

**Josh Mangelson 00:17**

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

**Robin Linkhart 00:33**

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Robin Linkhart...

**Karin Peter 00:38**

...and Karin Peter...

**Robin Linkhart 00:39**

...here today to talk about the life and times of women in Community of Christ.

**Karin Peter 00:45**

So we're going to start with some introductions. So I'm the usual host of Cuppa Joe. So if you are a longtime Project, Zion Podcast listener, you've heard me a little bit in the past, maybe too much. So we'll see as we go forward, but I serve Community of Christ as a President of Seventy. But what's really relevant to this conversation is that I am a female of an age where I grew up in a more patriarchal version of our denomination, Robin.

**Robin Linkhart 01:18**

Well, I am on the Project, Zion Podcast team and occasional host on the show, but most of my work is behind the scenes. I grew up in Community of Christ. And I currently serve in the Council of Twelve Apostles, and like Karin—although I'm just a smidge older than Karin, maybe a smidge and a half—I'm also here today, because I am a woman. Excuse me, I'm a woman who lived the experience of Community of Christ, from birth on. And we thought that we would start this conversation by sharing our story. We're going to begin with our young childhood. Karin, tell us about your young childhood in the life of Community of Christ.

**Karin Peter 02:03**

So I had kind of an interesting early childhood in the life of Community of Christ, because my parents who joined the church as young adults, and then became parents shortly thereafter, were a part of a communal living experiment called The Project which was in a place named Puyallup, Washington. So a shout out to all of those wonderful people. But it was several families, young families who lived on a parcel of land and built homes and shared gardening and just experimented with some kind of weird Zonic Community Living experiment. So that was a little bit different for early childhood, because everything about that early childhood was church because we were in this kind of project. So that changed when people began to move away from that. But, but it changed into a situation where we were part of a congregation that was...didn't have a building. And so we moved and rented space in, like, VFW hall and the Moose Lodge and those kinds of things. And that changes the experience of life in the church, then from people who grow up in an established congregation. It also affects, I think,

what we're talking about here today about women and men, because we were in the process of building a building. And when you were doing that, even in the, in the early 70s, a lot of the gender dynamics come into play, and a lot of them go out the window. So comes into play as the women cooked and cleaned and the men folk built and hauled and carried. But if you were a kid, you got sucked into whatever was needed. So I did things that traditionally were male roles, and I did things that were traditionally female roles. And I think that was a positive experience, even though that was still the time when only men served in church leadership. So that's my early childhood. Robin, what about you?

**Robin Linkhart 04:04**

So I was born into the church by virtue of the fact that my mother was born and raised in Community of Christ. My father was unchurched. Although, after he married my mom, he was very willing to accompany her to church throughout the years, including all through our growing up. I was born in Southern California when I was six weeks old, we moved to Anchorage, Alaska, because my dad was career military in the Army Corps of Engineers and we moved frequently during my childhood. My earliest memories of church are, in a sense, kind of a glimpse into what I would imagine. Leave it to Beaver life in Community of Christ would have looked like. Very traditional roles for men and women. Sunday school, very traditional experience of church with Sunday school for all ages worship all together. The sacraments celebrated, of course, communion on the first Sunday. And I got to experience different cultures and sizes of congregations, because we moved so often. The congregation in Southern California—San Bernardino branch where I was baptized—was a building that had been in the church for a long time since the early days of the church. And it was, I would say, a robust congregation, weekly attendance. And later on, lived in the panhandle of Sidney, Nebraska on Souix Army Depot, where we drove about 12 miles into town, and met in a farmer's home where they lined up the chairs in the living room, usually 12 to 15 chairs and our family, two parents and four kids were half of the congregation. Another time later, in my early childhood, we lived in the Pennsylvania area, where we had a large congregation that had a full time appointee, which is an employed minister of Community of Christ serving as the pastor there. And that congregation probably had a couple 100 weekly attendance and a really dynamic, robust children and youth program so experienced that. Like Karin, I saw women doing the cleaning and the cooking and the child tending. My mother was a musician. And so I saw her function as the piano player or organ player for our congregation. In small congregation, she might do that every week, because she might be the only one that served in that capacity. My dad did not join the church until much later. And so he functioned even as a non member and a non priesthood holder in a very male role and came alongside the other men assisting as was appropriate for him, which included serving on the building committee, and even teaching a junior high class later on. So Karin, let's move on to like our older later childhood, what did it look like for you.

**Karin Peter 07:21**

So I think when I was, like around 12, 13 years old, is when I really began to be cognizant of the reality that men served in priesthood leadership and women didn't. I mean, you knew that growing up as part of the air that you breathe it, it was fine. But I didn't realize the inequity of that until I was about 12 or 13 years old. And I know you have a very comparable story to this. So it's been interesting that we've been friends all these years, because I decided that the way I was going to get around this situation that women couldn't serve as ordained ministers was I was going to become Catholic. And that way I could

be a nun because in my mind, that would be the equivalent for women at the time. And I planned that until I looked up in the Encyclopedia Britannica, kind of what that entailed and decided that was definitely not for me. And, and I thought I had a backup plan. And so my backup plan was when I read the, the, what I call the owner's manual, the Membership Manual that you got, when you got baptized, I learned that we had chaplains in the military. And I thought that's perfect, I will go in the Air Force. And that way I can be a chaplain. And again, when I looked into how that happened, that probably wasn't going to work for me either. And I was very, just very aware at that time of the discrepancy of how men and women evolved in the life of the church. And that stayed with me throughout my teenage years. As I watched, the teenage boys get kind of mentored differently than how the teenage girls were, were mentored. And this would have been the mid 70s. And it was pretty apparent. It was a time when feminism was talked about and it was on the news a lot. And there were bra burnings, which when we talk about that now it's kind of the equivalent of the the pussy hats that women wore at... That was what they were called, that they wore in the women's march. You're laughing, but that's what they were called! And so it was the equivalent of that. And then there was all kinds of like, civic unrest based on feminism and that kind of thing. And it just became really apparent that that was that was in the life of the church as well. And there was a lot of dialogue about that in different settings. And as a as an older teen. I went to a youth event, and there had been some kind of disruption and some things that happened and I came home and I was telling my dad about it and he happened to be sitting there with a friend of yours who was also a priesthood member, my dad was who was an elder and there was this other elder there. And I was telling about this and how I felt about it. And the other elder, my dad would never seen said this, because he just didn't believe in inequity between genders. But this other guy said to me, oh, Karin, that's very discerning. When you get married, you'll be a wonderful helpmate to your, you know, priesthood husband. And I remember thinking, well, the heck with that it probably wasn't heck, but it was, I'm not doing that. That is not for me. And I just kind of took several steps back and didn't participate for a long time in the life of the church, because that was like, well, that's where I'm going to end up. I'm not interested in that. And I disappeared for a little while.

**Robin Linkhart** 10:47

I love your stories, Karin.

**Karin Peter** 10:50

We'll see how much it was edited out so well. Yeah,

**Robin Linkhart** 10:53

They never felt to be... I can experience them in living color and all the ways...[laughing]. So my childhood was a little bit different. But Karen and I do have some similarities. I was fascinated by other religious traditions, in particular Catholicism. We had some family friends who had I think they had seven kids. He was our pediatrician, and they attended our small town Catholic Church. And when I stayed overnight there, I got to go with him to church, which just captivated my imagination with the the ritual and the way sacrament was lived out in the context of the Catholic Church. And we had some current culture, like the Sound of Music that was focused on the life of a novice nun and different, different movies and TV shows that featured nunss. So I was captivated by that sense of a nun, although my sensitivities and awareness of the gender imbalance between male and female roles, was not really something I thought about in a, in a way that was concrete and well understood. I just knew I

was captivated by the sense of following Jesus, and that it looked like the life of a nun would be a great way to do that. So one summer, I actually wore a towel on my head with little bobby pins on the side to hold the front, straight across and just imagined my life as being a nun. And somehow it didn't dawn on me that in the reality of Community of Christ, that would not be a possibility. The other thing that's different for me is that in fourth grade, my dad career military was deployed to Dominican Republic. And so we lived in a developing nation for two and a half years fourth grade, through part of sixth grade and actually totally out of the country during a lot of the social justice unrest around race and around women. So we see the civil rights movement, and feminism really taking shape during that time. And so I missed that piece that would have naturally been in my life, even as a young child that would raise my awareness and consciousness. Return to the US in mid sixth grade. And boy was like a time warp because the first thing we did was my mom took us to the local clothing shop in this little town to get clothes that matched what everybody else was wearing, which was like mini skirts and fishnet stockings and those kinds of things. And I remember my mom being horrified at the things she was seeing on the news about burning bras, and it was announced that we would never be doing that. So it was a real fast and hard reentry into a world that had changed on the US. scene. My dad was deployed to Vietnam when we, right after we arrived in Nebraska. So all of that was kind of playing as a backdrop to my experience growing up in Community of Christ. Early in my junior high years, we lived in Rolla, Missouri, and we were there, three and a half years, which is the longest I had ever lived in one place in my life to that point, a lovely congregation medium sized. My mom played every week, the organ and it was a safe space. And it was, you know, going through puberty and adolescence and growing up and it felt good to be in a congregation again. In Dominican Republic. There was no presence of Community of Christ and we had formed a Community Church with all the US and English speaking folks who found themselves in Santo Domingo for either military or civil servant reasons. And that was a real ecumenical experience. So being back in the States and having a congregation and living into that, it was always all the men up front.

**Robin Linkhart 10:56**

Women basically..I never saw a woman do anything in a worship service other than provide music in one way, shape or form. One of the things we had back then Karin, you probably did, too, is we had early morning worship. That was like a 15 minute little devotion time before Sunday school. And that was the time when you got to see women and men do something that would be seen, even standing in the pulpit. In some congregations. It's like the pulpit was ordained, and a woman couldn't use it. But they certainly could not use it during your worship, but they might be able to stand there and do something read a scripture during the early morning worship. So that was that was interesting. And it gave me a taste as a young woman, in my teens, then of wow, this is kind of exciting. I think I, I think I like this. But again, I I just had not yet clearly seen the disparity between the roles in our church of men and women. And I think I was still kind of accepting it as the status quo. And this was what life was like. So let's talk about young adult. You've started on that a little bit, Karin, but we're out of high school, young adults, maybe some college, marriage, kids church, talk about that.

**Karin Peter 16:38**

So I had stepped back and I really didn't participate. As a young adult in the life of the church, I had just kind of went, not for me. And so by the time I did come back, I was a mom, I was married, my son was preschool age, when I started kind of dipping a toe back into congregational life. And it was about the

time of what we call section 156, which was when counsel was given to the church regarding the ordination of women. And it just happened to coincide. So I didn't come back because of that, in fact, I wasn't really interested in any kind of role in the life of the church, at that time, I simply thought that it was important for my preschool child to be engaged in some kind of church experience and Sunday school experience. And when I'm one on one with people, and I feel more comfortable with them, I'm a little more honest about that period of time, I refer to myself as a heathen during that period of time. And I was very good at it. And I excelled at heathenism and all the things that that might imply. And so I was really cautious about coming back during that time, and I didn't fully re engage until probably the mid 1980s. So my young adult experience would have been lived outside of the church experience.

**Robin Linkhart 18:05**

So my dad was military, as I said, career military and in the summer before my senior year of high school—at the age of 39—my dad retired from the Army and took a role at the city of Knoxville Tennessee, as the Assistant Director of Wastewater Control for the city of Knoxville, and he moved out to Knoxville, the family went with him and he rented a trailer, a house trailer with the plan that my mom was going to stay behind and sell our house and she would join my dad and I would stay behind and live with a family in Rolla and finish out my high school years. My last year in high school and my three sisters would go with my mom once they sold the house. So that was an interesting time for our family and an interesting time for me because they did sell the house around Christmas time that year. And we all went out to spend Christmas with my dad and then I came back and lived with a family in town. It was not a church family, but I went to church every Sunday as usual. And that was a time in my life when I recognized this consistent presence of the church in my life all through our moving time remained and was such a steadfast support for me in new ways, feeling alone and in the town that I hadn't experienced quite that way before. And another thing that was really big in our family is while my dad was in Tennessee—in the rental and we would visit you know whenever we could—he was attending Community of Christ and Oak Ridge, Tennessee and he was going through his own faith journey and experience of beginning to understand that he might want to join Community of Christ. So during that time he was baptized and confirmed a member, which was a really big thing to me. I remember I kind of had the heart of a missionary, even back then Karin, because I really wanted my dad to join the church. And he was active and supportive in every way as far as far as fellowshiping. But I used to play hymns on our piano and sometimes seeing and I think, Oh, if I just do this really carefully, and maybe I'm prayerful about it, my dad might suddenly feel this Holy Spirit telling him that he should join the church. So it was thrilling to me that he did join the church during my senior year of high school. So I moved out to Tennessee, right after I graduated from high school, walked out of the building, got in the car, and away we went. And I haven't seen almost anybody from my graduating class since that time. And I think it was about that time as I was going to college and had my first job. Ever. The summer before I went off to college that I began to get what I would call the beginnings of my feminist awakening. I decided to go to what was then called Graceland College. It's now Graceland University. I was fully engaged in the church life, campus church ministry and joined whatever I could to be part of that. Sang in the Graceland choir, which often sang at the worship services, was really active in student life and the church was very present on campus. And that's when I began to realize that there were young men my age that helped priesthood offices, and they functioned in those offices on campus and in the ministry programs there. And again, it was just like this slow awakening of feminism. Although I had been very conscious of social justice, especially in relation to race. It was a gentle,

sometimes abrupt realizations of the disparities of the role of men and women in the life of the church. I met my husband there at Graceland, we eventually got married and settled in Longmont, Colorado, and we were active in our little congregation there. My husband had been ordained to the Office of Deacon right before we left Knoxville the same day, my dad was ordained to priest. And my desire to be part of the church and live out my discipleship in Community of Christ was really strong. And I had a deep sense of commitment to that. We had three kids in 15 months. Our daughter was born and 15 months later, I had twins. And we found ourselves in my husband's new career, which was—he was a career insurance agent worked on commission only—was a journey of trying to .make ends meet while he built his customer base. And it was hard, it was really hard. And I was home alone. A mom with three little kids no car, the only time I went out of the house basically was to run to the grocery at 5 a.m. before my husband took our car to work. And on Sunday morning when we load the kids up and go and by the time they were toddlers, I was like in a sea of wanting to participate in church but overwhelmed with childcare. And I remember feeling really angry about that. So I have to tell you that I was to the point where I was broken over that, and talked to my husband and said, I can't go there anymore. If they can't even see us and do something to meet our needs. I just I can't do that. And we actually went a few blocks down the street to Christian Congregational Church and started attending. They had a great program for kids. And we even went through the new member classes and the pastor came to visit us. And this went on for several weeks and we hadn't heard from anybody at the church which further affirmed to me that they don't care about me. So um, one of the elders in our congregation, good friends. Bob called me one Friday and asked if I would play my flute at church that coming Sunday and I think that was Bob's way of checking in and trying, trying to connect. And, and so I did. And I remember sitting in that service and there was something about what was going on in that service that just spoke so deeply to me. And it was like, Oh, my gosh, our church is not perfect. But this is where God is calling me to live out my discipleship. And I did not know exactly how that was going to look. But I heard that loud and clear and went home and told my husband, I think we need to give it another try. So we started going back to church and one thing led to another and it wasn't long after that, that, um, that our church was talking seriously about what it might look like to consider ordination of women. So Karen, why don't you help flesh out the church side of our journey to ordination of a women.

**Karin Peter 26:06**

So one of the interesting things about how things happen in Community of Christ is that it's a it's a combination of what's happening in the body of the people what the conversation is, how resolutions are brought to World Conference can be very grassroots and how that happens. But at the same time, just the way God works with with this particular body of people is that the leadership of the church is discerning and considering and dialoguing about different topics. So, with the ordination of women, this was a very controversial topic, it was talked about for ages, locally and congregations in jurisdictions around the church and in the leadership of the church. And it.... Wallace B. Smith was president of the church, and he has on Project Zion, talked about some of this and how it was, and Julie Smith, his daughter has talked about what it was to live as part of the family, as a female and kind of walk as a family through this, which if you haven't listened to that episode, it's a really good one, to hear her perspective as a young woman. And, and, and again, I wasn't totally engaged in the life of the church at this time, but I was aware enough to know that even where I lived, which was on the West Coast, that there were a lot of people who weren't going to like this, and people were already kind of making a stand long before inspired council or at that time, what we called Revelation came to the church, about

the ordination of women. People were kind of picking their side and lobbying and trying to, to sway opinion on whether this was a good idea or not. And part of what fed into this was how we understood scripture. Is it literal? Is it cultural? Is it contextual? What do we do with, with scripture? What do we do with passages in the New Testament that say women should sit down and be quiet in church? What do we, how do we understand these? And, and for me, it was part of the process of becoming a more scripturally literate people was, was this whole journey towards the ordination of women, which we're, we're still on that journey. We're still engaging in what that means in the life of the church, but but this is what kind of happened locally as far away from independence as I lived, that people were picking their battles. And when Wallace B Smith brought the counsel to the church, about the ordination of women and priesthood responsibility and generosity and the temple. Lots of wonderful things in Section 156. People honed in on that ordination of women as the topic and it was divisive. It, in the, in the Midwest was really ugly, and... but even at where, where we lived out on the West Coast, it was, it was not a pleasant situation. And most congregations lost people who just couldn't accept that. couldn't live with that. But the interesting thing as, as disruptive as it was in the life of the church, and it was disruptive. It was almost a blink of an eye, before it became normative for women to be ordained. I mean, there was a pause between the revelation and that and the procedure of ordaining women. But once it started to take place, generally it was just simply how it was and you you really didn't realize that that hadn't been the practice all along. So by the time I came back, women had just been started to be ordained. In fact, my mother was called, which is probably one of the reasons I even was aware of all of this. And you wouldn't, you wouldn't have known that women hadn't served in priesthood all this time. Except there were little pockets of resistance all over the place. And in those pockets, and some of them still exist today, ordination of women was never accepted. It was never something that was that was accepted or or championed in any way. So that was what it looked like for me from kind of one foot in back in the church and one foot out watching that happen. What about you?

**Robin Linkhart 30:29**

So, Section 156, and the Doctrine and Covenants came out in 1984. And as Karen said, that was a very, that journey was divisive people had sometimes very polarized opinions about that. It had been in our conversation for a long time. And if we look back in the history, we can see it emerged really a ways before that, and kind of trickled down and had come in full, full dialog in the years just prior to 1984. I was in my little congregation in Longmont, Colorado, and I had one child in 1982, two children in 1983. And as you can imagine, not all my attention was on reading the Herald every month and paying attention to conversations. But that spring of 84, I flew with my three kids back to to visit my parents and World Conference was happening while I was staying with them. And my grandparents, who had been converts to Community of Christ lived in the same town. And so I remember caring for my three little kids and my Grumpy would come over and Gram and they would give little reports from World Conference. And I remember them being like very unsettled and distraught. And hearing actually, that's when I heard the news that Section 156 had come out. And it was it was really hard for my grandparents. It was difficult for my mom, my dad was very accepting of that. Went back to my home congregation, and we lost overnight, we lost half of our congregation. And it was a struggle for our little congregation to go forward. I think those who remained behind were very committed. Our pastor did not yet have his own affirming testimony of, of Section 156. And so he prayerfully walked with that he was very supportive of the church fully committed, served faithfully in that role, and went to the rededication of the Kirtland Temple not long after that it was during that service that he received spiritual

confirmation that this was God's will. And he, not long after that processed some calls for women to the priesthood in our congregation. It was beautiful to see women step into those roles. And because our congregation wasn't really in an metropolitan area, I didn't have the opportunity to see how you know, the five larger congregations in Denver lived into that. I was in a district and the district at large was very accepting. It wasn't long before we had a woman district president. We actually had two female district presidents in a row. So I was seeing that lived out and seeing how the nature and experience of worship and ministry as one who is receiving that took on new dimensions. Before we had two women in our congregation called, we had a young couple and their kids move out and they were in Colorado for a couple of one or two years. But she had been ordained before she came. And so that was our very first experience. I think she was in the office of teacher. And that that was a tremendous experience. When we had our fourth child in 1988, I stepped back from active engagement in the life of the church I attended every week. But I had been doing all kinds of things like teaching classes and directing the choir and helping out with everything that was going on. And I decided, you know, I need to just step back from that kind of involvement and just be a regular attender in the first year of, of our last child's life and be present with my family and kids. And that was a really important thing for me because it allowed me to drink (in) and become spiritually fed and take time to kind of sift and sort. And begin a journey that Karin began much earlier than I did of beginning to understand the depth of the theological transformation that was undergirding our capacity as a people to step into this and make this journey. And to recognize the enormous gift that is resident in how Community of Christ experiences and lives Continuing Revelation. That it's a dynamic way of listening to God and allowing us in a changing complex world, and culture and context, to live and breathe and walk with God and listen deeply to how God is calling us to be and to become, and to grow. Even when it's really hard. And sometimes we go kicking and screaming. So that that was really a dynamic time. I was called to priesthood in 1995. So my kids were...had grown quite a bit. My older three were in junior high, my younger one was in elementary school. It was something that I had felt stirring in me that I sensed that I had a call to ordained ministry, I wasn't certain of the office. I was thinking teacher, maybe priest, and it didn't come. I mean, I was feeling stirring probably for a year. And it didn't come and I finally decided, well, I can serve and be active and follow Jesus anyway, regardless of whether I'm ordained and not or not. So I just decided to let go of that, to maintain that sense of call and apply that sense of call to however, I had the capacity and opportunity to serve. And that's, it wasn't long after that, that my pastor came to visit on a Sunday afternoon and presented me—to my great shock, and surprise—a call to the Office of Elder. And that's kind of when I started swimming in the deep end of what it felt like to live into this on the participant side of being asked to serve in that way. So up to then it had been receiving ministry and observing how the depth of ministry took on new and beautiful dimensions. And then it was—it got really real in a different way. So Karin, how were things unfolding, at that point? So tell us a little bit about your experience of receiving calls and how that was for you, you'd reengaged in the life of the church. What was going on? And what did it look like

**Karin Peter 37:46**

I did reengage it would have been the late 1980s when I did so. Finally decided I'd put both feet back into church life and congregational life. And I was really lucky in a sense that the congregation I re-engaged in was the one I had grown up in. But it had really transformed. It was a large congregation, then, by the time I reengaged. It was very welcoming and very inclusive in a lot of ways. It had some really positive effects on me in the sense that even when I was a kid I was Invitational, you know, the



way you ta were talking about your dad, and you thought you could do these things. The way that it I expressed it was that I never went to anything of a church event without taking somebody with me. It was just the normal thing to do. You invited friends to go with you. And so when I reengaged, in the life of the church, I had that same kind of a way of, of living. My discipleship was always about invitation and inviting other people to come with me. Sometimes intentionally and sometimes unexpectedly. But I ree-enggaaged about 1988 fully. And as an as a person who was not a priesthood member, I was still invited to facilitate worship services and offer public ministry and those kinds of things, because that's just the kind of congregation that that it was. And so I got a lot of opportunities to serve, even though I was not an ordained priesthood member. But in 1992, I received a call to the Office of Elder. So it was a similar kind of expression of oh, okay, well, let's see what that looks like as we navigate that together. And my husband at the time was, he had finally joined the church, but he, he kept most of it at a distance. And so he was, he was a member or not... He was a member and he participated in some things but he was not going to ever or be interested in any kind of leadership or priesthood or anything like that. And I thought it was interesting that the pastor took that into account, but didn't let that determine whether or not he presented a call to me, which I thought was really forward thinking. I know of many, many cases, even now where "Oh, the spouse might not be, you know, okay with this or supportive of this." And I'm a real advocate for let the, let the person who's called make that decision on what their, what their personal relationship is like, and whether it can weather this kind of leadership in the church. So I did accept that call. And I was ordained to an elder in 92, and then served in my congregation. But also served in, in the, at that time, it was a stake, Seattle Stake. So I served in different capacities there as well. And I still had this, you know, heathen reputation to kind of overcome to some degree. But I was pretty diligent in that and had a lot of support and friends and, and other leaders that that were supportive and mentored me in lots of different ways, which I think is critical for people in, in newly ordained people to get that kind of mentorship from others who have walked the path before them. And then in 1995, I received a call to the Office of Seventy. And I was in my 30s. And there were some women serving iin the Office of Seventy, you know, fairly local, but not a lot when I went to my first quorum gatherings and those kinds of things, and that some of those occasions were the first times I was referred to as... that I was referred to in diminutive terms for being female. That was my first encounter with, I'm gonna say gender bias in the life of the church, post 156 was in some of the quorum gatherings originally. Umm just because I was a young woman who had been ordained to the Office of Seventy. So that was, that was surprising to me, because I had not experienced that yet. But I fully embraced that and feel like I really lived into that, that priesthood office. And that was, you know, a really authentic call for me. And really, I was very serious about it. And have been able to really use my nature of being a person of invitation in ways that has encouraged that kind of ministry in others, which is I think the best part of being in church leadership is being able to do that. So those are my kind of local, priesthood call experiences. You and I were, shared the experience in 2007 of being approached about serving in a new capacity as Seventy. And that was something that was at the field level where we were partnered with apostles. And there was, it was called aa field missionary coordinator. And we both served in that role for several years. And in some ways that was uncomfortable, and in other ways, it was really informative, and, and helpful. I didn't think I'd say that at the time, but I can say it now. And then in 2010, we're both called to serve as Presidents of Seventy. And I have served as a President of Sseventy ever since. There were several women serving as President of Seventy at that time. Currently, as we record this, there's only me, though, I'm the only female on that council. And I consider it part of my responsibility to make sure that the field apostles and others who are in church leadership

are looking, particularly for young women to serve in the office of seventy. Because that's how we get leaders in the life of the church is we mentor, we intentionally mentor others and in in the role of seventy in the life of the church, that doesn't always happen for women. And so I'm really concerned about that and what that looks like going forward. So, how about you?

**Robin Linkhart 44:28**

Well, I want to ask you a question, Karin, before I continue my story and that is along that trajectory of your ordination to elder and then now in the Council of Presidents of Seventy you became full time employed minister with Community of Christ. So when did that happen?

**Karin Peter 44:48**

You and I have had such similar trajectories. I feel bad. It's like I'm gonna tell your part of the story too. So you and I both actually started and employed ministry kind of late 1998 But I think our start date is January 1, '99. So we're in our 23rd year, which makes me feel very, very old and experienced. But I've served in lots of capacities. So I served, you know, local jurisdictions, I served as what was called a Transformation 2000. Minister. I've served as a what was called a Field Minister and Mission Center Minister and, and now as I went under Church Appointment, which I think you explained earlier, in 2004. So I started '99, went under appointment in 2004, and have served under appointment ever since, to where I am, and I'm several years short of retirement, but it is something that will happen at some point.

**Robin Linkhart 45:47**

So as I said, I was ordained, called to elder in 1995. And ordained in 1996. It was the year that I turned 40. One interesting thing about that call is I was called in September, before the new year started. We had a pastor coming in from a neighboring congregation, because we didn't have anyone in the congregation that that was willing or able to serve. And the District President had approached me that fall to ask if I would serve as Charlie's counselor. Now, my call had been approved. But my ordination wasn't going to happen until March. And so that was just kind of like knocked me flat like "You what, what?!" I said, "I won't even be ordained until March." And she's like, "That is totally fine." So it was a steep learning curve. And the experience I had then, which is one that has played out over and over and over again, in my life of ministry, is this sense that God consistently calls me into roles that I feel unprepared and unqualified to serve. And it's, and it's a leap of faith to say yes, to those calls. So I was already serving as the assistant pastor the day I was ordained in March, and then the following Fall, that Fall, I was elected pastor, and that started January, 1 of the following year (1997). And I, I really, I had so much to learn. And it was such a steep learning curve. And because I grew up in a home, where I did not have the benefit of a priesthood holder, my father didn't hold priesthood until I was, had been gone from home for a while. I had this big gap in what, what people would assume I might know, because I grew up in the life of the church and as a lifelong member. And especially since we moved so much, it would have been my dad only, that was like that that model of what lived out priesthood looks like close up. So the first time I was going to be presiding for a communion service, and it was the first time I was actually going to serve the communion, also. I was I was terrified, and I grabbed old time friend, Bob. And I just took him in the hall. And I said, "Bob, I need you to tell me how to do this". And he goes, "Robin, you have been doing this your whole life." I said, "No, I've been, I've been out there. I haven't been on this side of the table." So. So I was constantly grabbing men to teach me how to do

things, from communion to every thing else that I was called to do, and responsibilities and ministry, how to do it, what it looked like, where could I get resources, and I was just rapidly consuming everything I could get my hands on and watching. I was watching people live their ministry through a new lens because I needed to know what they knew. And I needed to understand how God was calling me to live into those roles, and to also understand that this was part of me living into the all of who I was, who God created me to be. And there's that there's a sense of authenticity, that that goes into that and that is lived differently in diverse ways in contexts and cultures, in men and in women and and it's been frightening to step out into that and also it's been the deepest joy of my life. So I served as pastor from 1997 to 2003. As Karen said, 1 January 1999, was my first day as a Field Specialist Transformation 2000 member (minister), which was a different category than the old time appointee, but still full time minister. And my assignment was to serve as a pastor in my home congregation, and that had turned into a journey of looking outward into the community, and understanding—how was God calling our congregation to live and be part of the neighborhood where our building was, how to be part of the greater community, how to invite others, how to be fully present and vibrant witnesses of Jesus Christ, by virtue of how we lived our lives in and out of the congregation. In 2003, we went into Mission Center formation and my role shifted, and 2003 was my last year serving as pastor in Longmont and I was reassigned to the Rocky Mountain Mission Center, and served as Congregational Support Minister, and later as a Mission Center Invitation Support Minister. And then in 2007, as Karen said, I too, was called to serve as—I was called to serve in the office of seventy, and to serve as a Field Missionary Coordinator, alongside Apostle Dale Loveman. So Karen, and my journey really began to weave together and we had been aware of knew each other outside of that time, because our (paths had crossed) in different ways. And in particular, through our time in seminary, and then walking into this new role, a new way of being that the church had never had before, with seventy, serving alongside apostles, who at that time, were not Presidents of Seventy. So we had four unique Field Missionary Coordinators, and seven Presidents of seventy. And then in 2010, with Karin, being called to serve as a President of Seventy. And this was really exciting because in the Doctrine and Covenants that had been accepted that year 163, I believe, had made provision for the number of Presidents of Seventy to be in response to the need and not bound by there would always be only seven or at maximum, seven. And that was the year we had ten Presidents of Seventy each yoked and mission with an apostle in their geographic assignment area. And that that began a new chapter of our journey, for sure.

**Karin Peter** 52:36

It really was, and it was so different because as a female, President of Seventy, I was assigned to a female apostle, which was great. And you had a very different experience because you were assigned to a male apostle.

**Robin Linkhart** 52:49

Yeah, I was assigned to a male apostle. And not only that he had been my professor in seminary.

**Karin Peter** 52:55

And he was awesome. But still, it was...

**Robin Linkhart** 52:57

...it was a little overwhelming. And another thing they did Karin that I forgot about until just now as we were partnered with another team. So I was partnered, well Dale and I were partnered with Mary Jack Dynes and Kris Judd, who was a President of Seventy. And so we had three females and one male in our our partnership.

**Robin Linkhart** 53:16

What did yours look like?

**Karin Peter** 53:16

Poor Dale.

**Karin Peter** 53:18

Let's see we were partnered with with Carlos Mejia and Bob Kyser.

**Robin Linkhart** 53:24

Wow.

**Karin Peter** 53:25

Yeah. So it was was two and two

**Robin Linkhart** 53:28

Awesome.

**Karin Peter** 53:29

Absolutely.

**Robin Linkhart** 53:31

And then in 2016, I was called to serve in the Council of Twelve Apostles and continuing to be yoked in mission with my President of SSeventy. Who has been Karin all this time.

**Karin Peter** 53:41

So we stay entwined in our journey here.

**Robin Linkhart** 53:44

We are really entwined, aren't we?

**Karin Peter** 53:46

We are.

**Robin Linkhart** 53:47

I think one of the things. Karin, as we began to go into general officer roles and have a different view of the global church is seeing how women in ministry and leadership has unfolded across the different nations of the church and to be—have a front row seat, for example, to the journey of Catherine

Mambwe from Zambia, who is now on the Council of Twelve. But I don't think she was even a Mission Center financial officer when we first met her, was she?

**Karin Peter** 54:21

No. She became a bishop and then became the financial officer after. I think we met her when she was, she was a leader, but she wasn't a Mission Center officer.

**Robin Linkhart** 54:33

My first World Conference was 1998. And that was the year that two, the first two women were called to serve in the Council at Twelve, Gail Mangle and Linda Booth. Later Stassi Cramm was called to serve in the Presiding Bishopric and then later, Stassi went into the Twelve Susan Oxley went into the Twelve.

**Karin Peter** 54:54

Mary Jacks Dynes.

**Robin Linkhart** 54:55

Mary Jacks Dynes and Barbara Carter. Mareva Arnaud. And Becky avage went into the First Presidency.

**Karin Peter** 55:07

Yeah, that's all been, when you when you think about it, in our journey that's all been within this last part of our journey. And it's really interesting. That was my first conference as well. And so my entire experience has been one where women have been in World Church leadership,

**Robin Linkhart** 55:25

And then to watch also as the dialogue that goes on in the council's and quorums of the church and see how the dynamics of living into gender equity, and the dynamics of male and female roles as we live that out contextually in our culture, which now includes cultures from all over the globe, and to see how, how people develop and grow. Watching. Because we were in the Council of Presidents of Seventy we were a part of International Leadership Council for a couple of years. And to watch this representation of leaders from around the church. I think there were like 70 people they would bring in, to have very important conversations and dialogue with the First Presidency. Not to listen to the First Presidency speak, but to receive questions and openings for dialogue and to really important issues facing the life of the church, because the presidency wanted to hear what other cultures and leaders had to say around the world. And to watch that voice, both male and female, grow stronger and more confident about really saying the truth of what their experience was.

**Karin Peter** 56:39

Absolutely. And that was a really good experience for me, because as a, as a person whose field assignment has always been in the United States. That colors my understanding of what it means to be a people of justice, what it means to be people of peace, because I'm part of a a preferenced culture and a wealthy culture. So it was a really good experience for me. It's also been really interesting. I joke sometimes when people say things, I'll say, "Oh, my feminist hackles are kind of standard up there."

We're not perfect. I mean, we've we've been engaged in this journey for some time. And it's not just gender equality, it's, it's, it's equality for for every, all people to really live that out. And we're not perfect in it. We have pockets where, where we don't have gender equality. We have pockets where we don't have equality for people who identify in, in a sexuality that's not heterosexual. And so, you know, we're still struggling, we still have remnants of colonialism and racist behavior in in some some of our elements of our community together. But when we find them, I think the interesting thing is that when we find them, we're getting really good about acknowledging it, and then figuring out what to do about it. And I know, a lot of times, you know, I'll raise the subject that, you know, women still aren't paid the same as men in big parts of this. And it's like, yeah, but as an American woman, I'm still you know, I've still been privileged in that. And so the church is really focusing on making sure across the board that compensation is fair, and just and equal and, and those things. And I really, I really take pride, I guess, in that, that we're, we're willing to look where we're not doing as well as we should. Gotta work on that. Not just as a people, but as individuals.

**Karin Peter** 56:40

Yeah, for sure. Yes. So there's always an inward and outward life journey. Which is just like, "Rats, you mean, I have to look at myself?"

**Karin Peter** 58:52

Yeah, I know, too. What is it about me? I also think that, you know, we've had decades to deal with this when he talked about 1984. To me, that's yesterday, but in reality, it's not. It's a long time ago. And, and we've been able to live into this. And so, you know, we talked earlier about what does that look like for people who are experiencing this in a in a much more rapid way than what we did and and learning how to walk with them out of our experience with this.

**Robin Linkhart** 59:25

Yeah, I think that's really important, Karin. As you were talking, it reminds me how much we learned from the journey to women's ordination that has informed us on how to walk with and pastorally support in sensitive ways the journey of change. Like Karin said the whole globe was not in the same place with women's issues. When the ordination, the provision for ordination of women was made, and we still in some nations are supporting the local leaders, the apostles of certain fields to do whatever we can to support that to support their leadership and engaging with their people with education and advocacy, dealing with change so that they can bring that about in a way that does the least amount of harm and supports women. And from that journey, it has informed us greatly in how we approached full inclusion for LGBTQ+, in the US and other nations. Understanding that we opened ourselves to that journey with the provision that it would not be a mandate for all nations, but national conferences, were the pathway to that and understanding the timing for that would be different. And I think this whole living into change and providing the network of education and support and dialogue and helping people work through things contextually and to lead, to be— their own leaders are the ones that are helping them walk through that because they know their culture, we don't. So that colonialism, understanding and confessing when we have been part of colonization as far as bringing and importing our own culture and context of the church into other places. And understanding that we need to hear and listen to local leaders and and equip them and develop them as best we can to support the process but they are the leaders of that process. I remember Mareva Arnaud came to audit in seminary. Do you remember?

**Karin Peter** 1:01:45

I do remember.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:01:46

French Polynesia? I don't think she was she may have been a Mission Center officer then I'm not sure. Steve Graffeo who's in the Presiding Bishopric his family. His dad was an appointee, an Apostle and Presiding Evangelist. They spent a large portion of time in French Polynesia. So Steve Graffeo was fluent in French and he would sit with Mareva and translate. And to watch Mareva grow and develop. And now she serves as an apostle on the Council of Twelve. And to be with her in French Polynesia, and watch her as she masterfully and full of grace leads and walks with the people that she is called to serve is amazing. Absolutely amazing. As Karen said, gosh, going through what we have, and then having the opportunity to walk with women who are transitioning into Community of Christ and coming from other denominations who do not ordain women—women who are going through a very similar journey that we and others like us went through in a collapsed timeframe. And watching the struggle of that, what are some of the things you've witnessed Karin, or that you understand about that process?

**Karin Peter** 1:03:10

Well, it's really interesting, because we always compare to our own experience. And I know my own experience, because it was, you know, decades in the making, that's, it's so different. But when I watch women going through it, now, they encounter Community of Christ, they come from a more patriarchal tradition, and, and yearn for that kind of liberation to be able to serve according to their giftedness. And so when, when they have the opportunities to do so, it's exciting, it's liberating. It's all the things that people you know, hope and yearn for, to be really recognized as a valuable equal member, and participant. But at the same time, it isn't enough, to just go, "Oh, women can be ordained here and Community of Christ, I can serve here. And that's great." Even in doing that, because the timeframe is so collapsed, women in ministry who come from a really highly patriarchal society, still, I think, have to be aware that your roots run deep. So I think of it like a plant, a little plant, little flower plant. As you, as you explore the opportunity to serve in ministry, it's like, you watch women bloom in that. We have to remember that underneath there, there's this root system that is rooted in patriarchy. And so different things become really hard to deal with. To give an example, one that I run into kind of a lot is that women are like, "Oh, this is so wonderful, because I feel so liberated and I was called to serve in the priesthood and it's just been a lovely experience in my congregation." And blah, blah, blah, blah, blah and then they If they take a class, I teach a preaching class. And so they take the preaching class. And at some point in the preaching class, I say, "Listen, when you're offering public ministry, there are parameters. Here are some of the parameters." And it's always women who go, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait, are you telling me there were things I can't say?" Because there's this idea that, "Oh, I've been liberated to do all of this stuff. And all of a sudden, there's no boundaries." And it's like, "Unh, unh. They're there for all of us. For all of us, there are boundaries." That's, that's life in a community that there always are boundaries and at Community of Christ they're really far apart. They're, they're wide. But, but we have to recognize that we stand in serve as representatives of Community of Christ. And we have an accountability not just to the institution, but to the people of Community of Christ. And so when we serve in public ministry, there are, there are boundaries, and women come up against them, they come up against it hard. And that's that root system. That's the reaction to, that feels like when I

was in this heavily patriarchal thing, and men were telling me what I can do only, only it's now, it's, it's a woman telling me what I can do. And so we have to recognize that. That that root system, the, the way that we were shaped and formed is still intact, because we didn't have the time to really dismantle it. I think when you take decades to go through a change, you have more time to do that. But to be honest, as a 63 year old woman, there are times when I'm doing something, and I get tweaked because my root system was still in that kind of a patriarchal experience. And so I have empathy for women going through that. But we have to, we have to recognize that. That, yes, there are boundaries that are diminished when we come into Community of Christ. But that doesn't mean it's a free for all.

**Robin Linkhart 1:06:58**

Yeah, for sure. I think some of the things that I've heard women express who are making this transition reflects the lack of opportunity, they have had to serve in various roles that Karin and I were able to serve in, even before women were ordained. And to live into that and to have modeled for us other women that had leadership roles in the women's department or teaching. And although they were working in collaboration with men who were the leaders of the congregation, they actually had a lot of autonomy, in, in contrast to how some other expressions of Christianity are that don't ordain women. And the other thing is, when when we are born into any kind of context, or culture or faith that has very clearly defined rigid gender roles, women, women's self expression, and self discovery can be shut down to the point that women who transitioned into Community of Christ—who are lovely, oftentimes very well educated, capable women—have not had the opportunity or been encouraged to do the self discovery and exploration of who they really are, and who they feel called to be. And that can be, that's not an overnight journey, either. So helping women peel back the layers of self discovery, and then find healing and wholeness for the woundedness that they come with, at, in a patriarchal system where, where they have experience, shame, judgment, even really difficult situations. And, and finding some sense of repair and, and those triggers can come up along the way. And, and those triggers are connected to those deep, deep roots. So it's been really important, I think, to understand the particular journey of women. And then what does that look like to live out not just in a church context, congregational life, but how does that affect their relationships in home with husband and sometimes it's a mixed faith marriage where maybe the husband is still active, and their, in her prior religion, or maybe has walked away from religion altogether. Or sometimes men very much support all of it. But the lived experience and patterns of life when, when you're living in response to a heavily patriarchal defined relationship can be really difficult to navigate, even when both partners are fully on board and trying to explore this new thing.

**Robin Linkhart 1:09:52**

Absolutely.

**Karin Peter 1:09:52**

Yeah, it sounds good. It sounds good. Yes, my wife's equal, be treated equally and yes, accept that priesthood call, that's wonderful. And then all of a sudden, it's like, wait a minute, where do I fit in? You know, I hear men say that now, where do I fit in this, that and because that used to be my job, and now you're doing it. So, what does that say, for our relationship and different people experience it differently. But there, I've met with folks who, who the male partner in a male female relationship has been super supportive, and is able to make that transition with grace. And I've watched where that has not been the



case where it becomes a struggle for people. But in reality that happens, whether it's a male female relationship, or a same gender relationship, or a long term Community of Christ relationship.

**Karin Peter** 1:09:53

We all have it, we just see it so clearly when it's in this compressed timeframe of transition for folks who are experiencing Community of Christ as a really joyful, liberating place to live out their spiritual journey. So

**Robin Linkhart** 1:10:50

For sure, and it's been super important, I think, Karin, you can speak to this too. But I hear over and over how helpful it is for both men and women, regardless of sexual orientation or pairing—that seeing Community of Christ model male and female working side by side, both heterosexual, LGBTQ+, seeing that modeled in a community, both as couples, as families, as singles, young and old has been such an important dimension of learning and discovering what their own path and journey can look like for them.

**Karin Peter** 1:11:44

Absolutely. And that's a good reminder, I think for Community of Christ congregations that have families come in—out of a really patriarchal experience into their congregational life—is to remember that it's a good thing when the, when the menfolk go into the kitchen to wash the dishes after a shared meal. And it's a great thing when, when women are presiding and serving the sacrament, to be sure and model all the various ways in which we can reverse some gender stereotypes and some expressions of ministry that have been long held in with a certain viewpoint. It just makes all the difference in the world. And I've watched lots of times, my husband who was a church appointee for 25 years, we would be somewhere and he would make a point if there was a crying baby, even if he was the Mission Center President, he would go over and pick up that baby and take it to the back of the room and cuddle it and help it quiet down. And I've heard young women say, I can't believe—and it's because he's male. And because he was a church leader—I can't believe he did that. But we all need to do that. We all need to model that it isn't gender that makes us servant ministers. It's call.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:13:02

I love that. Well, Karin, is there anything that you want to say today that you haven't had a chance to share?

**Karin Peter** 1:13:07

No, I said all kinds of things that are probably need to be edited out so probably done.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:13:13

Well, I think this has been really fun to do this together. I want to say a special thanks to all of our listeners. Be sure to check out our other episodes Karin noted a few earlier on in this podcast. We offer several about the life and times of women in Community of Christ. So check that out. This is Karin Peter and Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care, bye bye.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:13:50

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