

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.

Carla Long 00:33

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host Carl along and today I'm super duper excited to introduce you to Stacey cram, who is the Presiding Bishop for Community of Christ, as well as a member of the First Presidency. Hello, Stacy.

Stassi Cramm 00:49

Hey, Carla, it is so good to be here with you and to catch up.

Carla Long 00:53

Oh, my goodness, listeners, we've just chatted like for the last half hour just to catch up and we just had a really great time. So thank you, listeners, for listening to this, because then I got to reconnect with Stassi. Today, we're gonna be talking about the Community of Christ Faithful Disagreement Policy. And she and I were just talking and like it, I realized that there might be some confusion about this policy, actually. So I'm really glad that we're having this conversation. And from what I hear, Stassi is the best person to talk to about it. And we're going to get into why pretty soon. But before we do, Stassi, why don't you introduce yourself? Tell us a little bit about yourself?

Stassi Cramm 01:26

Well, okay, so first of all, I want to thank you, Carla, for this opportunity to talk about faithful disagreement principles, because they are, I think, really important in the life of the church. As you said, I work full time for Community of Christ as a minister, my husband and I are actually in transition right now. So we have been living the last 11 years in St. Charles, Missouri, which is on the other side of the state from Independence. But I spent a lot of time in Independence. And as Carla knows, I have a house in Independence. Because Carla and Kuzma got married there, which makes it a historic side. So anyway, so we are now living full time in our house in Independence, Missouri. And I've got two adult children and our son lives in Tokyo, our daughter's married and lives in Boston, and she's having twins. And so life is good.

Carla Long 02:19

Oh, my gosh, life is very good. And a little, it sounds like just teeny tiny bit chaotic. So (very chaotic!) So thank you for taking the time. So let's just go ahead and just do a really general opening question of what is the faithful disagreement policy?

Stassi Cramm 02:36

Yeah, that's a great question. So the Faithful Disagreement policy is a list of, you know, basically 12 principles and it came about back in 2012. And so the history on it is that in 2012, there were, I was in the Council of 12, at the time, and there were five apostles assigned to the United States. And we made

up a team called the USA Team. And we worked on mission and a lot of things together. But our primary focus at that point in time, was preparing for the 2013 National Conference that was held in the United States to consider questions about LGBTQ plus relationships, covenant relationships, and ordination. And so it was kind of this lengthy journey. And we were guiding people through the process, trying to be very intentional about discernment and discovering God's will. We were using the six lenses of discovering God's will, which your podcast may have talked about before. And so we were focusing on generating resources and opportunities to explore the questions through those lenses. In the midst of that, as you could imagine, there were a variety of opinions. And people held their positions, quite passionately. And so as we got closer and closer to coming up to the National Conference, we realized that whatever the outcome was, that there was a pretty good likelihood that not everyone would agree 100%. And so we started, you know, asking ourselves the question, what, "What does it mean, if we don't all agree 100%?" And is is often the case, we looked at our own history, because history, I think, informs us and so we remember 1984 and what happened when the World Conference approved section 156 in the Doctrine and Covenants, which allowed for the ordination of women. And so back in 1988, after that happened, the Standing High Council developed a statement on what they called Ethical Dissent. And so we went back and looked at our own history. We looked at that state We looked at what happened, post the World Conference. And we concluded that we needed a statement to guide us. We needed to develop that statement in a collaborative way as best we could. And it needed to be available before we ever got to a national conference. So that it it, its purpose was to guide the community, no matter what the outcome was. Somehow, if the statement had come after the outcome, it might have felt like it was being written towards the group of people who didn't agree with the outcome. And that wasn't the point at all, though, the principles needed to work regardless. So that's just a little bit about what the statement is and where it came from.

Carla Long 05:40

I find that really fascinating, Stassi, I think it's, I mean, it just goes to show you how much thought and care and work went into the 2013 National Conference. And I just think it's incredible. I do want to mention the six lenses that you talked about before. They're scripture, reason and knowledge, tradition, personal and community experience, continuing revelation in common consent. And we use those for, to figure out God's will, right? We try and use do, we try and use those equally? Do you sit? Do you think or how did that? How does that work?

Stassi Cramm 06:17

Yeah, I mean, I would say generally, it's about balance. And and all of us have preferences. So you know, for instance, people that know me, well, would would say that I'm a thinker. And so, you know, I tend to try to think my way into answers. So knowledge and reason is really important to me. And you know, Scripture is really important. So I like to do the exegetical process and draw out what Scripture says to us, you know, but other people are more feelers. And so personal experience, they tend to lean into that. They may be more rooted in history, so history speaks more to them. And so the whole point of the six lenses is to seek balance as a community, and to acknowledge that when we're seeking to discover God's will, although sometimes we do it by ourselves, for the really big questions that impact the whole community, we have to do it together. And we have to recognize that we all bring different strengths to the table. And that's why common consent is kind of like the ultimate one, you know, where

it says, after we've looked at these other five lenses, then how do we all bring our voices and seek common consent together?

Carla Long 07:27

I love that, I think that is super duper important. Because like, we can easily get stuck in like, this is my way. And this is the best way. And this is the only way. And this just helps you open up just a little bit more. I also really love that we learned some pretty serious lessons from 1984. Not the book, but from what happened when we were voting on section 156 of the Doctrine and Covenants, we learned some really hard lessons. And I'm really proud of us for learning those lessons and for trying to make it better and more inclusive. Because that's what it seems like we were trying to do, would you agree?

Stassi Cramm 08:02

Oh, yeah, totally. Um, it's hard to look backwards at history, and especially when it's not like way back, and that the people, you know, who are making the decisions at that time are still alive and still around. And so, you know, any observations that you make, you know, could come across as like criticism or critique, like, oh, you should have done better. And so everything that I'm about to say, should not be heard through that lens. Because looking backwards, it's always so much easier. So I think that there were tons of things that, you know, that people were trying to do. Just like, for instance, the Standing High Council on the principles of dissent, was an attempt to pastorally respond to what was unfolding in the life of the church. So what we learned was, you know, not that having those principles wasn't important, but when they get introduced is equally important, and that we needed to agree as a body, how we were going to behave with each other before we even got to the decision making point. So I think that was like one of the really critical lessons. The other thing that we learned looking backwards to 1984. And, and the journey that occurred in the years following also guided sort of how we made decisions at the National Conference. And Carla, you would remember this. So not only do we ask people, what their level of support was for a particular question, but we almost always followed that with asking them, "Why do you hold that level of support?" And that became really important, because what we discovered is people could be on opposite ends of the spectrum, on their level of support, like so, you know, one person could have no support, and one person might have full support. But when we ask them why we discovered that sometimes those people had this same reasons. In other words, the value of Scripture. And so that helped us see, okay, wait a minute, we both value scripture, it's just that we're interpreting scripture to come to a different place in our answer, you know, to the question. And so that created more pathways of exploration and opportunity and learning to understand each other, which is what led to the actual name of Faithful Disagreement, the key word for us was faithful, because what we figured out is that, that everyone that was going to be gathered at conference, we wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt that they had done the hard work of preparing to share a response to the questions. You know, that they weren't just like, you know, walking in with their fingers in their ears, you know, their eyes covered up not paying attention to anything else, just saying, I know the right answer, that they were trying to do the hard work of discerning together. And, and so, so when the decision was finally made, what we wanted to uphold is, even if you don't agree, that does not make you less faithful, it doesn't mean that you did not faithfully journey to try to seek, you know, God's will, and that God left you hanging, you know, with, you know, and didn't respond a response, you know, or didn't provide your response. Because that's what's really easy. It's like, once we get down to making a decision, it's like, we want to think in terms of who's right and who's wrong. And and if you're

wrong, then the only choice you have is to change your opinion. Well, we all know that life is way more complicated than that. And there's a lot of contextual situations, that doesn't mean that there aren't some absolute rights and wrongs, and that we don't sometimes disagree about those absolute rights and wrongs. But it does mean that we're all journeying together and that we're at different spots. And so we have to be able to extend a lot of grace, when we are at that point of disagreement. And we need to not be questioning each other's motives, or each other's faithfulness. And so that was kind of one of the key parts. And that's why, you know, that's why we didn't want to call it dissent, which is what the Standing High Council's statement was called, because that, by definition, almost makes it feel like well, these are the dissenters as if they are the on the outskirts of the community. Disagreement is something that happens collectively. So it's that the community is in disagreement after having done the hard work together. But that we can remain faithful in that state of disagreement.

Carla Long 13:00

As I said before, I am just, it always floors me, and it shouldn't for me anymore, how much deep, deep thinking and how much work with the Spirit goes into things like this. So that makes me, that just thrills me to no end, you have no idea. I love hearing that. So I wonder if you think it's time should we jump into what the Faithful Disagreement policy says? Can we can we talk about a few points there? Maybe not all of it, but like maybe your favorite parts of it?

Stassi Cramm 13:28

Yeah. So as kind of a precursor or getting us, you know, into that conversation. And I think Ron Harmon told you this, but so I had both the privilege and the responsibility on behalf of the USA Team, to go off and to draft initial principles. And you know, to bring them back to the team, because as you can imagine, writing a document as a team is impossible, if you don't actually have a draft to start with. But oftentimes, the draft becomes something totally different. And where you, you know, originally started, you can't even see it anymore in the final version, but it's just way easier to work with the draft. Well, one of the things that I found, I don't know, it's, you know, miracles, you look for miracles in modern day, because, you know, that helps us remember that, that God is out there, and that the Spirit is working and moving with us. And so, one of the kind of miraculous things was that as I brought in the draft, so I, you know, as a writing assignment, the draft came together relatively easy for me. Now, part of that is because the USA Team had done tons of studying and tons of conversation together so we had process, process, process. And so there was all these ideas, you know, floating kind of in the universe. And then I just went off into that quiet space and sort of allowed them to fall, you know, into my computer onto the screen. But what happened then is when the USA Team reviewed it, although it definitely got better, both through the review of the USA Team and ultimately through the leadership council, it, you know, the essence of it was there from that very beginning. And to me, that was the blessing of the Spirit in what you know, was unfolding. So the way the the principles are written is it basically starts out with a definition. And so I just want to like read the, you know, the very beginning of that, because I think sometimes there can be confusion as to you know, what faithful disagreements all about. So the definition says, "Faithful Disagreement is defined as actions and or responses by a person holding a different view about a specific policy, belief, principle or other position of Community of Christ. This disagreement with a Community of Christ, position or direction is helpful, responsible, faithful, and bounded by loyalty and commitment to the identity, mission, message and beliefs of Community of Christ. A person who faithfully disagrees is welcome to share about the church position

with which she or he disagrees. The intent of this sharing is to improve the overall faithful response of the church to God's intended direction without classifying others as unfaithful." So end of definition, but what I want to say is, so what you're hearing here is, this is not just something that says, you know, we just toss it around like, well, you have a different opinion than I do. So I'm not going to listen to your opinion, or I'm not going to seek to see if we can find common ground, I'm just going to faithfully disagree and move on. That's not what the Faithful Disagreement principles are about. They're about the community, considering important topics, theological positions, policies, you know, things that the community has to decide together, acknowledging that at some point, that community has to make a decision and move on, but you may not have 100% agreement. So the goal and desire is always to try to get to 100% agreement and to have consent and to do the hard work of trying to get there. But then when you can't get there, acknowledging that you can still stay together as community, even in the midst of having faithful disagreements on particulars, because you agree overall, and are working together towards the overall mission, and you don't want to break Community of Christ down. Excuse me, you want to build Community of Christ up. So that's kind of background.

Stassi Cramm 13:47

Well, that is Stassi, I think that you might have just blown a lot of people's minds out here in Utah, at least the the people that I work with a lot people who are no longer members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that is has never been what they have experienced. In my in my understanding, if what I've learned is if they have a disagreement with the church, and this might be true in other churches as well, I'm not sure, then you have to be quiet about it. And you have to keep it to yourself. And if the longer people do that, the more these things just build up and build up and build up until they just explode and in a not so beautiful way. And so, to me, this just sounds exceptionally healthy. It's not easy. What you've just described is not even remotely easy for any members, I don't think. Like I don't think it's easy for the person, maybe bringing up the disagreement. It's not easy for the people who are hearing. But it is a much more genuine and a much more authentic way to live in community, rather than just holding things in and not being able to speak what you're thinking. So I really appreciate hearing that. And I think that my listeners will also really appreciate hearing that too.

Stassi Cramm 19:18

I really hope so. And I totally agree with everything you said. And I think I think the one word that kind of like pops to mind is as the 12 principles got written, it was about how everyone remains constructive, and doesn't move to a space of of, you know, destroying the very community that we're all you know, trying to build together. So, you know, so the principles were written to say look, we may disagree on a particular decision or a particular policy, but there is so much more that we are bound together over and you know, that call to mission, that call to be you know who God is calling us to be both individually and collectively. And let's face it, I mean, even the Enduring Principles, which I think are like, amazing. But you know, if we really start to get into the practical application, sometimes people will use the exact same Enduring Principle and take two different positions on a topic. So you know, so almost everything in life can be applied in different ways. And so, you know, and so that's why being able to live in that space together is so important. And I think the other thing that we learned from scriptures is that it's often the, you know, the, the outsider voice, which is kind of, you know, breaking through that helps the the majority voice hear something or see something that they might other wise be missing. Now, that doesn't mean that the prophet's voice is always 100% right. You know, but sometimes by listening to

those other voices, it creates an awareness and collectively, the community discerns, you know, a new way of being or a new direction to go. And I think we can say that that's, you know, happening, even with recommendations from National Conference, those weren't like one time forever, you know, recommendations that will never be changing, the church is continuing to grow. And it's understanding of, of what it means to be inclusive of what it means to, you know, to support people in covenant relationships of what it means to commit to being ordained to serve as a minister of Jesus Christ. And, and that continued journey is going to continue to inform you know, policies, and it's all of those voices together, that, you know, that that we have to listen to, because I think the spirits moving through all of them.

Carla Long 22:01

You may have just blown some more minds with that. I mean, when you said the prophet might not always be right, I think that I just collectively heard here in Utah and Utah County, minds being blown. Not even kidding, Stacey. Oh, so you hear you heard it here. First, folks. I remember the first presidency said that, and it's true. I mean, I don't think that our Steve Veazey, who is our president and Prophet would want I would say, I'm always right. Like, that's not how he is. And that's not how God works, either. So I'm really glad that you said that, and I'm really I appreciated everything you just said. But that was that's an important point point for people out here in Utah.

Stassi Cramm 22:40

Well, and again, I mean, we need everyone's voice around the table. And so, you know, if President Veazey had to wait to speak, until he was, you know, 100% confident of you know, what he was, you know, saying was, like his best discernment of God's intentions, then we would lose out on Steve's giftedness, as a participant around the table, struggling, you know, as humankind trying to make sense of the perplex situations that we both create, and you know, and are called to reconcile.

Carla Long 23:17

I think that that is a beautiful way to look at, look at it a really beautiful way. So you are telling me, there's just not like a telephone that goes straight to God, right in the temple? There's not, that doesn't happen. Okay. I just wanna be sure. That doesn't happen. Got it. Um, so that's really, that's really wonderful. Thank you so much, Stassi for saying it like that. Now, let's jump into the policy. Yeah. So yeah, tell me some.

Stassi Cramm 23:40

Yeah. So again, the principles were written to the whole community so, so not just to those who, you know, had a different perspective. And so for instance, you know, the first principle is, you know, just upholds the Enduring Principles of Community of Christ, you know, and basically says that, that those enduring principles, make space and allow for faithful disagreement. So it's basically acknowledging you know, that to have faithful disagreement can be part of who we are. It also, you know, the principles like the second one lifts up that everyone in the community is called to be committed to our overall identity message, mission and beliefs. And you know, that, that that's what holds us together, even when we disagree on particulars. So you'll hear a lot of the things that I've already said, you know, are what's actually you know, lifted up and the principles. It acknowledges, number three acknowledges that holding a different view from what Community of Christ holds is not, is not a matter of you know,

being in good standing with the church. It doesn't mean that someone has lesser faith because they have a disagreement. And it doesn't mean that because they disagree on something that they're somehow not eligible for priesthood or for participation in the sacraments. Number four talks about that a person with a different viewpoint is, you know, is asked to share their viewpoint in appropriate places, and in ways, you know, that are constructive. And that because a person does that, that that does not mean that they will be excluded by a congregation or a Mission Center. So you know, it speaks both to the person with a different view and to, you know, the rest of the community. Number six talks about members in priesthood with different viewpoints, not using inappropriate speaking to, like, just speak out against Community of Christ, or to attempt to tear down Community of Christ. Number seven, says that agreeing with all things that Community of Christ does is not a test of faith. And but then he also says, but you can't simply ignore policies because you disagree with them. So for instance, you know, if you're a Mission Center president or you know, a priesthood member, and there is a particular policy that you don't agree with, then you have to still you know, implement that policy, but you can work to seek change in that policy. Number nine, says that at no time is any action that harms the body of the church considered in harmony with principles of this document. So again, it's about being constructive. It's about building up the church community, and the church's mission, not tearing things apart. Number 10 says that in seeking to create genuine signal communities, that we will listen respectfully to one another's viewpoints, and that we will seek out people who have different viewpoints from us, so that we can understand because that builds up community. Number 11 says that as a community, we embrace continuing revelation. So that means that we are committing to be open to the Holy Spirit and to both individually and collectively seek to respond wisely, what to where the Holy Spirit is leading us to go. And then number 12, acknowledges that, that we have a way of making changes in the church. We are, after all, a theocratic democracy, which means that, you know, we seek to make decisions in a democratic way. But we also acknowledge that it's not just about people's opinions or viewpoints, it's about seeking God's guidance, and trying to make decisions that are in line with God's purposes in the world. And we do that through legislative conferences. We do that through consent building methods that allow you know, different viewpoints to be heard. And that allow us to try to build as much consent as as possible before we have to make a decision. So that's kind of a summary of the 12 principles.

Carla Long 28:14

That is, I mean, that's just, it's so solid. And I've never really been one to poke holes in any kind of thing, but to me, that sounds really well rounded. It sounds really holistic. And while you were talking, I was reminded of a scripture from Doctrine and Covenants. And maybe you think of this one often as well. As a pastor, I think of this often it's section 161:3c where it says, "Be patient with one another for creating sacred community is arduous and even painful, but it is to loving community such as this that each is called." That's the that's the one that speaks to me when I think about the faithful disagreement. Principles, because it is hard to build sacred community, it is hard to be genuine and to speak maybe our true feelings in a place and and church should be the place where we feel free to do that. But still, it's scary. Because we're like, I just want to be liked. I just want people to like me, I don't want people to think that I'm doing all these things, but are thinking all these things, I mean. But it's that sacred community that keep continually continues to call us back. And so this Faithful Disagreement policy kind of gives us a little bit at some boundaries, maybe that we say, No, this is important. This is what we need to do in order to build that.

Stassi Cramm 29:40

Yeah, absolutely. You know, I think maybe sometimes people might think, Oh, well, faithful disagreement gives us permission to not work on building the community. I'll just like, you know, I'll just hang out with the people that think like I do, and that will be my community and will faithfully disagree, you know, with those other people over there, you know that think differently than we do. But that's not at all in line with our sense of what God is, you know, calling us to do. I mean, we are community builders, we are called as community builders. We, we talk about communities of joy, hope, love and peace. We talk about God's peaceable kingdom, we talk about shalom, we talk about Zion, all of those are different words that have been used through the ages to, you know, to imagine and to dream about, you know, God's reign on earth and, and what it looks like when the earth becomes one large united community. Now, that is literally beyond my imagination in many ways, especially right now, because the world is so divisive, and people are, are so ripped apart on a variety of topics, and then they just like pull into their common groups. But, but like you said, section 161 calls us to say, Yeah, I don't like conflict or contention, but when we have differences of opinion, how do we work through those, and that's where the six lenses come in. So they help us work together to discover God's will, but then acknowledging that we're human, and so even in the midst of our human condition, that we are not always going to 100% agree. And so that's how we remain in communities is through faithful disagreement, even while we're still continuing to seek agreement, I have kind of an unrelated example. So this happened outside the church, but to me, it like kind of fits within what we're talking about.

Stassi Cramm 31:44

Although I think maybe it's weirdly political, because of everything that's going on right now in the United States. So I'm not being political, if anyone thinks I'm trying to be political. I'm just kind of using an old example. About 20 years ago, I read a book and it was, you know, a theological book and the person was giving the example of how, when we reach a point of disagreement, we don't get to just like, walk away from it, and you know, and dig into our particular positions, we have to continue to dig deeper, and peel back on the topic and see where we can find disagreement. And the example that the author use this is part which could sound political, was actually about abortion. And the author basically said, let's look at abortion. Clearly, Christians in the US, you know, for decades have not been able to come to a common agreement about what is most faithful. And so instead, we just continue to butt heads and disagree, disagree, disagree, disagree. And And meanwhile, we put all this energy into our disagreements, and we're not putting any energy into making the world a better place. So it's like, perhaps what we need to do when we hit disagreement is to say, okay, we can agree on what we think God thinks is appropriate about abortion, but can we agree on what we think some of the root causes that lead to abortion are? Because perhaps, if we can eliminate some of the root causes, then you know, the need for abortion may become significantly lessened. And we may be able to find more agreement than even about that. So I love that example because it reminds us that just because we have arrived at a spot of faithful disagreement, does not mean we are done, and that we just live in that place of faithful disagreement. It says, we are, we stay together in community, we understand that we have you know, differing viewpoints on a particular topic, but we continue to work together to continue to peel back, where is God leading us? And where can we make positive difference in the world, so that we are about God's, you know, vision of shalom, and you know, we're the hands and the feet and the the action that's bringing that, you know, into place through the blessing of the Holy Spirit. And, you know, and that's why it's important that we stay together in community and not pull apart. So Faithful

Disagreement is not about separation, it's not about clinging together in little communities where there isn't conflict or contention. It's saying Nope, it's saying we love each other. We are committed to God. And even in the midst of this one disagreement, we are going to continue to dive into bringing God's word and and good news into the perplexities of life and that is really hard work!

Carla Long 35:01

Yeah, it sounds like that, once you realize there's a disagreement, that's actually when things get started, not when things end. What a great example, what a really fabulous example. Because, you know, like, when I am my best self, when I am the best, Carla Long that I know, I can see that very clearly I can see that, you know, like butting heads is, is not getting us anywhere. But when I am just my normal self, I'm like, ooh, but I really want to fight. But that's not what God calls us to. God doesn't call us to just want to fight God calls us to be our best selves, hopefully, all the time, that's impossible. But in those moments, when we can actually make a real difference, and who knows, who is listening to those conversations, who might be deeply touched by the fact that we are giving that a try and trying and trying to understand and listen to each other. Because that that could just be huge for our, our communities.

Stassi Cramm 36:00

Exactly. And it also says that in any given moment, we may need to let one topic where we've made a decision, you know, rest and live with that decision. But that doesn't mean that there aren't lots of other things that we need to be tending to. And so you know, even as we're resting in that one, you know, decision and even as some may be happy about it, and excited, and others may be frustrated that others may just not care about that particular decision, we still have to then collectively be discerning what God is calling us to respond to. And that's what discipleship is all about. It's never done. You cannot retire from discipleship, it's an life long endeavor.

Carla Long 36:42

And that's a really good thing. Like I tell people all the time, I'm like, God is a mystery beyond understanding. And does that mean, we should stop trying to figure out who God is no way that that just means we need to continue to keep trying. So I don't I don't actually know if you have an answer to this question or not, so if you don't, it's no big deal. But have there, have you seen like, any positives that have come out of this Faithful Disagreement policy, or any negatives that have come out about it? Like, have you? Have you seen anything like that from the church members after? I mean, we've been living with this policy for 10 years now. 10 years! So do you have any stories about that?

Stassi Cramm 37:18

Yeah, absolutely. So, for instance, I can think of a couple of scenarios were immediately following National Conference. Again, I was in the Council of 12. At the time, I got called to a couple of different meetings. And one of those meetings was with a group of people who were not supportive of the decisions that the National Conference made. And so they said, We want to understand more about Faithful Disagreement principles, because we now find ourselves in that space. And so we just had the like, most fabulous conversation, where as you can imagine, like, you know, that people might feel like really, you know, upset if they don't agree with something and then they want to talk to the field apostle, and they want to turn in their priesthood card or, or they want to do whatever, just the fact that the

Faithful Disagreement document existed, and that, you know, it predated the conference was helpful to us to explore with this group of people. Okay, so what does what does my discipleship, what does my ministry look like in Community of Christ at this time? And, and even to the point of we explored with well, if you you know, if as time continues, you still feel strongly that the church has made a huge mistake, then how would they how would they go about, you know, seeking a reconsideration? And so we explored all of that now, the reconsideration, you know, never came to fruition, but it was just like, Oh, yes, this is exactly how, you know, I saw that this document might work. So that's a positive. Another positive would have been a situation where, and you know, Carla, you'll understand this. Not everybody, you know, and Community of Christ congregations really knows what's going on and Community of Christ. So, you know, so I mean, we clearly had congregations out there after National Conference that really didn't even know kind of what was happening. I mean, you know, they kind of generally heard but it was like, oh, that's out there. That's not going to impact us. So that you know, maybe like a year or so later, I remember getting called out to a congregation and basically, you know, they had a situation where were, you know, where someone had disagreed with the policy and was making that known in Sunday school. And the leadership was basically not maliciously but because they lacked understanding. We're trying to kind of ostracize or keep quiet that person. So the person was like, my leadership does not understand Faithful Disagreement, I am following what I think are the principles, and I am not being met from the other side. And so again, we had, you know, conversation and, and, and actually the leadership was like, relieved, it's like, Oh, okay. So they were trying to be true to the church, their recollection was what had happened back in 1984, when there were really hard lines drawn. And so they were trying to apply those principles. And so they were actually ecstatic to learn about the Faithful Disagreement. So those are two, like really positive situations where it worked out well. Where it doesn't hasn't worked out, well, like one example would be where someone was trying to turn in their priesthood card. You know, we were I tried to talk to them about Faithful Disagreement. And they're basically like, you knew what the outcome was going to be, you forced the outcome to be what it was, and you just wrote this, you know, to try to keep me contained. And so you know, I mean, so, so they were experiencing it in a negative way. And that made me really sad. But, you know, I mean, all I could say is, well, I understand that, that's your perception. I'm sorry, that that is your perception, because it makes you feel, you know, bad in a lot of ways. And, you know, and I can't seem to share anything that would help you understand that your perception does not align with my experience, you know, so, so that was, that was a big bummer. And then I think another one this is, like more, you know, small scale is, it's kind of like the word love, you know, the word love gets like tossed around, like, lots of ways, you know, I love pizza, I love chocolate. I love my children. And fortunately, with love, you know, we have been able to human mind understands all the different meanings. And you know, and is able to put more meaning and depth of meaning when someone says, I love my children, or I love God, or I love my spouse as compared to loving pizza and chocolate. But I feel like right now, faithful disagreement principles kind of get tossed around or the definition it gets tossed around like that. It's like, oh, well, I faithfully disagree, which, I mean, I'm glad that the language has made it into the church. So that's the plus. But I don't want to, I don't want to lose the depth of meaning to of what it really means to faithfully disagree. So you don't get to faithfully disagree, when you first hear my opinion, you know, when you first hear my opinion, or my perspective, or the church's, you know, policy or whatever, you know, or when we're considering a policy, then you have to commit to doing the hard work of finding an answer together. And then when you've done the hard work, and a decision has to be made, then you can faithfully disagree and commit to being in the community. You

also can't say I'm faithfully disagreeing, so I'm going to withhold my tithing, or I am faithfully disagreeing. So I'm not going to serve on the worship team or I faithfully disagree, so I'm not going to attend church anymore. No, faithfully disagreeing is I am committed to trying to find consensus. And yet when I still disagree, I'm committed to still building the community up and faithfully, collectively living Christ mission. So

Carla Long 43:33

I think that is such an important distinction such because I have heard the words faithful disagreement, just tossed around like there's some sort of shallow thing, like, I faithfully disagree, let's move on. And it's not that at all, if you're you can disagree. Once you put that word faithfully disagree in there, it means something very, very different. So I really appreciate that distinction. I'm really glad that you said that. And thank you also for talking about the positives and negatives. I mean, sometimes we only hear about the positives, and it's like, oh, this is always wonderful. It's always perfect. Well, no, this this does affect people's lives, and it can affect people's lives in a negative way, as well. And not that the policy does, but you understand what I'm saying.

Stassi Cramm 44:14

Yeah totally. I mean, you said it, it's hard work. Being together and community is really hard work. And, and we you know, that's one of my questions for God. You know, I have a list of questions that I'm pretty sure I may not get answered, you know, in this world, but one of them is God, how can like faithful people work so hard to gain a sense of direction and end up in different places? That's, you know, how does that happen? And I'm sure it has to do with our context and our human nature and I know I am clearly not perfect in my own discernment, which is why I can't close off to hearing other opinions because we just need to remain always open and look for where the Spirit is speaking.

Carla Long 44:59

Ah, we'll Stassi, thank you so much for this podcast. It has just been a really fabulous podcast and really enlightening to really kind of delve deep into what it means to faithfully disagree with each other and still be in that sacred community with each other. And I appreciate you giving us the history behind it too. I mean, all the way back to 1984. Can you believe that 1984 is almost 40 years ago now. Like, it blows my mind.

Stassi Cramm 45:24

I know. It's like, okay, wait, make me feel old. Thank you very much. Because I graduated from college in 1984.

Carla Long 45:32

Sometimes I tell people that my mother was ordained when I was seven. And that was back in 1984. I'm like, I see you doing the math on how old I am now, I see that happening. Yeah. So anyway, I really appreciate you being here. Thank you so much for sharing all that with us.

Stassi Cramm 45:46

No I am, it was my privilege. And I do think that Faithful Disagreement is an important tool of unity and diversity of finding the blessings in community in you know, in acknowledging the worth of all people.

So you know, as we think about our enduring principles, the faithful disagreement really helps us live into those, I think an important way so I love talking about it. So thanks for the chance and I love catching up with you.

Carla Long 46:14

Me too. Thank you so much, Stassi.

Josh Mangelson 46:24

Thanks for listening to Project Zion Podcast, subscribe to our podcast on Apple podcast, Stitcher, or whatever podcast streaming service you use. And while you're there, give us a five star rating. Project Zion Podcast is sponsored by Latter-day Seeker Ministries of Community of Christ. The views and opinions expressed in this episode, are those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Latter-day Seeker Ministries, or Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze.