

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.

Carla Long 00:33

Hello, and welcome to the *Project Zion Podcast*. I'm your host Carla Long, and today I have a wonderfully dear friend who attends the Salt Lake Congregation with me. Her name is Monica English and she is going to talk to us a lot about peacemaking and peacebuilding. But, first, before we jump into that, Monica, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Monica English 00:53

Sure. I was born and grew up in Utah, except for a five-year stint when I was a child in LA, when my parents went to school out there. I've been married for a whole lot of years. I have a whole lot of kids. I have kids that are born to me, but I also have kids that are adopted from Zambia, and then kids that came to us in foster care and became our permanent children as well, so that keeps me really busy. I found Community of Christ about eight years ago and it made my heart sing. Just so many things and one of them was the effort towards peace and being a peace church and a church that recognizes that war and violence are problems in and of themselves, not solutions of our conflict.

Carla Long 01:58

Yes.

Monica English 01:59

So, I have just a few credits to finish my degree. I took a break when my father passed away and it's probably about time to get back in and finish that up so I can say I'm degreed as well.

Carla Long 02:15

Monica, you said Community of Christ made your heart sing. Well, I think you make a lot of hearts sing just by being a part of the congregation. You do such wonderful work in the congregation. And you're so good at urging us toward a peace and justice places. So, why don't you talk to us a little bit about what got you started in this peacemaking, peacebuilding business?

Monica English 02:37

Sure. So, my path has taken a lot of twists and turns and so, the reason I got into it is not the same reason I'm involved now because initially, when I looked at going back to school in my 40s, it was because I was interested in a, in being able to do the master's program at Graceland University for Community of Christ. I don't know that that's where my path will take me now but I needed an undergraduate degree, and the school that I went to, Utah Valley University, had this amazing program called Integrated Studies, where rather than focusing deeply on, say, biology, or on philosophy, you could marry different interests into a degree that fit well. So, I had a friend who her two emphases were peace and justice studies and geology, which made for a pretty amazing intersection of being able to

understand things like climate change, and how people work with the land. So, for me, my emphases were peace and justice studies, along with religious studies, and gender studies. So, three aspects that really fit together well and were very, very interesting to me. It wasn't very long into this degree that it was brought up that there would be conflict studies, focused study abroad in Northern Ireland, which I really was intrigued by. And so, once I decided that I was going to work towards going on the study abroad, I switched my focus in the papers that I wrote, in the things that I studied, and tried very hard to bring them all back to Northern Ireland, figuring the more I understood before I went on study abroad, the more, the richer the experience would be when I was actually there. So, I wrote for a class on History of Islam, I wrote a paper on the connections between the Irish Republican Army and Qaddafi in Libya. So, I really went out of my way to get as broad an understanding before I went. And as I was reading and researching with my focus also being on gender studies, I came across this really interesting group, political group, called the Women's Coalition of Northern Ireland. And I wanted to know, because I knew they, that the Women's Coalition had two seats at the table for the peace talks in 1996, and I wanted to know how that happened because Northern Ireland is an incredibly patriarchal society, as are most societies with constant ongoing conflict. It really changes the gender dynamic. And so, I asked my professor, "Are we going to meet any of these women from the Women Coalition?" And he said, "Oh, I can, maybe I can make that happen." So, the study abroad itself was incredible, amazing, and I had done enough research to be able to pick out, kind of, the us against them clues and signals that would be known to people within the culture, but not necessarily recognized for people outside. And I was able to meet and speak with a woman named Mary who'd been the secretary for the Women's Coalition. Well, the Women's Coalition was fascinating to me and there was little written about it. And so, I came back and I applied to UVU for a grant to fund going back for two weeks to research and interview women from the Women's Coalition, so that was my second trip to Northern Ireland. And I, while I didn't have the lion's share of interviews I'd hoped to have, what I did find was a few really critical interviews, and a whole lot of archival research that had been tucked away and I stumbled across. So, when it came to peacebuilding, I think the Women's Coalition is the group that really made me start thinking of things because they, of how it works on the ground, because so often outside peace experts want to come into an area of conflict that they don't understand, where they don't have the deep-rooted connection to culture and conflict. And so, I wanted to understand the signals that were being sent out, how the women were using these in a way that was beneficial for the furthering of gender equity and their story is fascinating. I just, these women are, they're bad-a. But it started with women. So, in Northern Ireland, men were the fighters and women were the ones who took care of the home, and that's the way it is in conflict areas everywhere. And so, you had a lot of single women as husbands were jailed, or killed, or off to fight, and women's organizations to help each other popped up. When peace talks became a possibility, and there were going to be elections for the people in the Peace Forum, the precursor to the actual peace talks, these women got together and knowing that their political representation was incredibly poor, they wanted to have women's voices at the table discussing peace. And so, they formed a loose organization and sent letters to all the political parties and said, "Would you please put women up on your ticket for elections?" you know, "This is important." They didn't get a response from any but one, from the Sinn Fein Party. And so, clearly that was not going to achieve their goals. The elections were done in a slightly different way, which benefited a small emerging party, because in peace talks before, they'd only included the big actors, and they, and the big actors weren't necessarily the most violent actors. So, if you elected people on a straight election, you don't get to talk to the people who are deepest in the trenches of the conflict. So, there were, they

called them "top down". So, they had people elected from different districts, but they also had 20 spots for what they called "top up". So, you get these people from here, and then the nine other parties who got the most votes were given a seat at the table, even if they didn't win a single constituency. And the women got together, figured out what it would take if they got 100 people in each voting area, then they thought they had a good chance. They got 1% of the vote, and with 1% of the vote, they got two seats in the forum. This party, though, was different, and they played on the cultural understanding of the time. So, they said, we're not going to be a sectarian group. We're not going to do, we're not going to be Catholic or Protestant. We're not going to be British or Irish. We are taking no position on the constitutionality. One of the big issues was whether Northern Ireland should be ruled by the crown for the UK or by the Republic of Ireland, be connected with the Republic of Ireland. So, that's what all the other groups were coming to the table to argue about. And the women in the Women's Coalition said, nope, we're not doing it that way. And so, they strategically structured their organization with diverse women. So, you had a Irish Republic factory worker. And so, and they looked at that all the way down. When they ended up going to the forums, there were, I believe there were a few other women at the forum itself, but when they moved into actual peace talks, these two women were it, but they got terrible treatment. They were, there was one particular representative who would moo every time they spoke, through the whole speech. "Moo, moo." And they were left out of things. They were told to go home, that they weren't, they didn't belong there, and suffered some pretty, pretty brutal misogyny. And they talked about, what do we do? Do we, how do we, they decided, they just put a board outside their office doors, and they would just list the things that had happened with the name of the person who did it outside their door. And soon, and when the press found out that board was there, all of that bad acting stopped. Because they weren't, so, the forum was just to gather information from a large group of people, but then when the peace talks actually happened, there were two representatives from each party that were part of the forum, so it was these two women. And because they were really the only party that had investments in both sides, while they didn't have a whole lot of influence on the floor, they found they had broad influence behind the scenes, because they could go talk to the representatives of the Protestant Unionist/Loyalist Parties, and they could go talk to the representatives from the Christian Irish Party, and they could, while these people were not in a space where they could talk to each other, they would talk to one of the Women's Coalition as a middle actor. And with that, they could go back and forth and moderate, hey, they say this, you know. Can you move on this? And so, it wasn't flashy, what they did, and it probably wasn't known, what they did. But with it, it is very clear that it was the work of the Women's Coalition behind the scenes that allowed for any agreement at all to come to power, or to come to fruition is a better word. But what was really interesting to me is that once the peace talks were over, and the women's coalition had done that job, they continued as a political party, but all of the other parties realized, huh, maybe we should include women. And so, the Women's Coalition basically succeeded themselves out of a party, because the representation of women in the other political parties rose to the level that the Women's Coalition, kind of, became defunct. They would have liked to have continued on for more, but it had followed its course. It was interesting, couple years back, I looked at the statistics in the elected body for Northern Ireland, and the representation was just over a third were women, which was huge. That's bigger than the U.S. It's bigger, Utah, my state has 11% Women in elected positions, and the United Nations says that to have a meaningful influence, there needs to be at least, I think it's 20%, it might be 30. Actually, it is 30, but we're not close here. But what it took was people on the ground thinking creatively, which is so often the way peace moves forward. In conflict areas, when people from one culture come in and try to tell

the country, the people, how to create peace, it often fails. And the, but if what is done is people coming in as consultants and working within the culture, it really can change things. And it can be something as simple, there was a conflict situation in South America that I read about in a peace book by John Lederach, who's an amazing peace author, who encourages people in peace work to put themselves in a back seat, to act as consultants, but to let the people within the culture figure out how to navigate that culture in a way that is meaningful to those in conflict. So, for example, in one area of South America, the women had quite a lot of influence over the fighting men through the songs that they sing. When things would start to work up and, if the warrior songs were sung, the men would work themselves up and then they would, off they would go to fight. If the women started singing the songs that were for a peaceful end to a conflict, then things calmed down. But there was no way that somebody outside of that culture could have gone in and said, do this, or taken something from our culture and say, do this. So, peace work takes humility, takes the ability to walk into a place and say, "I really don't know what I'm doing. Teach me." It takes the humility to not be in charge, to step in as you're needed, but step back and allow for people within the conflict to make those changes. And Jesus was, he was really good at this. When you look back, and you understand the way parables and words that Jesus was saying would have spoken to the culture that he was in. Recently, I gave a sermon and did some deep reading on the Sermon on the Plain, which has a lot of the same things as the Sermon on the Mount, but was in a flat space, which I love the image of, rather than Jesus up above everyone, the Sermon on the Plain, he came down, was surrounded by crowds, had to be nervous about the crowd being crazy. And then he started talking about things like, turn the other cheek, or if someone takes your cloak, give him your coat as well. And these, to us, sound an awful lot like just a really nice thing to do. I'm going to stand and I'm going to take it without responding. But one of the sources that I read pointed out, that in that time, a slap was given with the back of your hand. And it would be done with the right hand, your righteous hand, not your left hand that was sometimes used for yucky things, but also all throughout the Bible, you talk about wanting to be on the right hand of God. That's the righteous side. The left hand of God is the evil side. And so, when Jesus says, you know, someone hits you, turn the other cheek, well, turning the other cheek for a hit does two things for the person receiving the violence. It requires them to look at each other in the eyes as the face turns, but it's also, because the slap had to come with the back of the hand, to hit with the other hand meant that the person doing the hitting had to step into a space where he was not choosing the righteous side, where it was shameful to him. So, it turned it back around. The whole idea of, if someone gives you their cloak, give him your tunic or your coat instead, if someone was judged to need to give their coat, they still have their tunic, and typically, they only had one coat and one tunic. So, the idea is that if they also gave their tunic, they were exposing their nakedness which shamed the viewer, the seer, not the naked person, well, probably the naked person, but there was shame brought on both. And so, these were two ways that Jesus showed to, how do you take back your own power? How do you take a slap or the loss of a coat and turn it into something where you can still stand in your power, and it's the other person who has to recognize the shameful of the act of violence. And you find these sorts of things when you really look at the Bible and the New Testament and how it would have read to, or had been heard by the people who first heard these stories. It's very, very different to today. And Jesus was a master at flipping things on their head, using cultural understanding. So, I, the hope is, I have the interviews for the Women's Coalition. I have, oh, my goodness, boxes and boxes of archival research. Now I just have to write that paper. But some of my peace work has been closer to home. A professor that I spoke with in Northern Ireland, I was fascinated by parading and the messages that parading was sending, and he said, and I was

saying I wanted to study it, and he said, "Go back to your own culture and look around. There are opportunities there." And so, yeah, viewing parades through a lens of power and control is, and gender expression has been really interesting, and that's, I hope to write on the Pioneer Day Parade and the way that it expresses gender and the way that it signals power. Who has the opportunity to shut down streets and mobilize police too?" It's a really interesting thing and it's not just all over there. It's wherever you are. The other bit of research that might not typically fall under peace work, but I sure think it does, is a paper that I wrote with my sociology professor Debjani Chakrabarti. She's from, she's a native from India, and when she was in India, she wanted to do a paper on people who are Muslim and gay. And as she started that process, she got death threats, and they were serious enough that she backed off and didn't do it. So, when she was hired at UVU and came here and started to understand the culture in Utah, the very mainline LDS culture, she thought, huh, I could do this here, and she started doing the work to interview and study those who are LGBTQIA and actively mainline Mormon, she realized she didn't have the cultural knowledge to be able to do this paper and she asked if I would come on board and provide that context. We ended up interviewing 14, I believe, people who identified themselves as a sexual or gender minority and actively Mormon, Latter-Day Saint Mormon. And hearing the stories of people who are navigating spaces I would think, and a lot of people would think, were untenable, and how and why people make the choice, that was not a choice I could make for myself, comes to understanding. It speaks of understanding and it is peace work. It is work to bring hearts and minds together when we can understand, because I know plenty of people who are gay and have left the LDS church due to the pain that they experienced trying to be in those spaces, but there are people who are deeply invested in both of those identity markers within one person and understanding their points of view, their, how they navigate their world, is a peacemaking effort as well. So, there's peacemaking to be done, whether or not you're going to go to war torn areas. There is peacemaking to be done in our own backyards, in the way that we teach our children, in the local political events. In showing up at Pride, is an act of peacemaking, especially for those of us, my first pride I was Mormon, and I went to Pride and was blown away at the love, at the love from mothers, where, I had a sign. I went, I was Mormon and I had a sign that said "Mormons Building Bridges" and it was a bunch of Mormons who are standing up and saying, "We love you no matter what." And I remember standing on the side of the road after we finished our walk, and I still had my sign, and there was a group of mothers of transgender kids. And this mom, she was probably in her 60s, came running over to me with tears running down her face and said, "Can I hug you?" And I said, "Yeah," and she hugged me and she said, "I wish you'd been there when my son was little. He could have used you." So, there are ways and efforts to stand within your own culture and understanding, and from that place of culture and understanding, to reach out to people who are different.

Carla Long 29:54

I love that. That's where this has gone. Because, I mean, I think don't always know where podcasts are gonna go, but I love that this is where it's gone, because, you know, like, not all of us can go to Northern Ireland. Not all of us can go to Ukraine, which is, I don't know when you're listening to this podcast, but right now there's, Russia is still attacking Ukraine. And I probably wouldn't be of any help there anyway because I don't understand that culture, and I don't understand Northern Ireland, but I do understand my culture where I'm at. And I think that we are creative enough people that we can figure out ways to do that. So, I really appreciate that that's where you went, and we have an excellent model

in Jesus. Jesus very much used his own culture and those little quirks of his own nature to really turn things around on their head, which is, just, it is a really incredible lesson for us.

Monica English 30:48

Yeah, best peacemaking has to come with the, with inspiring curiosity and wonder, I think.

Carla Long 30:58

That is, that's it right there, inspiring curiosity and wonder. And, yeah, take a look at what's around you, but look with fresh eyes. Don't look with the eyes you've been looking with forever, but look with fresh eyes. Try and notice something different. Notice something new. Notice a way that you could do, make life better for people.

Monica English 31:16

And the best way to look with fresh eyes is to sit down with somebody who sees things differently than you and listen with an open heart so that we can open our eyes.

Carla Long 31:29

And listen, listen, listen, listen. You're absolutely right.

Monica English 31:31

Yes.

Carla Long 31:31

That word "listen", oh, it's so hard to do.

Monica English 31:35

Yup.

Carla Long 31:36

Listen with an open heart. That's wonderful. So, Monica, is there anything else you've learned about peacemaking and peacebuilding that might help us out?

Monica English 31:44

Yeah, one of the most interesting things I came across that was a fun, interesting thing, because I was able to share it with multiple professors, is the idea of *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. A academic book written by a professor named Anthony Cohen, looked at the symbols and what they mean, and how they function within a community. So, we can just look at an American flag. Actually, that's probably not a good example right now in our political, but, okay, we're gonna look at a British flag. A British flag symbolizes something to those who live in Great Britain. It symbolizes enough similarity among the people that they can rally around it. But if you were to ask the individuals, what does that mean to you? They would each give a different nuanced answer. So, yeah, we can go back to the American flag, which, in my mind, has a really different meaning now than it did five years ago, or 10 years ago. But that's part of the co-opting of a symbol that meant one thing, being taken and used and turned into something else, but it's done in a way that is almost unseen. So, when did the flag start

to represent somebody who votes Republican and not somebody who votes Democrat? You know, it was a gradual co-opting of a symbol. But communities need symbols to rally behind and the symbols that are rallied behind can often have an underground meaning, and I'll give you an example from Northern Ireland. There are, because I think it's one that's really easy to see, in Northern Ireland it's said that, "The Irish don't live in the past. The past lives on in Ireland." They're very connected to their history and especially moments in history that they find prove their point. So, every July 12 there are huge parades by the Protestant Unionist/Loyalist side of things, huge parades, drums that sound like that sound like guns. The dress is all military dress and the routes that they have marched for literally hundreds of years, are routes that take them right through the Catholic Irish Republican neighborhoods. And so, this parade is, actually, it's not just one parade, they go on and on and on all through July. This parade to the Protestant British is this family gathering, come together. It's amazing. Don't take our traditional way. It's not that we're going through Catholic neighborhoods, it's that this is the way we have gone for so long, and it wouldn't be the same. On the other side, you have the Republicans saying it sounds like guns. It's a show of force. It's, even if they're not carrying weapons, it's putting us in our place and reminding us that we are the lessor here. And so, this parade has very different meanings when it's between these two areas. And to go even further, when I went to the first of these parades, they were playing these American songs, "Home, Home on the Range", and "Sloop John B." by the Beach Boys, ...da da, "the sloop John B, my grandfather and me..." And I asked one of the men who was there, I said, "Why are they playing these songs?" And he said, "Oh, they just play some, anything that's, anything that's fun, that has a good tune, we'll play it." And I thought, okay, and so, I enjoyed the heck out of that parade experience. I got really involved. I skipped out on another thing 'cause it was like, wow. The next day I went to a presentation by a professor whose expertise was on parading in Northern Ireland, it just happened that way, and he was talking about the parades and the meaning that might not be picked up by the person who is just stepping in as a tourist. And he pointed out that, yes, they have these, and they'll play "Sloop John B." They'll play "Home on the Range", but "Home on the Range", when they sing it behind closed doors, they sing "No, no Pope of Rome," and it's a song all about how awful the Catholic church is. And another song talks about, "Sloop John B. is all about sending the Fenians, the Irish, back home. Send them home. Why don't you go home. We fed you. Go home. And so, symbols that are clearly understood one way, can have a secret quiet meaning behind doors that are rallied behind and have to be. To create a true community, there are symbols that people rally around. I know at church, the symbols of my community at church would be the communion table. It would be the Pride flag that we choose to display. It would be the cross. It would be candles because they're so connected for me with Lent and Easter and Advent. It would be communion itself; the bread, the wine, the acting in unison. They don't, well for me, I don't think that communion has magical power. It sure has a binding power; eating, drinking, coming together with our bodies, acting in unison with our bodies, is a way of creating a symbol of our bodies. And that symbol is a coming together. I choose to be in community with you because our values align in enough of a way that we want to gather together and enhance this thing that we're feeling and hopefully by bringing individuals together who feel this way and who have symbols that speak to their hearts to bring them together, we become better than we are individually.

Carla Long 40:02

I love thinking about communion like that. And I love thinking about those symbols like that. And it does really give a whole different view of it. You know, communion is, can be really simple. And, you know,

even though we only do it once a month, it can still become something that is rote, you know, something that we just do. But when you can attach and recognize those different symbols and how important they are, it can become meaningful, very meaningful, once again. So, I appreciate you saying that.

Monica English 40:32

Yeah, the symbols, not just the physical symbols, but ourselves, our actions, the eating, the drinking, the doing it at the same time, the kneeling, that all is our body becoming a symbol of our place in this community.

Carla Long 40:51

Oh, that's beautiful. I love that. I love thinking about that. That's very cool. Thank you so much, Monica. I really appreciated this. I've appreciated hearing your story, more about your story, and learning those things that you've been learning over the last couple of years. Is there anything else you wanted to say before we sign off?

Monica English 41:07

Oh, just, I'm so glad to be a part of Community of Christ. Community of Christ makes my heart sing.

Carla Long 41:14

Ah, thank you so much for saying that. And again, you make our hearts sing as well. So, thanks again. Thanks for being here and sharing your knowledge with us. You're great.

Monica English 41:23

Thanks.

Josh Mangelson 41:32

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