

## 495 | Open Topics | Women's Journey of Becoming Pt 2

Project Zion Podcast

### **Josh Mangelson** 00:17

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

### **Robin Linkhart** 00:33

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And today we are bringing you part two of the life and times of women and Community of Christ. Part one featured stories of lifelong members who lived through the major shift Community of Christ navigated to embrace the full inclusion and equity of women in our denomination, to include ordination. Today, we will hear stories from women new to Community of Christ, who in one way or another, are navigating a very similar shift, but doing it in an incredibly short span of time. All of our guests today grew up in the LDS church and are now members of Community of Christ. I want to give a very warm welcome to our guests, Leslie Dalton, Joanna Smith and Brittany Mangelson. Thanks so much for being with us. So let's take a moment to get to know you. Tell us a little bit about you. Lastly,

### **Leslie Dalton** 01:45

Hello. Thank you for having me. My name is Leslie Dalton. I live in Utah County in Utah. I have, we're a blended family. We have three children and three grandchildren. So that's super fun and kind of new. I'm a junior high English teacher. And I'm currently an elder in Community of Christ and I'm a member of our congregation pastorate.

### **Robin Linkhart** 02:17

Thanks, Leslie. Joanna?

### **Joanna Smith** 02:20

Hi, um, my name is Joanna Smith. I currently live in Salt Lake, Utah, just down the street from the Salt Lake Community of Christ. I am currently married to my second husband, wonderful activist, feminist man, Mark Barnes. And I have four children of my own. He has four children, eight grandchildren. I'm an activist, and I've been a stay at home mom, I've been a CEO. I've been an activist, and I've been every I've been lots of hats. As to what I do, and I joined Community of Christ just this spring.

### **Robin Linkhart** 03:05

Thanks so much, Joanna and our one and only Brittany Mangelson.

### **Brittany Mangelson** 03:13

So hello, everyone. I think that the podcast listeners probably know way more about me than maybe I'm even comfortable with. But I'm Brittany Mangelson and I also live in Utah County really close to Leslie, I serve Salt Lake Community of Christ as an elder and I served in various leadership positions in that congregation. And I currently work full time for Community of Christ as the social media seeker ministry specialist and part of that role includes Project Zion. So I'm really excited to be here today. A little nervous to be on this side of the mic, though. But it'll be it'll be good.

**Robin Linkhart 03:56**

But we're super glad to have all three of you with us today. Before we get into your unique experiences as women continuing your faith journey as a woman in a denomination that practices, full inclusion and participation of women in all dimensions of our community. Can you tell us the story of how you came to be a member of Community of Christ? Joanna?

**Joanna Smith 04:23**

My Community of Christ journey was both incredibly long and very, very short. And I I've been aware of Community of Christ my entire life. I attended reunions growing up with large extended family reunions growing up with members of Community of Christ. And then, so I was kind of vaguely aware of it in that regard. And then I was highly involved in the Ordain Women movement, trying to get LDS women to get the priesthood. And instantly in that we learned and I started studying Community of Christ, and their strong women in Community of Christ in their equality struggle. And then, over the last five years, I kind of came two or three times a year to Community of Christ, and stayed in touch with the community. And then just in the last year and a half, I became actively engaged in studying and questioning if it would be a good place for me. And then a moment came and I just pulled the band aid off and I realized everything that was holding me back and I just decided to get baptized. So I was just confirmed this spring.

**Robin Linkhart 05:53**

Thanks so much, Joanna. Leslie?

**Leslie Dalton 05:56**

So I would say I'm also a formerly LDS and the, I was never actively involved in ordain women. But I think that they had a huge impact on me and making me think about things, equity has always been a major value for me. And so I had a lot of issues with LGBTQ acceptance and people of color. And, of course, women in the LDS church, and I just there a few things happened one year, or over a couple of years. And I just reached a breaking point and couldn't, I just, I couldn't be party to some of those things anymore. So I decided to just kind of look around and see if I could find a new Community Community of Christ was like, not on my radar at all. But the very bottom of my list because I didn't, wasn't interested in joining another

restoration. Faith, but I just I went one day, and I it just felt like home to me. And I decided I didn't want that to. I still didn't want that to be a thing for me. So I stayed away for a while. And I just kept thinking about it kept thinking about how good I felt there. And so I guess, maybe four, four or five years ago, I went back and I just kept coming. And I was confirmed, I think three years ago. And yeah, I've very much loved it.

**Robin Linkhart** 07:43

Thanks, Leslie, Brittany?

**Brittany Mangelson** 07:47

So in 2014, I had just had my son, I had little twins that were three and then I gave birth to a son and my husband and I were in the thick of what we still consider a faith crisis. It definitely felt like a crisis of faith. And we were really wrestling with the origin story with Joseph Smith and everything that happened at the roots of the restoration. And so out of, I would say historical curiosity. We were interested in Community of Christ, because we knew enough about it to know that it was a church that ordain women and embraced the LGBTQ community with inclusion of ordination and marriage, but we didn't know how they got there. And so we, my husband, attended, again, mostly out of curiosity, and I was still taking my postpartum break with my son and kind of stretching that out as long as I could, because I was not super thrilled about going to our LDS ward. And then the summer of 2014, the founder of Ordain Women, Kate Kelly was excommunicated. And that was just a massive, massive break of my shelf and I just needed a place to collect myself and find myself again. And so I sent my reluctantly joined my husband in his search and Community of Christ. And I just kept thinking, Okay, I'm gonna stop going as soon as this stops working, right, it was really I thought that I would just be able to find strength there in the congregation and regroup and find maybe a more nuanced way of looking at things but then still make it work in the LDS church. And that just never happened. And it very quickly became apparent. That Community of Christ was where I was meant to be. So just after about six months of attending the congregation, we decided to be baptized and confirmed, which felt pretty fast. But again, we fell in love pretty hard, and pretty quickly and then about a year later, I was presented a call to the was a priest. And I'll talk about that a little bit. But it was, it was a bit of a difficult journey for me. And then a few years after that, I believe I was ordained an elder in 2018, in the fall of 2018. So it's and then shortly around that time, I started working for the church full time. And so it's been this really rapid, whirlwind experience for me, going from being a stay at home Mormon wife, to now full time minister and Community of Christ, who are who's helping folks discover and explore Community of Christ themselves.

**Robin Linkhart** 10:37

Thanks, Britt. So you each came to Community of Christ for lots of different reasons and, and found a spiritual home with us. How has it been for you to embrace and live into this different

way of being as a woman? How was it different than what you knew before? And what did that feel like Brittany?

**Brittany Mangelson 11:04**

So it's been difficult, like I just kind of alluded to, I definitely grew up in a very conservative, traditional home. My mom was a stay at home mom until my youngest sister went to school, and then she worked in a school. And so I never had a moment really being at home without my mom at home, I was taught that my place was in the home, I was taught the only source of true happiness I would find was to be a wife and a mother. And so traditional gender roles were really all I grew up with. And so coming to Community of Christ, and recognizing that even without ordination, I would be liberated in ways to serve, and really invited into ways to serve that went against what I always thought was my, quote, "divine nature", that's a very LDS term. But it felt like I was stepping into a role that was almost like a costume, right? It almost felt like I was playing dress up, or when I was asked to lead different services or do different things, it just felt it took time to grow into that. It was also difficult, because I think a lot of people think that when women leave the LDS church, and they go to a denomination, even if it's not Community of Christ, but just any denomination that is more equitable towards women, there's this assumption that we are power hungry, or that we, you know, we're just leaving to gain more influence and control. And so it almost felt like because my ordination came so quickly after I joined, it kind of felt like I was proving all of those folks, right, because I knew that there were people that assumed that about me, I'm also one that doesn't necessarily like to be at the center of attention. I'm an introvert by nature, I am friendly and outgoing, but it also just comes at a cost for me. And so again, ordination and living into this new role of actually putting on church has definitely taken some time to grow into. And I also have a very, I guess, I would say, sensitive soul to how it looks for people, I recognize that, you know, when I serve communion, in my congregation, there's a really good chance, especially in Salt Lake, I might be serving communion to someone for the very first time who's you know, who's never had a woman serve them Communion before. And so I remember one time this dad brought his little girl in, on a Communion Sunday, because he just wanted his daughter to see a woman serving communion. So in the context of my ministry, there's an additional weight, an additional responsibility that I feel because there are a lot of eyes on us. And we don't look like other ministers in the community, we don't look like what people expect an elder to be. And so I sometimes have a hard time letting go of all the voices in my head about how this should look or how I should act or behave or respond to folks. But at the same time, it hasn't all been difficult. It has been really liberating, and recognizing that when my daughters from the time they were three, have been able to see women serving side by side with men. That has been something that I'm really grateful that Community of Christ has afforded my kids and it's just normal, right? My son was four months old when we came to Community of Christ. And so even though it's been a A bit of a learning curve for me, I'm really grateful that this is just normal for my kids. So yeah, it's it's looked more challenging than I think I anticipated. And

there's still just different triggers and things that pop up. But I'm, I'm going along for the ride. So it's overall been really good experience.

**Robin Linkhart 15:21**

Leslie, how about you?

**Leslie Dalton 15:24**

So, I'm thinking about, you know, moving into this different way of being. And for me, the way we worship and Community of Christ is so different from what I've been used to that I don't know that being a woman has played into it as much. Certainly all the things Brittany talked about, and certainly, womanhood and women, and authority, and all those things have been strong issues for me. But in the LDS church, I was almost always in the role of a leader. And I almost always felt that I had a voice. So I wasn't. Now I realized that's not that was an illusion. But I, in my small congregation, I did have a voice people listened to me, people respected what I had to say, up to a point. And so that that wasn't as much of an issue for me at first, but I had to learn to perceive God differently. I had to learn to express faith differently. And I, the whole culture of that I was used to being told like, this is how things are, this is what you believe this is what you need to do to get the reward. It was so strong that I think the biggest challenge for me and coming to Community of Christ was I was floundering, because I didn't know how to think for myself. And I didn't know how to trust my own feelings and my ideas. And that's when I started to learn that I especially didn't know how to trust my own feelings and ideas as a woman, you know, when I started to recognize that, that all of that was maybe less than I had previously thought that it was my involvement as a woman in in a church. So that was the challenge for me. And at first, I felt like it's going to take me forever to overcome this. And it was surprising me, did not take very long at all. It was surprisingly easy to get used to.

**Robin Linkhart 17:32**

Thanks, Leslie. It amazes me when I hear these stories, how some of these threads of the journey are similar to what women went through over a long period of time. And I appreciate all of you sharing about that. It's, it's very helpful. And I I know this is going to be helpful for people who are listening to it to understand this journey. Joanna?

**Joanna Smith 18:01**

Yeah, I mean, for me, I, I feel an instant intense feeling of coming home for commute Community of Christ. So my name is Joanna Smith. And I'm quite literally a Joe Smith on purpose named by my family, and a descendant of Joseph Smith senior. And so I was taught from my very core very earliest interactions with faith, that the Restoration movement was a movement built for me. And a movement that my personal family sacrificed to create the community that they wanted. And so, inside the LDS faith, I believe that I believed that for decades, over three decades, I truly believe that if I contributed to my community, and if I built

it up, it will become what it could be or what I wanted it to be or better. And it wasn't until I put up my profile that it was like, instant backlash. And then I was putting my place very, like, I was putting my place. I there was backlash. There was everything and the community that I thought and was told intimately was my birthright rejected me. Um, and, and I don't say that like, I just say that that's like, how am I spiritually experienced it? I don't see it that way. But I'm saying that that's how it was explained to me. I guess that's a better way to put it. And then I, I couldn't understand how a church could could reject its congregants because to me a church was made up of a community of faith. And so like, how can you reject somebody else's face. And so coming to Community of Christ had my spiritual language and the same language that I spoke of, but all also a radically different way of letting me identify with no script. And I would say like, the way I was raised, I had this path laid out before me that there were these steps you take, and then you take this path. And it was a straight and narrow path. That was very prescribed, and this is what would happen. And when life didn't turn out that way, or I followed all the rules and all the paths. And then still, it didn't work out that way. Like I didn't, there wasn't, there wasn't a path I just felt lost. And coming to Community of Christ gave me just an open field to walk in. Like, I could walk over here and figure some things out. And I could walk over here as a woman and figure things out, and I could try on something here. And it was all this beautiful, beautiful wildflower patch that I could just kind of explore and become who I wanted and needed to be at the time. And, and I can grow from that. And I can change my mind and go back and grow. And that feels both wildly radical and like life changing to be untethered and terrifying. But also, intensely, unconditionally loving and intensely faith driven. Because I get to I allow my face to be an action word to let me go walk from one path to the other or to make a new path or to just go over there when there is no path. And so to me, it like it's been radically different, and also the most at home I've ever felt in my life.

**Robin Linkhart 22:49**

Thank you, Joanna. Those were some really powerful images as well as words. For the benefit of our listeners, I just want to clarify that when Joanna says she put up her profile, and she got all this backlash, that was when she put up a public profile on Ordain Women's website, which was a very courageous and significant move on her part coming out to the world as an activist for women's rights in the LDS church. Thank you all so much this is I just have tingles going over my whole body because this is such a powerful journey. And I feel so honored and privileged to be sharing this conversation with you and listening to you as you share from the depths of your experience and your hearts. Some might assume that a new sense of liberation and inclusion would be all positive. And we've touched on that a bit already. But we do know that change is always difficult, even the most positive of change. What have been some of the challenges and how have you navigated some of those Leslie?

**Leslie Dalton 24:03**

So the first thing that came to my mind when I started thinking about this question was the Japanese senpai kohai culture so I served a full time mission for the LDS church when I was 21. And you've and you've probably heard of this, in talking about Japanese business because it's so much a part of our culture. You know, working working with the Japanese has been so much part of our culture now. But that what it is that Senbei coli culture is there's, there's an authority and that person is the person that says how things are and the people or person under that person are obedient. And so in Japan, that people fit into the LDS church so easily. Once they, you know, change their concept of who God was, that was their big issue, but the authority issue made so much sense to them. And even as a missionary when put in a position of leadership or authority, which I would say I never had any authority as a missionary, but there it was that culture, right, so you just did what you were told until you were put in a position over someone else. And that makes it really hard to think for yourself. Because you are constantly looking for the person in charge, and looking for that person's cues, or just straight up, you know, commands for what you need to be doing. And, and if you start thinking for yourself, that's when it becomes really painful. So you don't just out of self preservation, right. And that concept of authority has been deeply ingrained in me and, and I had very authoritarian parents as well. They were good parents, and they loved me. But you know, you did not say no to your parents, and you just did what you were told. So anyway, coming into the set my own sense of personal authority. And I think this is what Joanna was speaking to, as well, having my personal authority be valid, like my path, and like Joanna said, going over here for a while, and then going over here for a while and, and finding that place has been exhilarating and terrifying at the same time. So I, but but the more I do it, the less scary it gets. And the more natural it becomes. And again, I don't know, I this is part of it's partly because I'm a woman, but it's also partly just because of the culture that I was in for so long, and how, how we are expected to be. And yeah, it's scary to break away from that, and not know not having all the answers not knowing where I'm going or what's going to happen to me. That is very scary, until you realize how freeing it is to not know.

**Robin Linkhart** 27:07

Thank you. Lastly, Joanna.

**Joanna Smith** 27:11

Yeah, I mean, I kind of touched on it before. But yeah, there's there's backlash. And when you choose to leave your traditions, in any form, there's backlash, and there's pain, and it's all valid. It's just quite painful. And I mean, I've, I think that we, having changed it, but I don't view changes. I mean, I don't view it difficult as bad, I guess is what I'm saying. I've learned over the last decade of my life that growth is hard and painful and beautiful. So it's been challenging to learn that. And to recognize that in myself, it's been challenging to like Leslie said, trust myself in that, but also intensely rewarding, because when I've stood up and said things clearly and affirmatively that I know are true in my heart. And then the backlash comes, I actually can live

with no regret in that I've searched and asked myself the questions of faith. So it's been incredibly difficult to be to, like, enter a world of liberation and inclusion and just equality. But it's, but I don't think that the difficulty is a negative. And I remind myself every time it's hard, which is daily.

**Robin Linkhart 28:57**

Thank you, Brittany.

**Brittany Mangelson 29:01**

So I just want to say a big old ditto to what Joanna and Leslie just shared. But when I was thinking about this question, I thought of a very specific challenge that I experienced. So I said before that I was ordained first to the office of priest, and I was heavily involved with Mormon feminist communities online and in person. And this idea of the ordination of women was obviously on everyone's mind and so I was one of the first to break out of the LDS church and to be ordained. However, I was not ordained to an office within Community of Christ that could offer what is called a blessing in the LDS church. So in Community of Christ, it's administration laying on of hands, very similar in the LDS church. And because there was a there was a culture clashed that was happening because in the LDS church, if you are 27, like I was at the time, you would not be ordained to the office of priest, you would be ordained automatically to the office of elder. And so there was this assumption that then I could provide this very specific, needed wanted ministry to a community that was very specifically wanting it from someone like me from a woman. And that was difficult. So, because I couldn't do it in Community of Christ. And so I found myself in this weird crossroads of not feeling like I was ready for ordination. Because I still felt so new, and was still trying to figure out what ordination meant, what priesthood meant, I was still in the process of rebuilding my faith and my theological beliefs. And yet, I was being asked to give ministry in a certain context. And then this other community that I was part of assumed that I could give ministry that would match their context. And I just felt like I was being pulled in a million different directions. And so I found myself in this place where I was trying to explain Community of Christ priesthood structure, while not making apologies for it, but while not throwing it under the bus, because people couldn't understand why I couldn't give them a quote, unquote, "blessing". I just had multiple experiences, where I just found myself trying to explain something that I didn't even really understand. And feeling again this paradox of not even feeling like I should, or could provide ministry, under the umbrella of ordination, whatever office it was, but then also, not being able, like still being bound up in institutional titles and things like that, and not being able to just officially provide the sacrament that was being asked for me. So it was, it was an uncomfortable place. And there weren't a lot of people, I felt like there weren't a lot of people that really understood where I was coming from on the Community of Christ side, again, the culture is just so different. And then on the LDS side, the culture is so different. And so there was just assumptions that were made. And there really weren't a lot of people who had been in



that exact spot before. And so it was really difficult. It was a this, this period of time where I really questioned ordained ministry in general, you know, like, are we just getting in our own way, like, are we are these now stumbling blocks of just providing liberated ministry and I really had to face you know, some word demons in the restoration history closet, because, again, this is a structure, this is a framework that was put into place by the founding leaders of our collective church. And so it just it was, it was difficult for me to kind of be part of something, but then still see the limitations in it, I guess, all while questioning my own worthiness and place to even be at that table. So I don't know if that was confusing, or if it was as confusing as it felt at the time. But it really, it was, it was a struggle. So

**Joanna Smith 33:28**

I actually, like just tell you, as someone who was in the community, you're talking about, well, you and watching you go through it like it also, like I think we there was a lot of people that felt like we were like starving in the desert for female like spiritual leadership. So it was like it and then it was like this, like, desperate plea to be all and end all and do well to whatever anybody else's idea of that was. Because coming from having none of that, to having some of that. It was like, please give us something anything and everyone wanted it in different ways. And I think you navigated it beautifully. But I from like, my perspective of it was like recognizing that we had had no spiritual leadership. I mean, I looked up to strong young woman leaders growing up in the mainstream LDS faith and I looked up to strong women in my family, but I didn't even even me and my like feminist mind didn't give them spiritual authority until somebody else told me I could. So that to see you go through it and then see everyone like, like, want to require a view what they thought it could be because someone told you it was there. May all of us evaluate like, what that looks like or could look like, sorry.

**Brittany Mangelson 35:06**

No, that was good. And it was, it was just a messy time. It was a really, it was messy and reconstruction after an in the midst of a faith transition is tricky. And then when you mix in ministry into the rebuilding, and nobody I didn't have anyone to learn from who had done that before, like I didn't know any woman who had gone from the LDS church to Community of Christ, that was still so entrenched in the LDS community. I think, you know, the one or two women that I knew who had transitioned to Community of Christ, they just cut off the LDS church pretty dramatically, but I was still trying to not swim in both waters but but support this community that was still trying to figure it out that was still trying to explore what ministry looked like within that context, while also branching out and again, it kind of felt like I was playing pretend minister, like it just it took a while for me to claim that identity for myself. It was tricky.

**Robin Linkhart 36:16**

Thanks. I think this part of the sharing has really demonstrated in a very clear way, how going through this radical shift in such a narrow span of time, just multiplies the complications, and it's intense, and it's deep. I appreciate what you said, Joanna, describing it as hard and painful and beautiful at the same time, super complicating. So we've touched a bit on these topics already, but let's explore them a little more. Tell us about the journey of leadership and priesthood as women, both sides of that experiencing the leadership of other women and taking on responsibilities in the congregation yourself. Let's start with Joanna.

**Joanna Smith 37:06**

Um, my first experience of experiencing women as priesthood holders, ministering to me, was in the Utah mountains. I think, Robin, you were there. I know that Brittany was there. Carla Long was there. And women from Community of Christ gave the sacrament at a camp I was at a my children were there and it was everything I had always wanted it to be and more. And it's, it did it. It confirmed that I had made the right choices and like the deepest desires of my heart to have women be able to hold the priesthood. Would it like was a pure? I don't know, I just thing. It confirmed that I wasn't crazy. I mean, it almost like instantly erase the gaslighting that I had been experiencing. And still to this day, I mean, my kids aren't all that religious, but still to this day. When women do the sacrament, my kids always make comments every month. They I think when that happened the first time I mean, they asked they invited Carla invited my daughter who was I think 12 at the time to participate. She helped pass out. And it's changed. It changed even how she views service and connection and community. Across the board. So yeah, experiencing the leadership of women and allowing women to minister to me, I think has been the most beautiful gift I've experienced in Community of Christ.

**Robin Linkhart 39:14**

Thanks, Joanna. Brittany.

**Brittany Mangelson 39:18**

So I think the first memory that I have of getting ministry from a woman in Community of Christ was actually just a simple conversation that I had with you, Robin. I read clothes. I was terrified to be at camp. My first experience with Community of Christ was not in the congregation. It was at the campground. And I did not realize that you were a president of 70 at the time, Robin. And so I wasn't sure of your title, your authority. I didn't know much about you. It was I think literally our first time talking and you had made a connection really quickly. Eat that you also had twins. And Lok Mackay was there. And we started talking about church history. And there was that shared connection of twins and I had just had my infant son. And I don't think I realized it at the time. But that was ministry, you didn't lead with your title, I didn't know who you were actually, when I found out that you were president of 70. That's when I totally got freaked out, because it just was. So again, one of those cultural clashes of, you know, here's

this woman, president of 70. That's, that's a big role in the church, and you have a lot of influence. And that's an important role. And so the fact that we were sitting up in the mountains, and I was bouncing my infant son on my chest in my little sling, and we were just talking about church and family life, and you saw me as a person, alongside luck, who's now also an apostle, it was transformative for me and the amount of respect to that I felt in that moment, that I was being seen as a person, not just as a mom, but that my questions and everything were answered and reflected on and affirmed. Yes, sacramental ministry is important. And I have those moments as well, you know, those those tender moments of being administered to and having communion. But I learned in that moment, that ministry also just happens in face to face conversations, just being vulnerable. And I have never at that point, like I had never even imagined that a church leader, in any denomination would actually see me and affirm me as a whole person. And not just as you know, a mom, and not just telling me what I need to believe. But that as a woman, I was seen as a whole person. And sometimes when I talk like that, now, it almost, I mean, that was, you know, over eight years ago, and it's like, come on, Brittany, of course, you're a whole person, but I really didn't feel like anyone had seen me as a whole person before I came to Community of Christ. And so I think that sometimes we think that ministry is this big, flashy thing, or that it's well prepared, or it's, you know, super, super intentional, and there's a sacrament involved, or there's a great sermon, and those things are all really good. But when someone is really broken, and struggling to even know if God exists, let him let alone, if God sees them and loves them, just standing across from someone who sees them as a whole person. To me, that is the most powerful ministry that someone can bring. And, and that happened that day at camp. So I mean, I have a million stories of then how it felt to, you know, turn around and be that person for other people. I already mentioned that dad that, you know, came and tracked me down with his little girl. And because she wanted to see communion, the sacrament officiated by a woman. So it's, it is a privilege and an honor to turn around and be that person that can see others who are often overlooked, who are often pushed aside, but to really stand in that place and see another human as a full human, that, for me is the most, I don't even know what word to use, exciting, humbling part of ministry. The sacraments are great, but actually showing up and seeing God in the face of another person, that's where it's at, for me, and to have that from a woman with quote unquote, institutional authority, and then to suddenly be the person with quote unquote, institutional authority and to be able to provide that for other people. That for me has been the most amazing part of this journey.

**Robin Linkhart 44:13**

Thanks so much, Britt. I just want to add it's been a humbling experience and life giving experience to watch you live into that circle and come around full circle and share as you say, embracing your whole person self and then sharing your whole person self with others who can learn the same thing. Thanks. Leslie?

**Leslie Dalton** 44:42

I just want to say speaking of women in leadership Joanna's wearing top that has little tiny pictures of Ruth Bader Ginsburg all over it and it's amazing. So I

**Joanna Smith** 44:54

We got get through the day however we can you guys. This is my shirt to remind me that one woman and can make a freaking huge difference in her community, even if it's hard.

**Leslie Dalton** 45:06

Women in Leadership everywhere is powerful for humans everywhere. So seeing women in leadership, from the very beginning was so powerful and so moving to me, and I just loved seeing women presiding at meetings. That's not a thing that happens elsewhere, performing sacraments and being heard at all levels, and that I know what you're talking about Brittany and I feel like there's just a bearing that women have where in Community of Christ, where you just you just know that, that you matter, right? Whether you hold a priesthood office or not, but I think that the most powerful experience for me at the beginning was receiving Communion from another woman. And I'm pretty sure it was you Brittany, it was very powerful to me. And then when I was confirmed, I kind of remember what was being said. But I also just remember thinking, there's a woman with their two women with hands on my head, doing this thing for me. And I'm never going to have, I'm never going to receive another sacrament from a man again. I've had millions of those. And I love and respect so many men, but I don't have to, I can have this happen every single time. And I don't know, for me that was it. I don't know if that's what I'll do. That's kind of where I'm at right now. But I, but I know that that's, that's what I feel like I learned that I want for myself to just kind of bring that back. That feeling of power and authority, just a nod over other people, but over yourself, right. But that said, this is what Brittany spoke to this to. So for a while all of that felt kind of contrived. For me, I felt like, here's this awesome group of progressive people that see a need that see that things are not equitable. And they have made up this thing where they're giving women full voice, and it's a fantastic idea, but it's pretend it feels like pretend to me and I even asked Brittany when she was ordained an elder I and I was super nervous to ask her this. But I just had to know what she felt that I said, does it feel like fake priesthood Do you like, is it because because that our experience was so different with, you know, just sitting back and I'm raising our sons and seeing our husbands advance in priesthood office, because it's all out automatic in the LDS church. And seeing all of that, like your job as a mother is to prepare your sons to go on and be strong priesthood holders, and your daughters, your to prepare your daughters to be that person that prepares other men and young men. And it just it felt like it's got to be fake. It's got a, I don't know it just, but then again, and and she's told me that she understood what I was saying. And that I think helped kind of break the ice with that feeling. Just knowing that I wasn't, you know, just in my head with that. And then surprisingly quickly, I just adapted to that new paradigm. And now, when I so quickly, which makes me feel that it's so right to have

women in equal positions, because when I see another organization, or another group, where women don't feel equal and are not listened to or heard or given the, the responsibility or the voice that they should be given. It feels weird to me now. It just is incongruous and I and I think how can anybody be part of this and I love that feeling of just knowing it's not right. And then being ordained to myself and being able to what Brittany was saying about passing communion. And giving that to somebody who might be receiving it from a woman for the first time is such a powerful and beautiful experience. I, the the sacraments are where I see that more. Brittany was talking about everyday life, and I was thinking, Oh, I should probably look for it more there. But where I'm at right now is seeing it in women who are are visible and accepted in that in their roles and that way.

**Robin Linkhart 49:47**

Powerful, powerful stuff. I reminded when I lived in Utah for three and a half years. How abrupt and sometimes sharp the overwhelming presence of patriarchy was just an everyday life, even going into stores, navigating different pathways in the community, sometimes it could be right in your face. And other times it was just a nuanced way of being and coming back home and attending my home congregation. When I was back in Colorado, it was, it was something that I was conscious of in a different way and in a deeper way than I had been in a long time. So we've talked about a lot of really intense things. How has all of this impacted your family life? Your professional life, and your network of relationships? Brittany?

**Brittany Mangelson 50:54**

Well, that's a massive question. And it's impacted literally every aspect of my life. A lot of friendships shifted, when I came to Community of Christ. However, it is also expanded my network of relationship tenfold, I still kind of known in a lot of spaces for being the Community of Christ minister. Luckily, there's more of us now. So it's not all the pressures on me. But I think that I still get called upon a fair amount by folks who either want a wedding done, who wants some sort of pastoral listening ear who want administration, I, I am on people's shortlist of folks who they feel comfortable sending their queer kid to, or just a lot of people I, I don't say that to elevate myself in any way. It's actually terrifying for me, and a really serious role. And, and it's, it's scary to be the person that people know, you know, oh, you have a question about Community of Christ. Here's my friend, Brittany, oh, you need somebody to talk to you about this. Here's my friend Brittany, Oh, you want a blessing from a woman? Here's my friend Brittany. It's something that I take very seriously. But it is also, I guess, it keeps me on my toes. As far as my professional life. Here I am, I never thought I was going to be a full time minister. That was not in my career plan at all. Not even a little bit. And yet, here I am. It's impacted my family life a lot. Luckily, I have a really supportive spouse. He himself is ordained and works on the podcast and supportive and interested in involved in Community of Christ himself. So that hasn't been too big of a hiccup. But as far as parents and siblings and friends, it's been it's been really challenging. And I think, especially here in Utah, where everyone assumes that I'm

still this submissive Mormon wife. And then if they find out that I'm not, it's been a little shocking. We recently moved a couple of years ago to a new neighborhood in our town. And that's also been interesting, because, you know, I've just been able to introduce myself as a full time minister. And so we don't necessarily have that ex Mormon label hanging around. But I'm now known as like, the woman clergy in the neighborhood, which again, is this weird, this is weird title to carry around, especially here in Utah County. So for the most part, it's been good. But there still are significant challenges. And they come up every once in a while. And just when I think I'm over having difficult conversations, another thing happens, where I realized we still have to go there. Because the reality is, is I let a lot of people down, like a lot of people down when I left the LDS church. And when I came to Community of Christ, and then with every ordination, and every yes that I've said, I've continued to let people down. So it's hard being a big embarrassment to people who you love. And then at the same time, the thing that's making you such an embarrassment is also the thing that is giving a lot of people hope and allowing a lot of people to meet God in a different way. So again, I still kind of feel like I'm stretched in a million different directions. And I try to be who I am and not hide the different parts of me depending on whom I'm or whom I'm around. But it's also really difficult because I don't want to be in your face about it or anything like that. I will say that my grandma passed away last year and we just did a little graveside service and my dad asked me to read her obituary and kind of a little eulogy that he had written. And my sister in law said afterwards, she said, "Brittany, I can tell that you were born to be a preacher, because you absolutely had your preaching voice." And I didn't know how to take that. Because, I mean, I knew that she meant it positively. But I also was done like, crap, did I make my family uncomfortable? You know, how did people did I speak with too much authority. And so I was just in my head. And, you know, it was a very LDS Mormon little service, but I spoke like I speak in Community of Christ, and just like that switch in tone, changed, and, and it was, it was enough to be recognized and spoken to me so. So it has impacted every part of my life. And it's this weird juggle, of just trying to be who I am, and yet not trying to make people uncomfortable with who I am.

**Robin Linkhart 55:56**

Leslie?

**Leslie Dalton 55:59**

I feel really lucky that I haven't lost meaningful friendships or family or anything, since leaving the LDS church and, and joining Community of Christ and being ordained to have are not the things that make that big difference, right, it was leaving the other place. But my, so my family, my, my mom and siblings, joined the LDS church as converts, when I was an adult. And so I don't have this big, you know, history of, you know, the, by letting all the pioneers down, and all of that, that's not a big deal. But all of my family has left that church. And so that was everybody was like, well, it's about time you, you know, came over to this side. My husband's

family is that family with, you know, the pioneer heritage, and they have also been so supportive of me, and I feel so lucky and blessed that my all my children, everyone has just been so good to me. And, and not good to me, they, they love me, and they support my decisions. And they, they honor my ability to make the decisions that are best for me and my family. My husband, they will they all came to my confirmation, my husband cried through the whole thing. And it was really sad. And he, he said that he was so embarrassed, and he felt really bad about it. And he said I was trying to hide it, but I just felt like this was just a break between us. And he came to my ordination. And I actually asked him not to come because I didn't want that to happen again. I didn't want him to have to go through that sadness again. And then. And he said, No, I want to come I want to support you. And when we left that day, he said, this is a good fit for you, you're in the right place. And he didn't cry at all. So it was, but that's how his family has been, is just kind of, it's hard for them to see me doing something different, but they've been so supportive and loving and able to see that it's good for me and able to see me grow. My professional relationships haven't really changed, my friends at work have been super supportive. And you know, we're just going along doing our thing and teaching kids and this and the same thing with my, my close friendships have all been not affected at all. I knew when I left my LDS congregation that I would be, you know, I was done with they were done with me. And I was done with them. And there are still people that I care about. But I was able to see more clearly the the the lack of depth and those relationships because it wasn't very hurtful to me to lose them. And I still interact with them because they're in my neighborhood. But it was it was great to see like who are my close friends and who, who loves me the most, or loves me enough to take me along. So not a lot of impact there. And it's heartbreaking when I see other people that have lost so many people that are dear to them and the kind of pain that causes my any pain I experienced was not because of my relationships. In fact, my close relationships are all stronger now than they were before. So I'm grateful for that.

**Robin Linkhart** 59:43

Joanna?

**Joanna Smith** 59:45

Yeah, I think I lost a lot. If someone would have told me the cost to wanting more just world. And in vocalizing that, I don't know if I would have given it up. And but you can't perceive the costs. I've lost dear, dear friends, I've lost most of the majority of my family. I've lost lots of job opportunities, openly told, but that's why I lost it. I would echo what Leslie said it wasn't because of joining Community of Christ. It was a mean, for me, I think I lost those things because of a rejection of the patriarchy. i People say they value a certain religion. And that's what they call it. But really, they're valuing toxic patriarchy. But I've gained so much. And what I've kept, has taught me what unconditional love is. And I feel like I love better, because I've experienced unconditional love from people. And well, I always thought I loved unconditionally,

I think I've learned it in an intimate way now. So I feel like I've learned unconditional love, and I can do that better. And I can be a better mother and I can be a better friend. And I can be a better activist and advocate. And I can recognize that there's unseen costs for everybody for any choice that people make. And while it might be worth it, in the end to have such beautiful growth possible, it doesn't diminish the pain.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:01:56

Thank you all so much for sharing on that topic. The network of relationships is such an important presence in our lives. And change touches everything. You all have shared some about what you've learned along the way. Is there anything else you've learned along the way and anything else that you've learned about yourself that you want to share today? Leslie?

**Leslie Dalton** 1:02:27

I've definitely have more self confidence. And I trust myself more, I think that I used to seek leadership roles. Because it was a validating to me that I was worth something, or my voice was, you know, worthy of being in the room. And I don't Brittany, Brittany, or join him, maybe both of you touched on this earlier. But now I feel like I'm willing to serve, but I don't have the same needs for recognition, because I know that I matter. That's powerful and so tragic to recognize that that, that all of those kinds of needs go away when you feel like you belong at the table. I mean, I always appreciate the thank you everyone does, but almost everything I do now is is my idea because I'm allowed to come up with my own way to minister and I don't need that same kind of validation that I had before. Oh, I did I wrote it down Brittany said something about being power hungry. And that people that people claimed that you know, you would you would come to a place where you could be ordained because you were power hungry. And I think it's exactly the opposite of that, that I felt compelled to slough all of those feelings off before I agreed to be ordained. And it really does feel like I can be a minister for Jesus Christ. At this point, instead of worrying about what my position or what my role is where it's going to get me.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:04:21

Brittany?

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:04:25

I've learned that I'm actually decently good at this. I think that the first 26 years of my life in the LDS church, I was taught to quiet myself that my voice didn't matter that my opinion didn't matter. I had, you know, very specific experiences in different councils, word councils, things like that where I was actually quieted, and I just learned that my voice my opinion, my thoughts didn't matter as much As the men's around me, I brought that into my marriage, I brought that into relationships with friends, I brought that into every aspect of my life. And through all of this, I've learned that my voice matters, that my experience matters. And that even though I do feel



like I am definitely still an introvert, I'm good at this. I'm good at sharing my ideas. And sometimes I have good ideas and sometimes seeing those things come to fruition and to see that people experience some level of healing, because of something that was thought up in my brain like that's, that's not something that I realized could happen. Before I came to Community of Christ. I was just always consistently told to be quiet. And so I didn't think that I had anything to offer. And it's through coming to Community of Christ, even before I was ordained that I was, I really realized that actually what I have to say matters. And that I, I can share from my experience, and I can share from my observations and I can share from this place of like a value system that I appreciate the enduring principles, that I have a framework and a way of looking at the things that actually can contribute to my family, to my relationships to my congregation. And I was just always the quiet person that never gave my opinion never gave my voice before. And so that has been kind of a jarring self realization. But it's been very real, and to everyone smile, give myself a little bit of credit, is also something that I have never really done before. So I think I'm still my myself's best critic. I get in my own way all the time. But, but when I push people's opinions and thoughts and assumptions aside, and just really try to show up where I feel I'm being called to and in ways that I'm being called to serve for me, that's when ministry is most successful, and when it's most authentic, and when it's most restorative.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:07:30

Joanna?

**Joanna Smith** 1:07:33

I think for me, I've it's just given me a freedom that I had never experienced before. Like, what is like, what is faith if you don't, if you can't ask questions, what is faith if you can't grow and stretch yourself what it like, it's given me a long road of lots of unforeseen choices. But it's given me a place for my actions and my work that is synonymous, synonymous with my faith, it's given me a place I can let go of generational trauma, it's given me a place that I can embrace doubt. It's, it's let me learn what true priesthood is. Which I think I've always known but now I can name it. And it's given me a place to let go of the rules and half the patriarchal men before me have laid and it's given me a place for unconditional love gross and unconditional love. And that's ultimately what I'm learning still, I don't feel like I've learned it fully, but I that I'm allowed to learn what faith is in a whole new way I'm allowed to learn what love is and a whole new way and priesthood and and just connection with the Divine. It's a whole new world.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:09:24

So what kind of support did you need along the way of this journey? What was helpful and maybe an even perhaps, most importantly, what would you want Community of Christ congregations to know about how to best support female seekers coming in to Community of

Christ as seekers friends and and for those who decide to find their spiritual home with us?  
What What would we might need to know?

**Brittany Mangelson 1:09:57**

So I This is a big question. And I have a lot to say. But I will try to be concise. There's a lot we come with so much baggage, we come with a lot of institutional distrust. We come with a lot of spiritual abuse on our shoulders. And it's really, really tricky to navigate that. And I think as much as having supportive women in leadership is helpful. I also think that for me, the moments that really took my breath away, were when the men showed up, in their support, lifelong members of Community of Christ that were men. I will never forget being at my first mission center conference, and I don't even remember who it was or what he looked like or anything about him. But it was a man who came up and talk to me about how excited he was about how I had shared my story and the things that I was doing and what was happening in the Salt Lake congregation. And in that conversation with him, nothing was said about my spouse, or my kids, or anything, I was seen as a whole person, me individually, I was not Josh's wife, I was not Sophie, Lillian, Grant's mom, I was Brittany. And he saw me as a whole person independently. And I have never, I had never experienced that before. And hearing the affirmation from him and other men, that what I was doing on my own was good. And it was enough, and it was exciting. And I was seen as a leader to them, even before I was ordained. That was life changing. And I think having the support and modeling from women is super, super, super important. But I cannot tell you how encouraging and affirming it is to have male role models that believe in you just as much as your female role models do. Who are there to support you who are there to respect you who are there to listen to you, that has been just the most mind boggling thing about Community of Christ. And that's not to say that, you know, we're totally rid of patriarchy ourselves. We absolutely swim in the culture of it, here in the United States, but but having the support of males in leadership has just been completely life changing for me. Joanna,

**Joanna Smith 1:12:48**

I could never name the amount of support I got over the last eight years of my journey from women who were supporting me and guiding me and just being friends. I mean, the day I moved back to Utah, from Georgia, after living away for 20 years, I was invited by Brittany to come to her ordination. And that experience alone changed me. And there's 1000 of those. And they, they changed, they changed me. So the good, I think for people coming in and seeking Community of Christ, I think the the thing that helped me the most was hearing like that there is no path like there. There's just no path. You there's no expectations, there's no. And that felt so weird to me, was so foreign, that I genuinely felt like they were lying when people told me that I very specifically remember Carla being like, Yeah, but I'm not lying. Like Carla had to use the words because she she could tell I just didn't trust her. And she's like, No, like, you don't have to do anything. Like you don't you don't have to join. You don't have to do

this. You can just come in if you decide not to like, like, I'm not lying. I'm that no script and permission to allow growth to happen. allowed me to deeply be changed and deeply be affected and become wiser. And I was the person that needed permission to do that. So anyone seeking to become closer to the Divine, the divine, and maybe seeing Community of Christ as a place to help them do that. I would say give yourself permission to do that. Give yourself permission to let go of That, to let go of the script and let yourself grow. And recognize that, you know, it might hurt, but it's beautiful. And and beautiful in in a deeply changing way. Lastly,

**Leslie Dalton 1:15:23**

amen to both of those women. I think, Joanna, that's you're putting it in a better way than I did when I just kept telling my friends it this is the do whatever you want church and Carla was like, "No, it's not, you can't just do anything you want!" And I and I had a hard time kind of explaining that. Compared to where we come from, that the fact that there's not a script is amazing. And it's also scary, we kind of talked about that before. I know that it's not the do whatever you want church, but it is in the sense that you are in complete control of your own journey, and your relationship with God. And all of those things, are you not what you're just doing what you're told. And that is something that is scary to let go of that path, right? You do this, this, this, this and this, you get this, this, this, this and this. And if you don't do those things, you get this and this and this. And being on that path for so long. It's really scary to walk off into your own kind of wilderness. So if what I would say to people, then we're welcoming seekers, LDS seekers is that the some of the that fear is not going to be visible. And often people won't even know that. That's what they're experiencing. But it is real, to just kind of feel like you're floundering, right. And just tell me what to do. Tell me what to believe. Tell me what to think, tell me what's true and what's not. It's really hard to step away from having those things be important. It's also difficult to come up with your own idea on how to minister because we're all used to kind of being told this is how you'll be ministering, God wants you to do this. If you don't do it, you're disobedient and ungrateful. And you're, you're losing blessings. And if you and so you just need to do it, whether you're qualified or not. And a lot of people spend a lot of time feeling unworthy and unqualified, or feeling like wait, just waiting to be told this is where God wants you right now. And trying to figure that out on your own is really challenging. We've, we have experienced sitting back watching men do things and thinking about how we could do it better. We evolved in there. But then actually finding your place in ministry can be really challenging. So I would recommend offering plenty of opportunities for for seekers to become really deeply acquainted with the mission initiatives. And then seeing examples of how the mission initiatives are, can be carried out, right? How can I help my congregation grow? How should I look at this congregation with new eyes not as not judging, but seeing what where there's a need where my talents might fit? That's almost impossible to see, I think at first. And for new people, it really does help to be asked for a little while to just be kind of led into that place of and and our congregation did that so beautifully.

Like please just when you please offer the prayer for peace or, you know, small things like that. I think that we've all been up at the podium before that's not new to any of us but but being asked to participate in different ways that just allow us to see kind of from the sea from different angles, and then visualize what the potential is for the Congregation for families in the congregation or friends or for yourself even. Yeah, I think that that asking and that's not that doesn't come naturally to people, I think who have been in Community of Christ for a long time. That's been what I've noticed, to ask people will you do this but that we need that sometimes, while we're getting used to that whole new idea.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:19:57

All right, last question is an opportunity for you to say or share anything you haven't had a chance to speak to today. Joanna, do you have anything?

**Joanna Smith** 1:20:09

I'm just processing. I think that that this is a beautiful conversation. And yeah, I'm, I'm learning. Lastly, you've had the opportunity to learn

**Robin Linkhart** 1:20:23

Oh, sure. It's great. It's great to share together today and learn from each other and be on this wild adventure together. Leslie?

**Leslie Dalton** 1:20:34

I just thought of one thing, and I, I'll just share this quick story. So my husband was in leadership positions in his congregation before and I would watch him come home exhausted on Sundays, just, you know, having done all these things that leaders need to do, and my job was to make dinner and make sure that he can relax when he got home. And I'm totally sympathetic to that. Because yeah, it was a lot of work. A few weeks ago, I came home exhausted. And my husband asked me how my day was. And I said, I, I taught Sunday school. And then I I don't remember if I was presiding, probably not. But maybe maybe I was presiding over a meeting or but I was, I participated in the communion, blessing and serving communion. And then after that, I, I counted the I worked with the offering money, I touched money that other people had donated. And I also helped in a, an administration, I assisted in administration. And of all those things that I did today that made me so tired in a really wonderful way, teaching Sunday school is the only thing that I would have been able to do in my former life, and just how that experience was so, so powerful to think that to put that all together and think I'm exhausted in a very good way, and I'm also overwhelmingly grateful that I was able to come to this.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:22:18

Thanks, Brittany.

**Brittany Mangelson** 1:22:21

So I think the only thing that I have left to say, and I don't even know if the community I'm about to speak to or even hear this, but I feel like the Mormon feminist community goes through cycles. And we can see that happening if we look at the history of that community. And right now, I think that the Mormon feminist community is in this budding stage of new newly wakened women, particularly, who are just noticing in justices for the first time. I feel like COVID really shut that up for a lot of, for a lot of reasons. And I'm seeing a lot of people ask just really basic questions with this undercurrent of fear, fear in them. And it's been really interesting to be in those spaces on Facebook, particularly, because I just want to, like, I want to burn it all down in the most Jesus the peaceful one way. Just remind everyone that you actually do have a voice and you should be able to question and you should be able to see God in ways that aren't strictly cisgender male, and you should be able to have a voice and you should be able to share your ideas, and you are just as worthy and worth just as much as your male counterparts. And I'm seeing so many women who are even afraid to ask those questions. And it just breaks my heart because there are decades and decades and decades of Mormon women who have asked these questions, who have acted on these questions and who have really found liberation in other communities. Whether that's a religious community or a secular community, and I just, I just want to take the collective community that is Mormon women, and just restate that there is a better way to do this. And you don't have to throw out your entire heritage. You don't have to throw out your entire belief system. You don't have to throw out your scriptures, your language, your ordinances or sacraments, that there is there is a community that has started from the same roots that has consistently chosen inclusion and equality and we've done so because God has nudged us there. And so, just through this whole conversation, I've just thought of this budding, emerging new community of Mormon feminists. And I just again, I don't even know if this message will get to them. But it just is so loud in my head that folks need to still ask questions, and they need to challenge the gender binary. And they need to challenge the very, very rigid patriarchal gender roles and reach out if you need support. There's a lot of people who have had these conversations and have walked this path.

**Joanna Smith** 1:25:33

And I would add to that, like, when you experience pain from a community that hurts you, or policies that hurt you, or even doctrine that hurts to resist the urge to throw it all out, to keep what is sacred to you sacred and to keep your faith your faith like this. We talk like even here, we're talking of this, like collective community and collective church and Community of Christ as a collective, we're all on an individual journey here. And that is at the heart of what faith is it's this individual connection to the divine and maybe let go of the institutional or the larger should these and embrace your individual growth with God, and your individual sacred moments. And then question all over the place. I have a shirt that says question authority, not your mother. And I want to say that to me, anybody hurt by any church? Like, question the

church, but maybe not like every part of God. And maybe not, you know, every single word or question, but hang on to what you know.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:27:14

Well, thank you all so much for sharing your stories and for sharing your prophetic voice as you speak out and advocate on behalf of others, and help all of us see God and experience the divine in ways that are true to each of us individually. And at the same time, we can reach out and connect to one another and share this journey together in life giving ways. Thank you so much, Leslie Dalton, Joanna Smith and Brittany Mangelson for being with us today. A special thanks to all of our listeners. Be sure to check out our other episodes about the life and times of women in Community of Christ right here. This is 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** 1:28:19

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