

423 | Coffee in The Swarm | Laura Harder  
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.

**Mike Hoffman** 00:33

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Mike Hoffman at Graceland University and today we're actually in the Swarm doing Coffee in the Swarm. And today I have with me Laura Harder who is President of the Council of House Chaplains here at Graceland. One of the unique things about Graceland's housing system is that, uh, each house, uh, which includes people on, the students on campus, each house has a chaplain and then they're elected. And then at the end of every year, we elect next year's president of chaplains. It's one of several Graceland student government officers. So, Laura, welcome to our program.

**Laura Harder** 01:12

Aw, thank you. It's nice to be here.

**Mike Hoffman** 01:14

Thank you. It's good to have you here. So, why don't we start off with telling us something about yourself? I mean

**Laura Harder** 01:21

Um, well, um, like Mike said, I am Laura. I am a, here, a student here at Graceland. Uh, I am a junior and I'm from St. Louis. I'm a music education major. And one cool thing about me is that I'm actually a triplet. And, so, uh, that's definitely very unique and most people are very surprised when they hear that.

**Mike Hoffman** 01:38

Yeah, that's a, you know, obviously I know it because I know your parents. (Yes.) Yeah. So, in fact, today's interview is actually the day before your birthday which (Yes.) is also, you were born on actually 911 (Yes.) 2001. (2000.) 2000?

**Laura Harder** 01:53

Yes.

**Mike Hoffman** 01:54

Oh, so it's, oh! (Yeah.) You were a one year old.

**Laura Harder 01:57**

Yes, I was a one year old when it happened.

**Mike Hoffman 01:58**

Okay. Well, that's good to know. I had you pegged, that's why when you said you were 21 tomorrow, it's like, uuuhhh,

**Laura Harder 02:04**

You're like, that does not make sense. But, yeah, no we were born in 2000.

**Mike Hoffman 02:08**

Okay, okay. Very good. Okay. Just coincidentally born on 911. (Yes.) Alright. Well, not so coincidentally, probably. (Yes.) Anyway, so very good. Uh, so you're a triplet? What's that like to be here with, with a brother and a sister (Yeah.) here at Graceland?

**Laura Harder 02:25**

Um, honestly, I kind of love it. I don't see them all the time. I definitely see my brother, Logan, more because he and I both do cross country and track. So, I see him at practice and stuff. I'll see Lacey around, too. Uh, but it's really nice. I feel like I wouldn't want it any other way because I'm so used to them being here, you know? (Sure.) And, like, being around and since I've been around them since I was like, before we were even born, like, thinking about the fact that we wouldn't be together just makes me kind of upset. And like, we're, we get along pretty well, which is good. We obviously argue like siblings do, but it's something like crazy, you know?

**Mike Hoffman 03:00**

Yeah, yeah. I can sort of relate to that because I'm a set of three brothers. And we were all born within 28 months of each other. And, um, a lot of people thought we were all triplets when we were growing up, but, yeah, and we, I understand the fighting ( . . . ). Yeah, so that's pretty cool. So, um, what's your semester like at Graceland so far? You know, the pandemic is continuing. Is it going okay?

**Laura Harder 03:29**

Um, yeah, I feel like it's going okay. I feel like, um, as a music education major, and I do track, I do cross country and track, it's, it was very, it was a lot of work like the last few years, um, but when I added my, um, Council of House Chaplains President position on top of it, it was like, wow, this is a lot. Um, the first week or so I kind of struggled a little bit. I'm not gonna lie. It was, it was hard to balance that. But I feel like since we're a little bit further into the semester now I've kind of found my stride and, um, the pandemic, it is not very fun and we still have to wear masks and, um, all that kind of stuff which, I mean, I'm used to at this point, so it doesn't

feel much different, uh, but it is, I mean, it's, it's gotten easier as the semester has gone on to finally fall into my role as, uh, chaplain and stuff like that.

**Mike Hoffman 04:21**

Yeah. I know I, I remember I was, I, I knew you were busy even last year when I, when you were running and I remember, you know, thinking about, Okay, now she's got a lot going on. Now she's running for Chaplain President. (Yep.) You know, I'm glad you found your stride because actually working with you the first few weeks, it hasn't seemed like you were really, like, I mean, not that you weren't busy, but (Yeah.) you didn't seem too hectic. I mean, you seem too crazy about it. So,

**Laura Harder 04:48**

Yeah, no. I mean, and I, I wanted, so I guess maybe I'm going into the next question you might ask about, like, why I ran. So, um, so my parents and, actually I'm a seventh generation Graceland student which I think is crazy so, (It is.) so, like, since I think Graceland started we've, I've had family be here (Oh, yeah.) so my mom, I'm on Paloma, uh, at Graceland, (Yeah.) which is one of our houses. And my mom was one of the House Presidents for Paloma which is kind of like an RA position. (Right.) And, so, I've all, but before I came to Graceland, I always wanted to be a House President because I'm like, Oh, that would be so cool. Because I feel like, not to, like, brag on myself, but I feel like I've always enjoyed leadership and I wanted to be a leader, and, but when I came here and I realized I'm a cross country and track and I'm a music education major, I don't have time to be a House President. And so I was like, not that being a, the Chaplain President doesn't take a lot of time, (No, but,) but it's not as much (It's not nearly . . . ) of a time commitment. And, uh, because I have a connection with Community of Christ, I was like, Oh, I think I want to run for Chaplain President.

**Mike Hoffman 05:59**

Yeah. So, do you, you have one more year here? So, do you want to be a House President next year?

**Laura Harder 06:04**

I mean, I would hope to, but realistically, realistically, I don't think I have time. (Gotcha.) Because I know there are other people who are music education majors who are House Presidents, but I'm also in cross country and track and most of them are in athletics. And, so, it's like, three things is a lot.

**Mike Hoffman 06:21**

Yeah. Yeah. Well, and three things actually turns into a lot of other things. (Yes. Yes.) Being involved with Graceland Student Government in and of itself is, I, I mean, I, I can think of at least three or four meetings you have to go to.

**Laura Harder 06:34**

Yes, I was counting them on my hand. I was like, I have six meetings in a week. But, I mean, usually they're not too bad. But I was like, Wow, this is, this is a lot, but it's really fun. (Yeah.)

**Mike Hoffman 06:45**

So, do you remember I, can you tell me a little bit about your platform? You, you started to say why you ran, but, but, you know, you ran for Graceland Student Government last spring? (Yeah.) And I just remember a little bit about your platform. But, you know, what was it you hope to accomplish? I mean, and you don't have to stick with just what you wrote last year.

**Laura Harder 07:05**

If I'm being honest, I, I don't quite remember everything that I said. It, uh, it has been, I mean, it was back in February, was it not? (Yes, yeah.) It's been a while, but I remember I really wanted to emphasize that chaplains isn't only a religious organization, it's kind of spiritual. And it's, I know that we've talked about this because a lot of, there's a misconception of what chaplains are on campus because I know that people are, like, Oh, it's only a religious thing. I'm not religious. So, I don't wa, I don't want to be a chaplain. (Yes.) Or, like, to me, I don't care what denomination or faith you are, I want you to feel like you have a place on this campus and that you belong no matter what. (Yeah. That's, that's good.) Oh, and I, I think I remember talking about the worth of all persons because that connects to the Community of Christ in one of our Enduring Principles (Absolutely.) that we have and that's, that's one that's always been really important to me.

**Mike Hoffman 07:58**

Yeah. You know, I, I mean, it's, it's like, for me, it's, it's interesting about the chaplains here because we think about, like, I, I think of it in terms of like being spiritual friends with people in the house. And, you know, your comment about religious it doesn't have to be religious. Well, so far, I mean, a lot of our chaplains come from the Community of Christ faith. A lot of them also come from the Catholic faith or some, I shouldn't say a lot, but some, and then other faiths as well. In fact, we've had some that are really spiritual, but not religious in some ways and then they just help people, (Yes.) you know, so that's, that's (Yeah.) good. So. Okay. Um, so what would you like to do after you graduate from Graceland?

**Laura Harder 08:47**

Oh, so, I'm here to be a music education major. So, if I'm being honest, I came in here and I was, came to Graceland and then I was, like, I want to be a high school band director. And that was what I wanted to do. But as my time has gone on here and I haven't gotten a ton of, like, in the classroom experience yet. Um, I would also love to be a track or cross country coach, if possible, because, I mean, I love, I would love to be a coach, but realistically, I don't know if

I'm gonna' have the time to do that, you know. But, um, as my time has gone on at Graceland, um, when I did go and, like, shadow in a, a middle school, I was like, Okay, I don't actually dislike this as much as I thought because I remember going into Graceland and I was, like, I do not want to teach middle school. (Oh, yeah.) Those kids are just, like, a lot to deal with. And my mom's a middle school librarian and so I was, like, I don't think I can do that. I don't think I can do that. And then I, like, texted her afterwards and I was like, I don't actually dislike this as much as I thought I would. ( . . . ) I mean, I love kids, uh, but I just thought that, but I know middle school is a very interesting transition period (Yeah.) in kids' lives and, so, I was like, I don't know if I want to do that. I really like high schoolers, so I'm not quite sure yet where, what age I want to do, but I want to be, do some sort of band directing, and, uh, (And coaching.) and coaching potentially because I love (Are there coaching positions in middle school, too?) Um, sometimes, but I think (Okay.) I know that at least in my school district that I graduated from, there was sometimes a middle school teacher would go up and coach for high school if they needed help or anything, but yeah, usually, especially with, uh, track and cross country, even just track, there'll be some sort of coaching position. So, yeah.

**Mike Hoffman 10:32**

Yeah. Okay. That's cool. So, middle school or high school, so. Alright, so, um, you know, I know obviously from our relationship here at Graceland, I know you've been involved in Community of Christ ( . . . ). Um, how do you see that happening over the course of your life? You know, do you hope to continue to be ( . . . ) in Community of Christ?

**Laura Harder 10:54**

Um, I do, really do feel like I want to be active in the Community of Christ because I really do love, love the church a lot. And, um, I'm hoping next summer, uh, one of my cousins, Cameron Harder, when he went to Graceland (Oh, yeah.) he was a Graceland rep, and I, and that just seemed like so much fun. And I love, I love traveling and so getting to be a Graceland Rep hopefully next summer would be one of my main goals because I feel like that'd be both good for, like, uh, my future job and just, like, have fun and (Yeah.) go to camps and SPEC and I've loved Spectacular since, um, like, my dad used to be one of the directors. And, so, I've been coming for years and years and years, and, so, I definitely have missed it over the past two years. And, um, even if I don't, if I'm not a Specter, like, a Graceland Rep, I hope to go to SPEC because I'm going to be old enough to, (Yeah. That's right.) to be a counselor and, ah, it just, uh, SPEC is the reason why I came to Graceland if I'm being honest because just being on campus with all the people just, it gave me, I felt like home.

**Mike Hoffman 11:56**

Yeah. So, I guess the last two years we've not had SPEC because of the pandemic (Yeah.) you wouldn't have been able to be there (No.) anyway because,

**Laura Harder 12:02**

No, I mean, I probably would have, like, visited. (Right, right, right.) Like, I can't not go to SPEC because it's just so fun, and like, I've made lots of friends, um, in this country and out of this country just because of that. It has been really fun.

**Mike Hoffman 12:17**

Yeah. Did you get to go to IYF?

**Laura Harder 12:18**

Yeah, I went to IYF. That was so fun. I have, um, several friends from other countries. And it's just like I (Yeah, you mentioned that. That's what I thought.) Yeah, no, I would, yeah, I went to IYF, so, I got, but luckily, I got to go all four years. I was the last age group to go all four years before, um, COVID happened, and so I was very grateful. And I feel so bad for everybody who didn't get to go. Uh, but hopefully it will get to happen again.

**Mike Hoffman 12:40**

Yes. I know, we live in hope. (We're all, we're all praying) that the pandemic ends soon. So, alright. Um, that's very cool. So, when, when we think about the church, do you have any, anything that you would like to hope that would happen in the church in the future, especially as a young adult? (Yeah.) You know, obviously, I, I'm pretty confident SPEC will come back, (Yeah.) you know, those kinds of things. Is there something totally new or on the horizon that you'd like to see the church do or, or be? Or is there anything you'd like to say (Oh, um.) if you have a chance and maybe this is the chance, I don't know?

**Laura Harder 13:24**

Yeah, I don't know. Um, I was thinking, like, I know that I just, for me, I always want organizations to be more accepting. And I know, like, right now we're very, we're pretty accepting as in general, but like, even more accepting and open to having people LGBTQ or, um, people of color have more powers ( . . . ) like powers of position, like, leadership positions (Yeah.) and, um, stuff like that because I know that in, especially in America, like, all that is on the forefront of society and, like, just more inclusion is always better in my (Sure.) opinion. And, so, I think, um, increasing that and, um, I'm also really excited for my generation to become leaders in the church (Okay.) because I feel like, for me, I feel like the best worships and, uh, stuff like that, that I've have, have been at SPEC or at camp where it's young people leading the worship and I just feel like I relate to that a lot more (Sure.) because, I mean, I feel like as it, not necessarily in a bad way, but I feel like in, in the, in our church, ( . . . ) not as much strayed away from, like, using the Bible, but I feel like I mean, like, obviously use the Bible in church, but I feel like whenever I get messages from younger people, I feel more interested because usually they tell, like, stories, and more relate that to, like, my life than just, like, (Yeah.) lecturing, I guess is the, I, I mean, I feel weird saying that, but like,

**Mike Hoffman 15:01**

Yeah, no, no, it makes sense 'cause I remember taking a class in, in speaking or developing a sermon, and it, it talked about how, like, like, you always want to tell a story, like, that comes from your, like, whoever's listening to you, like, whoever's present, it's common across people, you know, like across generations. So, that's, I think, my better, I shouldn't say better service, but the one's that people remind me are, are ones where I told stories about being in sixth grade and doing things like that, because so many of us have that experience in common, (Um hmm.) you know. That makes sense to me. I mean, yeah, so, it's like, I think that's what, I think that's one of the things here, you know, it's like the church expression at Graceland is really run by students here. So, it's, you know, so

**Laura Harder 15:50**

And so that's one reason like, I know, we have, at Graceland we have two different services on Sunday. So we have Sunday morning worship, which is more traditional style Community of Christ service. So, that's still run by students, so. And, so, it feels like, kind of like I would be back at home, but instead it's run by students instead of by, um, church leaders back home. (Yeah.) But then we have Afterglow, which, I think, is my personal favorite (Ah!) church service.

**Mike Hoffman 16:13**

So, tell me what, what makes it your personal favorite.

**Laura Harder 16:15**

Um, I don't know. I just feel like, I remember my freshman year, I think it was the first Afterglow that we had, I remember, I don't know why I remember this so much, but I felt very in the moment. And I remember it had been raining all day, this was two years ago, it was, it had rained all day and the, um, the Cheville Chapel, which is where we have our services on campus, uh, it's beautiful, and it was packed. I remember, like, every single chair was full pretty much. And I remember just, like, sitting in the back and they were playing, um, it's like a tradition, like, it's a contemporary band of sorts, so instead of, like, piano music, it's a band. And, so, they were playing and I remember looking out and, like, the sun just, like, popped out. And it, like, was coming into the windows of the church in such a way and it's just, like, I felt, like, (Yeah.) at home and I felt the Spirit in that moment. And, so, just getting that feeling and, I mean, it might not happen every single service, but, like, just going to Afterglow, uh, makes me feel, like, good. And I feel like the church is going in a positive direction whenever I'm there and it makes me excited for the future.

**Mike Hoffman 17:24**

Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. It's, like, it's, like, last Sunday, I, I, you know, I'm amazed at the modern contemporary music and it's not contemporary Christian music.

**Laura Harder 17:35**

Not necessarily. Like, sometimes it is, but sometimes it's not.

**Mike Hoffman 17:39**

I'm, like, last Sunday, for me, despite the fact that I didn't know the songs ( . . . ) very well, I, I've heard them, but, but I was amazed at how well they fit the theme (Yeah.) which is just really, (Yeah.) I think speaks to the younger adults that look out there and say, Oh, this song really works well with this theme or this scripture or, (YEAH.) you know, whatever they're basing it on. That's cool. Well, thank you for sharing about that. So. Um, so is there anything else you'd like to share with our listeners today about Graceland? Community of Christ? (Hmm.) The future?

**Laura Harder 18:19**

Uh, I don't know. I don't think I have anything else to share that (Okay.) I feel.

**Mike Hoffman 18:23**

Alright. Okay. We talk fast.

**Laura Harder 18:31**

Yes, we do. I'm a fast talker.

**Mike Hoffman 18:34**

Oh, well. Laura, thank you for this interview.

**Laura Harder 18:37**

Of course. It was fun.

**Mike Hoffman 18:42**

It was fun. Thank you very much. And, um, I wish you well.

**Laura Harder 18:43**

Thank you. You, too.

**Mike Hoffman 18:43**

Alright, thanks.



**Josh Mangelson 18:52**

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