

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.

Brittany Mangelson 00:33

Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of *Project Zion Podcast*. I am Brittany Mangelson, your host for this episode, and we are going to be adding to our "Grounds for Peace" series, which is about peacemaking and what it means to be a people of peace in Community of Christ. So, today, we're going to be talking about one aspect of peacemaking that, I have to be honest, I am a little excited, but also a little nervous to talk about, mostly because I don't know a lot about it. But I am with my good friend, Ryan Pitt, who is the Mission Center President of the Mid-Atlantic Mission Center here in the United States and we are going to be talking about chaplaincy. And Ryan is a Navy chaplain as well as being a Mission Center President, and so he is going to share his story, share about the program that he has gone through, share about the importance of military chaplaincy and Community of Christ's role in that whole aspect of the military. So, Ryan, thank you for being here today. I'm really excited about this.

Ryan Pitt 01:49

Thank you, Brittany. I'm so happy to be here, and what a generous introduction that was. I think this is my third time on *Project Zion Podcast* so, only two more before the infamous five-timer's jacket. Is that right?

Brittany Mangelson 02:08

Absolutely.

Ryan Pitt 02:11

I'll just borrow one of Tony's. I'm sure he's got a few hanging in his closet.

Brittany Mangelson 02:19

For sure. Well, this is gonna be a good conversation. And, you know, for *Project Zion* listeners who have been listening in recent weeks, we are starting to have more conversations about non-violence and particularly in response to World Conference Resolution 1319. And as we move closer and closer to World Conference, I, kind of, can't believe I just said those words, but hopefully everything pans out as far as the pandemic goes and we're able to really discuss this conversation and this topic of non-violence at World Conference in 2023. And so, Ryan, this interview is going to be part of that larger conversation of the preparation...

Ryan Pitt 03:04

Right.

Brittany Mangelson 03:05

...getting us there. So, why don't you just take it away and give us some of your reflections on that resolution, and just, kind of, where you see this conversation fitting in with that.

Ryan Pitt 03:17

Thanks, Brittany. So, again, my name is Ryan. My pronouns are he/him/his and, as Brittany shared, I have served as the Mid-Atlantic Mission Center President since 2016. So, going into my seventh year in full-time employment with Community of Christ. I am also a Chaplain Candidate Program Officer who holds the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade, or an O-2 in the US Navy Reserves, and I'll go more into that later. But just a geographic ping, Emma and I live in Bayonne, New Jersey, so that's Emma, my wife, and our 14-year-old dog, Henry. Little background. I graduated from Graceland in 2012 with a degree in Healthcare Management and Church Leadership minor. I earned my Masters in Healthcare Administration in 2015, and my Masters of Divinity with a Chaplaincy emphasis from Drew Theological School in May of 2020. And, Brittany, I think it's really important that we frame this whole conversation that we're having today around WCR 1319 Non-violence. I know we've had, you've had previous guests who have talked about this ongoing question, what is the role that non-violence assumes in our pursuit of peace on and for the Earth? This is a critical time in the life of the church as we find ourselves in the midst of a deep discernment, responding to this question. So, this is a reminder, this is your invitation, this is an urging for all folks to engage in this discussion through all lenses of discernment. And, as a precursor, I'll be sharing a little bit of church history, church policies, that I found particularly informative, as I've gone through this discernment of Military Chaplaincy. I'll also be sharing policies from the Department of the Navy, specifically SECNAV Instruction 1730-7 ECHO. That can be found online. Brittany, if I can, I can give you a link to that and post it on the *Project Zion Podcast* website, if folks are interested. But all of these resources are easily accessible, either online or through Herald House. But I think what we need to acknowledge going into this conversation is the umbrella of the pursuit of peace includes many paths. We all respond in our unique and loving ways. The path forward is illuminated by Jesus, the peaceful One, but everyone takes their unique step along that journey. The conversation that we're going to have is one that I'll, admittedly, that I need to admit, I needed 10 years ago, as I was going through my discernment. So, my prayer is that people find this particular episode informational. But for those who are discerning their life's call, maybe something ignites, that illuminates, a new path forward for them. So, that's a long-winded way of saying this is a part of that larger conversation that we're having as a church. And so, thank you, Brittany, for allowing me to share a little bit of my story with you.

Brittany Mangelson 07:23

Absolutely. I'm really glad that you brought up the idea that following Jesus, the peaceful One, and having a life dedicated to the pursuit of peace, being in a church who proclaims that mission looks different for everyone. And I know that the conversation about non-violence and what is a Christian's role in violence or non-violence can be really tricky. And just to underscore, you know, the backdrop of what we're working with, there are a lot of wars going on right now. The one that's been pushed forward in world news is the war in Ukraine, the invasion from Russia into Ukraine. And I know that even the First Presidency's statement about that sparked some folks. You know, there's opinions about it, right? And how do we have this conversation of non-violence when such horrific violence is happening all over the world, not just in Ukraine, and different types of violence? And what is our response as

Christians? How do we support our military families, our police families? You know, what does this look like in really practical terms for people who have different paths to peacemaking. And so, it is a complicated conversation, which is one of the reasons why I'm a, you know, little bit nervous to have this conversation. Because to be quite frank, I'm not entirely sure where my personal call to peace takes me. And on *Project Zion*, we've talked about a lot of different ways to engage in peacemaking, and some choose a life of being a pacifist, some become vegan, some work at the Peace Pavilion in Independence, Missouri. And, you know, we're not trying to say that one pathway to peace supersedes another, but we are trying to explore a wide variety of pathways. And so, yeah, I am excited to have this conversation today, because again, I feel pretty naive about it and I'm excited to learn more.

Ryan Pitt 09:39

Well, and to your point about many paths, there's, chaplaincy is just one of them. Military chaplaincy is just one of those chaplaincy paths. And so, if it's okay, Brittany, I'd love to share a little bit about the history of chaplaincy as a whole and then, kind of, work my way into the military chaplaincy pipeline, if that's okay.

Brittany Mangelson 10:10

Yeah, absolutely. Let's start at the very beginning of chaplaincy. What is it? And, yeah, I, like I said, I'm just excited to learn more, so take it away.

Ryan Pitt 10:21

Yeah. So, I found it particularly helpful in my discernment to find a passage from the *Doctrine and Covenants* to help my thinking about my personal response. And section 162:7d of the Community of Christ *Doctrine and Covenants* reads, "The call to respond is urgent. Look to the needs of your own congregations, but look also beyond your walls to the far-flung places where the church must go. Each disciple needs a spiritual home. You are called to build that home and care for it, but also to share equally in the outreaching ministries of the church. In that way the gospel may be sent to other souls, also yearning for a spiritual resting place." And that passage has been a pillar in my unfolding understanding of chaplaincy. So, the idea of religious leaders serving communities outside of sacred spaces is not new. The most common chaplain heritage story, which I'll share in a moment, dates to the fourth century CE, however, religious needs beyond religious sites goes back even further. Sacrifices to various gods, ceremonies, libations, all needed a religious leader. Different cultures, groups and empires had different ways of addressing these needs. Historical leaders realized the overall well-being and religious fervor of particular, of a particular community are deeply intertwined and in a lot of ways, this remains true today. So, the story of chaplaincy, specifically the word "chaplain", begins in the city of Amiens, in the fourth century CE. Martin, who later became St. Martin, a young soldier in the Roman army, was going into the city during what's described as a quote, "bitterly cold winter". People coming into the city were hurrying past a half-naked beggar who was close to death, and Martin, who at the time an unpaid individual, having only his military uniform, stopped. He took out his sword, removed his cloak, and then sliced the cloak through the middle, giving one half of the cloak to the man, and using the other half to cover himself again. His half cloak that he kept, became a precious object in military and royal circles. It became a, sort of, a spiritual symbol for the whole community. The cloak was used in the taking of oaths and carried into conflict and battle, and came to symbolize what was best in humanity, a symbol of the spiritual dignity of each person, and a powerful reminder of the need to seek

God in ordinary things. That cloak, it's called capella, or a cape, which comes from the Latin term, and I had to practice this a few times to make sure I got it right, capellano, which later becomes chaplain. So, there's a person who is assigned to look after this particularly sacred relic, and that person would be the chaplain. The chaplain, at that time, controlled access to the sacred symbol, organized prayers and ceremonies for the community to celebrate, and this was the first time, documented anyway, the term chaplain emerges. So that's, like, the legacy, the myth, the story of chaplaincy, but I think there's some really incredible truths that come out of that story. Chaplaincy, as a whole, is about listening and serving those in need. It's about empowering, observing and reminding all people of the inherent worth of all persons in the community. It's a form of service that challenges us to think about our lives but also our place in the larger story. Chaplaincy respects traditions while celebrating the uniqueness of each person and, narrowed into the Christian tradition, chaplaincy is rooted in prayer, discipleship, and reflection that we find in the life, ministry, and the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. So, today, clergy and ministers who are appointed to a variety of institutions and corporate bodies, cemeteries, prisons, hospitals, colleges, universities, armed forces, embassies, are usually called chaplains. There are also protest chaplains. There are movement chaplains. There are police and fire service chaplains, and business world chaplains, representing various ideologies, faiths and world religions. So, while the idea of capellano dates to the fourth century Roman Empire, servanthood authorized by religious organizations, and endorsing institutions, continuously expands. So, there is no one form of chaplaincy. It has taken so many forms over the years. And while the idea of a chaplain, and the actual term chaplain, comes from the fourth century CE, more popular in the fifth century, the idea of taking care of people and their religious needs, predates that.

Brittany Mangelson 17:11

Wow. I had no idea. I mean, when you started naming off all of the different kinds of chaplains, I had zero idea that some of those were a thing. I feel like I have a million questions now running through my head. I mean, the idea that there could be a chaplain for businesses, that feels very countercultural in the United States. And, you know, I noticed that a lot of the things that you mentioned were places of high trauma, right? Branches of the military, in hospitals, even universities where folks are having important transitions in their lives. But to have, you know, a spiritual support, companion, mentorship, etc., through a chaplain, this just, I'm, this is great, thank you.

Ryan Pitt 18:06

Sure. And we, there are members of Community of Christ that I'm aware of who are chaplains themselves outside of the armed forces. So, Dr. Brittany Longsdorf is a university chaplain. Emily Rose is a chaplain in the Kansas City area. Pam Cress, who is from the greater Pacific Northwest, is a chaplain up there, a hospital chaplain, I believe. So, the paths of the chaplain have taken so many different forms and you're absolutely right about these being places of trauma. More recently, at least in the States, the idea of protest chaplains and movement chaplains is becoming more and more popular. I had an opportunity to take a class on "Movement Chaplaincy" in 2020, and the role of the chaplain being a symbol of empowerment, a symbol of peace, a ministry of presence on the front lines of chaos, is incredibly moving. And that's becoming more popular. As always, funding is a weird place. You know, the financial support for these chaplains is not, it doesn't come by easily. A lot of chaplains are volunteers; prison chaplains, hospital chaplains, university chaplains, that's a little different, our military chaplains, but there's a lot of opportunity for chaplain work if folks are interested.

Brittany Mangelson 19:58

Yeah, protest chaplains was definitely one that I hadn't heard of. And I'm really glad that you brought up ministry of presence because as you were describing the foundational story of chaplaincy and just thinking about what I do know about this ministry, it almost feels like a hybrid of the ministry of a priest, ministry of presence, Jesus's friend, and a little bit of, maybe, spiritual direction, maybe a little bit of the ministry of an evangelist, just, kind of, all combined together in the moments of everyday, secular life, like you said, outside of the church, outside of a religious institution. And so, it's, it sounds like it's really bringing that ministry of presence, Jesus's friend, right into the neighborhood, which is exactly what I think Jesus did and what Jesus modeled. So, I'm super intrigued by this.

Ryan Pitt 20:52

And you're absolutely right. Chaplaincy is an interesting field that walks that line of the sacred and the secular, the structured and the free flowing. It's the chaplain's job, in my opinion, to create space for personal exploration, formation and religious expression. And for my particular religious context, maybe chaplaincy is a path to discover Jesus, the peaceful One, where peace is overshadowed?

Brittany Mangelson 21:29

Yeah, so let's talk about, maybe, chaplaincy. How did you get involved in that? I'm interested to hear more about your story of what took you to the, this exact spot in your ministry.

Ryan Pitt 21:45

I started working for an oral surgeon in 2013, in Bethesda, Maryland, and I worked for him for three years, and during that time, one of my co-workers, dear friend of mine, was married, she's still married to him, but married to a navy physician. So, at the time he held the rank of captain, so, an O-6 in the Navy, and working out of the Pentagon. And I remember we had this open house event at the office, and I met Tim for the first time, and we're standing there talking. He shared a little bit about his background and somehow we got to talking about church, and I told him, I had a minor in Church Leadership, and that I'm active with my congregation in Washington, D.C. And that was the first time anyone had ever mentioned military chaplaincy because he said, "Have you thought about that?" And I said, "I didn't know that was a thing. I didn't know there were military chaplains out there." Which was interesting because I've always felt this desire to serve. Growing up in Lamoni, Iowa, I volunteered for the local fire and EMS services. I've always been one to want to help out. I'm an Enneagram type two. I'm a helper. And I remember I was exploring military as a possible career. I met with Marine Corps chap-, geeze, not chaplains, Marine Corps recruiters, Air Force recruiters. At one point, I thought I was going to be a Navy nurse, and that I'd graduate from the Graceland School of Nursing. But none of those felt right. And I remember I had the paperwork, right? The dotted line, right there, ready to go and sign everything, and it just didn't feel right, and I didn't do it. When Tim brought up the possibility of ministering to those who are serving, that's when something really ignited within me, and I always kept that possibility on the back burner. I was working on my Masters in Health Care Administration at the time there, but there was this part of me that wanted to go to seminary, but in Community of Christ, there's not a whole lot of opportunity for full-time ministry and full-time ministry is a requirement to becoming a Navy chaplain and I just didn't think it was gonna be in the cards for me. But when I was offered the position to be the Mid-Atlantic Mission Center President, and when the expectation was that

I was to go to seminary, suddenly, I got a new hand dealt to me. I had some new cards. And after talking about it with Tim and Emma, my wife, praying on it, we decided that, yeah, this is a really good and intriguing opportunity that's presented. And so, upon exploring the various options, the Chaplain Candidate Program is a program that is available to those who are currently in seminary and wanting to become either an active duty chaplain or a reservist in the Navy. And so, I was finally able to meet with a recruiter, talk through some of those requirements, and it was one of those things, again, the stars had to align. I needed to get approval to go to a non-Community of Christ seminary from the church. I had to get accepted into that seminary. I had to get the right scholarship for this to even be an option. And in August of 2017, I received the official letter accepting me into the program, into the CCPO program, which is great, because I also started seminary that same month. And in October, I was commissioned as an ensign, so an O-1, into the Navy. So, the Chaplain Candidate Program is opportunity for those seeking to be Navy chaplains. You need to be endorsed by your religious organization. You have to be a full-time seminary student working towards an MDiv, a Masters of Divinity or an equivalent. You have specific height and weight expectations. And after completing your degree, they want two years of full-time ministry. And so, that's currently where I'm in. So, at the time of this recording, it's March of 2022, and I graduated May of 2020. So, I've almost met that two-year requirement before I'm able to go to the next step. So, while you're Chaplain Candidate Program, your primary responsibility is to do well in school. You have to have specific GPA to continue into the program. And during the summer months, you are expected to complete a few annual trainings. And so, as of now, I've completed three of those annual trainings. I graduated from the Direct Commission Officers Indoctrination Course, which is held in Newport, Rhode Island. Essentially, that's how to walk, talk, and dress like a Navy officer. In January of 2021, I graduated from the Chaplain Candidate Orientation Course, which is how to talk, walk, talk and dress like a Navy chaplain. And then in August of 2021, I completed an on the job training in Norfolk, Virginia, where I was able to shadow Navy chaplains for about two weeks. So, that's where you really get to learn about their ministry and how they serve the sailors, but also, Navy chaplains provide ministry to the Marine Corps and to the Coast Guard. So, it's an expanding role and it really is a ministry that takes you wherever those service members and their families may be located. So, the program allowed me to just see and experience, and get a real feel for what it's like to be a Navy chaplain. So, I'm not technically in the fleet. I'm IRR, so inactive reserve. And there's, at this point, no possibility of deployment. After this final step in, at, once completing two-year obligation, I attend a, an extended training later this year. And upon graduation, I will continue as a reservist in the Navy and continue working full-time for Community of Christ. That's a lot.

Brittany Mangelson 30:23

No, that's fascinating. So, the chances of you getting deployed, at some point, are probably pretty high? I mean...

Ryan Pitt 30:34

Yeah.

Brittany Mangelson 30:34

Okay, yeah.

Ryan Pitt 30:35

Yeah, so it, there's always the possibility of deployment. There are specific billets, what they'll call them, that they want Navy chaplains to apply for and be selected in order to be promoted. So, they want you to have time with the sailors' blue side, so to speak. They want you to have time with Marines' green side, so to speak. And they want you to have time with the Coast Guard so that you're well rounded. So, as you are promoted and leading younger chaplains, you have that experience in the fleet to recall and to guide decisions that you're making. So, deployment is always a possibility, but the regular expectations, you drill once a month for a weekend and then once a year you have a two-week training. And so, the plan going forward is that I'll continue full-time with Community of Christ, and serve as a reservist meeting those expectations, and then looking for opportunities to be eligible for promotion.

Brittany Mangelson 31:53

Got it? Okay, thanks for clearing that up.

Ryan Pitt 31:55

Sure.

Brittany Mangelson 31:57

Yeah, this is super, super interesting. And, I mean, I just have to ask, and again, maybe we'll get to this, but I'm interested to know what the process was like to talk to your religious leaders to get their support and get their backing. And this, kind of, dives into the question of, you know, what is Community of Christ's position on military service, etc. So, Ryan, if you want to save that for a little bit, we can but.

Ryan Pitt 32:23

Yeah, no better time than the present. Having those conversations was really, really interesting. David Anderson, who has now retired, but dedicated his life to ministry, teaches at the Community of Christ seminary now, is the endorsing agent for Community of Christ and so, he was my primary point of contact. In order to be endorsed by Community of Christ to be a military chaplain, you have to hold a priesthood office in the Melchizedek priesthood. At the time I was an elder. Currently, I'm a seventy. So, we also talked about my background and what I did with campus ministries at Graceland University, what I was doing with the Washington D.C. congregation, and then even more so as Mission Center President and taking more of the leadership responsibility here locally on the east coast so, really making sure that there is a call there, and it's not just looking for additional income 'cause it's such a unique ministry, and it's devastating, can be devastating, but it can also be some of the most incredible moments. And so, is the candidate ready spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, for those moments? I'll never forget my interaction with an Army vet at the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington DC. I remember watching this man walk up to the wall and rub his fingers across a name and he probably did this for 5, 10 minutes. And so, I just could not help myself, but I went over and just stood with him and said, "I can't imagine what you were feeling right now." The man, without breaking eye contact with the wall or without removing his fingers said, and I'll never forget this, "You have no idea what it's like to be without your friends, without your family and to be abandoned by God, and the only person you had got their name on this wall." And I just remember feeling so overcome with grief and pain for this stranger. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to do. I just stood there. A few minutes later, the man stood

up, saluted and walked away. That's a powerful, powerful memory, one that has fueled a lot of this desire to serve in this unique ministry. And even now, with the expectations nearly, or the requirements nearly met, I don't know what I would say to that man at this time. I still wonder what would 32-year-old Ryan have said instead of 24-year-old Ryan? But there is such a need out there for ministry beyond the walls, where traditional ministry is not adequate. It's not possible unless you are there in the moment with the person celebrating, but also grieving the losses. So that's why I always come back to that passage in 162, that "The call to respond is urgent," and to go, "...to the far-flung places where the church must go." For me that military chaplaincy is a way to respond to that call. And I'm fortunate that Community of Christ has taken an affirming position on those who are looking to serve in the military. And there's no question that there's a contentious history between the larger church body and warfare. I mean, I started this whole conversation with the story that dates to the Roman Empire with St. Martin. Community of Christ is no different. We also find ourselves in a similar position. Looking through church history at the onset of the Civil War, Joseph Smith III shares this really interesting experience before a crowd in Nauvoo about this very conversation, about the relationship between the church and military service. And I'm quoting from Mark Scherer's *The Journey of a People Volume II* when I share this, but Joseph Smith III writes, "Unconsciously, I became imbued with the Spirit of the occasion and the fires of patriotism within me sprang into active flame. I made an impassioned appeal, moved by some inner light and urge, which I did not stop to analyze, but the force of which I could not resist." And this was at a time when there was a call for people to enlist when the Civil War broke out in the United States. And this moral dilemma that Joseph Smith III found in his prophetic leadership of the new organization, this civic duty that the President of the United States is calling for citizens to respond, but also his personal decision not to enlist, was also reflected in the church membership at the time. And so, the church made a statement that expected members not to enlist, but if drafted, the nation as a whole will have to suffer for its sins, but you are not held personally responsible. So, at the time, the onset of the new organization, the RLDS, this, the Church's position was not to enlist, but if drafted, you are not held personally responsible. And historian Mark Scherer, makes some interesting observations about this. Joseph Smith III anticipated a draft, and probably, maybe strategically, asked membership to wait for orders to enlist. So, I think that you can speculate either way on that. I don't know if I really have an opinion, either way there. But the second point, I think, is particularly important. Military service would not impede upon memberships in good standing. And it's at that point, when Mark writes, "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints would not become a pacifist movement. Fast forward 80 years, Fred M. found himself in a similar position. The onset of World War II and a similar sentiment was shared. Mark writes in this section, "The church stood for peace, but responsibility for the decision of whether or not to perform military service was placed on the individual." And I'm going to pause right there, because I think that's a pretty significant historical part of our story. "The church stood for peace, but responsibility for the decision of whether or not to perform military service was placed on the individual, and furthermore, military service would not impede upon membership in good standing."

Brittany Mangelson 41:54

I think that it's so timely that we're having this conversation, because currently in one of the Facebook groups in Community of Christ that there's a lot of Community of Christ folks in, there's a question about whether Community of Christ is a pacifist church or not, or a pacifist denomination because we do proclaim peace. And so, what level of peace do we officially proclaim? And what I'm hearing you

saying in our historical record is that we are not a pacifist church, that that is not something that we have historically, collectively, decided as a denomination. And you've cited, you know, two historical events where the presidents of the church have encouraged people to, and of course, this is me paraphrasing, but to keep our mission of peace at the forefront, and yet, if duty calls, if you're drafted, and/or if your process of discernment leads you to sign up, then that is that. And so, it's interesting as we wrestle with this question of non-violence and what does this mean for us as a denomination at large? It does get tricky, right? It's not an easy answer that you can just say, yes, we are pacifists, because that's not who we are. And so, thank you for bringing that up.

Ryan Pitt 43:19

Well, we, you know, fast forward, I know, we're talking 19th century and early 20th century, but looking into more recent resolutions, WCR 1249, which was adopted April 19, 1996, is what, where we are presently, and in the resolved it reads, "Resolved that a person making a decision of conscience either to participate or not to participate in military service has the respect, the support and the ministry of the church." So, that history that we have had, as Community of Christ, dating to the 1860s, we continue to affirm this position of non-violence. We are in the pursuit of peace, but that's different than taking a pacifist position, and this, the language that we see now in this Resolution 1249, it's articulated that any participant, regardless of their decision, will have the respect, the support, and the ministry of the church. Furthermore, the church is able to endorse full-time military chaplains in several nations, including the United States. And as I mentioned earlier, there are certain expectations and requirements that the military chaplain must meet to receive the church's endorsement.

Brittany Mangelson 45:24

Yeah, again, that process of discernment is up for the individual. And we don't put parameters or clear instructions on peacemaking, but it's up to the individual, and I really like that it said that they will still receive ministry from the church, right? So, they're not, when we are at our best, folks who are involved in the military are not alienated for their choice to support that, and we include them in full fellowship, even while proclaiming peace.

Ryan Pitt 46:04

And it creates this very interesting space for dialogue. I've got some really good friends who are full-time ministers in the United Methodist Church, and we were talking about their position on non-violence and their pursuit of peace, and they were speaking on their personal behalf, not necessarily the organization, but there's this deep sense of appreciation for the diversity in opinion and thought and appreciation for those who stand firm in a pacifist position to influence decisions, to be particular models for folks. The other end of the spectrum, those who don't necessarily consider themselves pacifists, are also welcomed, are also seen and also valued for their overall presence and support and love for the ministry of the church. And so, it's a really fascinating place to have a foot in both fields with the U.S. Navy and Community of Christ who is dedicated to that pursuit of peace. Peace is the, it, for me, is the ultimate banner that I identify with. And to find yourself in those places where a Marine, a sailor, Coast Guard personnel, not, who's experiencing the most significant and evil traumas that one can encounter, and share that message that Community of Christ brings. And so, this is something that's really hard to articulate, but this is so important. During one of my trainings, I remember visiting a destroyer that had returned from the coast of Spain, and the commanding officer of the ship was giving

us the grand tour and taking deep pride in what the ship can do, and it's, the weapons that the new, the advancement technology. And so, we're walking around in all, and out of nowhere I just saw this sailor who looked like he could have been going to Spec in another world, walk out and just sit on the deck. And so, I watched this sailor just sit and put his head into his knees and sob. And so, I broke away from the group and went over and introduced myself and asked, you know, how he was doing. The young man had recently lost a friend who completed suicide, and he hadn't had a chance to talk to anyone about it. And so, being on the front lines of that ministry, I was able to connect him to the local chaplain there at the new port and receive the service that he, that, the counseling that he needed. But it makes me wonder how many people go unseen? Who needs to experience the ministries of the church in those new and unexpected ways? Who are the souls that are yearning for a spiritual resting place? And not that I can be all things to everyone. I'm not Paul. I can't claim to have that ability, but for the one moment, for that one person who was unseen, they were seen, they were loved, they were held, and we were able to get them the help that the sailor needed. You know, that's not everyone's story. That doesn't happen to every chaplain candidate who's at DCOIC in Newport Naval Station, but that was my story, and I'll never forget that. And I am hopeful that continued work with both Community of Christ and then the Chaplain Corps will help me keep my eyes peeled and my heart open for those holy moments aboard a ship.

Brittany Mangelson 51:42

Thank you for sharing that, Ryan. As you were telling that story, I was again reminded of the ministry of presence, and also of the Mission Prayer, just being “fully awake and ready to respond”. It would have been really, really easy to just ignore that young sailor, right, to just focus on what you were doing, the group you were with, not to even notice his emotional state, right? Sometimes we notice people and you know, they're a human over there, but we don't take the time to really see the person, and yet, you were able to. And I understand the feeling of not, you know, that you can't be all things to all people. There's a lot of ministry that needs to happen but, like you said, in that moment, you were able to show up for that one person. And also, when I think of how trauma can be passed on from person to person and situation and situation, it's those moments where trauma stops, or trauma is addressed, and healing begins that has ripple effects that we don't even, we can't even see, right? And so, the fact that you were able to connect him with resources that could help him heal from trauma, and hopefully not continue to pass that on in ways that everyone does when trauma goes unaddressed, is really important. So, you know, it's not that you just showed up for somebody who happened to have a bad day. You know, again, this is people are showing up for other people in really, really traumatic moments where they're holding just unimaginable pain and things that they've witnessed and experienced firsthand. And these are the moments that it sounds like chaplains show up and so, yeah, thank you. Thank you for sharing that story.

Ryan Pitt 53:36

Yeah, it's similar to the man at the Vietnam Memorial Wall. I'll always hold that sailor in my heart, and the role of Navy chaplain, according to the SECNAV Instruction 1730-7 ECHO, is to “provide ministry, to facilitate opportunities, to advise command,” and this one's my favorite, “care for all.” To provide, facilitate, advise, and care. So, when I think about, and you do all of that representing your religious organization. So, I think it's important to note that, as a Navy chaplain, you are not a pluralistic chaplain. You are not all things to all people. You are a chaplain representing your specific religious organization,

in a pluralistic setting. It's a First Amendment job so that you're empowering and allowing the freedom of religion. It's not to proselytize. If somebody wants to talk about baptism and becoming a member of the global body of Christianity and becoming a member of Community of Christ, you know, great, that's the conversation that can be had, but that's not the role. The role is to represent your religious organization according to its manner and form, and to be a military chaplain, representing a religious organization that has taken a stance supporting non-violence, is powerful, especially when it comes to advising. And, in my experience, having a statement on non-violence does not restrict the ministry or role of service members, in fact, it empowers new ways of being. I struggle when, internally, when people interpret the, a statement on non-violence is not supporting military. That's not the case. That's not the case. It's an empowering message that needs to be shared and heard. There are unfortunate circumstances when the sailors, Marines and Coast Guard personnel who are warfighters live into that identity, and I cringe, and God weeps. But if we're able to find a way to reflect the message and hope of Jesus, the peaceful One, in the holds of battleships, destroyers, platoons, then maybe we can help take the world one step closer towards God's eternal shalom. Maybe we can take one step closer in our pursuit of peace. Maybe we can take one step closer to the peaceable kingdom of Zion. We can't just have these conversations in safe spaces, in church walls, in auditorium chambers. We have to do the hard work of being peace builders, and that takes many roles, that takes many paths, but it takes all of them. And in Community of Christ, what I love about Community of Christ, is that they're, I'm getting choked up again, there is this empowerment of a loving source that guides that work.

Brittany Mangelson 58:19

Ryan, as you have been talking it, it's challenging. And if we can't have a conversation in unpeaceful times about peace, then how hollow is our peacemaking, right? You know, you want to talk about privilege, you want to talk about race, you want to talk about gender, and class. All of these topics intersect on the topic of non-violence, and it's just so much more complicated than it sounds on paper. And so, I'm really glad that you bring up the point that we have to be able to talk about this in the middle of the battlefield because if we don't, I think our peacemaking is pretty cheap, and it's pretty hollow. And whatever decisions we make about whatever resolutions or whatever conversations happen about non-violence within our sanctuaries, whether it be a congregational sanctuary or the auditorium chamber, I just hope that we truly do keep an international perspective in mind and that, you know, me, myself and my safe Utah environment, doesn't cloud the reality of other people. And obviously, I'm using myself, just as an example, but it does, it gets complicated really quickly. So, I'm grateful that you brought that up.

Ryan Pitt 59:51

Well, thank you. And you, the Chaplain Corps is relatively small. It's, the ratio of chaplains to service members and family that they serve is about one chaplain to about 3000 people. Imagine one person at World Conference trying to serve all of those individuals. But you work as a Chaplain Corps, and there are many religious organizations that are represented in that Corps. It's not just Christianity. It's not just Roman Catholic. It's not just Baptist. I met a Buddhist chaplain candidate at Newport in 2019. I did not expect that. It was amazing listening to him share about his message of peace. It was amazing listening to female chaplain candidates, representing the black church, talk about their fierce passion for justice. So, the Chaplain Corps is not as diverse as one would like, including myself, but it's working in that direction. And I've learned so much from my colleagues. I happen to be at a training when the

insurrection had taken place in Washington, D.C., and we just needed to pause for a little bit as a class, and take a moment of silence. And the next day, a rabbinical student who studies in New York City, who's become a really good friend of mine, offered this wonderful prayer to bring us all together. She brought in this incredible spirit of unity, but also through her lenses of discernment, if you will. It was just beautifully crafted. And I become, I'm learning to be a better chaplain. I'm learning to be a better Mission Center President, learning to be a better disciple, through all of these encounters. So, it's, you're reflecting, you're representing your religious organization to those that you serve, but you're also representing your religious organizations that you serve with. So, it's just a really fascinating and intriguing field that I'm still learning about and looking forward to actually getting out into the fleet and spending more time in my personal development, growth and ministry.

Brittany Mangelson 1:03:18

Awesome. Ryan, you've shared a lot of what chaplains do. Is there anything else that you wanted to get in as far as the duties or responsibilities and truly the ministry of being a chaplain?

Ryan Pitt 1:03:33

You know, it's a team approach. Chaplains, interestingly, are not the end all, that the final decision maker, when it comes to religious programming, it's actually the commanding officer and the chaplain work together as a team. I mentioned earlier that chaplains are officers. There are enlisted personnel who serve on religious ministry teams, the Religious Program Specialist. So, they, lots of roles. They assist in the worship, but because chaplains are non-combatants, and I probably should have mentioned that earlier. The Geneva Conventions established that chaplains are non-combatants. And so, these Religious Program Specialists, these enlisted personnel, sometimes sailors, sometimes Marines, are assigned to the chaplain and as the chaplain, your life is in their hands. So, there's this weird sense of vulnerability and trust and teamwork that you have to learn and train on. So, it's not a one person show. It is a team approach. When you have a religious ministry team of two, maybe three individuals for a ship with up to 600 people, you really require on their ability to be that ministry of presence as you've shared. If you were to look up a pamphlet online about Navy chaplaincy, you would see "ministry of presence" listed right there on the front fold. And, you know, instantly, I'm thinking about Aaronic ministry and how important that is in Community of Christ. And so, there's a lot of common attributes that both institutions, the Navy and Community of Christ, share, we just use different language to communicate the same thing. And there's this really interesting part of military chaplaincy that's probably one of the strongest, I don't know the right card, one of the strongest tools we have is confidentiality. And when a service member shares something with a chaplain, it's held in confidence, and that confidence is not broken unless there's something major going on. But that confidentiality is such an important ministry tool and creates this space of trust. So, I hope that I can live up to that expectation and support the long history chaplains have working with those service members in a loving, compassionate, but also confidential environment. I remember I told somebody when I first was commissioned, they asked if I was a war monger, which was such an interesting question that I didn't anticipate. But my response to that person was "No. There are broken and breaking hearts around the world, and the message we have here in Community of Christ is needed in those spaces." Just like hospital chaplains, just like prison chaplains, military chaplains have the opportunity to share that message. And so, I learned a lot about leadership and ministry. The, my time as a chaplain candidate supported my work on the World Church Ecumenical and Interfaith Ministries Team. It, for me, I am

finding this path that lives in this vocation that allows me to serve. And I think that's a good place to, kind of, bring this to a close is, the US Navy Chaplain Corps motto is "Called to Serve". And I've sensed that call within me for a long time. I'm looking forward to learning more about our theology of peace. The upcoming conversations on non-violence here in the US are going to be particularly meaningful. I encourage everyone to participate. And if you miss it, maybe there'll be a recording later on, or talk to those who were able to participate, because those conversations need to be had and the various perspectives need to be shared. So, I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful that our unfolding peace theology will continue to guide Community of Christ forward.

Brittany Mangelson 1:09:16

Ryan, you have given me so much to think about and, you know, when I think about our Enduring Principles and our Mission Initiatives and several texts of the *Doctrine and Covenants* came to mind as I was hearing you talk, but what an important place to bring ministry, right? What a place of horror and trauma and what better ways to show up in the places that are being devastated by war and trauma, and to be able to provide ministry for folks who something brought them to the place of signing up for the Military. And as our latest World Conference Resolution affirms, they are part of us. They are a person of worth. And no matter what brought them to signing up, they are valuable and should have ministry brought to them. And again, I was a little nervous to have this conversation, mostly because it feels very important and also very delicate, and I just thank you for all the connections that you've brought to our identity as a church that proclaims peace and your own sense of call. It's been a really, really informative and just good conversation. So, is there anything that I didn't ask or you didn't get in that you would like to leave us with? Any final thoughts?

Ryan Pitt 1:10:59

The courage that it takes to even have this conversation is so impressive and conversations like this take place on *Project Zion Podcast*. They take place in sermons, in prayer vigils, in services for peace, in classrooms. There's so much, there's a loaded history of militarism that is so evil and full of heartbreak. I am not ignorant to that. I know that the U.S. military specifically has a very traumatic reputation. Peace still needs to be the message shared, regardless. Communion still needs to be offered to those who seek the sacrament. Prayer is still needed by those who are in need of prayer, being seen when your head is on your knees, or your fingertips on a wall. If we don't do that, if we choose to remain hesitant, we've missed the point. I'm right there with you and others who are calling for peace, who cringe, and heart, and cry, and who don't have the right words to say when we see the ongoing wars and conflicts around the globe. But if we can remind one person of their humanity, we can remind them that they are a child of God, and that they not only have a place at the table but a meal to be shared, then maybe, maybe we've put another brick in this building of Zion, maybe a little bit more has been illuminated on our journey towards Jesus, the peaceful One, maybe one heart can find a place to mend. And so, I thank folks out there who are willing to engage in that conversation and challenge themselves to think through the issue, to educate yourself, to ask the hard questions of others and of self, because that's how we do it in Community of Christ. That's how we've done it. That's how we do it now and how we will always do it. And I'm deeply appreciative of that courage.

Brittany Mangelson 1:14:17

Thank you, Ryan. Again, this was such an informative conversation and one that I'm going to carry with me for a while. There were a lot of really important things that you said and important thought provokers that you shared. And again, thank you for sharing your personal story and the way that it connects with your ministry within Community of Christ. And again, I just cannot think of a more needed ministry to support troops all over the world and, you know, military personnel all over the world and people who are in really, really compromising, scary, traumatic situations. And so, the fact there are women and men out there who are willing to be a beacon of peace and hope in the midst of all of that is, I mean, that's where the real courage comes in. So, thank you so much, Ryan.

Ryan Pitt 1:15:11

It's my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

Josh Mangelson 1:15:22

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