of women being in the priesthood, they left the church and some of them had never worshipped again together. Families couldn't worship together. And that reconciliation, we had another one as well, that recon, I mean, that's the craziness of God, that God would take a female Apostle to lead--uh, I mean, how bizarre is that--a reconciliation group of restoration Elders, to bring to pass an opportunity for people who had long, long yearned to be together and worship. You know, parents and their children and brothers and sisters and friends from college. It, it was remarkable. So, that's how crazy God is, that God would use a female Apostle to bring reconciliation in some way between those who don't even believe that women are called to the priesthood. It's, it just, it just, I, it just astounds me even now.

**Brittany Mangelson 31:13**

Yeah, no, that is astounding. And, Linda, I'm just struck by that that started with a prayer on your part, and just being open to the possibility of relationship and then saying yes to meeting with an Elder. And it kind of snowballing from there. It seems like, from these few stories, it seems like there's a pattern in your life of you being prepared for something. And then by the time the something happens, you're ready to go and ready to say yes to the Council of Twelve or to say yes to having a gathering of over 3,000 people for reconciliation and, and focusing on what you have in common. That's really beautiful. And such a great way to recognize God moving in your life, because had that been presented to you just this idea of, Oh, we should have this reconciliation, big thing with everyone, you probably would have said, Well, I'm a female Apostle. I wouldn't be able to do that. They would reject my ministry, you know, but you had that preparation time of building relationships, of, of sensing that there was something to be done here and, and working up towards that, uh, all with this, the sense of call to this



ministry. That's, it's just, it's beautiful. And I'm really glad that, uh, you recognize it and are able to articulate it because it's, I think it's really helpful to just be able to recognize where God is showing up in our lives. So, thank you. (You're welcome.) So, Linda, we've talked a little bit about your transition. I'm, I'm, it sounds like your ministry was pretty accepted. Uh, but were there any unforeseen hurdles? I mean, I'm sure there were just challenges, things that, that happened that you, you may have not expected?

**Linda Booth 37:56**

Oh, yes, there's, there was plenty, plenty of those. Um, traveling internationally was interesting, uh, especially right after I was ordained because I started getting a lot of requests like to go to Australia and Africa and, uh, different places. Um, and my first trip was to Australia for three weeks and, uh, I hadn't been away from home, um, that long. That was, that was difficult for me traveling, uh, different culture, uh, standing before the people their, their approach, other culture was so different than what I had experienced. Uh, some of the men raising their hands and saying things like, Well, you're, you're easy on the eyes and was like, Wait a minute. But, you know, it was, it was, it was difficult. It was, it was really difficult. The people were fabulous. But there was also, uh, uh, again, over and over again, they were watching me to see what I could do or what I would say, uh, and, and to go to different cultures to speak a language that's appropriate for that culture, I learned that I really needed to, um, talk to people and to understand. And, so, when I, when I was invited to go to Africa for five weeks, I traveled with President McMurray, Grant McMurray and, um, Bunda, who was not, uh, had, was recently ordained, that was in 2001. Um, he was ordained in 2000. And, uh, I traveled all with men and, and in that, that travel a woman, first of all, that I was right in a sea of black and brown people, you know, children would come over just to touch you to see if you were really real. Uh, but they didn't know what to do with a woman. In their culture, women, um, were really more like possessions, almost like servants in some cases. Um, they didn't, it was, it was very, it was very difficult traveling. They would put me in the front seat. They would put the president of the church in the back seat because they didn't want to touch me, you know, they didn't want to bump up against me. But by the end of the lack, by the, about the third week of the five week trip, um, you know, I was sitting in the backseat, no, sweat was flying everywhere, because there's no air conditioning, we're bumping into each other. So, they kind of got accustomed to me. But when we'd go into the different villages, or the different little cities or towns, there was always this big celebration. And they were, the women would be singing and dancing and welcoming you and they would give you letters. And they call me Mrs. President. I think some cases they thought I was Grant's wife because they couldn't figure out who I was and how am I, but, but Bunda wanted them to see a female in leadership. And so wherever we would go, he would have me speaking. And sometimes I spoke rather than even the president of the church, because for Bunda, it was very important, Apostle Bunda Chibwe, it was very important that men and women saw a female in leadership roles and to understand how important that was. I, I traveled again in 2019 to Africa with, the summer after my retirement after 23 years, and I traveled with Catherine Mambwe who was recently ordained an Apostle, and the joy of traveling back to Africa with her, supporting her as an Apostle. And understanding the difficulty she now faces going into a culture where there are many women pastors now that weren't there when I was first there in 2001. And so things, the culture is beginning to change and to understand the significance of women's ministry and the acceptance of women's ministry. But to travel with her as a female Apostle was such a joy for me. And I continue to pray for her every day knowing that just as I faced certain challenges, the challenges that she faces in Africa as a female

Apostle are much different, um, similar, but much different than those challenges that I faced. Uh, but she, she is, she is a fabulous minister and a strong leader. And I, I could even tell after the end of the two weeks that even the people in that place were beginning to accept and to understand that she, uh, was truly a called Apostle of God.

**Brittany Mangelson 43:16**

Oh, I'm so glad that you followed up with that story about traveling with Catherine. I, her ordination was one of the highlights of my experience with Community of Christ. It was such a celebration. The church in Zambia and various countries all over Africa just physically getting up on the stage and dancing. And it was such a, such a joyous moment that will be, uh, you know, imprinted in my mind and heart forever. So, I'm really glad that you had that experience to be able to go back and to see the progress of women's equality and to have, uh, an Apostle from Zambia to be able to, uh, you know, support her in that ministry. And what a, what a beautiful full circle moment of just women's empowerment. This makes me so happy.

**Linda Booth 44:06**

And it was, it was and I still, I celebrate that, that wonderful calling in her life. And, of course, we have five women in the Council of Twelve now, and, and, and we have women in the First Presidency and the Bishopric and the Presiding Evangelist is a woman. And, so, in the leadership, when I, Gail and I came in, you know, we were the only two and now there's multiple women that serve in the highest leadership roles in Community of Christ. And, of course, in mission centers, women, um, in the United States in particular, but in other nations as well, are very active in leadership roles and in congregational life, and, so, uh, it's, we've come a long way since, uh, 1998 when I was ordained. I really believe that, when you think about it, it is pretty fast transition, uh, into leadership and acceptance as well, uh, of women's ministry and call.

**Brittany Mangelson 45:11**

For sure, which is why the pressure that you were under was probably so intense, uh, because it was relatively quickly, especially considering the history of the church and, but look at how beautiful of a place that we're in today. And just knowing that you really helped pave the way for that just makes my heart overflow with gratitude. So, thank you, Linda.

**Linda Booth 45:34**

Well, you, it's interesting when I hear you say that because I don't see myself in that way really. Um, I, it just, you know, it was just a God thing. And I think God, uh, working with God, it kind of works, works in a way that, that is a benefit to, uh, those who have that experience. So,

**Brittany Mangelson 45:57**

For sure. Well, that's the humility in you coming out. I think you're just a great pioneer, so, I'm, I'm just really grateful. So, it sounds like the transition from the perspective of the males on the Council of Twelve was pretty positive. It sounds like they were supportive. And that (Yes.) you were friends, and that they were there to have your back. I'm assuming, maybe this is an assumption, but I'm assuming that it was the same with the First Presidency because, at that point, they were an all male Presidency.

The Bishopric, like you said, was all male. Um, did you get that same sense of support from the First Presidency when you first came into the Twelve?

**Linda Booth** 46:41

Yes, absolutely. I will say Bud Sheehy who was counselor to the President, uh, Grant McMurray, uh, he had known me as a youth. He had been the youth leader when I was growing up. And so I had a sense every once in a while that he still considered me a youth. But he was also very supportive of, everyone was. Um, they were, they were, they were, they celebrated. They, they would have done anything. They wanted a woman, women in leadership. They, they really did. It was, it was, there was no reticence. There was, uh, uh, uh no stumbling blocks. They were always very encouraging. And they, and they did become, uh, especially in the Council of Twelve, my close friends and colleagues. Um, it was, it was quite remarkable.

**Brittany Mangelson** 47:34

Good. That's so glad to hear. Thank you. So, Linda, you've shared several stories from your ministry. But I want to hear more about the work that you did on the Council. And I know that several decades of church work can't be summed up in just a few minutes. But what are some of your highlights? What were some of your greatest joys as you traveled around and serve the church in this role?

**Linda Booth** 47:55

Oh, my goodness, my greatest joys? Well, when I first came into the Council, I, I recognized that oftentimes, um, the Council would encourage me to speak on behalf of the Council just because I was a female. They wanted that female voice. And, so, um, early on, I remember being asked by the Council to speak in favor of the name change from Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and, and I, I remember the joy when that name was changed. Um, I remember the joy of when the Council of Twelve was tasked with choosing the President of the church after Grant McMurray resigned and the spiritual process, we went through a discernment to provide a name for, um, the church. And I remember the joy, uh, when the Council met and we each shared our testimony, uh, that Steve Veazey was the one that was going to be called to be, uh, the President of the church. I remember the joy and the, the wonderful sense of Spirit as we deliberated together with the church through that process. Uh, other joys were, uh, I don't know how many High Priests and Evangelists and Seventy I called, uh, and ordained. Uh, each one of those prayers and deliberation with those people was a joy. Um, oh, the National, the US National Conference. So, when we, as a, a small team of us, um, worked, five of us worked to prepare that conference for the United States when, uh, we asked the delegates to come and to consider the ordination in states where it was legal at the time to ordain gay lesbian, uh, men and women to ministry and the joy of being able to stand with that conference after the vote and to be the one to read, um, the final tally, that it had been approved for ordination as well as for, um, marriage in states where it was legal or special services, uh, to join together men and women who, uh, love one another and made a commitment for their life. And I remember the joy of going to my friend Peter and, and Mark's commitment service in Michigan. Uh, what a joy that was. Oh, uh, gosh I could just go on and on and on. Ordaining a young woman named Nancy that I met in Chattanooga who had been a stripper and who had changed her life and, and, um, and to ordain her to the office of, of Priest and then eventually, uh, an Elder. You know, it just, it goes on. Uh, the joys outweigh any of the, the challenges or the heartaches of leadership. The joys are just so many, so many.

**Brittany Mangelson 51:13**

Linda, thank you so much. I know that, uh, sometimes it can be easy to focus on the challenges, but the highlights and the joys really do overpower everything. And like you said at the beginning, being with the people and serving the people is what brings you the most joy. And so I'm so glad that you were able to have several decades of concentrated time working in the field, working with people, uh, just spreading the good news of the gospel. It's, I'm, I'm really glad. One thing that I am curious about, as you were traveling in your field, did you sense that you were maybe a role model of sorts for women and girls? I know that you did mention that some women, uh, maybe confessed that they were a little concerned about having a woman Apostle, but did you, did you get the sense of, of you being this beacon of hope, or this new image for women to look to or young girls to look to because you didn't have an image of a woman Apostle when you were growing up? Or you know, when you were a young adult or anything like that? And so did you, did you get that sense that, that you were a, a leader for women and girls particularly?

**Linda Booth 52:24**

Yes, I did feel that, that responsibility, uh, to be able to be that, um, encourager and inspirer of women and girls. But quite honestly, I had the same sense that I needed to do the same for the men because I needed to be the role model for them to have female leadership and ministry. They had been experiencing women in their congregations as pastors and in services. But to have a woman come in as a leader, it, things have changed in Community of Christ, even in the 23 years that I've served in the Council of Twelve. Um, when I first went into the Council, there, there was this reverence for Apostles. I mean, even when I was growing up, it was like, they were like these super human, like, above everyone else, you know, kind of pedestal like, and I, I just wasn't comfortable with that view of leadership. And so, for the men as well who wanted to maybe put, you know, all of us in the Council of Twelve on these pedestals or in a different place. I wanted people to understand that, uh, I was vulnerable, uh, just like they were. That I was open, just like they were. That I was humble, hopefully, just like all of us were. And, and so while I felt as if I was a role model for women and, and young girls, to not aspire to ministry, but to recognize that they had a calling and would most likely in their life have that sense of call lived out. But I also felt as a real responsibility to men as well to, to be the role model of what a leader, servant leader was, not someone separate from but someone in their midst. And, so, I, I felt that also in my ministry, and my calling as well.

**Brittany Mangelson 54:42**

That's really beautiful. And I'm so glad that you brought that up because we often points to women to be the role models for other women, uh, but, which is great, but I am raising a son in Community of Christ and the fact that he is surrounded by women in leadership is just as important to me as it is for my daughters to see that as well. Because it, it changes the way that he will interact with women in the future. Um, it changes the power dynamics, it levels. It, it, it makes everything more equitable. And so to have that in his mind and culture and understanding of how the world works is very important to me. Um, it's really great that my daughters can see women in leadership and can see, uh, themselves reflected in their church leadership. But, yeah, it's, it's really important for my son to see that as well. So, I'm really glad that you brought that up. Thank you.

**Linda Booth 55:46**

Yes, I even had, I had an Apostolic assistant once who, he, he was kind of a harsh man, great, he was very gifted, very talented. Uh, but when we first started working together, we sat down, which is what I would do with people, and we talked about our work styles, our personalities, what we wanted to know each, about each other. And, and, um, and I could tell he was, um, well, what would the word be? Not concerned about working with me, but not knowing how he, his harshness, his, he was brusque, and how that would work with, with my, the way which I approached life. And I remember once he came to me after several years of working together, and he said that someone from the field had made a comment, Well, how was it working with, uh, having a female as his boss? And he told me that he had told this man that he was surprised that it caught, that working with a female Apostle had allowed him to tap into a side of himself that he wasn't aware that he had and that he realized he was becoming more vulnerable to people, he was becoming, um, I don't think he used the word soft, but he was, there was a kindness that was beginning to emanate from him that he was surprised by. And, so, for him to make that confession to me, first of all, that he was concerned about serving with me. But that just our interaction together and the way in which I approach life had made a difference in his ministry, was really, gave to me a sense of wonder and surprise. We, we don't recognize if we're just true to who we are and who God has made us. If we're true to that and not try to be someone else or to, I didn't come in as an Apostle with great authority, you know, and I am, I am the boss and you need to, you know. I came in as a, a, a, servant leader, who was willing to listen to and to be open to new ideas that they had to offer as well as, and, and it, and it helps to be who you are. So, sometimes I think women believe that if they go into a role of leadership and they have to act more like the men act in that authority, but, but if you're just who you are and you, you are authentically who you are, that's all God asks you to be. God doesn't ask you to be somebody else. God called me, Linda Booth, knowing my inadequacies, knowing my need, uh, to be, to have confidence. God, God brought me into that place knowing who I was and God didn't, never left me alone and always gave me the promises that I'd hoped for, the promises were kept. So, so for women in leadership, you don't, you don't have to go in and act like a man and be that male authority. You go in as who you are. And God gives you the gifts and the authority and, and, and if you go in with love, that confidence comes to you because in the midst of that love and compassion, the people respond.

**Brittany Mangelson 59:33**

Ah, Linda, that's so beautiful. And it's such an important thing to remember. I know that, uh, in the priesthood calls that I've had, I've wrestled with them and have thought, Well, I'm not like so and so or I can't do this as well as so and so. But whenever I kind of get some sense shaken into me and recognize that I am being called, in my inadequacies, in my insecurities, in the midst of what I can and cannot do and if I just show up and be myself, be the person who was asked to fill this role, uh, somehow it works out, somehow it's consistently worked out. And I'm still not sure how, but it, it has worked out in my life. So, it's good to know that it's worked out in your life as well. And, yeah, that just showing up as who you are, is what matters most and is what is going to make the most difference.

**Linda Booth 1:00:26**

Yes, authenticity is where you need to be yourself. You need to be vulnerable. You need to be vulnerable to the people and as well as God's Spirit and, and then the word, rest, well, the rest works out and oftentimes in a way that you never expected, never expected. I, I, I've discovered gifts that I

knew, didn't know I had because of trusting in God. I, I, I never thought of myself as a courageous person, but I, I know I'm brave now. You know, so, you, you discover all these things ( . . . ) about yourself. Uh, and the things that you didn't know about yourself, God magnifies. So, if, you're right, it's just saying yes and then trusting and having faith that God will, will, will show up and God does.

**Brittany Mangelson 1:01:18**

Yes, thank you so much again for that, Linda. I am curious, though, do you in the position you're at now--you're retired, you served your decades and decades and decades with the church--do you still see that there are areas in the church where women's voices are missing? Or that we could achieve a little more equality? Or do you think that we're, we're pretty okay as far as the equality of women in Community of Christ?

**Linda Booth 1:01:48**

Hmm. Well, I'm, I'm trying to do it from an international standpoint. Um, I, I believe in Western nations, women do have that equality prime, mostly. I mean, I'm sure there's instances where in some congregations that they don't. But universally, that seems to be the experience in Western nations that women have that opportunity, as I've already said, and in Community of Christ leadership on the highest levels of leadership, women are, are there and present in bringing that leadership and ministry. There are still some countries that I have visited, where, um, I know that women, uh, need to, uh, to have that sense of strength and courage. Um, I was in, uh, Central America, uh, for several weeks and while there were women in leadership, I could tell in that culture, women still, in some places, did not have a sense of authority or, or the confidence that they needed. And even when I went back in 2019 to Africa and saw the, the big changes that have occurred in the culture in the way in which women are respected, there's still, um, issues in that place, um, with the way women are treated. So, generally, I would say in Western nations, yes, uh, the women's, women's voices are heard and respected, um, but in other places, uh, that's not true.

**Brittany Mangelson 1:03:35**

I'm really glad that you brought up the international aspect of this. I think it's, I know, for me really easy to look around my congregation and my Mission Center and the larger church in the US and Canada and the Western, the Western world and see the places that we still have to work for as far as equality goes just in general terms. Uh, and sometimes I forget how, how far we actually have come in the United States. And when we talk about church policy, when we talk about church culture, it's not a uniform thing across the globe. And so we still have a lot of work to do. And I'm also sensitive to the idea of Christianity imposing our culture and beliefs on other cultures and that's a form of colonialization and, and violence and even white supremacy. And so there's, there's a lot of things to consider when we talk about equality because where we are at in the United States is not where everyone is at. And so I have a lot of compassion for church leaders as they're wrestling with various policies and calls to leadership, uh, and trying to diversify our organization because we really are in places that are not on the same page. And so to have a universal understanding of, you know, we need to have this many women or this many people of color, this many LGBTQ folks and in leadership, etc. Uh, it just gets really, really tricky when we are an international community, uh, an organization that, that has to have some sort of structure and boundaries and procedure. Uh, there's just a lot of cultural things that we

brush up against. And, so, my hat goes off to all the church leadership as they are trying to navigate all of these things. It's, it's difficult. Yeah, it's really difficult.

**Linda Booth 1:05:31**

It is. When you, when you just think about the Council of Twelve, so, you know, in 1998, there were just two women, white women, women, uh, from the United States. And now you look at the Council of Twelve, and I'm trying to think, all the different cultures, you know, we have a man from Honduras, who speaks primarily Spanish. We have a woman from French Polynesia who is an Apostle and, and, uh, serves in a variety of ways. You know, we have someone from Af, two Apostles from Africa, uh, both male and female, you know. We have a Canadian Apostle. We have a ( . . . ) Apostle who's Welsh from Wales, you know. It's not, and, and we have different, or, the skin colors are different on the Council of Twelve. You know, like I said, five women. Uh, they each bring a voice that is so critical to the health and well being of the whole church to be able to understand that we are an International Church, that we do have people from different cultures and walks of life. And, so, just to think about what's happened in those really few years, even in that leadership of that one Council, I, I think it's quite remarkable. When you see other denominations that struggle and struggle and struggle, and it takes, you know, generations for things to happen. In Community of Christ, things happen really fast, maybe not as fast as we would like. But when you think about it in the context of other denominations, uh, because we do have inspired counsel, I think God moves us along pretty fast, faster than oftentimes people can keep up with because there's so much more to do in the building of God's peaceable kingdom that we, we need to be on that mission, Christ's mission, to ensure that people throughout the world, um, are able to be, uh, the worthy people of worth that God sees them. So, yeah, you're right, Brittany. We, we've got a long way to go. But we, we do need to recognize that in such a short amount of time we have, we have moved light years. When, when I worked with the director of communications for the church, I worked with a woman out of Atlanta who came in as a consultant when we did our name change. And she told us about the Church of the Brethren who, um, were going to change their name and they were going to change their name to Community of Christ. Now they have been working on the cha, name change for like five or six years. They were thinking about it, processing it, discerning it, on and on and on. And in our denomination, you know, that happened relatively quickly. And thankfully, Community of Christ which reflects who we are, and who we're called to be is a wonderful name for this faith movement, but I, I just think of the Church of the Brethren who, who have that name Church of the Brethren. Think about it. And, and they had that name. They had discerned that was God's name for their church, but because they were so slow, and our church moves so quickly, we were able to secure that name and, and have it call us into the future.

**Brittany Mangelson 1:09:10**

Yeah, no, that's such an, such an interesting story. And I think that it's true that Community of Christ, it, it can seem like we move slowly, but from my perspective and my religious background, I think we're, we're doing great. The fact, you know, that we ordained women in the 80s, mid 80s, and, um, LGBTQ affirmation in 2013 in the US and, and multiple other countries following and even before that, uh, that's, those are big theological changes. They're not just cultural and policy. I mean, they're, they're theological expansions of God's love and grace, an opportunity to live Christ's mission and that is something that, I think, several churches are never going to actually address. And yet we said, Yes, we're gonna do the hard work and we pushed forward. And I just think that it's so beautiful that we have

the process to be able to do that through common consent and through how we conduct conferences, etc. So, yeah, the avenue for change, I think, is one of the most inspiring things about us. And, uh, just such a good reflection of the God that we know and worship that just is ever expanding, ever deepening our relationship with God and one another and what it means to be the church. So, I'm really glad that you, you brought that up. So, Linda, uh, you already touched on some stuff that I think would be really helpful for seekers. But I do work with a lot of seekers that come from traditions that don't ordain women. Sometimes women are so quickly to, eager to serve. But then other times, they really struggle with self doubt and confidence. So, I'm curious to know what you would say to women who just aren't sure if they're cut out to take a more active role in congregational life. Whether that's ordained or not, some women that I know particularly struggle with even speaking at the pulpit, or they don't feel like they can even get involved in children's ministry or planning activities because they just don't have a lot of confidence in moving forward in ministry. So, so what would you say to encourage, uh, and men too, but I'm just particularly talking women.

**Linda Booth 1:11:37**

Yes. And in, as you've been talking, I'm trying to think of what words I would say to a group of women who have that sense of reticence of what it is God wants them to do. And I, I just go back to something that is so, so important in Community of Christ. And that's the realization that all are called, all are called from the youngest to the oldest, male and female, in the inspired, um, Bible, Joseph Smith's Bible, it says that men and women are created spiritually in God's image. It's, you know, it's not just the men who are spiritually in God's image, it's the women as well. And, so, for all women, no matter in which culture they've been raised, or denomination, they have been called by God and God has a purpose for their life. Now, the purpose might not be to stand before the people and to preach or to pray. But the calling of a woman is there no matter what. And that calling might be as my grandmother, who moved amongst the people just caring for and loving people, and she never was ordained, obviously. But she was a minister whether she was ordained or not. And for women to realize that their life is also a life called for ministry, and it doesn't have to be ordained. You don't have to be ordained to live a Christ-like life. And that's what occurs when you, when you try to live that Christ-like life, then you are given more confidence and assurance that you're doing what God has called you to do. When you, when you love, when you are gentle and kind and when you reach out to people who need love and attention, which is something that all of us can do, and women in particular can do. I hope they feel that inspiration to risk something new in their lives and allow that risk to take them someplace where they wouldn't expect going. And in the case of ministry, it's risking, at times, speaking truth, risking, caring for, risking, reaching out to and in that risk taking, God's blessings will fill you with an understanding of how important your life is. And each individual life is important to God. And Jesus made that very clear as Jesus walked the earth and he reached out to the lame and the women and the untouchables and the unclean. And all those peeg, people on the margins will, sometimes women might feel that they are a bit on the margins. But that's exactly who Jesus lifted up and encouraged them to be all that they could be, all that God created them to be. And, so, while I don't really have words to share with them, I just hope that as they prayer, they prayerfully ask God for direction, that God will bless them as they bless the lives of others.



**Brittany Mangelson 1:15:37**

Well, I think those are really beautiful words that you shared. And I'm grateful for them. And I think that your wisdom is felt and heard by so many. And I really appreciate it. Thank you. Linda, this has been an absolutely wonderful conversation. I was so excited to have it and I've learned so much from you in our short time together. But I always like to end my podcast conversations with just a, a question of did I not ask you anything? Is there anything else that you would like to say? Is there a question that didn't get asked that you would like to respond to? Anything else that you would like to share with us?

**Linda Booth 1:16:18**

I, I think I've shared probably more than was even intended. But I guess I sh, I just want to emphasize that God uses ordinary people. And when a person says yes, uh, to God, that extraordinary things can happen. And, um, gifts that you didn't know you have will be magnified. And, uh, if you just risk, uh, God will bless you so much and, and that's been my life. I've, I've risked, I've stepped out of the plane at 30,000 feet. And, uh, I never thought of myself as being courageous. In fact, I always thought of myself as being timid. But if you just allow yourself to be taken someplace else, then amazing things can happen. And I want to thank you, Brittany, because when I first met you at the Temple with your family and, and, and, and saw what a wonderful family, family, you have and, and recognized in you and your husband, Josh, immediately, your giftedness and your, your call. And, and now when I see what has happened, as you and Josh have risked ( . . . ), risked and stepped out in faith, uh, the blessings that have been brought into your life and your family's life, but the blessings that you've been to so many people, I just rejoice and thank God, thank you.

**Brittany Mangelson 1:17:51**

Well, thank you, Linda. I always am just deeply, deeply, deeply grateful for the community that allowed us to, to be part of you, that you all paved the way. You had the really tough conversations. Uh, you made the, the policy change, the change in Revelation, the change in, in just expanding our identity and our, our mission to live out Christ's mission and I, I'm just really grateful for it. And I feel really blessed that we found you all and it's a place where I can raise my kids with a lot of confidence and I know that whatever they end up doing or being, uh, that they will be able to find a community within Community of Christ. So, I'm grateful for all of the pioneering women and men that came before me and, and allowed us to find a home here. So, thank you, thank you so much. And listeners you will be sure to hear more from Linda very soon. Like we said, she is the host of two different series on Project Zion and we are always excited to have her back to share from her life and ministry and her giftedness, uh, as a volunteer after her retirement. So, Linda, thank you so much and we will hear more from you very soon.

**Linda Booth 1:19:09**

Bye.

**Josh Mangelson 1:19:18**

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