

477 | Fair Trade | Mags Edvalson  
Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

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

**\*\*Trigger Warning\*\*** This podcast discusses suicide and suicidal ideation, and some people might find it disturbing. If you or someone you know is suicidal, please, contact your physician, go to your local ER, or call the suicide prevention hotline in your country. For the United States, the numbers are as follows: The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255), or message the Crisis Text Line at 741741.

**Carla Long** 00:34

Hello, and welcome to the *Project Zion Podcast*. I'm your host, Carl Long and today you're listening to "Fair Trade", a place where we get to hear stories about people as they move through a faith transition. And today, I'm very, very excited to introduce a dear friend of mine, Mags Edvalson. Did I say your last name, right?

**Mags Edvalson** 00:53

Yes.

**Carla Long** 00:54

Oh, good for me. I don't know if I've ever said your last name aloud. So, that was first time for me.

**Mags Edvalson** 00:59

Because it's new.

**Carla Long** 01:02

It is. It is still new. So, Mags, thank you for being here. And before you get started with your story, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

**Mags Edvalson** 01:10

Yeah, I am Mags Edvalson. I am a recent Edvalson. My name before was Mags Olsen, and I've been on before and I've talked a little about folklore, and I am a folklorist. I work in the Oral History on the Oral History Project for the church, where we collect oral histories for people who have worked for the church and who are of interest to the church history. And we're archiving those oral histories for future prosperity. And I live in West Haven, Utah, for the time being. We're pretty adventurous so, we may be moving soon, but that's where I'm currently roosted.

**Carla Long** 01:50

Thanks, Mags. And before you jump in, I want to tell our listeners that I moved to Utah in September 2016, and I think I arrived on a Thursday, and then on that Friday, there was a women's retreat up at our church campgrounds in Red Cliffe, here in Utah, and that's when I first met Mags. And I will tell you, I was deeply intimidated by her because she is just so smart, and she understands things very quickly. And so, I also recognized that she's super fun, and I wanted to be her friend immediately. So, I'm so glad that I've known you for six years now.

**Mags Edvalson** 02:30

That's a long time.

**Carla Long** 02:31

It's a long time that we're just...

**Mags Edvalson** 03:32

That's a kindergartener, first grader.

**Carla Long** 03:35

Yes, our relationship is a first grader. So, I don't actually know, I know a lot of your story, Mags, but I don't know all of your story. So, why don't you just jump in and start telling us maybe about, you know, about your life and then when things started to change for you.

**Mags Edvalson** 02:54

Okay. I think that my faith transition probably started when I was a kid. And not like I'm intended it to be this way, but I've always been a very curious kid. I love to read. I've always been fascinated with history and religion because I didn't have a whole lot of a foundation in my life. My dad was in the military and so we moved a lot and my family that I knew, all of my aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmas and grandpas, lived in Utah, and so, that was where I was meant to be, and I never lived in Utah so, I loved it. I dreamed about Utah. I romanticized it. And so, with that, I really got into Mormon history, and religion, and things like that. So, I remember one year, we were visiting my grandparents, who actually live up the street from, or lived, they're no longer alive, they lived up the street from the RLDS building, now Community of Christ Salt Lake Congregation building, and I remember, driving by it one day and I said, "Wait a second, Dad. What's that? That's not our church." And he said, "No, those are the apostates." So, I'm, like, what? Like, "Yeah, they didn't want to follow Brigham Young so they're the apostates." And I'm, like, oh, okay. So, I just, kind of, went with that. But it always, kind of, sat in the back of my mind like, there is, there are other paths to go on, like, other people believe in *The Book of Mormon*, like, are part of this, and I want to know what, why are they different? Why are they different? So, that was something that was always in the back of my mind as a kid growing up. And sometimes, I remember in high school, when Wikipedia started getting really big, I'd, like, go through and I'd look up all of these different churches and groups and offshoots of that early period of the church and I remember reading about, I think there was, like, a fringe, Steve Shields would know this, it's probably in his book, but there was like a fringe group in Lamoni, based in Lamoni, Iowa. And that was the first time I ever heard of Lamoni, and then I found out Graceland's there. I'm, like, oh, okay, cool. But yeah, so, I love to study all of the quirky, you know, quirkiness about Mormons, and one of those things that I think really makes this movement unique is how many denominations there are in the Restoration. And I was always fascinated by that, and what does that mean for my faith journey? What does it mean for the reality of our doctrine and what that doctrine entails and how it impacts us and things like that? So that's, that's always been there.

**Carla Long** 05:39

Yeah, it sounds like you were inquisitive from a very, very early age. And I think it's hilarious that your grandparents lived just up the road from the church that you now attend. I think that that is, that just blows my mind.

**Mags Edvalson** 05:52

Well, and my dad told me that he actually attended Boy Scouts there.

**Carla Long** 05:56

Oh, interesting.

**Mags Edvalson** 05:57

When he was a kid. Yeah.

**Carla Long** 05:59

So, he's been inside?

**Mags Edvalson** 06:01

Yes.

**Carla Long** 06:03

Okay, so that, I mean, it sounds like that was a pretty solid start to this faith transition that is going to be occurring later in your life. So, what happened after that? Like, where did you move on to, like, what really made you take a step over? Like, tell me more about it.

**Mags Edvalson** 06:23

So, I think it was around early college, I really, I wouldn't say my shelf broke, like a lot of people say their shelves broke, but in college, I, we moved to Utah, and I moved with my parents because I couldn't afford to stay in California where I started at a community college there. So, I moved with them and went to SLCC and I started encountering a lot of people who are members of the LDS church, and I realized that their, the way that they live their religion and their interest in their religion was very different from mine, and I didn't feel comfortable with those differences. I've always had to be the defender of my faith. I've always had to answer the questions. I've had people walk up to me in school and say, "Where are your devil horns? You're a Mormon, right?" And I'm like, what? So, you know, like, I, I've always had to stand up for what I believe in, in a very public way. I always felt that I had to. And so, seeing how different it is to live amongst so many members of the church, it is very different. And I would say that it's harder in a lot of ways to be surrounded by members of the church. And that really shook my faith a lot because the culture was so difficult to really acclimate to. So, in college, I stepped away from the church. I was asking all the questions, like, you know, what's with this misogyny stuff? What's with the polygamy? And, you know, there's all this cult thing, stuff going on with temples and blah, blah, blah. And I stepped away. And then I had a roommate who actually, who was a member of the church, the LDS church, and she, kind of, got me back into it. I, kind of, felt a lot of pressure, actually, because at the same time, I was also recognizing that my sexual orientation is not, I'm not straight. But I wasn't sure that I was gay either. I was definitely something else. And what I came to realize was that I'm asexual. And when you're asexual, and you are trying to figure out who you belong with, and where you belong, and all those things, it's really difficult to build community when everyone around you is really, really horny, because it's college. I don't know if I could talk about that. But it was really difficult because I really want relationships in my life. I really want, I like romance. I'm not a romantic, which is where you aren't romantically attracted. I'm pretty romantic with people, but I wanted more than platonic relationships, but I couldn't figure out how to have those because either you're Mormon and you can have a romantic relationship without any expectation of intimacy, or you can not be Mormon. And everybody basically is like, oh, you're not Mormon. You're in college. You're young. You want to have sex and, like, but I don't. So, it was a conundrum. And so, I had a roommate who, I didn't talk to her a lot about my sexual orientation, but she, kind of, prompted me to just, you know, go back to church because that's where I was gonna find people who are going to at least not question why I wasn't going out and, you know, sex, drugs and rock'n'roll all the time, like other people were. And so, I did. I went back to church, and it was fine for a while. I didn't, I still struggled with where I, what I believed in because I feel like I've always been very nuanced in my faith. I've always seen *The Book of Mormon* as a, not a literal text, a literal history, more as, like, a collection of stories. It's folklore that we've basically had built for us, that we believe in because they mean something to us. Those stories can mean something to us. So, *The Book of Mormon* was never literal history for me. I didn't feel that it was, that I had to follow a specific way. I was very, I was already LGBTQ friendly because, I mean, all my friends in high school were. A lot of them were in the Gay-Straight Alliance Club, and I was part of that. And you know, so I've always struggled to mesh culturally with something that I felt was very important to me, intellectually. So, one of the things that, because I was struggling so much with my sexuality and what to do next, church suddenly offered me a way out. I didn't have to be in a, where I say word, where it feels like a meat market, where you have to date all

the time, if I went on a mission. And so, I decided, at the end of my degree, I was about 24, and I just graduated, I decided, you know what? I am going to put off this whole marriage thing and I'm going to put off all of that, and I'm just going to go on a mission, and just invest, because I love ministry, and I love thinking and, thinking with people. And so, I did that. And I served a mission from the years 2012 to 2013, in Louisiana, Baton Rouge Mission. I spent most of my time in New Orleans, and I was so lucky because P-Day happened to fall on Mardi Gras, so, we went to Mardi Gras. And it was amazing because everybody was, like, oh my goodness, are you real Mormons? And we're, like, yes, we are. Here's a pass along card. Here's a little *Book of Mormon*. So, it was a great missionary tool, being at Mardi Gras at a parade. We were not on Bourbon Street, by the way. We did not see any boobs, or other things, 'cause that would have been bad. But it was a great place. It was, I loved my mission. I still love my mission. I don't regret going on my mission. My very best friends came from that mission experience because we bonded a lot. But what it did teach me was that ministry does not have to have an end result in numbers, that can be measured by numbers, you know, putting in those numbers every day, and saying I need to have so many contacts. I need to have so many lessons. I need to have so many baptisms this week. Those should not matter. And I had a great mission president who also felt that same way, that service is more important than anything else. And just loving people is more important than anything else. But when I got home, okay, so, this is the moment, I think, where things really changed for me. My parents came to pick me up from my mission, and when they walked into the mission, to mission home for breakfast, they were invited to meet the mission president and his wife and we had a couple other missionaries there, and they came in and I saw them, and I just, my heart sank, because I realized that this amazing experience was only temporary. And I had known that, but this was the moment where I would have to go back and figure out how to make the church work and I didn't see how that was going to happen because of my orientation. And so, I struggled a lot after that. I attempted suicide eight times in six months. I spent that Thanksgiving with a bag over my head in bed, waiting to just go. So, maybe trigger warning on that, but that's how bad I felt about myself and about my prospects. And, what a lot of people don't realize is that, you know, and what I didn't realize at the time, was that the church can hide, the church is easy to hide in when you're asexual because nobody's going to question if you're not married, but the church was not built, was not made for asexuals to thrive, because the church is meant to have families and your eternal calling is to be married to somebody of the opposite gender, the opposite sex, and to have children in this life so that you can have those families together. And I love my family, and I wanted to be together with them forever, and I want to, I wanted to have a family, but I didn't know if I could have a family in the way, or as quick in, as the church wanted me to have that. So, I really struggled after my mission, knowing that that was my, that was the expectation now. A year later, I was starting at Utah State with for my master's program in folklore, and I met a guy that, I met a guy at work. We were working at the church office building, actually, and, in downtown Salt Lake, and this was right before I left to go on my, start grad school. But we met and I just had this feeling, like, that guy would be it to you, if you just put in some effort, and not a lot. So, I said, "Huh, you're right, brain," you know, small little voice in my brain. So, I went ahead and I initiated a relationship with that guy. I wasn't really that interested in him. We were politically not aligned. He was interested in things I was not interested in, but I knew that he, I was manipulating him, and I fully admit that, and I feel awful about it, but at the same time, it was, it felt like an act of desperation because otherwise, what was I going to do? How was I going to make this work? So, we dated for a short time. I had moments where I freaked out, and I almost called things off, but eventually he, it was probably two months, he asked me to marry him. I said, "Yes." We started planning, and then suddenly, he just ghosted me, and it was devastating. It wasn't devastating because I lost him. It was devastating because I felt like I was losing my faith. Like, this was it. If I couldn't make it work with him, I wasn't going to be able to make it work with anybody because I don't like being in this meat market atmosphere of the why I say word. I don't like feeling as though I'm broken. I don't want to feel lesser than. So, I prayed about it and I said, "God, I'm going to take a break from religion. And I'm going to just live my life and continue to communicate with you the best I can. But I need to take, I need to walk away for my own sanity." So, I did. I was also very depressed at this time, because of this. I was sleeping, you know, 18 hours a weekend, and barely rolling out of bed to go to class or to teach the classes I was supposed to teach as a grad instructor. But, and that first, I almost dropped out of grad school, but I made it through. And it was a, my spring semester of my first year, I saw an ad for the World Parliament of

Religions, that was coming to Salt Lake, and they were looking for student volunteers. And so, I said, "Oh, that looks cool. I really like religion." I mean, that's what I was studying in folklore. So, I decided to sign up, and I did. And part of the perks of that was the opportunity to just walk around and just talk to people, like, that's what we did. We didn't really have jobs. They just put us in these green shirts and said, "You're the info person now. Go out there and walk around and be info." And that's what I did. And I was on the floor one day, and I came across this booth for Community of Christ, and I knew who they were. They were the apostate RLDS church that my dad warned me about. And I said, "Well, I'm curious." And I actually knew somebody at the booth. And I said, "What are you doing here?" And I knew, because I knew him as LDS. I said, "What are you doing here?" And he said, "Oh, I've switched over and I'm worshipping with Community of Christ now, and he introduced me to Seth Bryant, who was also LDS at one point. And so, I talked to him forever, and I was like, can I just sneak a *D & C* from you? Like, I'm just gonna, like, sneak one. He's like, no, take all the things. He said, "Take all the things. Study, come see what we're about. We have a house church in Logan." And I think it took a couple of weeks after that before I actually went, but I did. I went to the house church in Logan, and that's, kind of, where it started.

**Carla Long** 18:48

Mags, I hear a lot of faith transition stories, being the pastor of the Salt Lake congregation, but yours is very different than almost all of them that I've heard, you know, especially that you went on a mission to, kind of, escape the path that the church had foreseen for you. I think that's really interesting, and the fact that you had such a wonderful mission experience. That's not always true for people who are more nuanced in the way that they see the church. I think that's a really interesting part of your story.

**Mags Edvalson** 19:20

Well, and I'd left the church before that for a couple of years, too. So that's, I mean, the fact that I went back, like, I take this really seriously. I take my faith very seriously, and I really take spiritual autonomy very seriously. And that's one thing that I learned is just to love people and to minister them to no matter where they go. And I felt, like, you know, as I learned about Community of Christ, and going to house church, in talking to people in, you know, asking my questions, and having people respond, you know, the answers don't really matter, because it matter, what matters and where the answers are, are what you decide for yourself. I mean, a lot of people might consider that relativity, and I know that the concept of relativity is not very popular among Mormons, but for me, being somebody who already didn't feel like I could be part of that authoritative answer, that I'd already been rejected by that, in a lot of ways, emotionally and spiritually, I, it really, it felt like, you know, I can have God and I can be me, and that was so important to me.

**Carla Long** 20:35

I'm really glad that, you know, you stepped out and you started finding those things, especially when you came from such a deep, dark place, like, when you were describing where you were at after that relationship ended. I mean, I know that a lot of people who go through faith transitions, at some point have a pretty deep, dark place, and I appreciate you being vulnerable enough to share about that. That's, I'm sure it's a difficult thing to share.

**Mags Edvalson** 21:01

Yeah.

**Carla Long** 21:03

So, you got a *Doctrine and Covenants*. You were talking to Seth Bryant, and this was around the year, what 2016, 2015 or 2016?

**Mags Edvalson** 21:11

This is 2015, yeah.

**Carla Long 21:13**

Oh yeah, Parliament of World Religions was 2015, right. And so, you were, kind of, dipping your toe into Community of Christ. Oh, I do have a question before we jump into more of that. Was there ever a time when you were, like, heck no, I'm done with religion for good. I'm never talking about another religion ever? Or do you always, did you always see yourself as, like, a religious person?

**Mags Edvalson 21:38**

I've never been done with religion. I've never really seen, I've had to learn how to divorce, or at least separate in my mind, compartmentalize, spirituality from religion. And I think that I've always been pretty good at that. Where, when I, like, when I realized that most Mormons take *The Book of Mormon* literally, like, they go down to South America on these trips, and try to find out where all these places are, and they're, like, oh, that's proof of Jesus. Jesus was here. You know, this is Nephi. And, like, those people, I have a soft spot in my heart for things like that culturally, but I never really cared. I mean, it's, they're morality tales, right? Like, so, on a religious level, the things that I learned in a religion, I always assume, or I always have viewed them as part of a community, and that that community doesn't define me as an individual, but me, as an individual, I have, I want to be part of, and I am part of that community, and so, my experience can be different, but hopefully it is an experience that can help diversify and beautify that community. And I think what really comes, what it comes down to, as far as how I knew it wasn't going to work anymore, was the idea or the feeling that I wasn't intended, or I wasn't expected, and nobody wanted me to be an individual. And so, that's where I had to say, "You know what? I have to walk away from this." And it took me a long time to get to that point. It wasn't actually until after I did my internship at Kirtland that I decided to do that, because Kirtland was a huge part of my transition. I think the closest I ever came to saying, "Okay, no, I'm done with religion," was when I went to Kirtland and said, "No, I'm done with Mormonism for right now." So, in 2017, I think that summer, I did go to Kirtland as an intern, and it was amazing. It was so fun. I recommend it for anybody, Community of Christ, or Mormon, or even just, like, you know, a history nerd. You don't have to be in either of those churches to be an intern. You don't have to be in either of those churches to be a good intern, or a good guide. And I just loved it. I loved being immersed in the history. I loved being immersed in the culture of the congregation there and just seeing how things are done. And then when I got home, I started going to my YSA ward in the afternoons, and Community of Christ meetings in the mornings on Sundays, because I was still, like, well, this, these are still both of my groups. These are still both of these, my communities, and I was going to still try to make them work. And the thing that changed, the ball that dropped was when I went to church with Community of Christ, and I had friends there and they wanted to see me. They wanted to hang out. I really, really loved it. And so, I come out feeling really, really great. And then, I'd take a lunch, probably, usually with people from the congregation. We'd go out to lunch, and I'd say, "Okay, I'm gonna go off to my congregat-, my YSA ward now." And I went to YSA ward and I'd always come out feeling worse. Like, I'd feel, I come out feeling awful about myself, and that, I don't know why I was trying to make it work. I was trying to stick around. I think, it's because, you know, I wanted to hold on to this idea that God was informing both of these communities, spiritually, through the individuals, because I know so many good Mormons, and I know so many good people in Community of Christ. God is in both. I see God in both places. I also see a lack of God in some ways. I mean, we get some pretty irreverent moments with Community of Christ, sometimes. I mean, they're fun, they're really fun, but, like, sometimes I'm, like, I don't know if, like, I don't know if God would approve of this, but, you know, just joking around and stuff. But it was when I went to, I transitioned from the YSA ward into the mid-single adult ward, and I was sitting in at fast and testimony meeting one day, and I noticed that everybody was bearing testimony of, like, you had these amazing career women who are, so a mid-single adult ward is for 30 somethings to, like, mid-40s, single adults and I was just turning 31. And, like, I'm still not married. I'm not interested in this. I don't know if I will ever be interested in this, but this is where I have to be because I don't know where else to go. Like, family wards are really awkward and I don't want to be, you know, shoved in primary because I can take care of kids. So, this fast and testimony meeting had, they were all these wonderful women who were talking about their careers, and how they, how much they loved their jobs, and they felt meaning there, and I thought that was really, really awesome. And then you had a lot of men who were there and they were, they would all talk about how they

believed in true love, and they missed being married, and they just wanted to date, like, all of them. This was on a Sunday that just, that's all that they talked about. I'm like, oh my goodness, this is awful. And this, like, where am I in this? What am I supposed to do with this, because I can't fix these guys' problems, and I don't, like, I don't know how to be involved with these women, because, I mean, that's a whole other issue. I've always had issues with gender in the church as well. I mean, I identify as non-binary or agender. Why do I keep trying to do this? I don't think I've ever had a great day at a ward ever. I love thinking about this stuff. I love talking about whether Joseph Smith was a prophet or whether he was a con man or whether he was, you know, a mentally ill and, you know, I don't mat-, it doesn't matter to me what he was, but he created something that was really beautiful, I thought, and he produced things. He was part of something that has made so many beautiful things that I love. But the depression, the anxiety, the trauma that I've had, that I've seen other people go through as a result of being associated with the LDS church as it is today, I couldn't be around that anymore. So, that Sunday, I was, like, that's it. I can't be here anymore. And that's when I decided, you know, I feel really good about Community of Christ. I feel good when I go there. I have friends there. I feel like I want to give. I feel like I want to be part of it instead of just sit back and hide, and try to mask my orientation or my gender identity. I just, I want to be out there and myself, because I know the people will accept me, and I love learning to accept other people for who they are.

**Carla Long 29:09**

Wow. I mean, I remember when you were still going to your ward and coming to Community of Christ and I went to the ward with you one time, 'cause I had never been to the ward before, and I, that was my first experience of being in a Mormon meeting. And I was, I remember being shocked, and I remember walking away angry too. That was a, it was, that was really hard, and I could, I remember thinking that you did not seem yourself there. Like, you didn't seem like the Mags that I had known. And so, I never, I didn't really think about it because I was dealing with my own intense feelings at the time, but now looking back, I didn't see you in the ward as the same person I saw you outside the ward. So, I'm really glad that you recognize that too, 'cause sometimes that's not easy. I don't know if this is the place we want to go next, but I do have a question about your family. How did it go with your family when you decided to leave the LDS church and join Community of Christ?

**Mags Edvalson 30:16**

Well, as I have, as I've mentioned, I have left before, and so, I was the kid who, because, I don't know, I'm always searching for something, and, or I'm always searching for more knowledge, and I remember one time, like, sitting my parents down, very seriously, and saying, "Mom, Dad, I'm a deist." They laughed at me so hard. They just laughed. And I was, like, this is serious. I'm saying this because this means I'm done with the church and, like, yeah, whatever. You'll go to church again. Like, this is a phase. And that was a phase. I mean, I'd say it's, like, I'm a, I guess, like, technically, I count myself as a pantheist. So, like, deism, kind of, fits in there somewhere. But yeah, eventually I did go back to church, but when I transitioned over to Community of Christ, I felt like I had to step on eggshells a little bit, I'll admit. My parents have never been super antagonistic about it. They're, like, my dad has made, he made the cutest joke once. He was, like, he was passing out chocolate, my dad's always got candy, and so, he's, like, hey, do you want a little temple? And I was, like, what? And he puts a Hershey Kiss in my hand and says, "I got you a little temple." And he was, so, he was making a reference, like, he was building that into our family culture of accepting me and where I'm at. And I mean, I think for them, it feels, they've actually been to a couple things with me. I think they went to a Passover that we did at the building once. My mom has attended. She actually knows Jason Eyre from Murray High School, 'cause she used to work there with, kind of, in proximity to him, I guess. And so, she knew people there, and they've always just been really cool, chill about it, because I've always been, like, when I was a kid, I was Mormon, but I was also a goth kid. Like, I was wearing, like, black, and, you know, I'm a deist, and, like, you know, I want to be a Mormon Wiccan, and I was a little bit weird. Really, I just, like, I just really love the way people express their beliefs. And I love being, seeing that and being part of it, and learning from it. So, I think that they just, kind of, took it as it came, as long as I'm a Christian, and I believe in God, I guess, because my sister, she's been out of the church for, permanently, since she was,

like, 17, or something, and she is very antagonistic and very angry and atheist about it. So, I think that, in comparison, that my path is probably a little bit easier for them to handle.

**Carla Long 33:13**

Well, that's good to hear. Sometimes the answer to those questions about family is not, like, a really happy answer. So, that makes me happy to hear that, you know, you and your parents still get along and your family still gets along. I really love hearing that. And I really love the joke about the little temple. That's very cute. Okay, so I think we're up to around, I mean, you've mentioned a little bit more about, like, going to Kirtland in 2017. You mentioned that you met Seth Bryan in 2015, and, like, you started, like, you stopped going to the ward and so on and so forth. So, what happened after that? When did you get confirmed and tell me a little bit more about that journey?

**Mags Edvalson 33:54**

I actually was confirmed right before I went to Kirtland because I just felt like, you know, this is, I want to make these two churches my homes. You know, one is maybe more of a cultural home. One is maybe more of an intellectual home, and it's really shifted since then. Like, I, I've been, I've actually been to my ward up here in West Haven a couple times, because I'm trying to move my records over and remove them, but they're a little, couple of things I have to deal with first, so, I've been there a couple of times to work on that, and it just feels like visiting, I don't know, like a Presbyterian Church. I mean, I don't have any connection to it anymore, really. But at the time, I got confirmed because I wanted to have both of those homes. And, I wanted to have a foot there so that I could find ways and I could be, like, dig into ministry, but more like the ministry of a disciple, and, you know, go where I felt God was calling me. And I've always had this desire to be part of a community that, or a team that is geared towards building healing and peace for people who are leaving one and going to the other. I've met, actually, former Community of Christ members who have joined the LDS church, and it's really interesting to hear their stories and how they've decided to make that change. And as heartbreaking as it is, because I'm, like, well, but you're just, kind of, dove into something that's really, really hard and not always, I don't know, they're, I don't want anybody to be, to join the LDS church anywhere, but, like, if, I'm a terrible missionary, like, if they do, though, like, I also, I want to respect that. I want people to feel respected for where they're at, in their transition. And I think that, you know, regardless of whether people join Community of Christ or not, I love being part of a community that is, has their arms open and says, "Come as you are. Ask your questions. Let us help you be where you are, and get where you need to go." And that's still really important to me. I mean, in COVID, it's been really difficult to connect with people, but whenever I have a conversation with somebody about, you know, my journey and how I've really made peace with a lot of things in Mormonism, I'm not angry about Joseph Smith. I'm not angry about *The Book of Mormon*, I'm not angry about, you know, those are things that just are, right. And even feeling as though I've been marginalized, and I felt marginalized before in the church, I still feel like I've, kind of, moved past that. And I just want people, wherever they are, to feel as though they will also move past it and that they are still loved and supported. And I like being part of that, that deconstruction process.

**Carla Long 37:03**

I keep hearing that theme emerge from you is that, you know, the most important part is that people feel loved, supported through, throughout whatever journey they're taking. And I really appreciate that about you, Mags. That that is very central to who you are, and I think that people know that about you. Even if you're not saying it, we know that about you. So, I really appreciate that about you. And so, what happens now? Where are you at in your life now? You're working on the Oral History Project, so you're working for Community of Christ.

**Mags Edvalson 37:36**

Yeah, this is my third job with Community of Christ. Like, so, my first job was Kirtland and that was a three-month stint and that was so fun. And I would, oh, I'm so jealous, I can't do it again, because I'm actually married now, which is totally ironic. I left the Mormon church because I couldn't get married and then I got married. And, but it's,



you know, it's my best friend and we enjoy being together and we were, when we were in college, and I was sort of in and out of the church a little bit, we would always joke that we would always stay friends and that if we weren't married, we'd just, we'd still, we'd, like, own a house together and just build two separate wings that we live in. And then, it was just, like, okay, we should just be married. So, that's what we're doing, is just being friends together and doing everything together. So, that's awesome. But yeah, I just got married. My, it was soon after my second job with Community of Christ, which was as the World Conference Assistant Coordinator, something, like, no, not assist-, Coordinator's Assistant, I think. I don't remember the job title, exactly. But that was really fun, because I got to see the in and outs, ins and outs of World Conference. And I was living in Missouri and, kind of, getting a taste of the culture there. We moved back when I got married, but also because of COVID, because we, kind of, freaked out and said, "Oh, our parents and family and everybody we know, are all in Utah. Why bother staying in Missouri? So, we moved back to Utah. And I really miss Missouri. Like, Missouri is an interesting place. It's, I've lived in a lot of places, and I can't say that it's ever been my favorite place, 'cause there's some really weird things that happened on my street anyway, in Missouri, but I really loved it there and I loved, I learned so much from the members there, and they're so wonderful and just took me in and made me feel like family, which was amazing because I was so, there were times where I was really lonely because I didn't, I moved out there by myself. But I really, really love the community there. And so, we moved back and we've been living here for as long as COVID has been going and as soon as we moved back, we, I mean, I left my job. I got a job at the library after my church, my second church job. And I loved that job. Left that to move back here. And I got a call from Lach about taking this position for, as the Oral History Project Coordinator, and we've been talking about it a little bit because my background, my master's degree is in folklore. And one of the courses of study that I took was an ethnography and how to conduct oral histories and, you know, archive and do the fieldwork and all that. So, we've been working on that for as long as we've lived, as long as I've lived in Utah, I've been working on that. And it is so amaz-, it's so amazing. I mean, I don't do a whole lot of the interviews. I mostly train interviewers and transcribers, and then I, kind of, make sure that everything is happening so we can archive those interviews when they're done, but I do get a chance to engage with those interviews, and listen and learn from these people who have done so many amazing things. Like, I think that a lot of former seekers come from the LDS tradition, into Community of Christ, and I feel like we, kind of, collectively feel as though we've discovered something new, but really, we've stepped into something that existed, that has always existed. And I don't know how many of us actually get a chance to, and really learn and be immersed in the journey that Community of Christ has taken itself, in its own faith transition and learning how to be a church that is inclusive of people and respectful of people's journeys. It has been a hard road to go on for the church, but I love that I get to learn more about that, and it just endears the church to me even more.

**Carla Long** 41:51

Well, I am certainly glad that you're part of us as well. I have learned a lot from you, Mags, in the six years that we've known each other and I'm just so grateful that I get to be part of your life and part of your journey, too.

**Mags Edvalson** 42:05

Yeah.

**Carla Long** 42:06

So, gosh, I feel like we've made it to the present. Have we made it to the present? I think we're there.

**Mags Edvalson** 42:12

I think so.

**Carla Long** 42:14

Well, Mags, this has been a wonderful journey. I really appreciate you. I appreciate your story. Thank you so much for sharing that with us.

**Mags Edvalson** 42:22

Absolutely.

**Carla Long** 42:23

Thank you.

**Josh Mangelson** 42:32

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