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Project Zion Podcast

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

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Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode of Project Zion Podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson. And I'm going to be your host for today. And today I have on a good friend. And actually, when I say good friend, I mean good friend. It's been a minute since we've been in touch. And so we just chatted for 40 minutes before before we started recording. So I am thrilled to welcome my friend Molly Bagley on the podcast. This is going to be a Chai Can't Even episode which is where we talk to adults, young adults in Community of Christ who really grew up in the church, and just let them share their story and share their stories of discipleship formation, and then their hopes and dreams for Community of Christ. So, Molly, welcome.

Molly Bagley 01:27

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Brittany Mangelson 01:29

And I just have to say, you know, we, there's kind of this running joke about, I don't know, joke is the right word. But like, who should be on Chai Can't Even? Like who, you know, who is considered a millennial, or who is considered a young adult, because we're kind of in this weird transition phase where we just, you know, has been a young adult and now we're maybe just a regular adult in the church. But I have to say that Molly is wearing a Daria shirt, which I didn't mention before, which is like the perfect generational marker for this, like, Millennial X-ennial, you know, like born and raised in the 80s and 90s. And so, yeah, that's the era that we're going to be talking about a lot today. So I'm thrilled. I'm excited. I'm gonna stop talking and Molly, why don't you just introduce yourself really quick, just let us know where you're at what you're up to, and then we'll dive on into the bulk of the interview.

Molly Bagley 02:27

So I'm currently in Atlanta, Georgia. I moved here in 2019. To attend Candler School of Theology at Emory University. I have just completed the coursework for my Master of Divinity. I graduate tomorrow with we're recording this on the 6th, I graduate this 7th. I'm extremely excited. It was three years of a lot of work. So right now I am just enjoying not having to do things and not having to worry about turning things in and just enjoying my time and I am, I grew up in Pensacola, Florida, attending the North Pensacola congregation. Originally I was born in Independence, but we moved to Pensacola mid 80s. So that's pretty much what I remember. I'm currently at the Atlanta North congregation.

Brittany Mangelson 03:20

Awesome. Thank you. And I, when I realized that tomorrow was graduation day for you, I felt a little guilty asking you to this podcast, but I know that it's been a fun experience for me so far. I'm assuming that our listeners can tell by like, my super chattiness in my intro, and I'm just like, really happy to be

here. This is gonna be good. So Molly, let, let's just dive in. So you were born and raised Community of Christ. So you said you were born in Independence and then moved to Pensacola when you were young. So I am curious to know what your church experience look like growing up. So did you attend youth camps? Were you like mentored in your congregation? Did you feel like you were a burden? Or did you feel like you know, you were really part of the community? Just just talking about growing up in the church.

Molly Bagley 04:13

So yeah, so up until I was at Graceland. And when the name the name change happened when I was at Graceland. So growing up, was still RLDS. I, as a young child, just thought it was too long. I would try to shorten it and a couple of times I dropped the Reorganized. And I realized the problem with that one day I was at daycare and my daycare was right next to the LDS church in Pensacola. And so I said the name of the church I dropped the Reorganized and they're like, Oh, that one right there. And I looked, I was like, no, no, no, no. That's not my that's not my church. So I realized that that is an important word in the name, but I still felt it was just so long and complicated to say as a young kid, but I did grow up going to camps. I, yeah, first camp I went to I was eight. So started right away. And I went almost every summer. And then by the time I was a teenager, I was basically spending my summers at Bluff Springs campground. You know, I would be I would be a counselor at junior camp, junior high, I would attend senior high camp as a, as a camper, I would go to reunion and the youth at my, when I was younger, we had a really sizable youth group, our number of youth grew up attending Sunday school with the same group of people. As we got older, some moved away, some just kind of didn't attend as much as teenagers got much smaller, I think there were like three or four of us really attending regularly. So I actually started working with the younger kids pretty early on, I was probably 15 or 16. And on Wednesday nights, I would teach the kind of the youth class. I was it. So I really was mentored in that, in that aspect. As far as people seeing, where I had gifts in those areas, and working with kids and the youth and and can really kind of empowering you like you don't necessarily have to be like an adult to do this. Like you're, you're you can do this. And so was mentored in that in that aspect quite a bit. And yeah. When I was looking at the outline of the questions like thinking that I was thinking back on my camping experience, I think that was probably one of like, my favorite things about growing up in the church was our camps and reunion. And I mean, there were summers, you know, I would, wouldn't even go home between camps, we just do our laundry there and stay overnight, and we'd just be there when the next camp started, you know, because we were just, that was our summer. That was that was it. That was it. That was really formative. As far as teaching, leadership and spirituality and developing with my friends that way, because we had our camps, we would have all the way from like Panama City over to Louisiana. So there was always a really large group of us got smaller as we got to senior high camp, but that mean, our senior high camp's so nice and like, intimate and you just really knew everybody there. I really enjoyed that too. But I never, never, I don't I don't think I ever felt like a burden. I think at times, because I was so into, like, I would be the one that would kind of be like, Okay, well you can help with the kids during this business meeting. So like, as a teenager, I didn't necessarily participate in that part of the church. I was always like helping with the younger kids that that the adults could be in there. So I didn't necessarily feel like much of that part of the church. That's something I noticed that that changed. When I became an adult, we definitely did not, we encouraged our teenagers much more to participate in the business part of the church and the importance of that. So I think one thing I wish I would have had more of a focus there, in like seeing myself as part of the working part of

the congregation. And the opinions in that way mattered. But I also don't feel like that necessarily hindered my development as a church member, anything.

Brittany Mangelson 08:40

That makes sense. And I think that it's interesting seeing, like my own kids, my own, you know, 11 year old twins, and I have an eight year old who's getting ready to be baptized, but this transition of like being, you know, a consumer of church, but then recognizing that when you're baptized, I mean, you have voice and you have vote and you have, you know, your opinions, you are a member of the congregation. And so you do have opinions that can be considered and that that transition of, you know, been the person who gets ministry as a child at camps and things like that, and then going from this member that has more of like a logistical buy in, if you will, to the congregation. That's something that I'm like, Oh, should I be explaining this more to my kids, you know, should they be playing or paying attention more to the business meeting rather than you know, just like running around in the back like actually, you know, they're they're lovin like they could they could have some some sway in this. That's, yeah, I think that that. I don't know, transition is something that I'm assuming a lot of people go through as they're growing up in the church because I didn't have that experience. But it's interesting watching my kids now go through that and I'm like, oh, yeah, being no apparent in Community of Christ, I'm supposed to, like, teach you how to do the thing. And that's yeah, it's, it's interesting. So, I also think it's interesting that you recognize at a young age, you know that there was the LDS church that was next to your daycare, but like that was not what you were. So what was your general understanding of, you know, the similarities, the differences, our shared history with the LDS church?

Molly Bagley 10:30

So my dad is an elder, and I'll just throw it I'm not related to Dell Bagley, my dad is Joe Bagley. That's like the number one question I get when I meet people. But anyways, he's an elder and very, was very knowledgeable has always been knowledgeable about church history. And so I was also a curious kid. And so, like, I grew up knowing that knowing about Joseph Smith, and then after Joseph Smith, was, was killed that there was, Brigham Young led the group West, but that our church believed he had set apart his son, and waited, this was my understanding of kid, had waited for Joseph Smith III to kind of come of age and to be willing to leave the church. And so that is how we were different. And understanding that that split may well happen to Nauvoo. And, you know, I remember being told about the Palmyra in Kirtland and Nauvoo and then to Independence and so understanding about that the area I grew up in, has a staggering number of Southern Baptist congregations. When I, I attended seminary through Graceland as well, and one of our assignments was to do kind of a survey of our, of the makeup of our area, like where did the poor people live? What's the majority religion and I think in what in, in my county at the time, so this was like, 2015. I think in one county, there were like 98 Southern Baptist congregations. So with the name, there was definitely this. I definitely heard you're in a cult, a lot. I remember growing up in hearing, we had a group that would participate in like ecumenical sports teams, and there were teams that would not pray with us before the game, or I remember going to a youth event with a friend. And her father, like talks, you know, our parents met, you know, the first time we had like a sleepover and things like that. And I knew that her father was not a fan of our church, because I was allowed to go to events at their church and attend their church, and she was not allowed to continue with my church. And so before, events, my dad would kind of prep me, who would be like, you know, this is you're going to be asked if you're saved. And here's a way you can answer that

question. Because I didn't, you know, I didn't grow up with this concept of Yes, I was saved, I went to, I was saved at this point, you know, it was I'm saved through the grace and sacrifice of Christ on the cross kind of thing. And so he would help me to kind of preform some, some answers not, it sounds like putting words in my mouth. And I don't want to give that impression, but it was a way to help me to enter into these conversations with people. And so I remember going to an event. And when it came time for the youth group to go inside and play in a worship activity, I was not allowed to go. I stayed outside with someone filling up water balloons or water balloon volleyball later, and was grilled on my face. So I did have those kinds of experiences. And I don't think that the impact of that hit me really until I was an adult. And, like, kind of the knowledge of, of what was happening there and the fact that it was my church, and that we were so in people's minds so closely connected with the LDS church because of the name. And these knowing that the Book of Mormon was in the canon and, and that kind of thing.

Brittany Mangelson 14:40

that is so interesting. And I mean, to be clear, tragic, I mean, to have to be able to be prepped like that as a little kid, but it also feels relatable. And I think it's really great that your dad was able to frame your faith in a way that would empower you instead of a othering you, right? Instead of like, making sure that you had a target on your back, it was a it was a sign of protection and to be able to give you words and language to articulate your faith that wouldn't just automatically other you I think is actually brilliant parenting. And something that I wish that, I guess, more parents on, you know, like both quote unquote sides of the religious aisle, the belief system of you know, literal, literal, maybe even fundamentalism and then on the other end of the spectrum, maybe just pure secularism could could come together and understand that at the end of the day, like these are just kids on a playground, right? Like, these are just, these are kids and so putting our own religious baggage on them is harmful. So I, yeah, I think that your parents were very wise to be able to help you articulate your faith in a way that would would allow you to foster relationships while you're growing up. So as you moved into adulthood, so you said you went to Graceland. So how did that look? I mean, were you, so you were active in congregational life through growing up being a teenager? And then did you continue that once you got to Graceland? I'm curious to know, you know, did you feel pressure to only date people within Community of Christ? Or were you pressured to remain active? What kind of Graceland experience did you have?

Molly Bagley 16:40

So I loved my Graceland experience. And I really came full circle theologically, during that time to did a lot of breaking down my own theology and reconstructing it. And leaving with you know, I went in with strong faith, maybe a little bit naive faith, but definitely in, you know, I never really had, like a major theological crisis then or anything. I always, I wanted to learn, and I loved learning. And I was one of those people that like when something like, I have ADD, so I have that superpower of hyper focus. And so when something interests me, I'm like, "Alright, this is my life!" And so I started my mind, I was an art major, and my minor was church leadership. And I was taking some, so I was taking some religion classes and leadership classes. And so, you know, I definitely had that experience of I, like my freshman year, just kind of rambling. But my freshman year, I was in a communion service. And that's the first time I discerned that I had a call to ministry was just communion was being served. And I just kind of had this awareness that someday that would, that would be my role I would have, I would serve in that capacity. And then shortly thereafter, Graceland became a recognized as a congregation at a delegation by World Church and had a delegation, that's that conference and things like that. And then

campus ministers could process priesthood calls. And I was not called at that time. So that led, I entered into a period of a little bit of disillusionment, at that point, wondering what I was or wasn't doing that wasn't bringing about that call. And so I did drift away. Like, you know, there were regular services on campus and activities. And I did drift away from attending church regularly for a while, and then kind of got to a point in my life when I was like, Okay, wait, I'm making some decisions that aren't how I want my life to go. So let me circle back around to being more involved again, in church. And I never was completely separate, like I would still participate in services, I served as chaplain actually became chaplain in the hall. I was on Aponivi and my like, so at semester my freshman year, and so I did it for spring semester, my freshman year and then fall in spring, my sophomore year. And so I was still involved that way, but trying to figure out what involvement and leadership look like when you're not priesthood was part of my journey. And that continued well after Graceland as well. But so that was part of my experience. I don't think I ever felt pressured to like date anyone that was just only in the church or not, I knew it would be easier because there was always this because growing up where I did is like, there's always this label, how to explain this to people, but usually people when they come to Graceland has some. They do not know a lot about Community of Christ, just because there are some excellent programs at Graceland, just academically and sports related things like But but generally people developed some understanding of the church, so you didn't have to explain too much. So but I also think I only dated like two people. When I was at Graceland, I kind of was always the friend never their girlfriend syndrome in high school. But so I don't think I felt that pressure there. And I don't even think I felt pressure to be in involved or not involved in the church activities there. I didn't want to lose that connection. But I think it was also good for me to have that little bit of space that I created for myself to kind of grow a little bit more while I was there. And then also, while I was there, I was when I did, one summer, I did internship as a tour guide at Nauvoo. And that that point was probably one of the points where I really couldn't continue to fall in love with my church really dug even more into the history, and to how we developed to where we are today. And so that's where that process kind of started for me and that continued. And I did a lot of exploration when I was at seminary through Graceland as well, and looking at where we've come history wise and theologically, to where we are now. And so that kind of started when I was at Graceland taking during that internship and taking classes like restoration studies and restoration Scriptures with Bill Russell and things like that.

Brittany Mangelson 21:34

So I know that you said that growing up, you had, you know, some understanding of, of church history. But as you became a young adult, and were at Graceland and taking these classes, and being a Nauvoo was it challenging to learn more church history? I mean, did it spark any sort of faith crisis in you or, you know, make you question the roots of our movement in a way that that felt threatening?

Molly Bagley 22:06

I don't think at that point. That came along more later on. I mean, I definitely learning more about Nauvoo, I definitely had thoughts of like, the crazy train a little bit. But just some different teachings developing during that time. But I think it helped, that helped me to start to be critically aware. But really, my kind of crisis with that didn't hit until I was attending the Community of Christ Seminary, later on down the road, actually. And there was there was some space, so I graduated from Graceland in 2006. And I did not start attending Seminary until 2015, is when I started there, I put them intentionally and unintentionally. Right after I graduated from Graceland, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune

disorder. So there were some years of kind of trying to get that under control, and then working, and then feeling like I was in a stable place. And so that's when I went back to school for my master's in religion. And that was the point when we're learning more about scriptural development and church history, that I started to wonder, okay, what do I do with Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon? What do I think about this? And how does what I think, like, if I think that the Book of Mormon is a product of Joseph Smith and a product of its time, and maybe not unnecessarily from directly from a set of gold plates, what does that do for people who have a very strong testimony of the Book of Mormon? That's where I struggled. How can I reconcile my beliefs with these really powerful experiences that I grew up hearing as people who really delved into the Book of Mormon and who have strong testimonies of its impact in their life? And wondering about that, and that's where my crisis kind of started, and I'm not sure, I'm not sure I can answer that question even today. I think that's still something that I kind of wrestle with a little bit.

Brittany Mangelson 24:55

Thank you for being honest about that, because I think that you is as wonderful as it is to be in a church that allows for such a broad range of perspectives on the Book of Mormon or church history, and our theological development as a movement, it's really, really difficult for individuals to kind of find themselves and place themselves on that spectrum of belief, especially when, you know, I've heard the term "legacy member", when you have generations of your family invested in this and invested in this story, and I relate to that as well. I have, you know, I'm a legacy restoration person myself, and, and it is difficult, right? Because I mean, our grandparents and great grandparents, etc, etc, etc, cherished this text to cherish these stories, and had really powerful experiences with them that we heard about, and people in our congregations and, and so then to be presented with new ideas about the text have a different way of potentially looking at it, it's really difficult to try to piece apart what is history? And what is myth? And what is tradition? And what is it just all these different ways of looking at it? And then where is God speaking in the midst of this? And what does that mean for our community today? So I just want to acknowledge that, while we often you know, while I often celebrate the diversity of belief in Community of Christ, it can be really difficult to get to that point where any individual is, I guess, confident in claiming their place and their belief. And I still feel like I'm all over the map. And so I appreciate hearing you say, you know, like, I'm still not quite sure what I think about all these things, because, yeah, there's just so many different ways to look at it. And I think it's so easy to get stuck in the it's either all true, or it's all false. And I think the truth is probably somewhere in the middle. And, you know, that's, that's a difficult journey and a lifelong journey, I think, to take. So thank you for being honest about that.

Molly Bagley 27:20

I believe, you know, when I think about the Book of Mormon, and about Joseph Smith, you know, I love this vision of the church that, that Joseph Smith started, and I think it's this beautiful vision of Zion, one of my favorite passages comes from Doctrine and Covenants 36. You know, they were people of one heart and one mind, and there were no dwelt together, and there were no poor among them. And I think it's a beautiful vision of Zion. It's one of my favorite things. And I grew up with my dad telling me about Enoch's city and telling me about that, and, and I think, and so that was part of that, you know, coming into that, okay, well, what do I still think about this? What do I think about the Book of Mormon? What, what's inspired? And I do believe that there is inspiration and believe that, that Joseph Smith is

absolutely inspired by God to start this church, and I love it. I love it so much. But it is this, there are still points that I struggle with. But what do I really think about that? And do I know? I don't know.

Brittany Mangelson 28:40

I mean, you're in a community with a lot of people that don't know.

Molly Bagley 28:45

That's the thing I've always known that I had the freedom to ask questions. And then I had the freedom to explore these things, and that the conclusion I came to wouldn't necessarily be wrong. Like, you know, the person sitting next to me, I agree with my conclusion. But that doesn't make them wrong, either. Because we got to where we are to very personal and authentic experiences.

Brittany Mangelson 29:17

Yeah, that's beautiful, and a perfect way to sum up that tension that we were talking about with that spectrum of belief. So it's something that is so different from my childhood. I appreciate it so, so much. So thank you. Thank you for highlighting that. So molly, I'm curious because, you know, I haven't grown up in a community that did not necessarily empower women with a lot of leadership skills, or, you know, skills to be able to communicate or to have conflict resolution and just being builders of a community. I'm always just really struck by the folks in my generation that grew up in Community of Christ, because there seems to be maybe a gap in my understanding of, or in my skill set of how to effectively build community. And so I'm curious as you grew up in the church, and as you were mentored and felt like you were, you know, part of this decision making community. In what ways do you think that you were empowered to essentially be an adult like a functioning adult, I just feel like Community of Christ does a really good job at teaching humans how to be an adult. So can you speak about that a little bit any any sort of like leadership skills, you feel like you learned growing up?

Molly Bagley 30:45

So I've asked, I've been at Candler, which is a Methodist institution, sponsored by the Methodist Church, and so, but there, it's multi denominational, I've realized what a unique experience it is to grow up with no memory of like, I don't remember a time in the church when a woman was not at the pulpit. And what a unique experience, that is, I have friends who are incredibly triggered when they are in a service, and a man is at the pulpit preaching because of harmful experiences that they had growing up. And I don't, I don't have that, you know, I don't remember a time when a woman couldn't be a leader in our church. And so, you know, it's hit me recently that there is an entire generation who who don't remember that they just don't, they don't know that, what it was to not have have women in leadership roles. And so, like, I always knew that I that that one day could be part of my life, that I could have a leadership role in church if I if things went that direction, and that was part of my calling. And I had some great female models of that as well. And both in, in my family and in, in my congregation, who really took the time to mentor me. We had a youth leader, when I was, for a while when I was in high school and and she really took the time to, to empower to really kind of empower me as far as my involvement in church and seeing where we're, I had, like I had value, I always felt valued. And that what I had to offer was important. In in in that way. Yeah,

Brittany Mangelson 32:49

I absolutely love hearing that. Because again, I've brought up my kids a couple times, but just knowing that they're also part of that generation of just like not really having a recollection of a time where women weren't at the pulpit, we joined Community of Christ when my girls were really young. And so it gets me excited to know that they're not going to carry around that same baggage about their gender that I have carried. And then knowing that, yeah, this this whole generation, and really, you know, we're getting into like, second generation of Community of Christ, folks that just understand that women and men are equal. And I really appreciated that you pointed out that, because of how you grew up, you're not triggered by men in the same way, right? Because you haven't had that those experiences where you felt excluded by men. And so it's not like you have to be defensive around men and, you know, like, spied for your place at the pulpit because it's just there. And so I really think that that speaks to the beauty of, of the healed relationship between men and women that has come since 1984 in Community of Christ and it also makes me excited for our, you know, further progress with the LGBTQIA+ community and recognizing that we have a lot of work to do still, but but if we look at the healed relationship between men and women, and we you know, use that as a model for the straight community, straight cis community with the queer community, it just, it gives me a lot of hope. So thank you for lifting that up.

Molly Bagley 34:36

And I have that exact same hope, like I because I am part of I'm one of the facilitators with Harmony's Welcoming and Affirming congregations program, and it did it hit me last week, actually, that we are on the cusp of like having a generation that doesn't remember when an LGBTQ plus person couldn't be on the pulpit. We're on the cusp of raising a generation that just knows that as part of their church and as part of the church culture, and I think that is just wonderful. And it gets me so excited to be doing that work with Harmony, and also the work that our church is doing, and working for full participation for all persons. And so it gives me a lot of hope, like, I hope that I hope that your kids have that memory of, they're always like, there just never was the time when when, when someone was excluded because of their sexual orientation or their gender identity.

Brittany Mangelson 35:42

Yeah, it makes me excited, we are on the right trajectory, and I am thrilled for that. So Molly, I'm assuming that you know, your Well, I know you're a bit of a church nerd like myself. So seeing the value in a religious community is something that I think you identify with, but can you can you speak to that a little bit and having just completed your Mdiv, what do you see as being a benefit for the community at large as far as religious communities go? I mean, what are the benefits of having religion still be a thing, especially considering the our generation is stereotypically, you know, moving away from religion? What do you think the benefits are for keeping religion around?

Molly Bagley 36:34

I think that, at its, at its best, at its like optimal best. religion and religious communities can be safe spaces vary, unfortunately, more, they have not been. But I think at their best, that's what they should be. And those, those places where people can come and find community with people that have similar values, that even if you didn't grow up in that same tradition, I think that it provides a structure and in your life, that is different from from others, you know, my, my experience in my decision making is colored by what I learned growing up what I've learned from the people in my, in the churches that I

have attended, and what I can bring back to that even even in assignments when I would be working on stuff. I did this a lot at Graceland, but when I'm working on my endive, my thought was always how can I bring this back to the community?. Okay, so I'm writing this ethics, paper on environment, on environmental degradation and, and how our churches should respond to this. How can I bring that back locally? How can I bring that to the community, that kind of thing. And so it's provided that kind of structure in my life. And so I think that it is very beneficial. I also I mean, and I think, even religion, religion, and even just if you don't identify with a religious community, but foster a sense of spirituality, that there's something bigger, and this acknowledgement that there's something bigger in the world and creation than we are, I think that changes your perspective on your place in the world, and your, your place as part of this huge, massive, wider creation.

Brittany Mangelson 38:45

I really love how you said, you know that everything that you've done in your education, you try to tie it back to the community, right. And I think that religion and theology and just being open to other people's belief systems really breaks down the barriers that so often just get in the way of progress, right. And so I really liked that you acknowledge that religion at its best can break down those barriers and move things forward, while acknowledging that religion is often not always it's best. So to have ministers that are thinking about theology in a very practical way, and how can we make the world better in our context, is something that I think is super, super important. So thank you. So with Community of Christ, specifically and maybe you kind of already answered this, but what keeps you involved in church life today? I mean, why Community of Christ? Why do you stay involved with this denomination in particular?

Molly Bagley 39:56

I cannot imagine my life without it number one, because it's just always been there like I, my favorite things is I always feel like I can go into any Community of Christ congregation and you're gonna know someone or know somebody who knows somebody, someone, but there's also an inherent familiarity across the board that doesn't necessarily come in when you and yet And yet our congregations are incredibly diverse, but there is, like this inherent sense of community and I think that comes from being a smaller denomination. But, you know, when I started attending Candler, I did start thinking, do I, you know, do I, do I need to look elsewhere? Am I in the right place? And I just kept coming back to No, this is home. I, you know, I like I toyed with the idea, it's like, well, there would be more career opportunities and in ministry, if I were Methodist, or Lutheran and Presbyterian. But I don't know, I just kept coming back, I can't, I don't know if it's because this is where I'm ordained, and I don't know, using that elsewhere. But I also like, when I would think about looking else looking elsewhere, or looking at a different church, I would just become so profoundly sad. Because, you know, as a movement, we have changed and developed so much over over time, and I'm excited to see where we will go in the future. You know, I've, I've heard from some people of all of other generations, that we are a dying church, and I have just decided that I'm just here until the bitter end. I'm not going to, I don't particularly want to leave it. And I think that our, our theology and our sense of community. And I think it is on it's the it's the work I've seen this church do with the LGBTQ issues, and social and LGBTQ rights and involvement and full participation. That journey that we have started in are continuing. And then, more recently, with these, the USA conversations on non violence that we've been having, and giving space for our community to talk about that and to share about that together. That's something that's unique that I've

that I've noticed, as far as like, when I'm trying to explain to people, this idea of this continuing revelation tradition that we have, that is so much more than just adding to the Doctrine and Covenants, it has to do with our whole communal discernment process, and that no decisions are made in this church without the consent of the body. And, and so that whole sense of that fosters that broader sense of community that we have our local communities, but we are also part of this larger body, working together for these common goals, giving space for people for this fateful disagreement. You know, we talked last night was the final USA session. And that was one of the things that we started with was Blake going, Blake Smith going over that those principles of faithful disagreement, and, and giving that space for people and saying, We may disagree on this, but we are still we're still a community, we still love each other. And we, we give each other that ability to have that exploration.

Brittany Mangelson 43:58

Ah, I absolutely love everything you just said, relate to it so much, because everything from the feelings of when I have thought about leaving religion, or when I've thought about leaving the restoration tradition, there's just this overwhelming sense of sadness that has come over me. And and I've taken that as a sign that I need to stick with it until the bitter end. You know, like you said, and, and I have been so moved by these conversations on non violence and attending last night, it was just this. I had this overwhelming feeling that what we're doing matters, like it actually matters. And if we want to make the world a better place, we have to stay in conversation with one another about important issues that matter. And that's what we're doing with these conversations on non violence. And so while I recognize that Community of Christ is not the only place to have these conversations and to make this see progress towards a quality and peace, it's a really good place to do it. And when it's part of your DNA, like literal DNA, or your spiritual DNA, I think that it just comes naturally. And so I relate to you, I just can't imagine being somewhere else. I know that when we were first looking into Community of Christ, I had this idea of, you know, maybe we'd go check out other churches, but it just felt like coming home, and it just continues to feel like staying home. And I think for me, if I were to go to another denomination, and you know, join or whatever, it would feel like I was a guest in someone else's home. And I just don't know if I could find that sense of home like I do in Community of Christ. So even though I am a convert, I definitely relate to what you were saying, like, this is just who I am, this is just me. And I think it's really beautiful. Because we are doing good things in the world. Even if we're a little small church, I mean, we're doing we're doing good things.

Molly Bagley 46:13

If there's one thing that I have learned, it's before we can think and act globally, we have to do it locally, you have to have a local intimate knowledge and experience. And then like, like, if you take the environment, one thing I've read a lot lately by Sally McFae, who's an ethicist, theologian, and she writes, on environmental issues, and in her book, super natural, it's Super, Natural Christian. And it's how we should love the Earth. And she writes that in order to really love something, you have to know it. And you have to know it well and intimately. And so one of her recommendations is getting to know your environment that you're in. And I think that applies for a lot of things. Before we can start thinking bigger, about non violence and, and where you fall in the spectrum, I think it starts small, and then we move outward. And, and these ripple effects happen. So I like I like to think of like these conversations as us starting locally with these issues. And then we can go bigger. And we can, as individuals, we can think bigger.

Brittany Mangelson 47:38

And I think that that is so important when we look at the history of Christianity and colonialization. And the real harm that has been done to other communities, because, you know, white, European, American Christians just assume that we can put our culture on everyone else. But this idea that, that theology and change really needs to be a local reality before it can, you know, grow and expand and take other cultures into consideration. I think that that also is such a beautiful struggle that we have in Community of Christ. And just, you know, from going to the two World Conferences that I've been at, and seen how the conversations are truly coming from various places in the world. And it's not just, you know, a small handful of people in Jackson County, Missouri, who are making decisions for everyone that the voices from all corners of the earth where the church is, are being part of the conversation. And so yeah, that's another element of Community of Christ that I don't know if other denominations see as much just the, the grass roots nature of our denomination, I think is really, really important. So what are your thoughts on what's tough about being a millennial in Community of Christ? Or I guess, just in church in general, or the world in general? Not really, because I just so much crossover. And I think you've already mentioned a little bit of it, but yeah, what are what are some of the challenges that you see as being a millennial in Community of Christ?

Molly Bagley 49:26

So I'm a, as a religious comedian, Lliza Schlesinger would say, I'm an elder millennial, one of the women cuz I was born in 83. So I'm like, right on that cusp. And we have, I mean, this in order. This is true for every generation, we've seen so much change, but like, I mean, there have been so many moments that I'm like, I'm so glad that smartphones were around when I was in college, or high school or that Facebook was not a thing that I didn't have to do. deal with all of that. But I feel like Millennials get a bad rap. And, and so, yeah, that's like I used to get super offended when people were calling in millennials. I'm not that and but what does that what is that? What am I rebelling against? Like, what am I saying? No, not that. And so yeah. Maybe maybe just combating that, that kind of negative image that millennials have gained of not wanting to work hard and not wanting to be involved in more than I like a cursory level or being too involved. And, you know, being too involved in too many things or things like that, you know? I think that as a, as a generation Millennials are, can be very focused on working for change, and working to change, like, like, okay, yes, this works. But can we can we tweak it and make it work better? Or can we? Can we change these kinds of expectations of what this certain thing should look like? Is it? Is it a tradition? Because has value or is a tradition because we've always done it? And not everyone's open to asking those questions, because they're very comfortable in their traditions. And so when we come in and say, you know, I think it might have greater value, if we do it this way, that's come up against some pushback. And that change, but I think, you know, in order to not be a dying torch, we do have to continue to work and change and kind of roll with with new ideas and new leaders. And yeah, it's like, it's a times there's been like, this idea of like, the we need to, we need our younger generations to take up the mantle and to lead our church. And then there's people who maybe don't. And so we kind of come up against that. And that can be frustrating. That's,

Brittany Mangelson 52:27

Absolutely, I know that I, I know that you are not the only person in our generation that has expressed those concerns. And it's hard, it's, it's hard because the world has changed so much, and the needs of

the church have changed so much. And the expectation of religion in general, I think has changed. And so we're kind of all in this transitional phase. And nobody really knows what the future is going to look like. And then you throw in a pandemic, and you throw in financial issues, and you throw in all of these things, that it's just tough. There's, there's really tough issues that I think we're all wrestling with. And yeah, it's tough.

Molly Bagley 53:14

I think, and I think that like, you know, especially some of our smaller congregations may need to change how things are done, they may need to change how things operate. And that's very difficult to, to navigate and and to be thinking about, Okay. Do we now that now that we're moving into a more digital age, do we need a building? Do do? Can we have a more digital campus for our congregation where we gather at specific times, maybe once or twice a month? Maybe we rent a space? And we put our financial resources into that? Can we financially support this? Can we fight we are what can we financially support? And that is a it's a huge change from our traditional idea church. It can. So there's concerns of will people if we're not meeting every Sunday, will people still calm? Will they just be online? How can we increase the value of digital content so that people still feel like they're getting spiritually fed? How can we still make it feel like a community, but be but but also, you know, be a viable and viable and vital congregation and not lose membership, but also sustain ourselves in a way that so we don't have to completely shut down a congregation. So that's a that's a really hard place to be In thinking about those things, and it's a big transition, I think that, you know, one thing I noticed when the pandemic started was that a lot of our a lot of our areas are already set up to do that. So, you know, you look at like, the Beyond the Walls community. And, you know, we had for our congregations that are in more rural areas, that there's more distance between your congregations, maybe digital, more digital content and gatherings were already a thing when the pandemic started. And so, in some ways, we were set up well, to do that, because those changes have already been made, and are beginning to be made. So how do we expand that into other areas? And, and, and give our congregations the resources to do it well?

Brittany Mangelson 55:53

Absolutely, I actually was super proud of Community of Christ at the beginning of the pandemic, just seeing how quickly we were able to change and adapt, and in some ways continue to do what we were doing before. I mean, we had opened up the way for online Communion before the pandemic hit. And so we were already just kind of like, right there. And the pandemic just really had to say, Okay, we're doing it, we're doing the thing. We're prepped, we're ready to go. We can at least have communion together. So, yeah, the way that we were able to shift, I think, taught us a lot of lessons that I hope that we can carry into the future for sure. So, speaking of the future, you know, what are what are some of your hopes for Community of Christ and hopes for, you know, the next generation of, of youth who are being formed as disciples in the church today, and what what hopes do you have as a church as we move forward and continue to change and adapt for the different needs that the church is going to have into the future?

Molly Bagley 57:07

I reiterate what I said earlier, you know, about hope for, you know, a generation that doesn't remember a time when an LGBTQ person was not on the could not be in a pulpit. You know, it's heartbreaking to

discern that someone has a call for ministry and know how powerful their ministry would be. But also know, they are prevented, because of who they love, or their, their gender identity or something like that. That is heartbreaking. I hope that we have generations that do not know that heartbreak, of watching their friends, be denied ministry. Because of that. I want I want our youth that are growing up now to know we are small. But we can still make a difference, we can still have an impact, that even though our congregations are might be smaller than other congregations, that our church over our church members overall, might be smaller. But like, first of all, but 90, like I we have, there's so much potential, and I want I want them to know, and have confidence in that potential and have confidence in their contributions. Like I want them to know that they are valued, and they are important. And they are vital parts of of community first. And I want it I want our church to be its best and be safe space. I want people to know that our congregations are safe places to come, that you will be loved and you will be accepted. Just as you are. There's that you are you are no just as your

Brittany Mangelson 59:05

mic drop. That was awesome. That's that's the sermon right there. That's it. Oh, Molly, this has been so much fun. I you know, as we wrap up, I guess just sidebar, I did kind of combine a couple of the questions at the end there. But as we wrap up, I always just like to ask our guests if there's anything else that they would like to say before we sign off, but I also just want to give you a huge congratulations for finishing your MDiv and I cannot wait to see what steps are next for you and your ministry and your involvement with the church. And I just really appreciate your perspective that you've shared today. And I share a lot of your hopes and concerns and your drive forward and mission and just to really, I just I can hear so vividly through what you've shared today. Your desire to help make this church be the best that it can be. And just the acknowledgement that yes, we are small, but we are mighty, and we're having really important conversations and doing really important work. So thank you again, for uplifting. Just all of that, and big congratulations, this is an exciting time for you. So with all of that, is there anything left that I didn't ask or that you wanted to share that just maybe didn't come out in in the questions that were asked to you?

Molly Bagley 1:00:41

So that's, I think, just reiterating just what a special community I feel like our churches we have, when you look at the trajectory of where we've been historically, like where we've come as a denomination from 1860, to now. You know, we've, we've hit a lot of challenges, we have made decisions that were not always popular women in the priesthood, open communion, LGBTQ for participation, allowing our ministers to perform commitment ceremonies and marriages for same sex couples. You know, ordaining members of the, of the queer community, I think, you know, we've, we've come a long way. And we've had decisions that have been divisive at times. But I believe that as divisive and as painful as that process has been, we have opened so many doors for people. And I just hope that in the future, the way we as members of Community of Christ, live our lives, and express our love and passion for our church, and for Christ and for Christ's mission. I, my hope is that as we as that expression lives out in our lives, that it shows other people what, what we see in our community, and how we view work, the value that we put in, into living out Christ's mission, and that that, that helps them either find a safe space with us, or even just shows them that that there are there are places where, you know, they can find that kind of community themselves, but that our lived witness shows the core of our church, and how wonderful we think it is to others. Does that make sense?

Brittany Mangelson 1:03:03

It does make sense. I really, oh, this has just been so fun. I really appreciate everything that you've shared and your perspective. And it's honestly it's helped me, as I've, you know, kind of wrestled with my own sense of call. And just this idea of like, this does feel a little right like is the work we're doing actually doing anything. And so this is good to be reminded that it does matter. And that even though the world's problems can seem really big and really heavy right now, we are part of a community that is actively trying to make our own communities better, have our own our own neighborhoods better. And that is enough to have hope, right? Like clinging on to that is worth it. And it's it's important. So thank you so much for sharing everything and good luck tomorrow as you graduate. And as you prepare for your wedding this summer. I'm just so excited for all the good things that are happening in your life. And yeah, thank you so much.

Molly Bagley 1:04:16

Thank you so much for having me.

Josh Mangelson 1:04:25

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