

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

Hello, this is Mike Hoffman with Project Zion Podcast Coffee in the Swarm. This is our monthly podcast where we visit with Community of Christ students at Graceland University. Today I have with me Ben Long who is, uh, Ben, let's tell them a little bit about where you're from and what you're doing here at Graceland. So,

Ben Long 00:52

Sure thing. Uh, my name is Ben Long. I am from Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, uh, which is just outside of Nashville. Um, I've sort of arrived at Graceland through, um, obviously church affiliation as well as, uh, extended family, uh, coming here and multiple recommendations from people in my family, friends, and, of course, the Community of Christ.

Mike Hoffman 01:15

Very good. And what year are you here? You're in your third year?

Ben Long 01:19

I'm a third year student. I'm a junior. (Okay. Very good.) Um, I'm an Economics major, um, but I am also heavily involved in the music department as well as campus ministries.

Mike Hoffman 01:30

Absolutely. Uh, and we appreciate that. We'll talk a little bit about that here in a few minutes. But, uh, and this year, Ben is doing, is in a key leadership role here on campus. He's a house president. You want to say a little bit about that experience. So,

Ben Long 01:42

Well, house president in layman's terms is sort of an RA with extra steps, I would say. When thinking about an RA in a standard, uh, state university, you think about giving announcements to the people who are living in the hall on your dorm as well as enforcing the university rules in the dorm rooms, as well as making sure that everyone is having, uh, a positive experience at your university. But the house president has a couple extra steps and so doing more emphasis is put on community building, uh, with the people on your house, uh, as well as organizing specific events and intramural activities, uh, for your house as well.

Mike Hoffman 02:31

I know that's a, a really hectic role. I mean, you have a lot going on. So. So what house are you on, just in case we have alumni listening? I'm sure they'll want you to identify which house you're on.

Ben Long 02:42

Yes, I'm the current house president of Agape, a very long standing house established in 1962.

Mike Hoffman 02:49

Alright? Yep. And over the years, I've witnessed a number of men from Agape as leaders on campus, you know, so. So, from that standpoint, I, um, I have to believe it's a pretty good house and that kind of thing. So, (Uh, I hope so.) I'm sure you're being modest though. Very good. So, you're an economics major. Now, that's interesting, because I, um, I, the relationship I have with you is through campus ministries, obviously, as the campus minister here, and, and the, you know, I, I've witnessed your passion for music. I mean, you know, so it's like, in fact, you have to be one of the most passionate music people I've seen in campus ministry since I've been here. I mean, so, you've been, last year, you were one of the Afterglow band leaders. Um, this year I see you hanging around and still participating with Afterglow, which is good for, good for our program. But, um, so tell me about economics. Where does that come from? And what do you want to do with that?

Ben Long 03:52

The economic side of my education, uh, is really serving as a sort of a foundation for my formal education as well as a sort of plan B, uh, just in case my passion for music sort of falls through. I've decided to continue to primarily focus on music as a career. I've just decided not to specifically pursue that at Graceland. And so the current plan is to, uh, finish with my four year degree in economics and then go to a more music specific, uh, school wherever I can find, as well.

Mike Hoffman 04:31

You have one picked out already. I mean, I know you're in your third year and you still have a year and a half to go before you graduate. So,

Ben Long 04:37

Not, not necessarily. Um, was my time this year has just been focused on, on my economics major as well as being house president.

Mike Hoffman 04:45

Yeah. Yeah. Well, that makes sense. I mean, it's like, and you've got time to think about that. So. Well, very good. So, so what, if you could, if you could nail down where your passion for music came from, I mean, do you have any idea where it, like, (. . .) you know, I, I mean, typical thoughts are like, Oh, mom or dad or, you know, did, you know, did something trigger that with you somewhere along the line?

Ben Long 05:11

I think the thing that first triggered my passion and my knowledge of my talents in music just came from me trying a bunch of different instruments. Um, so, my parents put me into piano lessons when I was very young, probably around eight or nine years old. I was doing a couple years of that before I had also picked up private lessons in guitar. From then, um, I continued with those lessons, as well as picking up the clarinet in middle school. And, uh, in each consecutive year, I've just been able to, um, grow my technical abilities in those instruments while also, um, having, uh, just a natural ability to pick

up a lot of different instruments. And, uh, the passion really came from being able to play all these different instruments, seeing the different styles and the types of music that you can create, as well as just putting everything together, which has been really interesting to see in these past couple of years.

Mike Hoffman 06:12

So many multiple different types of instruments, too. I mean, woodwind, clarinet, piano, guitar. I mean, that's, that's really incredible. So, I knew about some of those. I mean, I knew you played guitar and I, I know you played piano. I didn't know about the clarinet, I don't think. I mean, maybe I did, but any other instruments you play. I mean, now,

Ben Long 06:33

I've recently picked up, uh, the saxophone. I'm now playing tenor sax in our jazz bands as an elective as well as, uh, joining the Graceland choir. So, I, I sing tenor as well. Um, and then I've been able to dabble in a couple other instruments. Um, I played the viola for a couple of years in high school, a member of the bowed string family. And I'm trying to learn drums right now, but that's a bit too alien for me right now.

Mike Hoffman 07:05

Well, that's good. That's good. That's, that's really cool. Um, yeah. My, I played saxophone in the middle, well, it would have been elementary school. I played the saxophone in elementary school for like, I don't know, a year and a half or something. And then, yeah, that's a whole nother story on why I got out of that. But yeah, anyway. But that's, that's really cool that you play all those instruments and do all those things. That's, yeah. So, when do you have time for economics? I mean, that, no, I'm just kidding. I'm sure you're a good student. So, that's, that's good. So.

Ben Long 07:40

I've been making it work.

Mike Hoffman 07:42

That's good. So, so if I were to ask you, I mean, you know, as a member of Community of Christ, you've probably heard before you, did you go to Spectacular? (Um Hmm.) Okay. So, you know, I mean, I, even before I came to Graceland, I've heard about the Graceland experience and that kind of thing. I did not go to Graceland as an undergrad. But how has your Graceland experience been for you? I mean, is it? You know, and you could speak honestly, I mean, I, you know, however you want to frame that.

Ben Long 08:11

So the Graceland experience, as it's been described to me, is a place that's so much more than just a standard, uh, avenue for your formal education. It's always been this place where you can receive an extremely competitive education while also having all of these resources and people available to you who care about you from the start and want you to succeed from the start. And the way that Graceland is run the way that people feel about Graceland and the way that people continue to act on this campus really impacts people's, um, core values and the, and it drives forward, um, people's wanting to come into themselves, um, create their own, their own self. Um, and Graceland has a weird way of molding

people into, um, fantastic leaders and, um, members of community wherever they may go. Uh, and that has very much been the same for me, um, through the many different opportunities for leadership that I've been offered to the ones that I've taken to now being house president this year. Um, the, the student life and the character development that Graceland is able to have, uh, on its students is very, very special to the students that allow that, that sort of building to happen.

Mike Hoffman 09:43

Yeah. So, with your experience about house president, I, I sort of want to go back to visit that a little bit. Um, in that experience, how would you say that, um, well, first, how many, when you talk about being a house president, maybe we should help some of our listeners know, like, how many other people live on your house? I mean is there, you know, (So,) it's a framework for that?

Ben Long 10:10

For every student that arrives at Graceland, they are automatically placed on one of the 16 houses at Graceland. Uh, it doesn't matter whether you are physically on the hall, whether you have a sort of semi-private, uh, unit, or if you live completely off campus in an apartment. Regardless of where you physically live, you are, are on a house. (Right.) So, all together, Agape has over 60 people, uh, collectively that are a part of Agape, um, and we have right around 40 of those 60, uh, living physically on the house.

Mike Hoffman 10:48

And when we say on the house, you mean actually, like, on the floor in the residence hall. (On, on third floor.) They're on third floor of Graybill, okay. So, so, the other 20 or so would live either in the apartments owned by Graceland or, when I think of this, off off campus, you know, however we phrase that, but

Ben Long 11:06

Would be, would be completely off campus. And either they commute from their place of living or they're taking online classes.

Mike Hoffman 11:13

Oh, yeah. Okay. Okay. Well, thanks for that. So, I don't know, I just remember being in leadership positions when I was in college, not to compare it, but you know, how it, how it definitely changes who you are? So, I mean, has this, I know we're halfway through the year and not the whole way through the year so, has it changed who you are?

Ben Long 11:33

I think it has. My experience with house president has definitely put an added sense of awareness on, uh, the people around me. It's put an added sense of leadership, uh, that I've placed, um, that other people have placed on me and the expectations of that. The experience of, of house president, uh, a major cornerstone of the job is community development and making sure that you, as the leader of the house are creating a safe, inviting, welcoming, uh, community for your house members to live in. Uh, and that alone has really sort of shifted the way that I'm, um, interacting with people, the way that I

handle situations, uh, and the way that I sort of address people and, and make myself known, uh, to people both on and off my house.

Mike Hoffman 12:34

Great. Let's, let's shift gears a little bit. Um, you know, I know you're active in campus ministries here. And so I and, and I know enough about it, that you've been active in Community of Christ before you got here. And of course, we're in the middle of a pandemic, that I don't know whether, how to frame that, because it's just keeps going on and on. It's like the gift that (keeps on giving) keeps on giving. Yeah. So, um, but thinking about the church side of things, um, you know, obviously, you've been involved with, uh, worship and campus ministries. Is there, is there any, do you live with a certain hope or expectation of the future of Community of Christ? I mean, you know, how would you, you know, I, I think about campus ministries and certainly the things we do here, you know, sort of an extension of what, what life in the church is like, but then, you know, once you graduate and go on, so do you have a, a big hope or a dream for Community of Christ, when you, you know, graduate and then go to be pastor somewhere? Since you've been HP, should we count on you being (. . .)?

Ben Long 13:42

Right, right. So, um, I guess my hope is that the, the church itself and the values that the church has upheld, um, at least the values that I've seen the church uphold, um, will continue, uh, and only strengthen. And I hope that the church can become a very sustainable thing after the, uh, current set of leadership, um, has, has come and gone. Um, and I hope that there are enough people who, um, see just how much good the Community of Christ can do, um, and how they can continue to, to bring that about. Um, I think I would be one of those people to sort of keep that alive. Um, (. . .)(. . .)

Mike Hoffman 14:43

So, so you think the church is basically on the right track. I mean, I see you as a person that's going to keep that alive, you know, sort of excites me. I have, I have grandchildren now, you know, and so, if, I think about, like their future down the road, you know, and it's going to take people between my age and, you know, their age, like you, to, you know, to have the, sort of provide leadership and ministry and those kinds of things. So, you know, and I see you, I see you doing that already on campus. So, I sort of, you know, have that hope for you, but. So, do you have any hopes or dreams for, you know, your life after graduation and out there? I mean, obviously, music.

Ben Long 15:26

Yeah, I would definitely want to, the dream right now is to continue with music, hopefully getting a career, uh, in sort of a recording studio environment. Hopefully something with songwriting. (Okay.) Um,

Mike Hoffman 15:39

So you've written some of your own songs?

Ben Long 15:41

Just a couple. Yeah. Hopefully, hopefully, that can be released or at least used as a portfolio, portfolio for future employers. (Have they gained any airtime?) No, not yet. It's still, still pretty kept in the vault right now. (Is that by your choice or just?) My, my choice right now until, until I deem them finished?

Mike Hoffman 16:04

Okay. That's fair. That's fair. Well, I just, yeah, so, yeah, maybe we can get some airtime for them here at Graceland on our radio station here seems to (That would be great.) Yeah. So.

Ben Long 16:06

Well, outside of music, I would definitely want to, um, continue with my life in the church. Hopefully, that, uh, wherever I may settle down I can find a, a community, um, either virtually or, fingers crossed, um, a brick and mortar place for me to, (Yeah.) to go on, on Sunday mornings.

Mike Hoffman 16:37

So, you, you, you are from Nashville, the Nashville area a little bit. So, so do you want to go back to Nashville? I mean, it, it is sort of a music capital of the world or maybe the country? I don't know which. Yeah. I mean, is that where you, do you see yourself going or

Ben Long 16:53

Not necessarily where I see myself going. I've just sort of kept it as a very decent option for me. (Gotcha'.) I'm, of course, very used to the city and (Yeah.), um, I'm very familiar, um, with the music side and the Community of Christ side and everything associated with that. Um, still keeping a lot of options open, but Nashville is definitely near the top of those potential places. (. . .)

Mike Hoffman 17:21

So, Ben, I appreciate the chance to interview you today. I really thank you. And I thank you for your involvement in campus ministries and Afterglow, and I wish for you great things in the, not only the distant future, but the near future, too, here on Graceland. So,

Ben Long 17:36

Well, thank you, Mike. I appreciated it.

Mike Hoffman 17:38

Alright. Thanks very much.

Ben Long 17:39

Of course. Have a good one.

Josh Mangelson 17:49

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