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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.

**Brittany Mangelson** 00:33

Hello, everyone, and welcome to another episode of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Brittany Mangelson. And today we have on Robin Linkhart, who is also a host on Project Zion. And we are going to be talking about Community of Christ as a Peace Church. So how this idea came about is Robin and I, along with many others, were recently in Nauvoo, Illinois, at a family camp or reunion. And it was a historical reunion, that was the theme for the 175th anniversary or commemoration of Joseph and Hiram’s death in Carthage, Illinois. And over the course of the week, we focus on different points of history. There were different activities, story sharing, reenactments of Joseph’s final public speech, etc. So, one of the nights we had a panel with some of the actors that played some of those historical figures in the reenactments, and the panel went over different stories and perspectives of that time period and then a little bit beyond with the Reorganization, with Joseph III, etc. And Robin played a part, in that later in that worship service, where she talked about Community of Christ being a Peace Church through the 21st century. So, she kind of brought it up to modern day and just really showed the pathway that Community of Christ took to where we are today and how peace has always been part of our DNA. So, I really enjoyed Robin's words. And we were a little bit short on time. And so, I know that there was some stuff that she wasn't able to get to. I threw out the idea to have this conversation on Project Zion, and so, here we are. Thanks, Robin.

**Robin Linkhart** 02:23

Hey Brittany, it is fun to be on the podcast today and talk a little bit about Community of Christ as a Peace Church, then and now, connected with our historical roots, but also kind of taking a high-level view of tracing how peace has really taken root in our movement and grown and born much fruit. Before I get started, I want to recommend a couple resources, because I'm not going to talk a lot about the early seeds. And I know there will be listeners who are keenly interested in that. I would recommend Lachlan Mackay’s article, “A Peace Gene Isolated: Joseph Smith III.” You can find this in the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, volume 35, number one, Spring/Summer 2015. This was actually Lach’s presidential address at the 42nd annual John Whitmer Historical Association Conference, September of 2014. He does a great job of really delving into Joseph Smith III and how Joseph nurtured those seeds of peace from our early history. There's also a book available on amazon.com. It's called *In Pursuit of Peace* and the authors are Andrew Bolton, John Hamer, David Howlett, Lachlan Mackay, and Barbara Walden. That's a fairly new publication. It goes through a very thorough overview of how Community of Christ evolved from the early days of the church, to who we are now and the continuous focus and nurturing of our call to pursue peace. So, I think we definitely can see seeds in early church history of peace. If we look at Section 95 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which came about around the same time that we see Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon exampling this turning the other cheek as a common Christian approach to conflict when they were tarred and feathered. In Section 95, we read that the Lord's people are called to renounce war and proclaim peace and then that's followed by counsel to bear the enemy's smite against you, not once, not twice, but three times without seeking revenge. And then only after that would a defensive response be justified by the Lord.

We see other seeds of peace and the Doctrine and Covenants in what's commonly called the Fishing River Revelation, which was given in June of 1834, when Zion’s camp was forced to set up camp due to heavy rain, and a hailstorm between two forks of the Fishing River, on their way to Missouri. That reads like this, the piece of that, that I really like is, “Sue for peace, not only the people that have smitten you, but also to all people, and lift up an ensign of peace and make a proclamation for peace unto the ends of the earth, and make proposals for peace unto those who have smitten you according to the voice of the Spirit, which is in you, and all things shall work together for your good. And lo, I am with you, even unto the end.”

We see these revelations coming to the early church in the midst of multiple complex and aggressive persecutions. And admittedly, the early church kind of forgets about these peaceful councils in the early years as we respond to multiple violence and oppression all around us. I think the evidence is really convincing that Joseph Smith III’s exposure to violence throughout his childhood, left him with this kind of firm resolve to walk in the way of peace. So, the early seeds of peace were nurtured under his leadership. And you can see his resolve to this peaceful approach to living as a young adult in Nauvoo, even before he became the Prophet and President of the Reorganization. This approach nurtured by Joseph Smith III, held steady during the presidency of Fred M. Smith, and Israel A., with some deepening in various degrees. And I think especially under the presidency of Israel A. Smith, we begin to see some fanning of the flames of peace.

Now, I would be one to say that if you want to really understand the movement and journey of Community of Christ, you could see that really poignantly if you want to read all the *Heralds*, from the time the *Herald* was first published, and of course, we had earlier publications that reflected what was going on in the life of the church before that. But another way to see how things are happening in the life of the church is to look at all the World Conference resolutions that we have passed in our World Conference gatherings, of course, that used to be called General Conference.

Under Israel A. Smith, we see three resolutions coming up which I think reflect his leadership and the church's growing sensitivity and awareness to being peacemakers in our world. World Conference resolution 963, in 1948, was about racial equality. We see another one, number 976 in 1950, on racial equality, and then six years later, not too long before his death, we see 995, on racial integration. Following the death of Israel A., W. Wallace Smith was ordained Prophet and President, October 6, 1958. Simultaneous with that, a new era is emerging in the life of the Reorganization.

**Brittany Mangelson** 09:12

Robin, I'm wondering what the significance of a World Conference resolution is. How does a World Conference resolution kind of trickle down to the culture of what we now know as mission centers and congregations, but at the time, I'm not sure how they administratively organized themselves, but how does World Conference resolution kind of impact the culture and the direction of the church at large?

**Robin Linkhart** 09:37

So, the thing that we see happening around a World Conference resolution is reflective of what's happening in the life of the church. It's in response to contemporary happenings, crises, as well as you know, good times, bad times, shifts In culture, shifts in knowledge, what is humanity discovering in any given time, new information that impacts how we understand our world, how we understand our role in that world. It can also reflect deepening biblical scholarship, interpretation of Scripture, all those kinds of things. So, it reflects what's happening in the life of the Church, as well as how prophetic leadership in the church is understanding God's call to us in any specific time and place. It's this tension of the in between of life as we are living it in that time in place, as well as how we're understanding God to be leading us and calling us to live and become, at the same time. World Conference resolutions can be sponsored by the First Presidency or leading Council quorums of the church, as well as they can emerge from the grassroots level and come up through, you know, back then it would have been districts and stakes, and now it's through mission centers. So that reflects how the people, and we would understand the people of the church, to be prophetic people, how the prophetic impulse is being lived out at the grassroots level, and live to the importance that we want the body of the church, the global body of the church to consider things we see as being important to not only the life of the church, but the life of God's people of faith.

Every generation has to answer the question, what does it mean to be the people of God, in this time, and in this place? And so, World Conference resolutions, whether they're coming from the leading quorums, or they're coming from the field, reflect our response to that question. So those things that are brought to the legislative sessions, in the context of a World Conference, are debated, discussed, and voted upon. And those that are approved reflect the sense that the body as a whole is saying, “Yes, this is important to us, ” and we will make that a resolution. And different resolutions, may have policy associated with it, which help implement any directive in a resolution. Sometimes there is not a policy related to it, but it may result in forming a special team or committee to focus on the content of that, provide educational resources, and in some way, shape, or form, help the body begin to live into what that resolution is saying to the church.

It's really interesting, I think, to go through and read all these resolutions over the course of our time as a people of faith and see how our understanding of the nature of God, and who God is calling us to become is refined, maybe we turn the dial and get more clarity on certain aspects of that. I think it's really exciting and how we live out common consent takes on life through that process.

**Brittany Mangelson** 13:41

Yeah, thank you for that. I think that that helps clarify exactly how peace is implemented in the church through World Conference resolutions. It actually matters. It's not just people bringing forth a little document and we talked about it and then forget about it, but that there's actual impact that these resolutions bring. It can shift and change or like you said, turn the dial on certain things that the church will be focusing on, whether that comes from leadership, or whether that comes from the people in the field. I think that's really significant. So, thank you for clarifying that.

**Robin Linkhart** 14:16

Sure thing, the other thing that I've seen in my life, which is, even though I'm what some people would call an older adult, is I've had about 20 years of actively attending World Conferences now. And it's interesting to see certain World Conference resolutions that had a statement, but it wasn't associated necessarily with specific actions, and how the World Conference, the body of the church, will pick up certain things that they think are really important, and make a new resolution years later, that puts hands and feet on it. And that includes a directive of how they think we should address that in the life of the church and oftentimes that has to do with education and awareness, or a specific task force associated with it. So that's another trail to follow as we marched down our history of World Conferences, General Conferences, over the years.

**Brittany Mangelson** 15:20

Fascinating. We could spend a lot of time doing that. But today we're talking about peace.

**Robin Linkhart** 15:29

I want to talk about Apostle Charles Neff. He was an apostle from 1958 to 1984. His leadership really impacted some of the changes that we see happening in the 1960s forward. He was a missionary, and he had a lot of impact on the mission and theology of the Reorganized Church in lots of different ways. He also founded the humanitarian agency, Outreach International, which is very well known and very active today, and the Community One Resources Development, Inc, which is known as CORD. You hear a lot about CORD in the Philippines. Those two agencies, institutions, nonprofit institutions are alive and thriving today. He was responsible for that. He was responsible for starting the church in Japan, South Korea, Philippines, India, Nigeria, Liberia, and Kenya. This was at the very beginning of the Reorganization going global, in a new way, and to new countries. And also, this was associated with the missionary work that challenged Charles Neff, and in turn Community of Christ, to rethink the church's theology in ways that opened it to the voices of other cultures. Charles Neff on the frontline of that missionary work, found himself confronted with horrific realities of massive poverty, getting out of the US context, and being confronted with just expanded horrific details of poverty that we don't see in the US.

He grew up in a poor family in the US, in Hardin, Missouri. He also served in World War II in the Navy, in the Pacific. His time in World War II had a massive impact on his worldview, as well. Neff believed that the entire Gospel and church doctrine could be boiled down to two essential, non-negotiable principles and that was the reality of a personal God and the worth of humans. We understand the worth of humans today in our enduring principle, “The Worth of All Persons,” which has deep roots in the restoration, and particularly in Community of Christ. Charles Neff felt that the church's mission to incarnate these principles took place through social development, religious witness, and political activism. He had a few key points. I wanted to share those. He was really focused on community. That was a really big thing for him. And of course, that was really critical to the movement from the beginning. Community and the importance of community has continued to take on deeper life and meaning and understanding in the life of the church. He felt like it was absolutely fundamental that we understand that our life as Christian disciples is not just about us as individuals, but is about us as a collective, social group of people, and in the context of that interaction, not just between us as disciples and Community of Christ, but that our interaction with all of society across the globe is fundamental to what it means to be a church and mission faithful to the living Christ. He also was keenly attuned to the importance of indigenization and cultural sensitivity.

I think Neff was one of the first that realized that the liberating truths of the Gospel are best expressed through Indigenous culture and context, language, symbol, meaning, all of the things that people use to communicate and live out how they understand. God needs to be enculturated in who they are authentically. In other words, he helped us understand that the Restoration Movement was not intended to be imported as American culture into other parts of the world, that the message, the essence of Christ’s message lives in all contexts and cultures and we do a disservice if we import our own culture on top of that message. In the process of that, recognizing Indigenous leaders all over the world, and how they can be carriers of the message, and interpreters of the Gospel to the benefit of the whole church, we have something to learn from each other in the context of each other's cultures. He also focused on liberation for the poor, and the dispossessed. He was aware of liberation theology. He appreciated what liberation theology has to say about what it means to follow the Christ. He understood, I think, in a very deep and personal way, what we see in the New Testament and lived out through Jesus, was God's preferential treatment and awareness of the poor. He had a focus on human equality.

If we look back at what's happening in the world around us in the 60s and 70s, and even the 80s, we see a lot of racial inequality, the civil rights movement, the importance of that to us as a people of faith, and then also women's rights, later on. He really was trying to break down the walls, the divide, and help us understand the deep meaning of the worth of all persons, and how that pushes against the human tendencies to stratify society and label and rank people according to their color, their class, gender, all kinds of things. And then lastly, and this, of course, was highly impacted by his time in World War II, seeing violence firsthand in different parts of the country, he had a very anti militarism stance. He would be bringing us into understanding what it means to be a nonviolent people, or to understand that to truly live into a global sense of peace, that conversation and dialogue needs to be a first response, as opposed to a military response of violence and weapons. He was also living during the advent of nuclear warfare and the impact that had when we use it in the world, the devastation that it perpetuated across, not just humanity, but all creation, and the health and welfare of our planet.

I think it's important to understand what was going on in the world at the same time when Charles Neff, was serving in the Council of Twelve and we begin to see World Conference resolutions in response to this. I want to share what some of those resolutions were in just a moment. As a people, we were going through a deepening awareness and appreciation of our Christian heritage and realizing our place in that circle, the greater Christian tradition. You see this reflected in Section 161:1b which came in the 90s. “Claim your unique and sacred place within a circle of those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ. Be faithful to the Spirit of the Restoration, mindful that it is a Spirit of adventure, openness and searching.” In the center 60s, early 70s, we were really beginning to explore what this Christian tradition was, this greater heritage that we came out of, and understanding that we were not separate from that, we emerged out of that. And that understanding, that journey and history, the history of the Christian faith in theology, had a lot to say to us. It helped us understand not only where we came from, but who we are in the context of that. That was a really big thing happening during this time. We started going out into many different nations and were exposed to systemic oppression and injustices faced all over the world. During the same time, the new Mormon history was coming out, credible historical scholarship, bringing more information, some of which was very uncomfortable to receive. And that meant we began our journey as a people, recognizing some truths that we might prefer not to face at all. There was a lot of disruption during that time in regard to our heritage and roots.

In the US, we have the civil rights movement, and the intersectionality of that movement was second wave feminism, and we had the sexual revolution. We have riots at Kent State University and peace sit ins over the place. This is in the context of the Vietnam War. We have nuclear disarmament activism. The world is becoming like this pressure cooker of social justice, awareness, and activism. All of that is going on in the context of W. Wallace Smith, Prophet and President, and Charles Neff, who is doing tons of work in this area.

If we look at World Conference resolutions, we see things like 1064, a tribute to Martin Luther King in 1968 and 1075, Gospel to Racial and Ethnic Groups, also in 1968. We see World Conference resolution 1087 on Peace, War, and the Use of Force in 1970. So, we're beginning to experience this kind of push me pull you understanding around war, lots of talk about just war, lots of talk about nonviolence during this time, in World Conference resolution 1148. In 1978, we have the World Hunger Fund, which provided for our program to be established, that would facilitate opportunities for those interested and motivated, to participate in additional ways beyond the fasting discipline, and to add these funds to the support ministries that were directed specifically towards problems of world hunger. So early in our tradition, we had oblation and fasting Sunday and those funds were always collected to help aid the poor. This was going to be a bigger emphasis, based on that guiding principle and traditional practice, and really put some hands and feet on it, so to speak. That was in 78 and then the First Presidency in 1979 officially established the World Hunger Fund, which continues to this day.

Then in 78, with Wally B. Smith, Wallace B. Smith, our Prophet and President, lots of exciting things began to take off. In 1982, the World Church Peace and Justice Team is organized and that is specifically to pursue issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries that are of importance to the worldwide church. We're beginning to see that this kind of siloed type of apostolic field approach is good to have focus on particular contexts and cultures of the church and to support that, but at the same time, we need to have a very interrelated, interdependent, interconnected dialogue going on with all of the church because a lot of issues are global issues and we can do a lot more good if we approach that as a team, and then bring it home, so to speak to specific fields. Let me stop there. Brittany, do you have any questions before I launch into other kinds of things that are beginning to emerge in the life of the church?

**Brittany Mangelson** 30:10

I don't know if I have questions, but I am reminded of why I enjoyed listening to you that night at reunion so much, because it's fascinating to me as I hear you speaking of what I think is that at International Headquarters in Independence, they were kind of theologically breaking apart what does the Gospel mean? And then people like Charles Neff, I'm sure there were many others that were actually encountering that in the flesh, were actually in the field having kind of a parallel experience of, okay, we need to re-examine what Christ's mission is, what the purpose of Christianity is, and all these things and break them apart from Americana, culture, and maybe even a little bit of the prosperity gospel. The Restoration has elements of the prosperity gospel, I think, is an argument that can be made, but when you're in the field, faced with abject poverty, what does the Gospel actually mean to these people, when you can't promise them all these things that maybe other Christian denominations are promising them? It's just interesting that field ministers were really being faced with that reality at the same time that we had other church leadership going to seminary, and kind of breaking apart that new Mormon history and on a theological level, maybe coming to the same conclusions that a lot of field people were coming to, which I think is just really fascinating, because they were both happening at the same time. So, I don't know. It's just really interesting to me. So that's not really a question. It's just an observation.

**Robin Linkhart** 32:03

Yeah, I love that. And I'm reminded, even as I'm reviewing and studying things about this, what does it mean, peace then and now, historically, and now in the in-between time just going over all these things? I love this. We have some historical perspective now and kind of stand back, [able] to look back over time and see how God is having God's way with us, inviting us into these new mission adventures across the world, and what stares us back in the face, as well as pulling us into deeper theological study and reflection. It's amazing. And then, how that lives out in the life of the people and how it not only comes out in World Conference resolutions and to see this emerging focus by reading the Doctrine and Covenants and see how it comes to us through continuing revelation.

**Brittany Mangelson** 33:08

Yeah, I love it, too. I've also heard people mention that you can kind of trace that by looking at past hymnals as well, the ones since the 50s, 60s, and then take a look at the songs that are in each hymnal. You can see the development and the expanded understanding of who we are and what Christ’s mission is.

**Robin Linkhart** 33:32

Yes, absolutely. You see the theological understanding reflected. I think, most poignant in our most recent hymnal, *Community of Christ Sings*, is this expanded sense of diverse culture and claiming that and singing it through Indigenous languages and hymnody. Okay, we have Wallace B. Smith in 1978. We're going to march on into that era, and we had the World Church Peace and Justice Team established in 1982, which is super important because that becomes for our church, this kind of vigilant, intentional focus on peace and justice and how we can continue to be actively engaged with that pursuit in the context of being a faith community. So, we see in 1982, World Conference Resolution 1177, which was just titled “Peace” and superseded resolutions 1052, 1087, and 1129. Sometimes we go back into our past and we rescind resolutions, or we collect a bunch together and say, okay, that's all going to be subsumed under this new resolution. That's what that did. And that same year, 1178, “Nuclear Arms Reduction.” There's a lot of awareness of nuclear warfare, or the capacity for nuclear armament. And then in 1984, we have Section 156, and this was huge. I don't think we can overstate the importance of Section 156 in the life of the church. That revelation in Doctrine and Covenants does two really important things. It says, now is the time to build this Temple in Jackson County that has been prophesied for so long. The Temple Lot was staked out by Joseph Smith. We see different expressions of the Restoration Church making claim, some hold title to pieces of it. We had a little portion, others had parts of it. And here in 1984, it's time to do it. And it talks about what this will be, it will be an ensign of peace, dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation, and healing of the Spirit.

So this, this icon of what it means to be a Restoration people, and specifically, the Reorganization, is going to be built and I love the fact that it says ensign of peace. It goes all the way back to the Fishing River Revelation that uses that same language of ensign of peace, and it talks about what that's going to mean in the life of the church. And then, in that same revelation, it calls for the ordination of women, which is this incredibly powerful, and highly debated shift and understanding of gender and priesthood and ordained ministry, in the life of the church. So, we're going to build this ensign for peace and at the same time, we're going to make this huge step forward in social justice in the society we live in. I think that's huge. It continues to speak to us, as a people, as we live into the meaning of Temple as an ensign of peace, and how it's called us to really stretch ourselves and disrupt our lives, and all kinds of peace and justice social issues that we encounter.

In 1984, the Human Rights Team is established. So, the Human Rights Team and the Peace and Justice Team are two really critical teams in the life of the church. The Human Rights Team has done work that brings us face-to-face with human trafficking and establishing a human trafficking project has brought us to dialogue, and movement, and advocacy related to international immigration issues. We marched out on down through the 80s and in 1986, we had resolutions on domestic violence. We had another one on human rights and one on apartheid. In 1988, we have one on racism. That same year, and we have a day of prayer and fasting for peace. In 1990, we established a Temple Ministries for Peace and Justice, even though the Temple is not completed. And in 1992, we have a resolution on Children's Advocacy, as well as the Earth Stewardship Team. So, we see another team established. We have the Human Rights Team and the Peace and Justice Team and now we're going to have an Earth Stewardship Team. That would speak to our enduring principle, “Sacredness of Creation.” We see our mission is beginning to be aligned with our identity as peacemakers, as a people who are partnering with God to accomplish the cause and purpose of Zion on this planet. So that was 1992.

In 1993, the building of the Temple is completed, and we have the dedication in 1994. And now we have this symbol that reaches up into the sky with a very unique design, an ensign of peace, and with the dedication of the Temple, we are now invited to full on give expression to being peacemakers, through flesh and blood. We are going to incarnate the Gospel with a new sense of purpose and call. The Daily Prayer for Peace started in December 1993 and on that same day was the first Peace Colloquy at the Temple. The Peace Colloquy and the World Church Peace Award has been given every year since then, with the exception of two years. In 1993, the Community of Christ International Peace Award began. In 1995, we have the Peace Pavilion, which was formerly the Children's Peace Pavilion, housed in the Auditorium. Now it's housed in a separate facility, just behind the Temple parking lot. In 1998, we have a resolution, 1258, with an international ban on land mines. And that same year, we see the appointment of Andrew Bolton to a Peace and Justice minister. You can see how we build these layers of integrity in response to being peacemakers. Having a full-time minister dedicated to that focus made such a huge impact in the life of the church. And of course, Andrew Bolton continues to be a very active advocate for peace and justice, even after his retirement. In 2000, we have a resolution on personal use of firearms and in 2002, resolutions on sexual abuse of children and an Ecumenical and Interfaith Ministries Team.

That was a big one, because that is bumping up against our, one true church. We had begun to reframe our identity from being, a one true church, to being a faithful expression of the one true God. In other words, we want to be a true and right expression and reflection of God's presence in the world. [With the] old, one true church paradigm, you can't really be ecumenical and interfaith if you're the only real one true expression of God on the planet. In the early years, and even in my childhood, we didn't really partner with other Christian faiths at all, and certainly joining into an official association was seen as taboo. Even when we were received and accepted to be a member of the National Council of Churches here in the US, we still had people in the church thinking that we're going down the slippery slope to do this. But what we've realized is that to pursue peace on earth, we are called to be in relationship with all those organizations, and especially religious organizations that have common understanding of a call to be part of establishing peace and justice on our planet. So that actually has been very well aligned missionally with who we understand ourselves to be in the context of the world today. In 2010, we had the resolution on human trafficking, which I told you came out of the Human Rights Team. In 2013, Supporting Indigenous and Minority Peoples. That same year, an action toward Nuclear Weapons Abolition. So, we continue to be very aware of the potential of nuclear destruction on our planet.

That same year, we also established the Health and Wholeness Team, which I think has been an important step to really embracing the integrated understanding of the physical and spiritual in the context of our life as disciples of Jesus Christ. I think you know; the Word of Wisdom speaks to us in the context of the enduring principle, “Responsible Choices,” understanding our bodies, the natural world, and how our spirituality is integrated into that, that God is a God of wholeness and full integration of body, mind, soul, and Spirit. The Diversity and Inclusion Team, which we have now, also upholds “Worth of All Persons” and speaks to this “Unity and diversity” in the global community of faith that benefits from the beautiful dimensions of diversity that we see in the faces and peoples of our planet, and at the same time, the expression of being one in Christ. In 2016, we have the Palestine and Israel Resolution and also opposition to predatory loan practices. The African American Ministries Team was established around the same time as the Diversity and Inclusion Team.

And then this last conference, in 2019, we had the Domestic and Sexual Violence Resolution, and also the Nonviolence Resolution, which is picking up on some of the past focus’ and resolutions of the church and putting hands and feet to it. So that's a call to really not only hold up nonviolence as something to integrate into our everyday life in conflict resolution, but also as cities, nations, world powers, and begin to intentionally address awareness and education in the body of the church, and to bring some contextual understanding to what nonviolence means in different places of the earth. In the US, we largely do not have to live in the context of violence going on all around us. And I'm talking about armed violence, not necessarily domestic abuse, which we certainly face, but we have sisters and brothers in the church that every day, right outside their front door, there's armed warfare happening. What does nonviolence look like, in that context? How do we work towards nonviolent resolutions? These are two very complex issues that face us in our world today. So let me pause there for any questions. And then I just want to wrap up with some commentary from another peacemaker who's connected with the church.

**Brittany Mangelson** 47:27

Yeah, as you were listing off all the things that the church has been involved with in more recent years, a lot of them, I think, could be or are seen as political. And I know that there's kind of a pushback against by many people about religions and churches getting involved in politics. I'm curious what your thoughts are on that, because violence is often political. And so, I'm wondering what your thoughts are? How do we as a church, whether it's ministers in the church, disciples in the church, or the church at large, how do we kind of walk that line? And is it a line we need to walk? Or is that just the reality, that if we're dealing with peace, issues of peace, then we're going to brush up against politics.

**Robin Linkhart** 48:24

I would say, Brittany, that issues of faith are always political. We live in a context where we have governments. Different nations have governments. We have city and state governments, as well as national government in the US. We recognize that there are different kinds and forms of government across the globe, so living out our faith is always going to connect with the political arena. Certainly, the enduring principle, “Responsible Choices,” would call us to understand our faith, how we understand the nature of God, how we understand who God is calling us to be and become, in this world. “Responsible Choices,” would also call us to understand the context and culture of where we live, what kinds of challenges we face in our cities and nations, and what voice do we have in our form of government? And how do we make responsible choices in their arena of government laws of the land that would be consistent with our understanding of our faith and who we were called to be? I don't think there's any way around being political in our faith.

We live in a nation that has become very highly polarized politically, and that brings with it a lot of strong feelings and opinions. And sometimes in the context of our church community, we find ourselves holding different opinions along that perspective. I think a key principle in dialogue is the “Worth of All Persons.” So how do we share our opinions and maintain our respect and integrity and regard for the worth of all persons? How do we talk about very polarizing topics and maintain integrity and esteem for one another?

So, I think that's something that Community of Christ has had to learn how to do as we talk about divisive issues, like gender, ordination of women, inclusion for LGBTQIA, etc., and other issues like arms and immigration. There are all kinds of divisive issues that we talk about in the life of the church. I would say Jesus was definitely in the hotbed of politics, in his life and time. And this conflict of power, had a lot to do with how he ended up on the cross. Jesus was politically radical in his day and time, and not just in the Roman Empire, but in the life of his church, the Judaic culture, the Jewish faith. So, I think, we walk aligned very carefully, we do our very best to uphold and respect one another in the context of that journey. We recognize that there's always a tension between life and understanding how God is calling us to walk forward, so we have one foot in the muck and mess of life and the other foot firmly planted in the center of Christ, God revealed through Jesus Christ, made known to us through the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit. And it I think, to be full on engaged in following the Christ gets messy sometimes, and that always touches politics.

**Brittany Mangelson** 52:33

Thanks, I really appreciate that answer. And, you know, like you said, it's not necessarily US politics that we're brushing up against, its cultures, and politics from everywhere that the church is at, which, you know, I think we've seen play out at different times in World Conference, in different points in history. That is because we are a global church. It's not just the 1950s Americana culture that we're dealing with. The reality is that the Gospel, just kind of busts through all of that and the political parties that we see in America. It's a lot more involved and a lot more expansive. It's good to keep in mind. Thank you.

**Robin Linkhart** 53:20

Certainly, I wanted to end with sharing some things that I read in a 2009 *Saints Herald* blog online, from Matthew Bolton, who's the son of Andrew Bolton. He is pushing back on Community of Christ and inviting us to consider what does it look like if we really are serious about peace? And what kind of fruits might that bear? This was written in 2009. I think we see some of these things. We've begun to talk about [them]. He talks about what he might expect to see if we were actually bearing fruit in a serious way. He talks about seeing a commitment to nonviolence and non-participation in military or armed factions. Certainly, our most recent nonviolence resolution this year is pulling us into that same place.

He would help to see widespread participation in peace groups at the local congregational level. We used to have a lot of peace clubs across the church. I haven't done a recent assessment on that, but it would be interesting to know how engaged we are in peace groups at the local congregational level. He thinks it would be a great idea if we had Peace and Justice offices at the United Nations and in Washington DC. I thought that was really insightful. That could help keep us informed about national and international peace issues and help us educate our members, and in a sense, begin to influence policy. He would hope to see a substantial engagement with national peace building efforts in conflicted countries where the church has a significant presence. When he was writing, he was thinking about places like Haiti, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We could certainly add lots of different areas to that list now.

He talked about posting World Service Corps volunteers, to conflict and post conflict zones. So, World Service Corps, internships that actually were sent to areas that need support in the way of peacebuilding activities and walking with vulnerable populations, informing human rights, campaigns, etc. He talked about the possibility of offering entities like the UN or the US State Department, space in the Auditorium or the Temple as a meeting place to host peace negotiations, etc., really allowing our concrete buildings to be a space that's utilized not just by us a focus on peace, but other organizations that are engaged in peace. He talked about having a Peace Studies major at Graceland University. He noted they currently have a minor in it. I ran a search on that when I first read this. It still is a minor, not a major, but great a great idea, I think, to have something offered as a major content of study in a degree program at Graceland University. He talked about sponsoring prominent peace scholars in residence at the Temple who could hold public seminars and write articles, maybe work with church leaders on education and information about ways to build peace in the areas that we serve. He talks about dedicating efforts to get involved with the ecumenical and interfaith movement at the local, national, and international levels. We have made progress on that one, as far as being a member of the NCC, here in the US. There are lots of different ways to do that globally. I think our participation in the Parliament of World Religions, has been notable in recent years, in 2015 in Salt Lake City, and then in Toronto. I can't remember if that was this year or last year but having a presence there.

And then the last thing he talks about, is having a particular attention to peace building in the Holy Land of the Middle East, an important calling he sees for all members of the three Abrahamic religions, Jewish, Christian, and Islam. I really appreciated Matthew Bolton's perspectives on deeper ways, additional ways, that we as a faith movement, Community of Christ, can put hands and feet on our understanding of truly being peacemakers in the world today, of helping realize God's dream for the world, God's vision of the peace of Zion, here and now, in our Earth, in ways that truly bring peace, reconciliation and healing of the Spirit.

**Brittany Mangelson** 59:18

So, Robin, what I'm wondering about is what is necessarily stopping us from doing some of those things that Andrew suggests on his blog. This was written in 2009. You noted where we have made some progress, but is it mostly a problem of resources and capacity? Or what do you think is holding us back from some of these suggestions?

**Robin Linkhart** 59:46

I want to make sure that we understand what I just talked about came from Matthew Bolton, not Andrew Bolton.

**Brittany Mangelson** 59:52

Oh, excuse me.

**Robin Linkhart** 59:53

Yeah, no worries. No worries. They're both Boltons. I think sometimes we say it's resources. But I think that we have a lot more power in our world than that. We can look back on lots of peacemakers in the world that had almost no resources at hand to make a difference, who have made huge, powerful differences in the world. I think we're holding ourselves back. I think it's hard, and to be a peacemaker, and stand in the gap in the middle of social injustice, it causes us to do things that can be uncomfortable, that can be disruptive in our lives at times, which cause us to stand smack in the face of violence. It's hard work and it's slow going. So, to really change systemic oppression and poverty across the globe, it's having the focus, having action plans, and being dedicated and committed to walking that path, day after day after day. Now, it's always going to be a series of two steps forward, one back, or one forward and two back. But it's the long journey in the same direction, which is, what mission is, a long journey in the same direction. And the more that we can do that, as a people, the more impact we can have, which means a lot of individuals in different places all over the world are choosing to take steps into that. I think the reality is that we [should] identify a step we can take that puts us, even if it's a baby step, out of our comfort zone, and bit by bit, we go forward. And when we recognize powerful peacemakers, in the midst of our community, we identify those folks, we empower, equip, and support them, so that they can be leaders of our movement and help us find a path forward.

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:02:19

Thank you for that. I was hoping you would say something like that, but I didn't want to fish for it, or lead you into it too much. I'm grateful for what you shared. And I'm grateful for this conversation at large. Like I said, at the beginning, it was something that I found a lot of meaning in as I was listening to you, as you were first presenting this information. And, you know, I'd heard bits and pieces of the story, but to have it all kind of thrown out there, one way to track how Community of Christ has been a Peace Church, and how we can further engage in the work of peace, was really meaningful and impactful for me. And Robin, like you mentioned, we do you have a podcast with Lach Mackay that mainly focuses on Joseph III and his response to some of the historical events that had happened to his dad, and then how he kind of pulled that peace gene out of those events and his response to some of the horrors that had happened in his childhood. So, I think that these two episodes will pair well with each other. I'm really glad that you brought it into the 21st century and have given us some meat to chew on of where we can go again, or where we can continue to go as a Peace Church. Thank you so much.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:03:37

You are very welcome. I just want to raise one more thing. And that is in response to, what's holding us back or what can we do? We have a ton of great resources online, largely associated with some of these teams that we have in place, the Peace and Justice Team, Human Rights Team, the Earth Stewardship Team. They have some fantastic stuff and concrete action plans that we can do in our congregation. I would say a lot of our congregations are small, so find one thing that you can do that fits your congregation’s size, and you're where you're located, relevant to your city and area and go for it. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. There's a lot out there already. So, cofchrist.org, put one of these teams in the search engine, and explore.

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:04:33

Awesome, thank you and maybe we'll put a few of those links in the show notes just to get you started a little bit.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:04:48

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