

433 | Coffee Buzz | Gratitude, Giving Tuesday, and a Financial Update

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.

Linda Booth 00:33

Welcome to the 26th episode of Coffee Buzz, a podcast conversation with a member of Community of Christ First Presidency. My name is Linda Booth. I'm a full time disciple of Jesus Christ and a retired Community of Christ apostle, and director of communication, having served 23 years with my friend and colleague, Stassi Cramm, who is my guest today. Stassi serves as a counselor to Prophet-President Steve Veazey and as Community of Christ, presiding bishop. So welcome, my friend, how are you and your family?

Stassi Cramm 01:12

Thank you, Linda. It's always good to connect. So me and my family are doing really well. Life seems to be very busy for everyone right now, but we're looking forward to the holidays and several opportunities to connect. We're having a family gathering at our St. Charles Missouri home for Thanksgiving. That will include our daughter, son-in-law, his parents, my parents, and my brother and his family. Then our son who lives in Tokyo, Japan is coming back to the USA for two weeks around Christmas. And I think our daughter's going to drop in for a few of those days as well. So I'm looking forward to slowing down and being present with everyone. I know you and your family do a lot of things around the holidays, as well, so you'll understand when you'll say that family and being together is one of my favorite things about this time of year.

Linda Booth 02:08

Oh, me too. In fact, I recently took our 11 year old grandson, Cooper, to the Van Gogh Alive, which is here in the Greater Kansas City area, and it's a multi sensory experience. And when we were talking, I said, we've got holidays coming up and I said, "What's your favorite holiday?" And I expected him to say Christmas for obvious reasons. And he said "Thanksgiving!" And I said, "Why Thanksgiving?" He said, "because it's all about family."

Stassi Cramm 02:39

Oh, that's so sweet. I love it.

Linda Booth 02:42

I do, too. So I know this is a busy time, not only because of the holidays are coming up, but I know it is for the bishopric. And the World Church Finance Board has just approved the Community of Christ audit, which I know was time consuming for you and your team. And I'm assuming you're working hard on next financial update, which you usually present to the World Church Finance Board in December and then it's posted on the Community of Christ website. But most of our Coffee Buzz listeners may not know that, usually the presiding bishopric has two counselors, however, you're down to one counselor,

which must put a lot of extra work on you and Steve Graffeo, who's your counselor, and also your team. So how's that going? As well as how's the development of the December finance report going?

Stassi Cramm 03:39

Well, I think it's going pretty well. I'm happy to report that we have released all of the read ahead material for the December Finance Board meeting. We tried to do that about a month in advance to give the board plenty of time to review. During our December meeting with the board, they will receive an update about 2021 which is overall pretty good news. And they will also consider the proposed 2022 worldwide mission budget. We will be reporting how Giving Tuesday went so we're very excited about that. That comes up on 30 November. A typical December of giving is usually a really big time for us. And so we're hopeful that if Giving Tuesday goes well and December goes well, that the Church will actually be within the 2021 goal range for Worldwide Mission Tithes, which was \$11.7 to \$12.7 million. I know these sound like really large numbers, but the worldwide mission budget is actually significantly smaller than it was in years past. You would remember that. And as you know we are, I think, pretty efficient and effective. in how we support the church and living Christ's mission within the Worldwide Mission Tithes shared, and the other income we have available. The December 2021 Financial update, which will be posted on the church's website the week of 6 December, and it will also be posted in three languages. A summary will also be reported in the January-February 2022. Herald. And a report about the survey results from last spring that you and I talked about in a previous podcast, as well as we've just completed a survey that was accomplished as part of the generosity cycle in a partnership with Barna Research. So that will also be posted on the website and a summary in the Herald. As you noticed, the Presiding Bishopric is short one counselor right now. But in spite of this, we work really hard to make financial information available. So if anyone has questions about finances, they can email presidingbishopric@cofchrist.org, and we'll help them get answers. We want people to understand and know how their tithing dollars are being used and what the financial status of the church is.. I also want to do a huge shout out for Jeff Naylor. Some may remember that he was a counselor in the Presiding bishopric and, and then had to step away due to personal reasons. But even though he was no longer able to serve as a counselor, he agreed to provide some consulting support to the church. And he's done an amazing job of leading the church's request for a proposal that will lead to a new contract for an investment manager for the church's pooled investments. So we plan on having that process complete and announcing that in the December financial update as well. So his efforts have been a real blessing and have kind of helped rounded out the team. So thank you, Jeff Naylor, if you're listening to this podcast,

Linda Booth 07:03

Yes, thank you, Jeff. And, and also, thank you to you, Stassi, and Steve Graffeo, and your team. I know you're working really hard on behalf of the church. And so Coffee Buzz listeners, I encourage you to check out that December Finance Report, which is slated to be released sometime the week of December 6 on the church's website, and then if you want to read it in the Herald in the January-February Herald. And if you really like audits, then the audit is on the website now. So if you're interested, you can check that out. Stassi, I've always appreciated the fact that Community of Christ leaders are willing to be transparent on many issues, especially when it comes to finances. So thank you again. And on November 4, an email was sent out to Community of Christ staff and Mission Center leaders in Australia, British Isles, Canada and the USA, about a new digital strategy for Herald House

and resources. And having been in Communications all those years. I'm really excited about that. So please share some of the Phase One elements of this strategic plan.

Stassi Cramm 08:19

Sure, I'd love to. We think that this is going to be a really good plan that will help everyone find the information that they're seeking on the website from Community of Christ. As many of your listeners would understand technology is constantly changing. This means that the church must continue to improve and modernize our use and implementation of technology. Our current website at CofChrist.org is based on older technologies that needed to be replaced. You would remember bringing that online. It seems like it was just yesterday, but actually it was long time ago. And so we needed to upgrade. So whenever an organization needs to upgrade, it's best practice to incorporate lessons learned from the past, as well as consider new capabilities that can be incorporated going forward. So the Communications Team, in collaboration with several groups from the field and headquarters, is leading an effort to increase and focus the church's presence online. As a result of all of this, they looked at what the three major functions of the current website are. And those were 1) supporting and growing mission, 2) providing information in support of Church Administration, and 3) developing disciples to serve through formation resources and experiences. So the new digital landscape strategy for the church includes three distinct, yet connected websites that will support these three major functions. The focus of our public domain of CofChrist.org will be supporting and growing mission. The primary audience will be members and seekers. And the anticipated launch of a new site available in English, French and Spanish is slated for first quarter of 2022. So the team's busily working in the background on how the new CofChrist.org will appear. The second site is also under development, and it will be intended to provide information in support of Church Administration. This site will be password protected, built on the Microsoft SharePoint platform. But the goal will be that it will be accessible from anywhere. The primary audience is leaders, priesthood and members. Ideas for the site name was crowd sourced and the results should be announced soon. So we're anxious to have a name for this site. The site is starting to roll, roll out now. So Communications has been sending information and holding training sessions for like Mission Center officers. And we're you know, information will continue to be added over time as that information is available. Unlike the 2005 Administrator's Handbook, or the Priesthood Manual that was written and released in 2004, and other printed material, this site will be a living site, where information can continuously be updated, deleted and added as needed. So it will allow us to be very responsive to providing the kind of information that administrators need in a pretty timely fashion. The third focus is the update to HeraldHouse.org. And of course, that website is focused on developing disciples to serve through formation, resources and experience. The audience is members, leaders and planners. On this site, people can now discover retail and free disciple formation tools, resources and products, enhanced French, excuse me enhanced French, and Spanish experiences will be available sometime in early 2022, followed by a way to see several pages of a book's PDF before downloading. So we're very excited about all three of these websites. I know change is really hard. And we've experienced some bumps and frustrations. And I'm sure we will experience more. As people learn where to go to find information they need. The team is trying to provide good instructions to help people learn the new systems. What I can say is that the new digital landscape strategy is going to ultimately provide easier access to more information in three languages. It's also going to be more efficient, and so hopefully use a little bit less staff time in keeping it up to date. So it's a great step forward as the church continues to grow in our implementation of technology.

Linda Booth 13:13

That is, that's fantastic. And, and probably Coffee Buzz listeners don't know that the staff, our staff keep decreasing. And so the fact that this is all occurring with a smaller staff is truly amazing. There's a lot of dedicated people that work for the church, and we should give thanks every day for their expertise and their willingness to work so hard on behalf of the church

Stassi Cramm 13:40

Amen.

Linda Booth 13:41

Yeah. There's a lot going on in November for the Presiding Bishopric. you have Giving Tuesday, which is on November 30, which you've mentioned, which has a generous matching grant of \$250,000. Meaning that if I give \$50 Then the matching grant gives the church \$100, which is fantastic. And also the Presiding Bishop is partnering, as you said, with the Barna Group to survey, survey people about their views on generosity. So, so, do you have any news on Giving Tuesday or the survey on generosity?

Stassi Cramm 14:20

Yeah, we are really grateful to the contributors who have pledged the \$250,000 matching funds. So we're really, I'm always amazed and grateful and humbled at people's generosity, and their excitement about this important day and their willingness to help multiply people's giving by matching dollar for dollar. And as for the latest survey, I want to thank everyone who's listening who responded, the information is going to be really helpful as we continue to plan for the future. So let me give you just a few tidbits and then people will be able to find more information online in December. A total of 716 individuals completed the survey. When asked in what ways are you most generous, the top three responses were: 28% said emotional and relational support is how they're most generous. 27% said that they're most generous through service and volunteering, and 26% said they're most generous through monetary support. So we thought that that was really interesting, It really represented that whole-life stewardship concept of Community of Christ. 91% of respondents identified having at least one person in their lives who modeled generosity, and identified reflecting God's character by showing love to others as the most important reason Christians are generous. So I think that importance of modeling generosity is you know, we should all listen really closely to that because we might be able to be that model and mentors for others. The second reason identified for Christian generosity was to give back in appreciation for God's generosity. And of course, we talk a lot about God's abundant generosity in Community of Christ. 94% responded that true generosity is planned at least some of the time. So although there is spontaneity that occurs, you know, to truly be generous, you have to really plan and I loved that people saw that because, again, I think that speaks to our understanding of stewardship and the role of planning in stewardship. And 62% of our respondents said that their congregations were receiving adequate information from the church about the impact of their giving. So you talked about transparency, that really, I mean, I, I wish it were higher than 62%. But I'm glad that we're at least leaning in the favor of people feeling like they're getting what they need, as far as information. We'll have more details in a report on both surveys that will be posted alongside the Financial Update the week of 6 December, and there will be a brief summary in the January-February Herald.

Linda Booth 17:21

Excellent. I'll look forward to reading those. And Coffee Buzz listeners, please put November 30th on your calendar, and contribute generously to Giving Tuesday. Let's put us over the top for, so that mission can be supported throughout the world. So there's a lot to be grateful for with what you've been sharing with us, Stassi. Last month on October 11th, Canada celebrated Thanksgiving Day, and folks in the United States are preparing for Thanksgiving Day, which is on November the 25th. So how does your family's typically celebrate Thanksgiving? And what are you grateful for as you look forward to Thanksgiving, Stassi?

Stassi Cramm 18:09

Well, we typically celebrate Thanksgiving by getting together as a family. Last year, it was just us and our, my parents and we sat across the room from each other because no one was vaccinated yet. Each year who gathers changes, but the concept is the same. We want to connect with family members, whether it's virtually or on the phone or being physically together. This year that feels particularly important, because as I said, we didn't gather in 2020 because of the pandemic. I'm especially thankful this year for family and the opportunity to be together. I confess that in years past all the hoopla around getting together perhaps dominated too much of my intention, instead of just being grateful that we were all together and taking the time to be fully present and bask in the experience. So this year, we'll plan a big meal and we'll clean the house and we'll do all the hoopla. But when it comes time for everyone to walk through the door, I'm just going to let things be what they are. And I am going to soak up every minute of the togetherness.

Linda Booth 19:23

Yes, yes. Yes. And when you think about it, it's interesting that we just designate one day a year to express our Thanksgiving or gratitude or focus, as you said, on the presence of family together. When when really it's gratitude that's good for our health. It should be something that we focus on every day. I was reading the Harvard Health Publishing website, and it reported that research—and I guess it's common sense really—shows that being intentionally grateful every day can enrich a person's life. That it can actually make you happier. And the paper went on to say that the surest indicator of a person's emotional well being is the degree of gratitude in their lives. So what do you think about gratitude? Where do you think it comes from?

Stassi Cramm 20:20

Well, as you can imagine, the Presiding Bishopric has done a lot of reading, study and reflection about gratitude. So the very basics: gratitude derives from the Latin word gratia, which depending on the context translates as grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. But I don't think that's what you're really asking. As you said, there's been a lot of research done about gratitude. A One White paper from Berkeley University explained that throughout history and around the world, religious leaders and philosophers have extolled the virtue of gratitude. Some have even described gratitude as "social glue" that fortifies relationships between friends, family and romantic partners, and serves as the backbone of human society. Research suggests that gratitude has deep roots that are embedded in our evolutionary history, in our brains and our DNA and in our childhood development. If you look at nature, because we learn a lot from looking at nature, animals as diverse as fish, and birds and vampire bats engage in

what's called reciprocal altruism activities. And those are behaviors that one animal performs to help another member of their species, sometimes even at a cost to themselves, presumably because they recognize at some very instinctual level, that the other entity or the other creature may repay the favor at a later date. Many scientists see this desire to repay generosity as an expression of gratitude. And in fact, some scientists suggest that gratitude may have evolved as a mechanism to actually drive this reciprocal altruism, thereby turning strangers into friends, and allies who are more likely to help one another. I think all this research supports my own personal observations or like you said common sense. It also supports the idea that if humans were created in the image of God, then positive attributes such as gratitude, are likely how we were created to be. Ultimately, I think gratitude flows out of love, and moves us past the feeling of thankfulness, to actions that express our love. I recently read an article at Psychiatric Medical Care site about the difference between gratitude and thankfulness. Of course, the Oxford Dictionary defines the word thankful, as pleased and relieved. Both of these are, of course, great feelings. Everyone wants to be pleased and relieved. But that's just it, they are just feelings. And as we all know, feelings can fade. The Oxford Dictionary defines the word grateful as showing an appreciation of kindness. So this is where I think the difference lies between thankful which is a feeling and being grateful, which is an action. So like being thankful, being in love can be just a feeling, such as I love fall colors. But the kind of love that Jesus called us to exhibit love of God, self, neighbour, and even enemy is much more than a feeling. I think this kind of love isn't a call to action. It's a call that leads us to a whole host of other actions, including being grateful. So I kind of think that gratefulness comes from love.

Linda Booth 24:14

So true. I really like what you said about gratitude as a "social glue" that holds us all together in relationship, but that's the part of community which, so gratitude must be really at the core of what it means to be a community. I also liked when you talked about that gratitude is a part of our very DNA, that it's a God given gift, which also needs to be cultivated, cultivated and nurtured and lived and that gratitude is indeed action. That is, that is fantastic. Gratitude for me is also its intrinsic. It's an intrinsic appreciation for what you receive whether it's tangible or intangible, with gratitude, we acknowledge the goodness in our lives even in the very tough times. And it helps me in particular to connect to something larger than myself, whether it's other people or nature or God. So how do we how can we cultivate or grow our gratefulness?

Stassi Cramm 25:26

Yeah, um, you know, research would tell us that some people might be more naturally grateful. And you guys can probably think of people you know that, that you just think, oh, my gosh, gratitude just flows from them. And it's just as easily as breathing. But I think the really good news for those who don't necessarily have those natural feelings of gratitude, is that gratitude is one of those attributes that can be cultivated. People have probably heard the phrase, you know, "develop an attitude of gratitude." So like all significant changes we want to make in our life, it takes intentionality, perseverance, and a support system. It also takes a willingness to be honest when we fall short, and extend grace to ourselves that we can do better moving forward. I've been reading a book called, How God Works: The Science About How Religion Works. I'm sure that doesn't surprise you. But in this book, researchers report that feelings of gratitude are one of four reasons that teens practice religion. So when teens were asked, "Why do you practice religion?" one of the reasons was because of the sense of gratitude, their

religion helped them experience. The author reported that if you believe that God or the universe is generous, which of course I do, it makes complete sense to feel a strong persistent sense of appreciation. So the relationship between gratitude and belief in God works the other way to, for example, research shows that people who were randomly assigned to pray for others over a four week period felt more intense gratitude in their own daily lives, than did those who were assigned simply to think about other people in a positive way. So the practice of our faith is a great way to bring more gratitude into our life. And there are a number of spiritual practices designed to cultivate and grow gratitude. So let me just share a couple. First, some people work on keeping a gratefulness or a gratitude journal. This is a journal or part of a larger journal, where a person is very intentional about each day identifying the things that they are grateful for. A second spiritual practice is expressing daily gratitude. This is a practice to commit to identifying one person or one circumstance that brought you gratitude in the day. And so an example would be like at supper time, sometimes, you know, people will talk about their highs and their lows, but you could talk about your highs, your lows, and what are you grateful for today, a follow up to that is then actually turning your awareness of gratitude into an expression by reaching out to a person and saying thank you. For instance, you might text a person or write a positive review for them on Yelp, if it was a service provider, you know, are actually putting our gratitude into action is a great way. Another idea, of course, comes from a movie title, and it's Paying it Forward. This is the practice of doing something kind or helpful for someone who hasn't asked for anything. The other day, I was talking to our daughter and she was going through a drive thru after a 24 hour shift at the hospital. It was like 5:00 a.m. in the morning, and she was exhausted and she was picking up some breakfast on her way home. When she got to the window to pay her bill and pick up her food, she learned that the car in front of her had paid her bill. It changed her whole mindset and day, and I'm sure it changed the mindset and day of the person who had paid her bill. So as you can imagine, the list of how to work at being grateful is somewhat endless. And so people just need to be creative and intentional about it. So my point is that if you feel like there's room in your life for more gratitude, then be intentional about finding ways of expressing more gratitude to yourself, to others—including strangers, and to God. Like love, gratitude is limitless. You can't run out of it. In fact, gratitude, like love has a multiplying effect. The more you immerse yourself in love and gratitude, and the more you give it away, the more you have, and the more others have. So in some ways you can't give love or gratitude away, because it just keeps coming back to you.

Linda Booth 30:21

Yes, yes, it's important during each day to be centered in gratitude and Christ's love, which increases our own sense of well being, and happiness. Each and every day, no matter what, one of my personal practices that I've done—I can't remember when it started, it's been so long in my life—is every night when my head hits the pillow before I start my prayer, my litany of names that I'm praying for, I say, "Thank you, God," And then I go through the day, I remember during the day what it was, that brought great gratitude to my soul. And, and I think that practice causes me then the next day to look for those things that I'm...

Stassi Cramm 31:09

I'm sure it does. That's great. Yes.

Linda Booth 31:12

And I've been hearing, I've always heard people say, you know, when this bad thing happens, I'm going to be grateful. Well, I've been hearing recently people say things like, well, when the pandemic is behind us, I'm going to be so grateful. Or when the pandemic is behind us, I'm going to be so happy. How would you respond to that comment? And when have you felt grateful or happiness during the pandemic?

Stassi Cramm 31:42

Yeah, those are really, I think, important questions. I would say that true happiness, and probably authentic gratitude generates from within us, it's kind of God's Spirit and presence within us. It's not externally generated. Oh, sure things happen around us that can stimulate happy feelings in US or grateful feelings. For instance, I'm always happy after one of my kids call. And I'm also really thankful. But this kind of happiness is a feeling. And as I've already said, feelings are fleeting. I think the kind of happiness people are looking for past the pandemic is more about a state of being, I think the pandemic has created a lot of uncertainty, instability and fear of the unknown. This is destabilizing for all of us. I know, it's been very destabilizing for me. But we're missing out on making the most of now, if we don't seek to bring happiness and gratitude into each moment. As one adage says, "The present is a present we should gratefully receive." So knowing about gratitude doesn't mean that I always practice what I know, I've definitely had deep moments of disconnect and darkness through the experiences of the pandemic. However, I've also had significant significant moments of deep gratitude. Sometimes the moments of gratitude have come in the quietness of my home, when I simply gave myself the time and space to intentionally count my blessings. It's kind of like you, at night with your head on your pillow. And sometimes I've experienced deep gratitude through online worship, or other virtual connections that have been made through the gift of technology. I definitely have a love-hate relationship with my computer. As you and I discussed in the past, our daughter's wedding in 2020 was a hybrid experience. Even though it was not what she had planned. I was so grateful that we pressed on with the important elements of life and making the most of what we could safely do. So I think even as the pandemic continues to roll out in waves, and you know, I think we all have to do the very best we can to make the most of each moment and not wait for some future that we cannot fully understand or even define. We can all choose to experience happiness and gratitude through our connections with God and each other now.

Linda Booth 34:27

Yes, I totally agree. But I was recently reading a blog by Diane, Diana Butler Bass, who's the author of a lot of books, including Christianity After Religion. And I was surprised because she used the word gratitude in a way I had never thought of it before. So she was lamenting about the polarization of people over politics, and different issues, and she began the blog by sharing her own frustration. And in some cases, anger with people whose political views were different than our own. And she ended—which was a very long blog—by encouraging her readers to find solidarity with others. And this is how they found that solidary solidarity is by nurturing gratitude for our differences. So when I read that I've been thinking a lot about nurturing gratitude for our differences, especially for those who believe differently than I do. So I think Diana is up to something. What do you think about nurturing gratitude for our differences? Do you believe it will make a difference in this polarized culture that we live in?

Stassi Cramm 35:47

Yeah, gosh, I mean, that's a new concept for me. I've not, I've not actually read anything about gratitude for our differences. So I'm, I'm really intrigued by that. And of course, Diana Butler Bass is a very wise woman. So I think it's, you know, worthy of pausing and considering. You know, it kind of as I'm listening to you describe it, it reminds me of, when we're encouraged to walk in another shoes, you know, at least conceptually to try to understand the world from their perspective, which then hopefully gives us better insights into their response. And so I feel like this idea of gratitude for our differences, you know, potentially puts us in that same space of trying to recognize that the other isn't our enemy, you know, they are another human person. And we have to coexist together. So I think nurturing gratitude for our differences might be similar to Jesus's challenge to us to love our enemy. So given that I think that gratitude, you know, comes from love, I think I'm you know, I kind of feel like the connection there. Our readers or I mean our, your listeners would be good readers, I'm sure of the scriptures. But I want to quote from Matthew five, verses 43 through 48. Because this is the scripture where Jesus talks about loving our enemies. It's written that he said, "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sunrise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." I love this scripture, 'cause I love the questions 'cause they're so specific. And sometimes Jesus talked in riddles, but in this case, the questions are so specific. And actually, I was reading the Gratefulness Daily Blog this morning. And the writer, and this is just really short, she said, "Gratitude creates a sense of abundance, the knowing that you have what you need. In that climate of sufficiency, our hunger for more abates, and we take only what we need, in respect for the generosity of the giver." So I believe that gratitude for our differences might help us contribute to our sense of God's abundance of love for everyone in creation, the fact that God, you know, rains in, on everyone. And like the author says, when we all start to believe there is enough and to spare, as our scriptures tell us, and we take only what we need, it will leave more for others, and maybe that will help move us out of this scarcity, you know, perspective, which adds to, I think, the polarity in a place of seeing our likenesses, even in the midst of our differences. So, I believe if we make choices and treat others with the idea of moving closer to Jesus, the peaceful One, or better yet embodying Jesus, the peaceful One, then yes, I think I do believe that having you know, gratitude for our differences can make a difference in the world.

Linda Booth 39:29

Yes, I agree to Stassi, we've come to the close of this Coffee Buzz. Are there any other thoughts about the the impact of gratitude in our lives and our relationships with God and others that you'd like to share?

Stassi Cramm 39:44

Yeah, Linda you always has such good questions. And there's just so many things I always, you know, want to say so I'm grateful to your listeners for being patient. I think you and President Veazey discussed in, maybe it was just the last podcast, that we are living in liminal times, which means we are in an in-between. We're in between what was and what is yet to be, and, and that, this time may last for

a long time. So we may be in the in-between for, you know, for a long time. Some are even asking if the church has a future. People are grateful for the church's past. They're grateful for the impact the church, you know, has had in their lives, but they're, you know, wondering about the future. So I guess I just want to say, I think the future of the church, you know, I think the church has a future, maybe that's a better way to say it. And I am grateful for the church and the difference that this faith community has made. But I'm also grateful in anticipation of the impact that I think our faith community is going to continue to make in my life and in the life of many others. I believe that fostering important faithful attributes such as love, gratitude, and generosity to name just a few is part of the importance of Christ-centered communities. Research shows that taking part in religious practices builds community. We've already talked about that. So turning back to the book about the benefits of religion, the author reports that research shows that people simply being in a room together does not make people feel emotionally connected. The value comes from being together in purposeful ways. And I think that's part of why the church exists. And I think that's part of why it's important that we gather virtually when we can't be physically together, but also why we need to—when we can safely—get back to physically being together. The author reports that religions aren't just a club, they work on the brain. And I would add on the heart and soul in deeper ways. Praying, singing and moving together, nudge the mind, the heart and the soul to create and strengthen social bonds. It's the ways these rituals synchronize heartbeats, breathing rates, and bodily movements that create a sense of connection between people who might otherwise never interact beyond a quick hello, I'm sure your listeners have experienced that deep connection with someone, that if it weren't for the experience, through the gathering of Christ-centered communities, that they would have never had. And the feelings of gratitude and compassion that sermons and prayers evoke, spill over in the moment to make listeners more willing to lend a hand to one another, and to start a relationship that otherwise might never have bloomed. So our shared rituals are important, and Community of Christ identity message, mission and beliefs unite as a worldwide community. Sometimes we pull inward and forget that we are part of something much bigger than just ourselves or our local congregation and Mission Center. Gratitude for each other, and our worldwide presence, helps us keep the bigger picture. Of course, verse one, and section 163, or paragraph one says, "Community of Christ, your name, given as a divine blessing is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go." So I really, I'm grateful for people you know, who are willing to risk and to keep pushing forward and to persevere even when times are tough. And Linda, I want to thank you, I'm grateful for these conversations, and I always leave them feeling really uplifted. So I hope your listeners also feel a sense of gratitude for you, and the connections to people and mission you help us make.

Linda Booth 44:19

Oh blessings. Thank you so much, my dear friend, I do appreciate you too. And I have great gratitude for you. You always bring such good insights and you express your great faith and your dedication to God and God's people and to the church. And you always share that sense of hope for the future as we move forward together where God's leading us. And in so many ways I'm I'm grateful for you my friend Stassi.

Stassi Cramm 44:49

Oh, thank you.

Linda Booth 44:51

And thank you Coffee Buzz listeners for joining our conversation. Please watch for next month's episode of Coffee Buzz. I'll be having a conversation with another member of the First Presidency, Scott Murphy, who serves as counselor to President Steve Veazey, and Director of Field Ministries.

Josh Mangelson 45:20

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