

444 | Cuppa Joe | Historic Sites Foundation Fall 2021 Lecture Series | The Church Behind the Iron Curtain

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.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome, this is "Cuppa' Joe" where we explore Restoration history, and I'm your host Karin Peter. Today's episode is a collaboration with Community of Christ Historic Sites as we interview the presenters from the "2021 Historic Sites Fall Lecture Series". All of these lectures can be found at the historicsitesfoundation.org website. Now, our guests today are Eva Erickson and Kerstin, now I need to ask pronunciation. Do I pronounce the J, Kerstin?

Kerstin Jeske 01:06

Jeske.

Karin Peter 01:07

Jeske. All right, thank you. And Kerstin Jeske. They are the lecturers, the partnering lecturers for the Historic Sites Lecture, "The Church Behind the Iron Curtain". Now, for many of our listeners, they, their political awareness comes from post-Berlin Wall and post-Iron Curtain. So, this will be a wonderful exploration for people, for our younger listeners who aren't familiar with some of that terminology. So, Kerstin Jeske was born into the church and as the daughter of the leader of the church in East Germany, at that time, church was a big part of her life. She worked full time for Community of Christ from 1994 to 2005, and served as a President of Seventy for Europe and Africa from 2000 to 2007. She's now an ordained high priest and serves as the Ministry Coordinator for Norway, where she resides and she's joining us from Oslo today. Eva Erickson grew up in East Germany as well, was raised in the Lutheran church and joined the RLDS, now Community of Christ Church, in 1991, after experiencing children's and youth camps. Eva met her husband in the US and lived there for many years before returning to Germany in 2005. She's a member of the Standing High Council, and serves as the Ministry Coordinator for Germany. So, welcome to both of you, and thank you for joining us here at *Project Zion Podcast*. So, I'd like to begin with just a little bit of basic information, kind of, the when and how did the church originally arrive in Germany? And, kind of, who were the first members or locations of the church in Germany? So, let's begin there, Kerstin, Eva?

Eva Erickson 03:08

Great, I'll take that one. I did a little bit of research, and I mostly based my information on a seminary paper that Michael Menzel wrote. It was his final project, when he did seminary. It's called, "How it all Started". And it pretty much tells the story of the beginning of the church in Germany, as well as a history, church history in Germany by Gerhard Schoepke. So, the way that they're telling it is that there were some early attempts in 1841 for missionary work in Germany, when Orson Hyde was on a mission to Palestine and stopped over in Germany. Didn't, wasn't very fruitful, so, there was nothing happening then. Then the RLDS church, again, tried to send missionaries in 1872, but again, not much

success there. And then there was a renewed effort in 1904, when a Claus Joehnk was appointed missionary to Germany. Joehnk was from Germany originally. He had immigrated to the US. He was fluent in German, obviously, and that was important because this is before Google Translate. It was, in fact, a problem for a while to recruit more help for him because it was hard to find priesthood that spoke German. So, in any case, Joehnk came back to Germany, started the mission in Germany, and went back, obviously to the north of Germany, where he came from. And so, his first activities were in the Hamburg area, and he was joined by another missionary called John Becker. And so, in Hamburg, they baptized three people, but these three people afterwards, there's not much mention of them, so, I wouldn't call them any of the important members really, in that time. But then Joehnk moved on to Berlin where he met a Alexander Kippe, and Kippe was apparently, at that time, a member of the LDS church, but that was an accident, believe it or not. So, I thought that was a funny story. Kippe's brother lived in Australia at that time and had had contact with the RLDS church and told Alexander about it, and they went back and forth, and he was all excited about it. And so, Alexander wanted to be baptized in this RLDS church as well. But in Germany, there was no RLDS church at that time, so, he got all mixed up and accidentally joined the Utah church. But there was a funny story. So, but anyway, because of the brother in Australia, the name of Alexander Kippe was given to Joehnk in his missionary work. I guess he went back to church headquarters and asked for names and references and who to possibly meet. And so, in 1906, incidentally on April 6, the day of the birthday of the church, Joehnk baptized Kippe, Alexander Kippe, and his wife and mother-in-law in Berlin. And Kippe turned out to be a pretty important person for the church. I would say he's the first really important member. He did some missionary work, and he also translated *The Book of Mormon* into German, first translation for our church. Yeah, then Joehnk, so the missionary moved on to about two hours south of Berlin, into the town of Altdöbern where he was to meet Smolney, Johann Smolney, and Smolney is a really important name that you will hear anytime you talk to older members. So, Smolney and his wife lived in Altdöbern and they were Lutheran at that time, or initially, but they weren't really satisfied with the Lutheran church. And so, they joined the Baptist church, but that doesn't really, didn't really make them happy, either. They had questions, in particular questions about the Holy Spirit and the structure of the New Testament church and he felt that the Baptist Church couldn't satisfactorily answer their questions, and so, his questions. And so, there is a little bit of a story there. I don't want to make it too long, but the short version of it is, he had a friend close to where he lived, and that friend's daughter moved to Kansas City. And so, in Kansas City, she also met the RLDS church. Whatever, apparently, in the conversation, the friend and Smolney figured out that some of his questions might possibly be answered by this church, and they wrote back to the daughter, to Kansas City, and asked about it. And she responded that, yes, there was a missionary coming to Germany. So, this is how it happened, that Joehnk came to Altdöbern, met with Smolney, but they did not get along. They had fierce arguments. They just didn't like each other apparently. And it didn't look so good and Smolney thought, okay, this is not it after all. I'm just gonna turn my back and go. And then, how it happens, sometimes, there is a memory of Gertrud Urban, the daughter of Johann Smolney, and in her memory, she says that Smolney had a dream before Jung turned his back and left again. Smolney had a dream. And in this dream, among other things, he was told that the person who would come as a messenger to him would be a shoemaker. And wouldn't you know it, next day he asked Joehnk what his professional was, and it was a shoemaker. So, he was convinced this was the right person. This was the right church. This was the right answer, and he joined the church where he was baptized in 1907. And yeah, those are the beginnings. The three main areas of activity of the church were then Hamburg, Berlin and Altdöbern.

Altdöbern is incidentally, is very close to Großräschen where our, one of our big churches is right now. So, that is all one area there. And, yeah, Kippe and Smolney, I would say were the most important leaders in that time, besides the US missionaries that came and, like I said, Smolney's daughter is called Gertrud Urban, and for those who have listened to our lecture, Gert the other day, Gertrud Urban married Alfred Urban or Gertrud Smolney, at the time, married Alfred Urban and Alfred Urban happened to be the main leader in the East German church, and so, this is how we can make a good transition to our lecture because our lecture of course, only covered East Germany and only covered the years of 1961 through 1989. And so, Alfred Urban was the most important person in that time. So, I think that was a, yeah, that was a good transition now.

Karin Peter 09:28

I enjoy all of the small bits in that description of the church coming to Germany, whether it's the disagreements that people had, or the dream, but my favorite is that it really depended on the young woman going to Kansas City. And we forget sometimes the role that women played in the church before women were ordained. So, thank you for sharing that particular piece of information. So, now we have a bit of a foundation on how the church arrived in Germany, and, as you said, your lecture focuses on East Germany during the time of the Iron Curtain, so, if you will, tell us a bit what that was like and how that affected what was happening with churches in general, and particularly with RLDS church, as it was on its journey to become Community of Christ.

Kerstin Jeske 10:34

I can start on that one. Like, in general, in East Germany, church life was not looked upon very favorably. There was really the slogan from Karl Marx, "Religion is opium of the people". So, and with that they really, the government or the state officials tried to ridicule anything that was to get, came together with religion and had something to do with believing. They even tried to get rid of the Christian vocabulary, some ridiculous attempts. Like, in Germany, the German word for Christmas has nothing to do with Christianity, "Weihnachten". But then, we would decorate before Christmas, for example, with angels. So, they tried to come up with a new name for angel and renamed it, in German, vorweihnachtliche Flügelfigur. Which, translated means pre-Christmas figure with wings. Really rather weird. So, yeah, but they just tried to get rid of all the religious parts in the language. And I think they did a pretty good job trying to rule it as much out as possible. When I was studying, like, in the late 80s, we had East Germany behind the Iron Curtain already for 20 years, and several of my fellow students wouldn't really have a lot of knowledge of the Christian story, Bible stories. I remember once a fellow student got a video cassette of a movie, and since it was an English one, everybody got excited, and "Oh, we should watch this." And it was *Monty Python's, Life of Brian*. And there were two of us who could sit there and laugh. And I knew the other one was Christian and I, and all the others, they couldn't laugh. What is this? They didn't have the references. So, yeah, anyway, there's, now I'm getting carried away. So, they really tried to...

Karin Peter 12:51

So, Kerstin, can I stop just one second? Because that's an important point that you just made about cultural understanding. Sometimes church people think that everybody has the same cultural understanding about Bible references or Christian references, but you're talking about living in a culture where all of those references are no longer.

Kerstin Jeske 13:16

Right. Right.

Karin Peter 13:17

So, making connections with people is even more difficult.

Kerstin Jeske 13:21

Yeah, yeah.

Karin Peter 13:21

Okay, Thank you.

Kerstin Jeske 13:22

Yeah. We tried to, yeah.

Karin Peter 13:24

That's important. Yeah.

Kerstin Jeske 13:25

Yeah. So, yeah. So, all this, obviously our education in regard to history, politics, Christian heritage, was very biased, but otherwise, I would say, the reli-, the education we got in school was very good. We had good education generally, and sciences, music, sport, languages, and that came in quite handy in our church, lots of musical ministry, and also being able to communicate, then, in English, which was often the second foreign language we had to learn. From fifth grade on we all had to learn Russian in school. That was mandatory. But then if you wanted to go on to high school, you had to have a second language and it usually was English. So, that helped us also in communicating with the world church. So, religion was not encouraged. We knew we were watched when we went to church, or because we went to church, so, we started to get really careful in what we talk about and to whom. You were not sure whom you could trust. Once you developed friendships, then they got really deep, and they were very strong bonds that developed. I mean, now I've been, I'm over 50 years old now and have been living in Norway for over 20 years, but my real friends-friends are still in Germany from that time. There's some rather unusual bonds that developed and it just bound us together in a rather unusual way. So, yeah. And there was also large solidarity among the members. I would say most of the members we had in East Germany did not have too much, but they all shared very generously, whatever they had, very gladly invited youth for weekends to stay. We stayed with different families. The host would even sleep for the weekend in the car, leave us the house. So, some really good stories and very, very good memories. So, life was very simple. I think the message of the church fit very well into this situation. Everybody could get involved as much as possible, as much as they wanted to. Also, and one positive thing about the East German society was really that men and women were rather equal. I mean, most of the women worked full time, so, they had, really, equal rights in the society at large. So, that also meant that it was a rather fruitful ground when ordination for women came along. Even though it did get, take some time until it got started. It was 1989. The first woman got ordained in the spring of 1989, Sigrid Spring from Großräschen. She was the first woman in East Germany. And

then in October of '89, another young woman and me got ordained in Großräschen. And then, there's always...

Karin Peter 16:54

So, Kerstin, can you tell us a little bit about a, kind of, the role of women in the congregation prior to ordination? If the culture was such that men and women had a certain level of equality, how did that translate into congregational life before women were ordained?

Kerstin Jeske 17:16

Well, they had, we did have women's group, women's leaders. They would be involved in doing readings, praying publicly. Yeah. I mean, there wasn't an official role in the priesthood, but also getting the children together and the women together. Yeah.

Karin Peter 17:42

Okay. So, still very active, very prominent in the congregation.

Kerstin Jeske 17:47

Yes. Yeah, I would say so. Yeah. Eva, do you want to add?

Eva Erickson 17:54

Yeah, maybe one thing to add. So, from about 1980, you know, obviously, the same situation it was in 1961, was not as in 1989, you know, so there was a development even within East Germany. In 1961 was very, what Kerstin said in the beginning about churches being, oh, so bad for society and everything. That was very strong in '61, but it, kind of, sort of, weakened and weakened, I think, towards the end, maybe. But most of all, churches in general, not just our church, churches in general became safe spaces, particularly for people that were dissenters, I think, is what you call it, right? Like, people that are,

Karin Peter 18:40

Dissenter.

Eva Erickson 18:41

Yeah, that don't agree with the government. The Protestant church, incidentally, already started a peace movement that didn't just have to do with tearing a wall down, or something like that. It was more general. But they had an annual event called a Peace Decade, decade, meaning 10 days, not 10 years. So, it was in November, I think around probably had to do with World War I annual event. So, they had this peace movement going already, and so, then when towards the end of East Germany, there was a lot of opposition to the government, these opposition groups were able to meet in churches and, kind of, hook on to the peace movement that was already there. And so, churches grew for once because people felt, well if I can't agree with the government, and I can't say it anywhere, because I'm not safe to say it in public, well in churches, I can say it, so people would actually join, no, I don't know, not join, at least go to church more because it was an opposition movement. For us, as Community of Christ or RLDS church in that time, I think for us, it was the beginning of ecumenical work that wasn't even declared as that in that time, maybe, but later, sure, yeah. But young people, for instance, I remember

being at a youth gathering in Leipzig, and that happened to be, it must have been a Monday because we went to a Monday demonstration and the Monday demonstrations were the big thing in the last maybe two or three years of East Germany. And so, we would, kind of, hook into these existing activities of other churches. I know, remember, we went to Jena, city in southern East Germany, with an American friend of ours who happened to study in East Germany. Don't know how that happened, but it did happen. But we went to a demonstration there. So, we, kind of, learned that even though there was still this, "one true church" feeling, in this, you know, when I got to know the church. And in the '80s, I definitely became taught, was taught that it was the one true church, but still, we were able to open ourselves to other movements, other Christian movements. And so, I think I would contribute that to the situation in Germany. It wouldn't have been quite so, we wouldn't have been quite so open to others if we didn't have the necessity because that was where we were safe. That was where we could talk with others that had also anti-government feelings, or at least pro-Christian feelings, which you couldn't voice anywhere else. But then I think after our church got officially recognized in '84, I think, that's also when our church leaders took part officially in ecumenical meetings with other churches. So, that's when things became more official. But I think what I'm trying to say is that, in an official way, but also unofficial way for us as young people, this was the beginning of ecumenical work. And I think that's awesome. I think it's a very early time for our church to start that.

Karin Peter 21:52

So, I'm seeing a thread through your comments, Kerstin, Eva. You started with these early figures, and I think it was 1906, 1907, and is it Smolney? Is that the name of the...

Eva Erickson 22:09

Smolney.

Karin Peter 22:10

One of the things that that family was looking for was evidence of the Holy Spirit and evidence of the church functioning as a New Testament church. So, if we jump ahead to what I've heard now, Kerstin, you explained, experiencing the church in a way that was very much the New Testament church where people cared for one another, were perhaps isolated because of religious beliefs, and so had to develop deep level of trust, share with one another, offer hospitality to one another, which are all indicators, if we read Acts, of the early church, the Holy Spirit expressing itself through that kind of Christ centered hospitality, but not forgetting the critical element of Christianity, which is to challenge political systems, which is what you're describing, which in the United States would make people crazy. But what you're describing is a youth camp making the decision to go to a Monday Demonstration, which was a political demonstration, that joining of the Christian concept of challenging oppressive political systems, all of that is an expression of the early church. So, I don't know if Smolney experienced that in 1907, but the legacy of the church in East Germany certainly experienced it and expressed it.

Kerstin Jeske 23:31

I, just another thought I had. I think it's a fine line when we actually were able to get officially registered as church, it was 1984. And the question was, well, why did we get the recognition? Why was the government allowing us to officially meet? And the answer was because you are not dangerous for us.

So, I think they knew very well where we were and what we stood for, and knew that we did not openly challenge the government. So, at least at that point, it was safe, or they thought it was safe to recognize us as church. But then also, of course, yeah, the development in the late '90s, before the wall came down, just many, many things happened in society and in the churches. And then...

Eva Erickson 24:29

Late '80s.

Kerstin Jeske 24:30

Late '80s, sorry. Yeah. So, and then we also became more open and taking part in the Monday Demonstr- Monday prayers and demonstrations that would also ask for freedom in the country.

Karin Peter 24:49

Marvelous. So, before, I want to get to some, who were some of the leaders during that time, during this later time period, but before I do, I just wanted to ask, did the church experience a difference after 1989? Was there a difference in how the church was expressed or how you gathered? In other words, did this, did the sense of the, kind of, the end of the Iron Curtain, did it change how the church expressed itself?

Eva Erickson 25:24

I don't know, I think, for sure, because we all scattered, at least, you know, the young people, the core group that we talked about in the presentation. We all scattered into different parts of the world, so, for a bit, there might have been a vacuum, but maybe not, I don't know. But the expression of the church didn't really change, I would say. I would think we still stood for the same thing we stood for before. I don't know. I would think nothing.

Karin Peter 25:57

Does the church, is there still an ecumenical aspect to the church in Germany?

Eva Erickson 26:04

Sure, sure. Different congregations do different things, and, you know, we are not officially part of the, well, what you would call, the NCC, I think in the US, so, the German equivalent, simply because we don't have the manpower for anybody to go there right now. But on a local level, we have collaborated with other churches. And actually, on the national level, we had a few, like, workshops and gather, or meetings, with the Protestant church, for instance. And so, I think that is definitely still going on.

Kerstin Jeske 26:38

One thing that happened right after the wall came down was that people were allowed to travel. Before, we were not allowed to travel outside of East Germany, or we could travel to the East, but not to the West. So, people used their summer vacation for family gatherings, family camps, youth camps, children's camps. And once they could travel, then they used their vacation to travel to other places, and it was more difficult to gather the people. That was one thing that changed right in the very beginning. But it was also good for us to experience really, that we are part of a bigger church, that we

could take part in church gatherings in the Netherlands, in the British Isles, or even the U.S. So, it had ups and downs.

Karin Peter 27:28

So, who were some of the church leaders at this, during this transition time, the later part, let's say from the late '70s, to '80s?

Kerstin Jeske 27:42

It was my father, Manfred Jeske. He was the leader of the church in East Germany at that time. He was a seventy and he had two counselors, Joachim Schöne from Dresden in the south and Siegfried Fillinger from the north. And especially Joachim Schöne was, had lots of talents and was really a driving force getting behind, both getting the church organized, also organizing youth camps, family camps and other activities. And, yeah.

Karin Peter 28:21

We want to make sure here at *Project Zion* that we mention people's names, and thank them for the efforts that they've made to continue the church in different places. Do you have any favorite stories or anecdotes or memories from that period of time that maybe don't fit in the historical consideration, but that are important for us, would be good for us to hear?

Eva Erickson 28:47

Yeah, so, a few people that we didn't mention in our lecture, because they were not East German leaders, were people that came into East Germany. We mentioned Tom and Earline Campbell, for instance. And we have to really recognize that, I mean, I wonder how that was for them? They came from the West, and they went into this weird closed off place, East Germany, and it must have been scary at times. Well, they came anyway. So, one of the people that came was Jac Kirkpatrick. He was the apostle for Europe and Africa, I think, at that time. And I vividly remember him visiting with his wife once in a while, but also just him alone, would attend family camps and come to, like, special gatherings. And it must have been Kerstin's ordination, I would say, because I think it was a month before the wall came down, so, probably beginning of October of 1989. He was in Großräschen attending the ordination, and I remember sitting in Kerstin's parents' living room with Jac and a few others, and it was his last evening. He was going to leave again next day. And then I was like, oh, I'm gonna miss you. And when we didn't know we're going to see again? Do you have plans to come to East Germany again? And he said to me, "Next time we see each other, it will be in the U.S." And I go, "Haha, nice joke. I mean, whatever are you talking about." You know, that was a month before the wall came down. And I talked with him about a couple years ago, about the experience and I said, "How would you have possibly known that the wall was coming down?" And he said, "Well, in the outside world, we could see the signs, you know, if you looked at the way things were going". But for us inside the bubble, you know, in East Germany, it was absolutely unexpected. When, on the ninth of November, my dad said, "The wall fell", I said, "Nice joke. What's the next one?" It was just unbelievable. And so, for Jac to tell me a month before it happened, "The next time we see each other in U.S.", which wasn't true. We didn't see each other next time in the U.S. But point being, the wall would go down, and at some point, you could come to the U.S., that was just unbelievable. Unbelievable.

Karin Peter 31:00

It's very interesting, I remember watching as the wall came down, and for you to share that, from within, you didn't see those signs. So, it was an immediate transition. Whereas for the west, watching all along. Yeah, yeah. That's very similar, I think, to a lot of people who are experiencing a faith transition right now who have had, kind of, their belief system crumble immediately. Whereas in Community of Christ, we have had decades of, kind of, making, developing new understandings and opening ourselves to new ideas. And this is a, an interesting illustration of what that feels like. How did, not just how did the church in East Germany stay alive in that kind of climate, because that's a profoundly difficult climate for a religious organization to navigate, but what kind of impact did that tenacity and persistence have on the rest of the church after the wall came down? You had a completely different experience in East Germany than the than the rest of the church in Germany. How did that affect you? Or how did it affect the church and the rest of Germany when the wall came down?

Eva Erickson 32:30

Well, I guess we should start with the fact that Alfred Urban, I guess, is the one name I would name, who made the conscious decision to stay in East Germany, conscious decision. I mean, he had the chance in the '50s that you were able to go to the west, move there, and many people did. And I think Alfred, sort of, knew what was coming up. And anyway, he was already older and people that were above a certain age that weren't, let's say, valuable to East Germany anymore, you know, like retired people, for instance, they could freely travel to the west. He could have gone pretty much any time and he decided to stay in the East together with his wife. Their children ended up in the West, and they just didn't follow. So, I think that alone made a big impression on peoples. He was a very strong leader also. We shouldn't forget that. But for somebody to consciously make that decision, I think that's a pretty good statement there. Churches, in general, were not forbidden. I take that back. The Protestant Church and the Catholic Church were not forbidden. Our church at some point, I think all of our congregations, at some point, separately, were not allowed to meet in the '50s at some, for a while there. But then by '61, definitely, they were all allowed to meet again. So, when I say the churches were not forbidden, it was, kind of, I think, I wonder if the East German government just didn't know what to do. They didn't know forbid or not forbid; you know. So, the big churches, they never did forbid, but our, at times, our congregations couldn't meet. But anyway, so by the '60s they were allowed to meet but it was more, I don't know, it wasn't secret at all, but it was just unwanted. But, you know, I think, you hear so many stories where in a harsh environment, faith grows. And I think that's true for East Germany also. I mean, it was a harsh environment in a sense of being observed and, you know, the Stasi wanting to know everything about your life. It was, in a sense, also a harsh environment, in a sense of a very simple life. I mean, we, unfortunately or fortunately, I don't know which way I want to put it, we were able to watch West German television. We could see what's in the stores there. We could see the advertisement for whatever there is. And then we went to our own stores and we had maybe two kinds of cheese and, I don't know, we all wear the same clothes. You know, it wasn't, you, we had enough. We did not starve, but it was, by far, no luxury. It was first by far no colorful, you know, but we could see on TV and we couldn't have it. And that also, I think, you can describe as a harsh environment. It's unfair. It's an unfair system, you think, you know. And I think under those circumstances, that's when faith grows. That's when people move together closer. That's when the community grows together

closer. And so, I think that is something that for sure stayed in the church in East Germany, even after the wall came down.

Karin Peter 35:39

Yeah. Kerstin, did you want to add anything to that?

Kerstin Jeske 35:43

Yeah, I just agree. And, actually, yeah, it reminds me of a saying of a young man who joined our youth camps just shortly before the wall came down. He started attending and he called himself an atheist. And he had the saying, "Es geschieht nichts Gutes, außer man tut es." So, there's nothing good happening unless you do it. And he got really very much involved. And I think that you just had to, I mean, you couldn't wait for anybody to do things for yourself. You just had to get going yourself. And I mean, he's now the chairman of today's Church Association in Germany. And so, you just, I mean, we, if you wanted to get things done, we had to do them ourselves. And that's something we learned early on. And I think, really, we were given a lot of freedom. And the leaders trusted us, and mentored us, and allowed us to do things. We prepared worship services, and we had youth camps, which were organized on our own, and really learned a lot doing things. And, yeah.

Karin Peter 37:05

Yeah. So, one...

Eva Erickson 37:08

I think to clarify is that the "us" that Kerstin talks about is the young people. So, this is people that are not ordained, people that were barely 18,19, maybe, you know, just really a group of young people. And I think that is what, when we look back now, what we find so amazing, is that we did things by ourselves because we wanted to. Nobody took us by our hands. It was, we wanted to, and in that wanting to, I think leaders recognized there is something going there, and let us do things, gave us freedom, let us, allowed us to do things. And I think that's, yeah amazing.

Karin Peter 37:43

Absolutely. So, what are some of the maybe key learnings or major impacts that you feel that the church in Germany has brought to the global church? Do you see any trends or ideas that you can connect to your experience in the church in East Germany?

Kerstin Jeske 38:08

Well, I would name the concept of friendship evangelism, really, because you had to be so careful about what you say, to whom, in East Germany, and you wouldn't just talk about church to whoever you meet. So, it really meant that you became close friends first and trying to, yeah, establish friendships, and then you talk about the gospel. And that's, this proved to be a good tool. It worked well for us. And I think that's something, that's really, yeah, something that can be learned, that missionary work is possible, even in these circumstances, by the way of friendship evangelism.

Karin Peter 38:58

Building those authentic relationships with people.

Kerstin Jeske 39:02

Right?

Karin Peter 39:02

Yeah. Yeah.

Kerstin Jeske 39:03

Yeah.

Karin Peter 39:04

Yeah, regardless of where it takes them, even if it takes them to being the leader of the Church Association, in Germany? I mean, that's relationships. Absolutely. I wanted to ask each of you, as we begin to conclude our conversation here. How is your experience growing up in the church in Germany, in East Germany and joining the church as a young person? How has that shaped your personal discipleship? How has that shaped you as a disciple. So, Kerstin, we'll start with you.

Kerstin Jeske 39:44

Can Eva go first?

Karin Peter 39:47

Eva, do you want to go first?

Eva Erickson 39:48

I can do that. So, like I said, I was part of the Lutheran Church in, when I grew up, my parents were not very active, but they were active enough to send us to, my sister and me to, now they called it, like, something like church school. It wasn't Sundays. It was some, one day during the week, and you would go as a kid and, with your peer group, with your age group, have Christian education. But then I got, because of my neighbors being the Urban's, Gertrud and Alfred, they invited my sister and me to church camps. And so, that's when I started to go to Community of Christ. And initially, I did both. I did both Lutheran Church and Community of Christ. And so, what would really impress me was, that, several things, but one thing was the family-like atmosphere, that, you know, I was a teenager, and teenagers have a hard time with their parents, that kind of thing. But I was really, I was impressed how accepted I was, how my opinion was accepted, with adults in the church. You know, I was allowed to call them by their first name. Okay, that's not very German. We are very formal sometimes. So, that was a cool thing. But also, I mean, I, like, in Kerstin's home, I felt like I was one of their daughters, sometimes, you know. And in the homes of other friends that I went to, I was just accepted for who I was. The other thing was, how I was able to be involved. In a Lutheran church, I was a spectator, I would say. I was, you sit in the pew and somebody up there does something, apart maybe, from the Christmas play, or some special activities, but on an every Sunday level, you are just observing. Where I think Community of Christ, from the beginning on, I was asked to do things and not just me, everybody. I was just part of it, before I was a member, way before I was a member. You know, I mean, if it was reading something, if it was making music, if it was, we, as a youth, organized whole worship services, that, you know, that we offered to the church, and it was absolutely accepted. It wasn't like,

“Ah, you little kids, or you young people”, even though it was a fairly stiff society in that time still, I think. But that was just really impressive to me that, the way that we were allowed to be part of it all. You were just part of church. You’re not just observing, priesthood or not, you know. That discipleship of all people, that, I think, that is something that was really cool. Yeah. And the last thing of course, the peace theme. I mean, I was into peace anyway, because of the peace moment in the Lutheran Church that I had started going to. And then to go to a children's camp, and you have the, one of the activities was to make a plaster seal of the church, and you painted it, and it had the word “peace” on it, and had the symbolization of peace through the lamb and the lion. And, I mean, the kid and the lion and the lamb, I guess, too. But that was just super impressive to me that a church would have that as their symbols. So, out of that, yeah. I mean, I was definitely a different person. As a kid, you are different, obviously. But also because of joining this church, it shaped me. It molded me. It helped me develop my discipleship and my leadership skills through these camps. That was just life changing, I would say.

Karin Peter 43:15

Thank you, Eva. Kerstin, did that give you enough of a breather?

Kerstin Jeske 43:19

Well, I just realized it was a dumb thing to let her go first because she said most of it.

Eva Erickson 43:24

Sorry.

Kerstin Jeske 43:30

Yeah, a lot of this is just true for me too. I mean, I really enjoyed growing up in a, with an extended church family, enjoyed having all ages around. We had old people, young people. That actually, that's something I realized when I went to Graceland. At first, I said, “Oh, wow, so many young people in church.” But then, after a while, well, but where are the old people? And where are the children? So, and just to recognize the worth of all persons, and that we were all really an important part of the church, and everybody had something to contribute. And yeah, I would just say the worth of all person was really lived out very early on in a very important way. And that has really, something that, been something that stayed with me and is still very important for me.

Karin Peter 44:32

Thank you.

Kerstin Jeske 43:33

And everything else I can just sign what Eva said.

Karin Peter 44:39

So, it is time for us to bring our conversation to a close but before we do, I wanted to ask if you had any closing thoughts that you'd like to share with us before we end our conversation?

Eva Erickson 44:51

Yeah, we talked about that yesterday a little bit. And I think what we would like to say as closing thoughts is that it is hard, of course, to describe life in East Germany. I mean, for people who haven't lived there, how could you realize what it was like? And so, what we tried to give is really just a small glimpse. There is so much more to it. But looking back, it's, I agree, it does sound pretty scary. You know, it wasn't for us. We lived in it. It was normal life. It was normal. It, we didn't realize it was scary. But no, when I listened to myself telling these stories, I wonder, wow, how did we do this. But despite all that, it was a good life. We had it, we had a good life. We had really good church life. We had really strong friendships. We had really good spirituality in our church, even though we had that outside environment that was so non-churchy. And we were given a chance to develop leadership skills that are hard to find in other places, I think, maybe because the church was so small, so everybody was needed. I don't know. But it was just, it was a good time, despite everything.

Karin Peter 46:05

Thank you, Eva. And thanks to our listeners for joining us today. And a big thanks to that young woman who went to Kansas City in 1906, in 1907, and started something that we now have the benefit of these, of both Eva and Kerstin as leaders in Community of Christ, so, continuing that tradition of women's leadership. So, for our listeners, we encourage you to view the lecture that Eva and Kerstin gave. It's in the archives under "The Church Without Boundaries" *Fall Lecture Series* at historicsitesfoundation.org. You can go there to see it. Did you have photographs as well in your lecture? Oh, excellent. So, another treat for our listeners. If you go and watch the lecture, you'll see the slides that were presented as well. So, thank you to Eva and Kerstin for being with us today. This is "Cuppa Joe", part of the *Project Zion Podcast*. I'm Karin Peter. Thank you so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 47:19

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