

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.

Robin Linkhart 00:33

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. Today we are recording an episode for our series Holy Grounds where we explore spirituality and the integration of spiritual practices in the journey of life and faith. Today I have with me Shandra Newcom in Colorado. And currently Shandra is serving as a Mission Center President for the Rocky Mountain Mission Center. And she will soon be serving as the Mission Center President in Sierra Pacific Mission Center. Shandra tells me her last day in Rocky Mountain Mission Center is April 13 and so that is right around the corner from the date of this recording. Welcome, Shandra. We're glad to have you with us today.

Shandra Newcom

Thanks, Robin. It's great to be here.

Robin Linkhart

Shandra, we'd love for you to just give a little introduction of yourself. Tell us a little bit about your background and your faith journey.

Shandra Newcom 01:32

My son and I live in Boulder, Colorado, and I've been in Colorado a couple of times. But overall, I've been here longer than anywhere else. So, for me, right now Colorado is home. But as you said, I'll be getting ready to move to California soon. I grew up in the church, my family and I attended Community of Christ congregations starting in Chicago; going to Canoga Park, California; moving to Olathe, Kansas; going to Graceland where I studied philosophy and religion, all the way through where I find myself now. I attended Iliff School of Theology in the early 90s. And I went there supported by my professors at Graceland who sensed in me a call to theology specifically around peace and justice ministries. So, I appreciated their support as I made the decision to do that. I've been very engaged with Community of Christ, currently serving as Peace and Justice Chair for the Peace and Justice Team. I have been a passionate supporter of the Theology Colloquy, and the Peace Colloquy and all those different ways we get to connect together in community as we explore God in our midst. And I see right now myself on a journey of exploring spiritual formation and spiritual aliveness in community and how we treat each other and how we experience God moving in and among us, and I have such great passion and hope for Community of Christ at this time that I am thrilled to be able to move to Sierra Pacific and to continue working with Community of Christ.

Robin Linkhart 03:31

Thank you for that wonderful introduction, Shandra. You certainly have a broad range of experience with Community of Christ in different places across the globe, as well as a faith journey with lots of

different dimensions. Tell us how you first maybe learned about or discovered spiritual practices, how you got into that or connected with it.

Shandra Newcom 03:58

I start thinking about my time at Iliff Seminary when I worked with Jane Vennard who is a spiritual practice -I'd say guru, master, someone who invites us into spiritual practice, in really awesome, and tender and loving ways. And so, I worked with Jane, she was my spiritual director. She introduced me to things like Lectio Divina, centering prayer, dwelling in the song. I worked with her individually and in the classroom setting and at retreats. And she's actually been engaged with Community of Christ in a number of different ways, which I just love those connections. But I would also say that my time at Graceland drew me into spiritual practice in an interesting way that I've really only come to understand in the past few years. I experienced a pretty severe time of depression while I was at Graceland. And within that experience, I found myself searching for connection with God, and not feeling like I had a voice, maybe, at the time, I didn't know what to say. And so I had to get quiet and just listen. And I didn't know where to find God. It sounds odd to me now, but I just, I felt alone. And so I had to pray. That was my physical and emotional and spiritual response to that time, was to engage in spiritual practice, whether it was listening to music, singing, praying, being quiet. It wasn't ways that I was trained by someone, it was my own - that response to what was happening to me, that there was God in the midst somewhere, and I listened and found God even there.

Robin Linkhart

Shandra, what spiritual practice would you say best connects you with the divine in your current life? And why might that be?

Shandra Newcom

I love the idea of walking as a spiritual practice. And there are so many ways to do that. And I love them all. So walking, you know, you can just walk. And there's the Thich Nhat Hanh idea of every time you lift your foot a lotus flower blooms. And the intentional drawing in and being quiet and paying attention to what's around you and seeing God in community and in the blooming everywhere you go. There is walking the neighborhood, a time for a person or a congregation to go and explore what's around maybe the church building where you might attend, being prayerful about the neighbors that you see, the people who are in the homes. All of that kind of soul energy that's around a congregational building, or folks who meet maybe in a home, people who sort of meet in non-traditional places. Really seeing that there's a way to connect by walking in the places where people are living and being prayerful about those people. I would say for me, the biggest walking practice that has meant the most to me is walking the labyrinth. And, you know, I've experienced labyrinths everywhere. I've walked a labyrinth on a beach, I've walked a labyrinth at a campground, at the basement of the United Methodist Church. And the first labyrinth I walked was actually at Graceland University. And I didn't know anything about walking the labyrinth. And there's a whole, you know, you can learn a lot about the history of the labyrinth and ways that people are going to walk in the labyrinth, and what it means. And we can talk a little bit about that. I didn't know any of that. I just knew there was what looked like a maze to me, which I now know, isn't really a maze. It's a journey in on a path to a center and a journey out and that people were walking it. And so, it actually took a bit of courage for me to step onto what was a canvas labyrinth, in the art room at Graceland and I just started walking. And that first labyrinth experience for

me, where as I walked I shed or let go of what was kind of holding me separate from God in some ways; walking to the middle and sensing this really powerful moment with my Creator and then making the choice to walk back out into my life. I'll never forget that experience. It moves me still.

Robin Linkhart 09:34

You mentioned the history of labyrinth. Can you give us just kind of a high level overview of history of labyrinth especially for those who may not have much knowledge of labyrinth at all.

Shandra Newcom 09:48

So, what I'm going to say is, I would invite someone who's interested in walking the labyrinth to do just a really simple search for all the different pieces of what the labyrinth has meant and what it means. There are, you know, different types of labyrinths, different, I'm going to use the word circuits or models of the way a labyrinth can look. There has been a history of labyrinths traditionally used, less traditionally used. For me, the important piece is a labyrinth is a way to engage with God as you go on your journey. So, I really am a believer that we're on a journey of faith, each of us, and that we encounter God in different ways. The Labyrinth is actually just a physical representation of that journey, where the person who walks the labyrinth is deciding to enter into a time of journeying with God that represents the bigger life journey. So, you can enter a labyrinth with a question and take that question with you as you shed or step away from all the things that are hiding that question for you or complicating that question for you. You can enter the labyrinth with an intention, something that you want to discern. And there's this really powerful energy connected to a labyrinth, where the people who have walked it before you and the people who will walk it after you, all of that is there. And that meets God and the heart of God as it meets your openheartedness and the heart of you. So that's not a really great traditional like, this is a traditional way of looking at a labyrinth. It is my invitation to spend a little time with a search engine just learning kind of some of the overview. And I'll have a book that I would recommend to you at the end of our conversation, which would be helpful as well. But it is it is, what it means to me and what you might consider as you walk a labyrinth.

Robin Linkhart 12:43

That's very helpful. I do also want to let our listeners know that we have a labyrinth at the Community of Christ Temple in Independence, Missouri, which is an outdoor labyrinth, which is always open to whomever wants to walk it. And many of us in Community of Christ over the years, and as we deepen our understanding of spiritual practices in the context of our life of faith have found, as Shandra has, that a labyrinth can be a very powerful spiritual practice. Shandra, I want to go a little bit deeper on this spiritual practice of walking, which I really appreciate. When I was in seminary, we had to do some field trips to experience different faiths and I went to a Buddhist meditation here in Longmont, Colorado. It was held in a little house that had been dedicated to being a public gathering for different Buddhist meditations. And part of that was a sitting meditation, but we ended it with a walking meditation. And that's probably the first time that I really was exposed to meditation as a spiritual practice, and how powerful it can be - the intentionality of it. So, what I'd like you to do is pick one of the other walking practices, maybe one you've mentioned outside the labyrinth or another one, and pretend like you are instructing us. We've never done it before. And kind of walk us through step by step of how will we prepare for that? What would we do? For example, I think you talked about one where every step was a lotus flower blooming or something like that. So, if a listener right now wants to try a walking practice

wherever they are, could you walk us through something kind of simple, step by step how you would instruct us to do that.

Shandra Newcom 14:43

I can. And I want to just add to something else you said, Robin, before I get to that, which was you talked about sitting meditation moving into walking meditation. And I love that idea. I forgot to talk about one of my favorite ways to walk a spiritual practice is to not walk, and to sit in prayerful support of those who are walking. So, I want to mention that because there have been times in my life where I've had difficulty walking maybe because of a health issue or something and wondered how I could participate in that kind of spiritual practice. And in those times, I've been able to sit either on a bench, for example around a labyrinth, or on a cushion, or just in whatever makes me comfortable, and prayerfully support and hold in love the people who were walking. So, I just wanted to put that out there just so people would know there's space for everybody in this kind of practice. If I were going to tell you, I do like the idea of talking about what it would be like or what it would take to start just a simple walking spiritual practice. So, if you're going to go for a walk with God, there is a time of making the simple, but deep decision to take off on the journey. It takes a little bit of courage for one thing, if you're walking with a group of people who have the idea we're gonna all kind of walk meditatively together and you're in a building where people maybe can't see you doing that it's a little more comfortable then if you were to say, I'm going to go for a slow walk with God, outside in the neighborhood today. So just pay attention to your surroundings: are you feeling you need a little support so you're doing it in community? Or can you go out on your own. Let's say you're going to walk as a spiritual practice with your congregation. And you've decided to stay in, for me it would be the fellowship hall in the back of the sanctuary at North Valley. And so, you and your friends and the people with whom you go to church might just focus with God, in sharing a prayer together, singing a song. You know, Community of Christ Sings has so many amazing songs that just help quietly ground us. So, singing, "Oh, God, We Call" for example, just recognizing that we are sharing the invitation, and then getting up and walking. It's not walking with a purpose. So, it's not walking to get you from here to there. And so, knowing that frees you to be able to slow down. The invitation is to walk in such a way that you sort of meditate and get quiet, opening your heart and mind to be in a relationship of discernment and love with your Creator. The Thich Nhat Hanh idea of a lotus blooming every time you lift up your foot, is a way to get you even quieter in yourself and focused. So, when you meditate, for those who have done a sitting meditation or walking, you may have spent some time knowing that there are always ideas, there are always things floating through your head. And in meditation, you don't connect to or grab on, I guess, you don't grab on to those ideas. You let them flow by like a cloud. It's even more powerful to have something upon which you focus so that the ideas can just be clouds, and your focus can be on God and your relationship with God. And so, imagining the lotus flower just helps you do that. There's nothing kind of magic about it. It's just a focusing tool. So, you get up, you have called on God to be with you. And you start walking. And so, if I was in the back of North Valley, and we were all walking, it would be a little tight, there were 20 of us. So, the other really great thing about walking in community is you're always kind of paying attention to your physical relationship to someone else. And paying attention to make sure you don't run into somebody. And so there's this sense of it becoming a dance, where you are moving and you're seeing that there's someone coming up to you so you take one step to the left, and you go around them. You're not looking them in the eye necessarily and engaging in any other way other than to know that they're sharing that space with you. You're on your personal walk in the midst of the community

that supports you, which is pretty much how it is, it's what we're doing. As people of faith, you walk, and maybe you've set ahead of time, we're going to walk for 10 minutes, you get up, you walk for 10 minutes, you're seated. And then my favorite thing is to take time to, if you were walking by yourself or walking in community, reflect on what that was like. Was it really difficult because you have a lot going on in your life and you couldn't focus? Was it simple, you really just got quiet and were able to just be someone who walks with God? Was it something in between? You know, there's all that spectrum of how we respond to spiritual practice depending on our day, our mood, who's around us. All those things. So really, it is get up and walk.

Robin Linkhart 20:54

Thank you. That was wonderful. And as you were talking, I can imagine myself actually taking a walk. You're mentioning North Valley Community of Christ, I've been in that building before and I just had a very keen picture in my mind of that space and a walking practice. You have given us quite a few tips. Is there anything in particular that you would give to someone that was trying this practice for the very first time, kind of a first-timer tip?

Shandra Newcom 21:31

Yeah, yes, going into a spiritual practice, it's always great to go into it remembering that it's a practice. So really this is kind of an over or broad first-timer tip for any practice. And then maybe I can look right at that walking practice. But you know, it's a practice. And that's why we call it that. So not to expect it to be perfect. Not to expect that there's going to be this monumental shift. And in fact, to know to pay attention to the little shifts, the little moments. To listen for those. With a walking practice, I would say choosing a place, if you're doing it by yourself, that you can commit to walking sort of the same path every day or every time for just a little while. For example, if you're walking outside, right now would be a perfect time in Colorado to follow up on this little idea. I went for a walk yesterday, and I went for a walk in a meditative way today. And I saw bulbs that were blooming today that were not there yesterday or coming from the earth, they weren't blooming yet. And so, I guess I would say, if you're looking to just get started in this spiritual practice, choose a place, maybe choose a regular time, and go out and just start walking. Just pay attention to the little things that are going on around you.

Robin Linkhart 23:19

Thank you, thank you so much. Shandra, as you share about this practice and its presence in your life, and how it has become very meaningful to you, how does your experience of this practice change you or change your day?

Shandra Newcom 23:42

I walk the labyrinth, really, when there are big changes, transitions, questions, when I'm searching or wandering or feeling lost, those are the times that I choose to walk the labyrinth. And maybe on the, I'm on the cusp of something, I'm there's a decision that's just right there, maybe I'm feeling alone. Walking the labyrinth, and this happens every single time, focuses me, reminds me of whose I am, connects me with God and the energy that's moving through me and through life. So, there's that big, big experience for me. Walking the labyrinth, I know there's sort of a deep connection that leads to openheartedness for me. So that's kind of the big piece. As I said about walking, just walking in your neighborhood or walking in your congregation, the little shift, the little moment, the small Aha, the recognition that I'm a

part of the greater dance of life. That comes in those walking moments, where I am reminded that I walk just like the person next to me walks. I pray for those who are walking, if I can't walk. Or I express myself physically in some way, whether that's singing or writing or whatever. So, I go from sort of the big picture of walking the labyrinth and how that's been in my life, to the small moment of quietly walking and watching the flowering bulb. And both of those have changed me and affected me differently. But the part that's important for me is they have grounded me in the divine spark that calls me and invites me into living this life.

Robin Linkhart 26:22

I love the way you describe this movement of centering and this traveling in with God, and this sense of going out again, as well as the many dimensions of the integration of the physical and the spiritual, both in and out of, of your own body. Very beautiful images you're sharing with us today. And it really kind of dovetails into this next thing I want to hear a little bit more about from you. And that is the differences between individual practices and group practices. You've already helped us understand a little bit of the meaning of them and these two different dimensions. Can you go a little deeper into that into these individual practices and group practices and how it sounds like you find those both very helpful to you?

Shandra Newcom 27:22

Yeah, I really look at that idea from an understanding of wholeness. Wholeness of body, mind, spirit, heart being. And that, for me, it takes both individual spiritual practice and community spiritual practice to create that sense of wholeness and wellbeing in my life. I think when I was younger, I didn't understand the power of community spiritual practice. And so, I have a lot of moments and stories from my life growing up and young adulthood of personal spiritual practice and their importance in my life. From sermon writing, which I believe is a powerful spiritual practice, to meditation and centering prayer. I think it was transformed for me, or my understanding was changed, when I went to a spiritual formation retreat a number of years ago in Arizona, and we sat for meditation in a circle in a pretty small room, all in chairs. And so, our circle had to be tight. We were seated right next to each other. I could feel on my arms and on my hips the person next to me on either side. And we meditated for 20 minutes. And I remember first thinking, there's no way I'm gonna be able to meditate for twenty minutes, a) because that's just a long time and it's been a while, and b) because I'm going to be noticing all these people around me and it's going to draw me out of this, what I was imagining to be amazing meditative time. And my experience with that was actually the fact that I was able to feel the person on either side of me, and sense the rhythm of their breathing, helped me deepen my experience with God, and reminded me that it is not just me who's having an experience. It's not just me, who's beloved. It's not just me that was created to be in this time and space. It's us. So, after that experience I started looking for ways to engage in spiritual practice in community. I became passionate about it, knowing that there's, you know, value and importance and maybe a mourning process or journey for you, personally and individually. But I really started looking for how we engage in spiritual practice in a group. I found it all different ways. I have found reunions, for example, or family camps, to be prime group spiritual practice places. Learning different things together so that when we go home we'll have experienced things that have transformed us in some way and will transform our faith journey. One of my favorite and most meaningful experiences with this was a number of years ago at Rockies Family Camp through the Rocky Mountain Mission Center, where we were again in a circle, it was probably 60 of us, so a bigger circle. And we did a mandala drawing. A group mandala practice. And a mandala is

an image, a circle, a creative spiritual practice, different shapes and pieces that you might draw, or mark out or create, coming together to form something, I'm going to describe it kind of like a flower, you know, something with repetitive colors or shapes, that you might color or draw on a piece of paper, or all sorts of different ways to experience mandalas. But we used a piece of paper and markers. And there we were ages five to 85, creating this mandala. And so, I might start with the circle in the middle and then hand my mandala to the person to the right, and around that circle, they might draw petals like the flower, then they would hand my original mandala to the person to their right, and they might add some lines. I got that started and we were listening to music and sending the papers around the circles and adding our own brightly colored pieces to our neighbors' mandalas. And I went and just sat in the middle of that circle and witnessed 60 people engaging in a spiritual practice together. Quietly, reverently, recognizing the creativity in each one that came before them, and wanting to add their own story or voice to what was before them. And then once that mandala went all the way around the circle, the original author received theirs back with a piece of everyone's story colored on it. And I have felt this before, but maybe not as strong before or since, that it was my honor to hold that sacred space so that their stories could be told through that creativity. I think in group or community spiritual practice we get to know God in a different way because we are knowing God through our neighbor.

Robin Linkhart 33:26

That sounds incredibly powerful. I remember the year that we had the mandala as part of our reunion resources. I haven't heard anyone describe an experience exactly like the one you had with such detail, and it really, it really is powerful. Before we move on, I just want to kind of give a little bit of listening recap as I'm hearing you talk about all these different spiritual practices that you have integrated into your life. And I'm sure these are just a few but I want the listener to just kind of listen to this all together. This sermon writing. Singing and music. Sitting practices individually and with community as we hold community in our prayers and meditation. Walking meditations alone and with community. Lectio Divina, you mentioned early on, which is a classic spiritual practice. The mandala and in the context of art and creative expression. I love the way you noted holding sacred space for other and also holding sacred space for ourselves if we're alone, that intentionality. So many ways that you have framed and shared spiritual practice today. And I want the listeners to know, that's just the tip of the iceberg as to how deep this whole idea and practice of spirituality in our everyday life can be. Which brings me to this next point. And that is that we're all different. I like the way you said spiritual practice is called that just because it is a practice, this sense of there's not a drive to perfection. The intentionality is the practice however it unfolds. And in the context of that, recognizing we all are very individual and diverse. And actually, there is such a thing as spiritual types for people, which means there may be practices that we find challenging. So, Shandra, what spiritual practice or types of practices do you find most challenging? And why is that?

Shandra Newcom 35:58

I am all about all of them. You know, I love them. So, I think for me, it's more the process. For example, making sure the time is right. Making sure it makes sense. Although I say that knowing that accepting the invitation to engage in a spiritual practice that might be new or challenging or uncomfortable is a really healthy way to come to spiritual practice as well. So, you know, it's not always easy or simple. And you're right, like this move toward perfection, which I think is something we face culturally right now, you know, wanting everything to be exactly so. So, it's the process that I find the most challenging

at times. I have also found it challenging to invite people into spiritual practice at times. In my experience with congregational life, we are set in our ways quite often. And we're used to what we're used to, and we like what we like, and we're used to it, and we like it, because we've kind of worked through some things and we find ourselves set. Here we are. And when someone comes in and says, Let's engage in spiritual practice, in this way that might make you feel uncomfortable, but it's going to be really great and it's going to be worth it in the end. And I promise, it's hard to believe that sometimes. And it's, it's hard to get to where that makes sense, or we're willing to risk. So, the challenge I found with spiritual practice, there have been congregations that I've worked with in my time at Rocky Mountain Mission Center, but even outside this Mission Center, where I have been with people and asked them to engage in a new spiritual practice, and I've had people say, Oh, here comes Shandra. She's gonna ask us to do a spiritual practice. And I love the people who are willing to say that out loud, because I know that often it's what we're thinking. And it's actually a great jumping off point for us to talk about what does that mean, and why might you be uncomfortable. And as you talked about spiritual types, that's exactly it. You know, sermon preaching, or hearing as a spiritual practice might really make sense for someone who language and words connects with them. But for someone who's sitting in the silence is their deepest spiritual practice they're just waiting for that sermon where, I'm sure it was lovely, gets to the end so they can have that one minute of quiet reflection on what was said. And so that is me maybe making a different question out of what you asked. And so, I also find myself challenged to answer the question you asked, because I don't want to take myself off the hook. So, the answer to your question after all of that, is patience. Patience is the most challenging spiritual practice for me. And patience with myself, but patience with my community. Patience with the people that I am talking to and in ministry with. Patience with how we make decisions. Patience is a way of letting God in and sometimes I find myself busy or cut off or not wanting to listen, and the challenge is for me to recognize that I'm in those spaces and to be patient anyway.

Robin Linkhart 40:00

Thank you for that. And that really connects with what you said at the beginning. The process is the challenge. And while patience, I think many of us find the practice of patience difficult. I appreciate the way, too, that you've named the awkwardness or discomfort with spiritual practices that many of us have. And also helping us recognize that there is a place for stretching ourselves. That opening ourselves and availing ourselves to a practice that may feel uncomfortable or not a perfect match for our spiritual type, that there's a dimension to that that also helps us grow. Shandra I know that you are part of the core team for Discover and Live Your Future, which is a relatively new, I'll call it a program for congregational revitalization. I'd love for you to share a little bit about Discover and Live Your Future and how spiritual practices fit into that particular journey.

Shandra Newcom 41:15

I am passionate about us as a people and how we are having the conversation in many congregations in many mission centers around the world about what it means to be a part of authentic and loving Christian community. And the conversation has come from a lot of the reality that we face as Christians. In my context in the United States, recognizing the shift from us saying that the United States is a Christian country, or however we would have labeled that in the past, recognizing the rich tapestry of beautiful diversity that exists even within faith and movement in this country and around the world. So those shifts, everything from Sunday used to be church day to now it's sports day, or it's experience

day, or it's get outside of the building day to sort of working with people who would consider themselves to be spiritual, but not religious. All of that conversation, and there's a lot to that conversation, and there's some important questions that are being asked from all of that, have led us to where we are now, which is facing the reality that a number of our congregations are aging, the size isn't what they used to be, and the deep mourning, the sadness, that comes from maybe not seeing all of our family members at church on Sunday, knowing that what we connected with 50 years ago or for me 20 or 30 years ago isn't what we have now. Okay. So out of all of that has come a desire for us to reimagine what it means to be in Christian community. And Discover and Live Your Future is a part of that conversation. It's a, you know, a way of being and learning and engaging within congregations, within small groups, that ground us in the rhythm of awaken, risk, and bless. And so, many of the listeners here may know the Mission Prayer, and I know that Ron Harmon did a previous episode around the Mission Prayer. And so, from the Mission Prayer, which has been a practice we've done at reunions, that was a focus of our reunion text one year, a practice that many congregations share every week, or people pray the Mission Prayer every day. Out of that, the Discover and Live Your Future core team really saw that there was this rhythm - awaken, risk, bless. That we awaken to God's invitation to relationship into authentic and loving community, that we risk new experiences and new understandings and new connections. Then we experienced blessing from God and one another, and we bless creation. And that rhythm leads us to this well of desire to be in community, experiencing that. And then recognizing that God is at work in the world, that God's up to something. That there is movement and just beauty that we can connect to as communities. And that, that may take place 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning and it may not take place at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning. And what would it look like if it doesn't? How could that be different? So spiritual practices are a way for community to come together, to awaken to God, and to provide support in the risking to step out in faith. And I would even go back a step, which is to say, a person's individual spiritual practice, time or experience, shores them up to participate in community spiritual practice, which then leads to walking out the door and participating in the world. And then it's kind of like a cycle, you know, there's a circle of it. You've, you've engaged with the Creator, and in community you have been in relationship with God. And then in the world, you're you're out there honoring what God is doing, and tapping into that, and seeing new ways of being as a community. And then you go home, and you are once again engaging in individual spiritual practice. And so there are three core practices that Discover and Live Your Future tends to or pays attention to. There's the Mission Prayer, there is Dwelling in the Word, and there's Sharing in the Round. And sharing, Dwelling in the Word is a Lectio Divina practice. Sharing in the Round is just that, it is being in circle or around table in community with food, with conversation, and just being in relationship. Recognizing that how we do that is important. How we make sure everyone is invited in is important. How we honor all voices is important. And how we show up authentically is important, so that we can respond to God's movement in the world.

Robin Linkhart 47:11

Thank you so much for that overview of Discover and Live Your Future. I really appreciate what you said about that being asking the question what, what does it mean to be part of a loving and authentic community, and then all the ways that that connects with how we have experienced church in the past, and how perhaps we are experiencing it now and how we potentially might experience that in the future. Early on today, Shandra, you mentioned the word hope and it, as you shared that word, hope, it just felt effervescent as it came out of you. So, on the heels of talking about Discover and Live Your

Future and the possibilities and practices that's inviting us into seeing and experiencing, tell us a little bit about the hope that you have and how you see hope unfolding in the context of Community of Christ and in the world we live now.

Shandra Newcom 48:19

I love the word hope. I love the idea of having hope. I believe it is forward moving, and invitational and promise making. I just appreciate you mentioning it because it does, it brings me alive. I, as Mission Center President, have had the opportunity to be with people in homes and congregations. And I've heard their struggles and their pains and their sense of being broken. And what I've seen as they come to community, to experience and find the hope that moves them forward into deeper relationship, into relationship with God. And I've learned that it is that hope that calls us into not being stuck where we are but into seeing there is something new to be discovered. Community of Christ, which is a people I love, has faced challenge and struggle and pain. And yet in the past 50 years of my life has transformed into this place and space of holding this world in hope. And so as we've had conversation, even in the past three years, about what we're facing, there has been this thread of hope that comes from the fact that we keep showing up in different ways. You know, the beauty of it right now is we're showing up in congregations online. And we're showing up in homes. And we're showing up some of us still in that building that we built with our hands. And we're showing up at World Conferences. And we're showing up at campgrounds. And we are holding each other in hope. And there have been times where some of us may have not felt hope, and others of us step up to fill that space and to remind us of the hope that has come from who we have been, and moves us into who we are becoming, I think hope is, is the thing. I think it is the important movement of our time. And that we are blessed to be able to provide hope for one another in the times that we need it so that we get, we get there all together. And we know that we have been blessed in the journey of being there. For my life, moving to taking a new position in California as the Mission Center President there, that decision comes from my hope about my own faith journey, my ability to grow in faith, and the promise and possibility of new relationships that I'll experience in that. I'm able to make that decision because of the hope in relationship I've experienced in the Rocky Mountain Mission Center and the people who have supported me. So I see this thread of hope throughout my life that keeps me showing up, keeps me wanting to be a part of this amazing, amazing community, and helps me recognize the promise of God to bring new life and Shalom to this space and this world that needs our hope right now.

Robin Linkhart 53:07

As you're talking about your sense of hope in such a living way, I could see how your life of spiritual practices continues to reconnect you with that thread of hope that you have seen and witnessed and continue to experience in your life and in the life of our faith community. How spirituality is, in a sense, our lifetime reconnection with that thread of hope and our connection with ourselves, each other, and God and really is that lifeline to keep our awareness of hope alive and our intentionality of observing how God is already working among us. I think you talked about it. God, what is God up to in the world today? Shandra is there anything that you would like to share about that perhaps I haven't asked you this morning.

Shandra Newcom 54:18

Yeah, there's two things, Robin. One is I had an experience. I traveled to Tahiti a number of years ago to teach a class on spiritual practices. And the financial officer was there. And she, I don't want to overstate it but, for one of the first times she really understood that being a financial officer and working with money is a spiritual practice. And when she, I don't know what it was that I said that story have inspired that in her, but when she saw it, I saw it. And I really was opened to the idea that tithing and stewardship and those ways of being are spiritual practices. And I loved that and learning that and being open to that, and it's made a change in how I live. And I think that having those conversations can make a change in how our congregations come together and how we connect to the larger World Church body and to the broader world. So, I just want to mention that that's a growing edge for me, and how to bring that into my life. So, mentioning Tahiti, I also want to say that I've had many opportunities to travel internationally and to teach about spiritual practices and spirituality in a lot of different communities. And what I've learned from those travels and experiences is that there's a shared longing that we have for an experience with the divine. You know, and that no matter how we understand God, whether that's mother or father, or energy or being, tradition or risk, or alone or community, all those different ways of talking about this source that moves in us and that calls to us and that has created us, you know, all those different ways lead us to this longing that we share. And that spiritual practice is really a recognition of our shared humanity, and our shared spirituality. And so even when I'm alone in meditation or prayer, I know I'm connecting to the greater source of love that moves through us and within us and ahead of us. And having traveled, I'm able to see that that love source is found wherever I go, and that we're all wanting to connect to that source and be connected to one another. And it's been transformative for me.

Robin Linkhart 57:21

I love that. I just want to say again, what I heard you say about spiritual practices being a recognition of our shared humanity, and shared spirituality. And the way you phrased it, the love source found wherever I go. Wherever we go that love source is there. That's beautiful. Thank you so much. Shandra as we prepare to close our time together today, what resources might you suggest to our listeners who want to go deeper or launch out on a discovery of spiritual practices?

Shandra Newcom 58:09

I'm so glad you asked because I have a couple. So going back to the labyrinth, I want to recommend a book called *Walking the Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice*, by Lauren Artress, A-R-T-R-E-S-S for those who are interested. And there's also a Sacred Path companion book, I haven't worked through that workbook, but I've read *Walking the Sacred Path* and felt that it was very meaningful just about spirituality in general, and the labyrinth. And then I want to mention a couple of books by Jane Vennard, you know I mentioned her at the beginning as someone who invited me into spiritual practice and spiritual conversation. *Embracing the World: Praying for Justice and Peace*, opened my eyes to understand spiritual practice and connection to justice and peace work. And that spiritual practices of justice and peace work are really valid and important to us in community and individually. And then she has a book called *Fully Awake and Truly Alive: Spiritual Practices to Nurture Your Soul*. So those two I think, are a great place, anything by Jane Vennard is amazing, but I'd start there. And then finally, Barbara Brown Taylor's book *An Altar in the World*. I have used that book at retreat settings, for my own learning about spirituality and spiritual practice. And what I love about that

book is, Barbara Brown Taylor really gets to the heart of what I believe to be true about spirituality, is that it is encountered all the time in our daily life in little and big ways. And it can be washing the dishes. It can be going for a walk like we talked about. It can be singing. It can be sitting with your partner or with a child or with a friend, and grieving. You know that spirituality is there in the root of it all. And she has chapters that talk about different ways that we engage in spirituality in that book. It's really a powerful read.

Robin Linkhart 1:00:21

All wonderful resources. Thank you, Shandra. I also want to mention to our leaders, excuse me, to our listeners that the Discover and Live Your Future and Leading Congregations in Mission can be, those resources can be found at missionalleaders.org. And we'll put that in the chat box of this episode on Project Zion Podcast. Shandra, thank you so much for being with us today and being willing to open your life and provide us a window into how you practice spirituality, what it's meant to you in your life, and how it continues to live in and through you in so many different ways. Thank you.

Shandra Newcom

Thanks, Robin. It's been such a joy and I appreciate you and our relationship and the willingness to talk about my love of God in the world through spiritual practice.

Robin Linkhart

And Project Zion Podcast listeners, thank you for joining us today, as we talk about spirituality, and the integration of spiritual practices into our journey of life and faith. This is your host, Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care. Bye-bye.

Josh Mangelson 1:02:00

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