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

**Carla Long** 00:33

Hi, everyone, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla long, and you're listening to the series percolating on faith, where we discuss theology, the church, or really whatever else we want to talk about. This is the second part of a two-part series on Community of Christ sacraments. Now, you as the listener might have just finished listening to part one. If you did, please show us a little grace, because we recorded part one a couple of weeks ago. And hopefully we remember what we said and what we didn't say.

01:06

It's so hard getting old and losing your memory, but at least we remember the important things.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

I'm glad you're owning that, Carla.

**Carla Long** 01:14

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I still remember when dinnertime is. And I still remember how to play Words with Friends, the most important things that we can do. So let me welcome back our snarky guests who've already been a little bit snarky. Oh, just a little bit of fun. Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith, thank you for coming back over and over again, it's like you're a glutton for punishment or something.

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

Our pleasure you, you can address this as your snarkiness.

**Carla Long**

Oh, if you insist.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 01:46

It's good to be here, Carla.

**Carla Long**

So Tony, actually was really listening to the podcast from part one, which is wonderful. And he's, and he was mentioning that maybe we should go over just a few more things having to do with some of the sacraments we mentioned last time. And one thing, Tony, that you wanted to bring back up and talk about, again, was the sacrament of laying on of hands or sometimes we call it administration to the sick.

02:16

As many listeners know, I live in Salt Lake City. And from people who, who were Mormon at one point or who might still be Mormon, sometimes they come to our priesthood, and they ask for a blessing. And we just don't do that. We don't know exactly what that is. So, what they're sometimes what they're asking for is, you know, a laying on of hands with, with oil and things like that. So, one of my big questions is, why do we use that oil, in the sacrament, in our sacrament, the laying on of hands.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 02:48

You know, as, as we mentioned, in the last one, in Community of Christ theology, a sacrament has three parts, it has the sign, and it has the word, and it has a covenant. As those are the three elements of a sacrament. And so, with the laying on of hands, there's a double sign, there's the hands, and there's the oil. So, the oil is part of the signature of the sacrament, the oil helps symbolizes the, the anointing or the, the outflow of the Holy Spirit in that experience. So that's why they use oil. And you can find

03:28

in the Gospels, Jesus heals people, but then when he sends the apostles out in Mark chapter six, he sends them out with oil, they take oil with them. And then in James chapter 5, in the letters,

03:43

those who call for the elders are anointed with oil. So, so the, the oil is an ancient symbol of anointing, by God's presence, God's Spirit. So that's part of the part of the signing, that goes into the sacrament.

**Carla Long** 04:00

So, we actually make sure that the oil has been blessed, right, like we pray over the oil before we use it. Is that pretty normal in other denominations as well?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 04:17

I, I think so, I think that that oil that's used in other churches, for sacramental purposes, has been set apart, in some respects.

04:30

Charmaine and I what we do is, if we, we, we might fill one of our vials with oil, we leave the cap off, and we may both hold it together and offer a prayer of consecration. The consecration doesn't somehow make the oil magic.

04:46

What it does is it's a way of saying, this oil we're not actually going to use for Italian food. We're going to use this this oil is being set apart for a different purpose. And so that's That's why we do the consecration of the oil. Does that make sense?

**Carla Long**

Yeah, it does. I, I hadn't thought of it in that way before. I actually don't know if I've ever consecrated any of the oil I've ever used. I remember when I was working in Europe, I think somebody consecrated,

consecrated, like 30 ounce olive oil jar. And so, I just filled it up from that for a long, long time. Because it's a long time to use 30 ounces of oil, it would take a long, a lot of administration's

**Tony Chvala-Smith 05:31**

That's whether you whether you were to use it for cooking, or for praying for people, that's, that's a lot of oil.

**Carla Long**

Actually, it was a lot of oil. So I don't remember if we talked about this in the last podcast, but we can do administration's for the sick or laying on of hands, either privately, or in a group setting like, you know, in a worship setting. So I, I've really appreciated both of those types of administrations.

05:56

Have you had any experiences with perhaps in administration in that in a group setting that you found to be a good experience?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

Yeah, actually, I would say lots of times, particularly with a group of people who have formed community for a period of time, and, like, at a reunion, a family camp, or perhaps at a weekend retreat, where there's been deep sharing, and sometimes sharing of our struggles, or our pains, or, or our hopes, and in those kinds of setting, settings, where there's a common kind of understanding of what the sacrament is, as well as this understanding that we are there for each other, that in this kind of prayer, it's not just the two elders, who are involved, but the community as a whole, it's a beautiful, beautiful sacrament to have in those kinds of settings. And sometimes, depending on the group, and what they're comfortable with, sometimes, there may not just be the, the two elders, you know, doing the prayers, but other people in the community may come and put a hand on the person, you know, sit on the floor around them, touch them, so that it's not, so that there's a a communal aspect of this. And, you know, particularly in those settings, where someone is a crisis point in their life, this can be a really affirming sacrament, to open to the community.

07:50

And, you know, I'm not sure if we talked about this, but there's typically two parts to an administration prayer, or the prayer of, of a blessing of this kind of, of praying for healing, or is that there's the, the prayer that comes with the drop of oil on someone's head, the anointing prayer, and that's typically just very short, kind of naming the intention with which we come to recognize God's outpour of love in the drop of oil, and to ask the spirits blessing on this time together and on the person who will offer the next prayer, which is the confirming prayer. And that prayer, then is, is the one in which very intentionally ask God's blessing in this person's life. And, and, and, again, whether that's done in a private setting, or if it's appropriate in a public setting.

09:00

The main purpose is asking God and trusting God's desire to bless this person. It's not the blessing will not be accomplished. Because the person people praying have said the right words, it's about the

goodness of God. So, try to connect people with the awareness of, of God's desire to bring healing or blessing or peace or reconciliation into the life of that person.

### **Tony Chvala-Smith**

In some ways, this particular sacrament is very expressive of one of our enduring principles, the blessings of community, and as Charmaine was describing those sometimes we call them healing services in the church, those those services where administration is offered on a larger scale and

10:00

Where, where, for example, at a church camp last summer Charmaine and I were guest ministers at was a healing service scheduled for, I think it was maybe Thursday evening, it was later in the week. And a lot of preparation went into that. So that at a particular point in the service, there had been chairs set up around the perimeter of the tabernacle, we were in sanctuary we were in, and elders had been, had been determined, designated in advance to go to those chairs. And so, people with particular needs could go to those chairs. And it was, I was presiding over part, that part of the service. And it was such an amazing thing to watch someone go to the chair, followed by loved ones and friends, brothers and sisters, and then watch the, the elders anoint, and lay hands on and then watch, you know, that that circle of, of loved ones gathered around that person and perhaps touch each other touch them too, as the prayer of administration was offered, it was a real amazing symbol of what the blessings of community means for us, as well as the fact that we also believe in the ministry of all members there, there. There's priesthood, which has specific ordained functions, but then at the same time, every member of the church is called to be a disciple called to be a minister in that respect. And so the, the laying on of hands. In this particular sacrament is a really powerful symbol of our community.

### **Carla Long 11:45**

Yeah, I totally agree. I've been part of a part of those healing type services. And even with youth, I remember in a, I think, as a senior high camp, when there were priesthood members who were ready to perform the sacrament for people and the youth came forward, like high school students, teenagers who never want to admit that anything's wrong and who never who always seem like they're gonna live forever, but they came forward. And it was really touching for I think everyone involved. So thank you for that explanation.

### **Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

Yeah, just to give a, an image of another one. Another image is that in one of the International Youth Forums, and I can't remember just which year it was, Tony might remember.

### **Tony Chvala-Smith**

2000, I think maybe, maybe that's kind of what I'm remembering.

### **Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:42**

There. At the end of, so we have youth from all over the world. And at the end of the week, or the time that we had together, there was a service that was very much like this, in the in the temple sanctuary. And there were chairs, and then there were at each of the chairs there were church leaders, who were

prepared to pray for the youth who came and sat in those chairs, or the youth leaders who came and sat in those chairs. And it was just marvelous to see some long-time church leaders, gently placing their hands on the head of a 14 year old, and as they're praying tears just streaming down their face. And that it was just the sense of the Spirit at work in that space was phenomenal.

13:40

That that's all a lasting image for me of, of in community joining in prayer, but individuals being receiving that the gift of prayer at the same time.

### **Carla Long**

Yeah, that's, that's wonderful to hear. I love hearing stories like that about our world church leadership council, how involved they are with youth camps, and how much they want to be involved within the church, the churches life. I think that's pretty awesome.

14:10

So, from the last podcast, we didn't really jump in as deeply as I was hoping to, to the evangelists blessing.

14:22

Our evangelists blessing use to be called the patriarchal blessing. But now that we have women in that evangelist role, we do not want to necessarily call women patriarchs, I guess we could call the patriarch and matriarch blessing. That's just a little bit too much, isn't it? So, hearing Utah, and the evangelist/patriarch blessing, it might mean something different to people who attend, say the LDS church. I don't know it from personal experience because I've only been Community of Christ, but I've heard that in the LDS church.

14:57

A patriarchal blessing is something thing that happens without, like preparation between the patriarch and the candidate. And that's just their tradition. That's how they, they operate. But it's also more of like a kind of like this is your path. And a bit more of a, this is too strong a word to use, but it's more of a fortune telling kind of thing. It's like this is what's going to happen to you and your life. And I, Charmaine, I kind of want you to respond to that, in a more of a Community of Christ kind of mindset, like, what would we say to that? What? How do we view it and knowing that that's the filter we're looking through?

### **Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

Yeah, I would say that, that we, we look at that quite, quite a bit differently. And some of these, some of the ways in which we look at it have been things that have evolved over the last two or three decades.

15:56

But I think we've wanted throughout the time of the reorganization, to, to now as Community of Christ, wanted to be quite careful about claiming what God is saying. And so, there's a very strong awareness that in these prayers of blessing, that it is a person that it is us, trying to use our best understandings of the person, and our best understanding of what we may have sensed the little nudges from, from God,

that we would put into the prayer, but we would be very intentional. And I know this has been important for me to do when preparing with someone for their blessing is to acknowledge that, that many, that I'm very human, and that the words that I say, even those places where I'm saying, Here's what I think God would want you to know that I'm recognizing that these are my thoughts and my words, and that God may use them to bless the person. But that I can't be absolutely confident about where that line is between what is it. that's my thought, my awareness, and what is it that may be a word from God. And I think that's sometimes a tricky line to come up to. But I think it's an honest line to acknowledge. And so that's one of the things that has been important in Community of Christ in this evolving understanding, of an evangelist blessing. And that is backed up by this time of preparation with the person. So that, that we know each other, you know, the person who I'm offering this prayer for, knows that we've talked about their struggles, knows that we've talked about the relationships in the lot, in their life, or the relationships they hope to have in the future.

18:18

And so, rather than saying, you know, this is, you know, who you will marry, or this is when you will marry, or this is what your path in life will be. The prayer is really, more about the both of us, the evangelist and the person receiving the blessing, trusting God and that person to create their path together. It's not me dictating where they should go or what they should think or saying, this is exactly what God is saying to you.

18:56

But inviting them into this ongoing path and this ongoing relationship with God.

19:03

Now, there, there are times and there are things that we I'm thinking evangelists here when I say we know that God would want this person to know and be reminded of, things like that they are known and loved by God to remind them that they are forgivable and forgiven when they come before God.

19:33

And, and so those are things that we can say that we know that that we know that God encourages them to make room for love, both for loving others and for letting themselves be loved. We know that God wants them and, and each of us to open our hearts and minds to the Spirit's guidance in the different struggles in parts of our lives. And we know that God is through Christ through the Holy Spirit invites us into, to cultivate relationships, and to come to work on cultivating relationship with God. So these, there are things that we know that God would, what would want them to hear. But when it comes to more speculative things, we try to be very wise and, and not obligate people to and, you know, telling people this is, you know, you have to make this decision or go this path.

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Because of that trying to, to, with some humility, recognize that it may be very easy to confuse what we think are our thoughts with what God's intent is, and that that's a dangerous place that and a place to be circumspect.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 21:03

So, in a sense, then in the evangelists blessing, God's primary nature as love, compassion, as wanting to help people grow in their humanity. That's what's really expressed.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

And, God's presence, God's desire, God's presence with us already, and God's desire for us to know God's presence and power at work in our lives.

21:29

And not that we're dictating what that will look like or mean, but to remind to help people become attuned to God's presence in their lives. So, one of the things I really love about helping people prepare for blessings, is to explore their own prayer life, maybe to take up journaling, maybe to try different kinds of, of personal meditation, maybe to do Lectio Divina with scripture. So, it's part of the fun of it, for me, is helping people get attuned to sensing how God is at work in their life. And so, then the blessing is, is asking God to help them continue to grow in that. And, and there are times in blessings where there might be words of counsel or wisdom, but they tend to be things that we have discovered together, reminders of some of the things that they may have, some of the struggles they may have had, and some of the insights that they have had, and then always in the blessing to, there will be thanksgiving to God for God's action in that person's life. And God's promise to be with them in the future. So, so there's some, yeah, so it's probably very, very different than from how and what this blessing might look like, in the LDS context. So yeah, it is kind of fun to, to articulate what it is that we hope a blessing will do. And then the steps that are involved in it.

**Carla Long 23:18**

I really appreciate that, Charmaine, very much. Yes, that's exactly what I was asking. And I don't mean to throw our LDS brothers and sisters under the bus at all, I because I really have never experienced a patriarchal blessing in the LDS church, it's just, I've heard some experience, experiences of people coming out of the LDS church and saying that their Patriarchal Blessing didn't come true. And they were disappointed by that, or that they felt like they had done something wrong, or they had failed in some way. And I, I just don't think that that is fair. So I appreciate your explanation of that. And, again, I hopefully I didn't use too strong of language. When I was talking about that.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

I didn't sense yeah, I didn't sense judgment on that. And, and, in fact, one of the reasons that we're that we are where we are, in using, the kind of language I've been trying to use is that there have been times in our past, when that same thing that you were describing where someone, sometimes in evangelists, but sometimes in other settings someone had, sensed they thought this was directly from God. And so they told a friend of mine, that you're going to marry so and so and under the influence of the Spirit, and, you know, that didn't happen, and it shouldn't have happened in my mind. And anyhow, but, but then there was this really strained sense of trust between this person and God, the individual who was told what God was going to do in their life.

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And it really was a disservice to that person's ability then to develop their own relationship with God. Because, because of this thing that somebody else said, that didn't come true and, and was not



response on my part I, the adult who's who said that to this young person, I think was, was not being responsible in in that context. But yeah, I, you know, there's some, but we're all in different places with this. And I believe God works in all kinds of ways. At but, you know, part of the reason why we are as a church where we are with the understanding of evangelist blessings, is that this is an opportunity for a person to reflect on their relationship and their path with God. And so, our, our, role is to encourage and affirm and to listen and to support.

26:11

And, and that's a pretty, that's a pretty cool role to be in.

**Carla Long 26:17**

Oh, for sure. Okay. Well, thank you so much for that. I really appreciate hearing about that from you, Charmaine Chvala-Smith, an actual evangelist, talking about evangelists lessons, very exciting. So also I was reminded that we forgot to talk about baby blessings in the last podcast, and that was the last of the eight sacraments that we were going to discuss. And honestly, I can't believe that I forgotten them. As we're recording this, I am currently 37 weeks pregnant and all I think about are babies and baby things. And this baby, baby is stealing my brain. So I cannot believe that we forgot to talk about baby blessings. So let's discuss the importance of baby blessings in our sacrament.

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

Sure, yeah. So we need to repeat that the blessing of a child and in our churches, not just for members, it's, it's open to anybody who wants to bring their child into one of our worship services, having made arrangements for a blessing. This, this is patterned after the story in the Gospel of people bringing their, their children to Jesus, for him to touch and to bless. And so, the laying on of hands and the holding of the child is the really important sign it reconnects us to the word, which is the Jesus story about the blessing of children. And this again, this is not unlike the evangelist blessing in that we have to be careful not to somehow turn the prayer of the blessing of a child into some sort of prediction or fortune telling event.

27:54

And also, one has to be very careful not to turn this into a kind of like, magic protection charm around the, the child. That's not what the blessing of children is about. It's really about presenting the child to God, with the community, for that, for the blessing of God in that setting, to help that child know, without a doubt that they're loved and needed and wanted and desired and a full part of the community. That's really what that blessing is about.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:31**

Yeah. And often it's, it's a way to introduce the family, and the baby, to the congregation and the congregation to the baby. And this opportunity for the community to unite in prayer for this child, first with thanksgiving for, for it being in our presence and, and second of our, that connection that we have to each other, in the body of Christ. And so, in the baby blessing, there is typically the prayer of thanksgiving and thanksgiving to God for the parents who are, or the family members who are, are bringing this baby to receive this blessing and praying that the child will be having an awareness of God with them as they grow and develop.



29:28

And, and then a commissioning, usually in the prayers of commissioning to the community to uphold this baby and this family as they, in this very action, indicate their desire to, to have God integral in their in their home and in their family. So, it's kind of a nice commitment on both sides.

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

That commitment aspect is the covenant part of the sacrament. And I think you know, Charmaine has indicated, this covenant is not just the parents making the Covenant, it's the whole community.

30:06

I mean, in theory, it's the whole community covenanting, once again, to make our churches a safe place for children.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

One of the places where that really hit me the most was when we were in living in Milwaukee. And a couple had triplets. And so, it was actually quite a little maneuver, quite the choreographing, of having everybody hold the babies, so that the parents could be with the one baby who was being blessed. And it was, it was delightful, because it was this whole sense that we have to do this together, we need to help each other in this process. And so had quite the, you know, the baby juggling going on, but it was, it was a pretty sweet thing to be a part of.

**Carla Long**

So, I hope there wasn't actual baby juggling that was taking place.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

I knew you might go there.

**Carla Long 31:08**

I remember blessing a child in when I was living in California, and he was older, he was like four or so and this little boy had so much energy, there was no way, no way that he was going to sit still for a three minute blessing. So, I actually just stood, and he ran around me and I just grabbed his head. Every time he came by, I just put my hands on his head, put my hands on his head, because by the very end of it, the congregation was laughing so hard. Nobody was really paying attention to the blessing anymore. But we got him blessed. He was blessed for sure. Yes.

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It was a perfect blessing for that little boy, for sure.

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Thank you for that. I appreciate it. So. So, we've discussed all eight of our sacraments in the last two podcasts. I think it's really important to talk about our roles as priesthood members. I don't know if we, I think we've told our listeners what priesthood role we have. I'm a bishop, Charmaine is an evangelist and Tony, you're a high priest. Right.

32:13

Right. Yeah. So, we all start within the priesthood. And so it, approaching a sacrament, from a priesthood point of view, is, is pretty important. So what is the importance of say, like spiritual practices for a priesthood member getting ready to perform a sacrament? What what is our job? How should we be prepared for that?

### **Tony Chvala-Smith**

So, let me start by saying what our job isn't. And then when we can take it from there. I'm going to take the, the, as they, as an medievalist would say, the the, the via negativa, the negative way here first.

32:57

Our job is not to be perfect as priesthood members, that is, in the history of Christianity, there was a, a schism in the fourth century in North Africa called the Donatist schism, the Donatists broke away from the church because they taught that only those sacraments performed by pure people, as priests who are pure, were valid. And the problem with that view is that it opened a giant can of worms because after all, what does that mean?

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Let any of you without sin cast the first stone, you know, so, people like Augustine and other theologians in North Africa saw right through that and said, no, the, the efficacy the, the, the value, the value of a sacrament cannot be dependent upon the perfection of the ordained person, just not possible. The value of the sacrament is connected to a variety of things like the integrity of the whole community,

34:04

the intention with which it's performed, and, you know, the, the kind of words and, and symbols that are used in it. So, you know, when I think about being in a, in a service in which a sacrament is going to be celebrated, or if Charmaine and I get called out to do an administration, probably my first thought is not and should not be, gee, how holy am I today? That's not really what it's about. God, God is the, God is the primary actor within the sacrament. And as an ordained person, I'm simply a mediator of that grace and because it's grace, it does not depend upon, you know, how good I am today. I have been involved in sacraments when I was not having a particularly good day. And it did not necessarily mean the sacrament was invalid or not a means of grace to people who are there. So that's kind of the, the negative side of it first, you know, on the on the positive side.

35:09

I see, I see ordained ministry, priesthood and Community of Christ is that we are servants of the servants of God, that is the, the whole body is called to ministry, the whole body, the whole church is a servant of God. And those who are called and ordained to particular ministries with within that body, have as their function to enable the whole body to pursue the ministry of Christ in the world. So, it's important for me to be attuned to a congregation or to a situation I need to be thinking about what the sacrament means, and especially need to be working, if I'm if I'm preaching in a service where there's a sacrament, I want to make very sure that I'm, I'm connecting the spoken word, to the rite to the sacred,

rite, of a, of a sacrament. So those are things that that I think are important for, at least for me to remember.

### **Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

Yeah. Some other elements that I would say are part of spiritual preparation for people who are wanting to bring ministry, particularly in those defined priesthood roles within a congregation is, is an awareness of our own need for God, that we're not above other people that we don't have it all figured out. But that kind of humility that comes from an awareness of our own humanness, our own dependence on God and God's grace, I think that's, that's an important place to be to be honest and realistic about who we are. And that helps in many different ways. And one is that it can help us to not give into those ego needs, that can too often make our service about us.

37:24

Rather than it being about God, and what God is wanting to do within the community.

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You know, yes, we may want to offer ministry that will be lasting, and that will have a great effect on other people. But if it's about our success, or how we're seen by others, or that were lifted up in a certain way, then we've drawn the attention away from what God is doing, or what God wants to do within the community, and drawn it to ourselves. And so that kind of awareness of our own, our own brokenness, our own partialness is really I think, important, so that we don't get the focus in the wrong place.

38:13

And in that same way, particularly when we are doing sacraments, whether it be communion or confirmation ordination, or the prayer of administration or of healing of the sick.

38:26

That there's, there's also this need to realize that the sacrament has its own voice and to let the sacrament be heard and seen, and to not get in the way.

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By, you know, drawing attention to the amazing words that we use, or the tone of voice or the length of the prayer. We evangelists are known for the length of our prayers at times.

38:52

So, making it not about us, and to be sure that as we were preparing to bring ministry, that again, in the sacraments, that we, we point to those places where God can be seen and sensed, whether it be the symbols that are being used to help God's presence, be tangible and felt and real, whether it's in the, the hymns, the words that are there, or the prayers themselves, or the sense of call it. So, it's pointing to those things that make God's presence real in our midst. And, you know, maybe that's a little esoteric, maybe. But I think, I think that that's helpful to us to remember the big picture of what are these all about? You know, they're not about us. They're about Jesus. They're about the desire of the Spirit to breathe itself into the life of individuals and congregations.

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

So yeah, I mean, I really like the the, the sacraments as signs and symbols

40:09

to God, they're not really first about us. And that's been a recurrent problem in Community of Christ theology, you think, thinking that the ordination is about how wonderful the person is being ordained? Well, no, not really. Or thinking, thinking about the baby blessing as though this, this child is somehow more special than all children ever born? It's like, oh, no, probably not. The point is that the sacrament points, it points to God's creative and redemptive love at work constantly, in the world, and in the church. And so, yeah, I mean, how do we let the sacrament do its job of pointing and not having it points to us? That's really important.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

So yeah, and you know, maybe that another one of those things that we have to be alert to as priesthood members, is that temptation to think that somehow we are better than other people, you know, that, yes, we've been trying to do all these things, right. And therefore, our words are more important than somebody else's, or that we have some right to judge other people's lives or journeys or decisions.

41:28

So I think that's another part of that is to recognize that there's this really deep human instinct, to say, who I'm better than, and who I have more importance than or less than, and that sometimes that that can get out of whack when we're thinking about priesthood, but it's not about us being lifted up, it's about us, kneeling down, and being a servant, and being, you know, like, like, the Christ hymn in Philippians 2, of emptying ourselves, of our status, and so that we can serve. So, you know, I, I just think that's an element that is kind of a tricky one. And when we're feeling insecure, it's, it can be an easy place to console ourselves that, that, Oh, I have this or I can do this. And that makes me more righteous or more in touch with God than other people. And the reality is that, that's probably not true.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 42:42**

So I'm thinking of that amazing passage in Second Corinthians where Paul the Apostle describes himself and his coworkers as, as earthen vessels, you know, clay jars.

42:58

And the treasure of the gospel is carried in fragile people, by fragile people. And so, it's, we, we have to be careful never to be ashamed of our fragility, our fallibility, and our humanity. It's the means by which the amazing gift of God is passed on and shared.

43:24

It's, it's God's work to, to make sure that it's passed on and shared, but uses, uses us broken people to do that. I think that's a real important message. It can't be repeated too much in the church. So those are some thoughts on that, Carla.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

Yeah, and by lead on, add on, add on just a tiny bit more in it, and that people who are seen as leaders within a congregation, and priesthood are often, are often seen as that, to acknowledge our need for God's presence, because we are broken because we, we are fragile, then is an invitation to the rest of the congregation to trust this God who knows that about all of us, and wants to, to bring that stabilizing love into our lives. So, it gives permission to, to the rest of the congregation to trust God with, with our, our very human, fragileness.

**Carla Long 44:28**

And I just got to say that if the only people who are allowed to do sacraments were those who are pure in heart are free from transgression. I don't think anybody could ever do a sacrament in the whole history of the world. I mean, none of us know. None of us have that on our resumes.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 44:47**

And to assume that about yourself is a form of self-deception anyway, so it's, yeah, well said, girl.

**Carla Long 44:57**

Well, I mean, we would still like the sacraments to happen. So anyway, that would be kind of an impossible task. And if God knows us as well, as we think God knows us, then God knows. So...

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

Right, exactly.

**Carla Long**

In Community of Christ, in Community of Christ, we celebrate the sacrament of communion, only once a month, only the first Sunday of every month, which we mentioned on the last podcast. And so that, there's a very good possibility that it when someone walks into a community Christ building, there might be no sacraments that are taking place.

45:34

So maybe like, perhaps 75% of the time, there's not a sacrament in worship service, there might be, there might not be. So, I would like for you to speak a little bit about, you know, like when we do have a sacrament, in a worship service, be it baby blessing or an ordination, baptism, confirmation, communion, the importance of keeping that sacrament as the focus as the center of the worship service. Is that important? Is that not important? You know, why is it important? If it is?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 46:16**

Yeah, it's a really good question. A couple of thoughts on that, to get started with it.

46:22

So, the sacraments are our means of grace in our life together. And they, they deserve care and focus in a worship service.

46:36

The Lord's Supper is not like just a quick serving of refreshments during the surface. It has deep evocative, symbolic meaning that connects us to the Jesus story. And so, it's really important to take the time and practice the intentionality of, of talking about what does this mean, when we do this, when we share this rite together? What's happening here? How, how does this connect to the Jesus story, which is the kind of authorizing story behind the rite?

47:15

What does it point us to in terms of God's character and nature? And what does it call us? Finally, what does it call us too in terms of our discipleship? So, there's, there's so much room to explore a sacramental moment in church from different angles. But that's what I where I would go for starters.

### **Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

Different times when we've had the opportunity to teach classes, either about preaching or about planning of worship, or you know about this about sacraments or theology and worship, that's something we really like to lift up is the idea that the sacraments are kind of windows, into relationship with God. And that, so in a service, where there's a sacrament, it's, it's already creating this wonderful opportunity, because it's not just words, because sometimes, some people don't clue, you know, words are just words, and they, they don't inspire, but sacraments because they are things we do with our bodies, or that we see visualized in front of us.

48:32

Take on a tangibility, that is its own kind of sermon, and to build on that to take the words of the sermon or to take the hymns that we're singing, to help magnify what's being done in the sacrament, does a whole bunch of things. So one of the things that the sacraments did in the ancient church was it taught the story over again, over and over again, it taught the story of Jesus' body and blood and, and Jesus' presence with us, and in us, a very tangible way of understanding that for, you know, sometimes people who weren't literate and so they would hear and they would see the story of God in the church in our lives, played out before them. And so, I think that's still really important about the sacraments, is that they're teaching moments about the life of discipleship, but they're also teaching moments, about the nature of God, you know, of Christ coming and being present with us, of touching people, of the Spirit flowing around us and in us.

49:53

And again, because there are these symbols and hands and often the tangible part of a sacrament without having to put a lot of words to it, we're reenacting God's desire to touch us.

50:15

To let our, our physicality not be a barrier to God, but actually to be an avenue by which God becomes real to us. And we know that we are real to God. So, the sacraments have just so many different dimensions, to help us worship.

50:40

And that's what we come together to do is to worship God and have all kinds of these little subtle reminders in them. And so I think we often under appreciate how much they can do and say, for us in worship, if we let them.

### **Tony Chvala-Smith**

And then to, to follow up on that. It's like the, the sacraments,

51:04

Re-present not represent they re-present to us, aspects of the doctrine of the Incarnation, that the divine Word became flesh in Christ, for the salvation of all creation. And so, these physical actions and signs remind us that God is God is invested in, concerned about the physical material, political, social, economic world, we're a part of the sacraments have profound, profound ability to keep us anchored in this world. There's a whole theological tradition that goes all the way back to St. Augustine, which talks about the sacraments as visible words. It's like a message made visible, not because it's spoken but because it's done. It's, it's portrayed, it's dramatized, I think that's really kind of a neat way to think about them.

### **Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

Yeah. And another thought is that in some ways, the sacraments, slow us down, make us stop and take this aspect of our life together, or life with God, in a very intentional way, and kind of going back to your question earlier about priesthood preparing for serving, I think that's a really important, portent thing is to slow down, to take time, to be still, to be quiet, to let our thoughts and our hearts have space, to think about what is it that, that we are doing.

52:47

Not, not to do not to earn something for ourselves but to, to keep reread reuses a lot, but to keep pointing back to God so that slowing down and taking time, I think are part of the a priesthood role as well.

### **Tony Chvala-Smith** 53:05

The Roman Catholic theology going back to Vatican 2 and too figures like Karl Rahner, began to speak of the church, as a sacrament itself, that is the church is a visible sign of what God is trying to do in the world. And then they, they spoke of Christ Himself as the primordial sacrament, that is, Christ as the Word made flesh is, is the primordial sacrament, the one, one from whom the community and all the sacraments flow. And then the church itself is a visible sign of the kind of, of redemptive community God is trying to build in the world. And that's easily transferable into Community of Christ theology too we would align very much with that, that, that it's in our life together, that God is trying to show the world a different way to live, a way in which every person is valued and honored, which creation itself is honored and not trampled, in which there hopefully are no poor, in which, in which the rights of every person are, and the dignity of every person is honored in community. So, so sacramental theology is exceedingly important to us as Christians, it's really, it should, it should even be more important in Community of Christ theology, than it's been. And fortunately as a church we're, we're doing a lot more work on sacraments in sacramental theology, because it's, in some ways, it's the it's the path. It's the path into the postmodern future for us.



**Carla Long** 54:44

Yeah, sometimes I must admit, I'm a little bit disappointed even in myself, that I, I don't feel ready to perform a sacrament or to take communion or to be a part of someone's ordination or, and so on.

55:00

I think that what we're saying here is really important and hopefully our priesthood are listening and saying, Well, maybe I need to take the sacraments a little bit more seriously than what I have in the past. I mean, we can't just walk into the first Sunday of every month and say, oh, gosh, I forgot the bread, you know, you know, put a little effort behind it and thought behind it and, and realize if this is these, like we said before, touch points from God to us. And what can we learn about that character, God's character through the sacraments?

55:36

Well, thank you, Tony and Charmaine. Our time has almost come to a close.

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

Interesting, interesting paradox there.

**Carla Long** 55:44

It is. Is there anything that you wish I would have asked?

55:49

That you wish I would have asked? I did not ask or any closing thoughts about the sacraments?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 55:57

Hmm. Well, how about, here's, here's one closing thought, when we talk about the sacraments in Community of Christ, let's use the verb celebrate. We don't do the sacraments, we celebrate the sacraments. I think that would be very helpful in our life together.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

To kind of recognize love that recognize them as gifts, rather than something we produce or make. That's I like that too.

56:25

Good job, Tony.

**Carla Long**

Anything else? Yeah, good Tony. Any anything else?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith**

Thank you, Carla. Some good, insightful questions that took us into some interesting places.

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Carla Long**

And who knows if we found our way back out or not, but we did our best right.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 56:46

Being lost in the sacraments probably isn't isn't too bad of a thing.

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

There are far worse places to be lost.

**Carla Long** 56:54

Amen. Amen. Well, thank you again, Tony and Charmaine, for your time and for your valuable insight. I deeply appreciate it.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 57:04

Well, we do too glad to have these opportunities, because it makes us have to be more intentional about putting into words what these things mean, not just to us, but to the church too.

**Tony Chvala-Smith**

And we hope that we hope that it prompts questions from, from listeners, who probably will go straight to you, Carla, for the answers.

**Carla Long** 57:27

I don't think so. I think they can ask me, but then again, I'm gonna pass them on to you. So yeah, please feel free listeners to send your questions to [ProjectZionPodcast.org](https://ProjectZionPodcast.org) We'd be happy to answer them. Thanks so much.

57:46

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