

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 00:27

Hello, welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host, Robin Linkhart. And today we are here to meet Carla Long. Now for regular listeners. That name is very familiar, but something new is happening in Carla's life. She has been called to serve and the Presiding Bishopric of Community of Christ. So today, we're going to meet Carla and maybe you'll learn some new things about her. Welcome, Carla.

Carla Long 01:01

Hi. It's so weird to be on this side of the mic. I will tell you that right now.

Robin Linkhart 01:06

Isn't it though? So Carla, we'd like you to just take a couple of minutes to introduce yourself to our listeners. Maybe some of just the basics about you.

Carla Long 01:18

So I'm Carla Long. And I'm currently living in Eagle Mountain, Utah. And I've been living in Utah for the last six years. I'm here with my husband, Kuzma Brudsky, who is a church member from Horlivka, Ukraine. My daughter, Lia, and my who's four and a half and my son Ari, who's two and a half. And I've worked for Community of Christ since 2005. So 17 years now.

Robin Linkhart 01:45

Wow, that feels like a long time when you put it that way.

Carla Long 01:49

It really does,

Robin Linkhart 01:51

Doesn't it? So I want you to tell your story in a way that maybe our listeners haven't heard before, and some people who are wanting to find out who is this new person in the Presiding bishopric. So let's start with the story of your life, like your birth and take us through graduating from high school.

Carla Long 02:14

So I'm a Kansas girl I was I was born in Fort Scott, Kansas. My hometown is Mountain City, Kansas, which is about 600 people. My graduating class in high school was 38 kids. And I actually thought that was pretty normal for everyone. I thought everyone had just had like, 40 kids in their whole graduating class. So when I got out of high school, I was like, what you had how many kids in your graduating class? So I grew up on a really small hobby farm. My father was a civil engineer. And my mother was a teacher. And so I kind of got the best of both worlds. I love teaching and I was a teacher for a little

while, which I'll get to, and I really love mathematics. So I'm a pretty good combination of both my mother and my father. We just had a big garden growing up, we had we lived on about an acre so we would play softball and volleyball in the front yard. We had cows that we treated mostly like pets. So I would like ride the cows sometimes. And we named them all. And it was just a really idyllic childhood. I've, I love playing sports. I've been playing sports since I was three years old. My father was the coach of our team in Mapleton, Kansas, where the Community of Christ was where I attended Mapleton Kansas has 70 people in the entire town, three churches and 70 people. And so I played softball from when I was three years old. And there's a memory that everyone loves to remind me of. I was sitting on the bench. I was three years old, and they told me that my job was to be the cheerleader. And so I took that very seriously. And I was definitely a cheerleader. And then when it was my turn to go in and play. I started crying and they're like, "Carla, why are you crying?" and I said, "Who's gonna be the cheerleader?" So I take that very seriously cheerleading in my life. And I was a cheerleader in high school, which I really, really loved. And I think that's something that's kind of carried on throughout my entire life is I love cheering people on and I love being cheerleaders in people's lives. I went to church camp at the Ozark campgrounds near Joplin, Missouri. And I just thought it was the most important place on the whole planet. I loved going to church camp and even the ride down to church camp was something very special. We'd get to stop at McDonald's. The way there was a place in Joplin, where they have a water treatment facility plant that looks like a castle. And so like every time we went by, quote unquote, the castle, I knew I was getting close to church camp and we just would start seeing and start getting excited about going so I went to every church camp I could go to we went to reunion and junior high camp and senior high camp and SPEC, and those were my most important memories. Growing up, I doing those things. and being with people who intentionally wanted to be with me, and who wanted to create sacred space for me, was by far the most important part of my childhood and the most memories I have growing up. When I was five years old, I had my birthday at reunion. And I got a Snoopy snow cone machine. And I don't think there's anything better in the whole wide world and getting a Snoopy snow cone machine at reunion, because I got to make snow cones for all my best friends the entire week, and it was totally awesome.

Robin Linkhart 05:31

Oh, my gosh, that sounds great. Okay, so you are graduating high school and we're ready to hear about the next chapters of your life. What happened after that?

Carla Long 05:44

So I didn't really know where I wanted to go to university. I had been accepted by a couple of different schools. And of course, Graceland was on the list because I love SPEC so much. And I had already applied to go to Graceland. And I just I had not made a decision. Even April of the year I was graduating high school. I hadn't even made a decision yet. And I remember I'd taken a nap on a Sunday afternoon. And when I woke up from the nap, I woke up with this absolute assurance that Graceland was where I was supposed to be. And I literally accepted the next day I accepted and said yes, I'm gonna go to Graceland. This is where I'm going to be. And my parents were like, Great, let's do it. So I went to Graceland. And that was in 1995, which sounds super long ago. I was a mathematics major, and a secondary education minor. And I really, really loved my time there. And it was Graceland was a pretty good choice for me because I was a very, very young 18 when I went to Graceland, I was a small town girl. I was used to small towns. I wasn't even in my first traffic jam until I was, I think 20

years old. So I didn't even really know what a traffic jam was necessarily, when I was driving. And so I, I was a really young, a young, 18 year old. So Graceland was a good place for me to grow up a little bit more. I yeah, I pursued that mathematics degree. I wanted to be a math teacher. My dad said, hey, "I'll pay for college. But I'll only pay for four years and you better have a job when you come out of it." So I said, "Ookay." So when I came out of it, I started teaching mathematics at Fort Osage High School and Independence, Missouri. And I remember very clearly, being super, super excited that I was gonna get paid \$26,000 A year \$26,000 a year, I thought I was making bank. And I taught at Fort Osage for three years. And then that third year, I started feeling God, calling me pretty loudly, just just like annoyingly tapping me on the shoulder. And I had finished a master's degree by then I finished a master's degree in education by that point, and I was talking to my dad, I'm like, do I want to do the Peace Corps? What do I What should I do dad? And he's like, "Well, what about that World Service Corps with the church?" And I was like, "Oh, that sounds cool. I haven't really thought about that." So I applied for World Service Corps. And they accepted me and I was chosen to go to the Philippines. So I moved to the Philippines in October 2002. And I was in the Philippines for about six months or so I learned how to speak Tagalog, not well. All the Filipinos will tell you I did not learn how to speak it well, but I gave my first sermon ever half and Tagalog and half an English. And in the back of the room, there's a sweet little Filipino woman who laughed the entire time she could not believe I was speaking in Tagalog. And I practice that sermon for three weeks beforehand. And it was it was terrible. A terrible, terrible sermon. But I tried so hard, and they appreciated how hard I tried. And I loved my time in the Philippines, I I met so many amazing people. I got to teach in a school that our church was running at the time. It was just an incredible experience. I learned so much about myself. While I was in the Philippines and I got to see so much of the of the world. It was awesome. Um, I had to cut my time in the Philippines short though I supposed to be there for a year I had to cut it short, because the war was getting ready to start in Iraq. And many Filipinos were very angry about that. And everywhere I would go, I stood out like a sore thumb because I'm blonde and I'm very, very pale. And so people would notice and call me "Americana" all the time. So some, not where I live necessarily in my village, but every week we'd hear about an American business being bombed and American being shot and killed in the Philippines. So the church finally decided that I was probably a little bit too much of a liability to be there. So they pulled me out of the Philippines a little bit early. I was only there for six months rather than for a year. And when I got home, they said, World Service Corps said, you can stop your contract. You can work out the rest of your contract your year long contract here and independence, you can move to Taiwan or you can move to Australia. And I was like, Ooh, this is interesting. So I said, sent me to Australia, and I just had the most amazing Australian experience. I lived about an hour, no, I lived about three hours north of Sydney.

Carla Long 10:29

I had this house, the Mission Center had this fleet of cars. So I got a car I had to learn to drive on the left side of the road. I taught in a school that our church was running for Aboriginal youth. So I taught them whatever they wanted to learn. I learned about Aboriginal culture, I learned how to do dot paintings, and I learned all about the Aborigines. I actually borrowed a surfboard from my good friend, Adam Wade, and I went surfing every week. And because I was only 10 minutes from the beach, and I was actually ordained as a priest down in Australia, my parents came out to see me and my, my father, and my Australian mother actually ordained me to the office of priest. And it was that time in Australia, was just the most incredible time for me. It really deepened my faith. It really showed me what it meant

to work for the church, even though I was just a volunteer. And I felt like I was actually an Australian, because I had a snarky sense of humor that they had. And I learned how to drink coffee in Australia, which I'd never done before. And I could be my snarky, snarky self, and everybody just expected it.

Robin Linkhart 11:44

So how long were you in Australia, then?

Carla Long 11:46

A full year. So I was there from July to July. And when I came back from Australia, I started a doctorate degree in math, math education at UMKC. So I was teaching master students at UMKC, University of Missouri in Kansas City, I was teaching master's students and I, that was my plan. But when I got back, I realized that math wasn't really my first love anymore. That really wasn't where my heart was anymore. And my heart was with the church. And so while I still went ahead and taught at UMKC, for a year, I dropped out of the doctoral program, and I started seminary with Community of Christ. So I paid for seminary myself for my, for the first year. And I just kind of existed for that first year I was I was having some pretty serious cultural issues, like it was hard to come back to the United States after being away for a year and a half. And I was just trying to figure out my life. So I decided that what I really wanted to do was work for the church. So I applied to work for the church. And I was hired to be a congregational financial officer in the Sierra Pacific Mission Center in Northern California. So I went out to California, and I was the congregational financial officer out there. Did I know what I was doing? Not exactly, but I learned on the job, and I really loved numbers still. So that was very helpful.

Robin Linkhart 13:17

So a congregational financial officer? Or no, no,

Carla Long 13:20

Is that what I said? I was a Mission Center financial officer.

Robin Linkhart 13:22

Mission center financial officer, and you were still in seminary at that point, or you had finished?

Carla Long 13:29

Good question. So yeah, I was still in seminary. So I took a year of seminary without working for the church. And then for the rest of my time in seminary, which was a five year program. I was when I was in California. So I was also in seminary, finishing up my master's degree while I was a Mission Center Financial Officer, thank you for that. And so, you know, when I was in California, I, I really learned how to be an administrator for the church. That's one thing I really learned how to do. And I also learned so so much more, I went to a lot of youth camps. And I really enjoyed leading youth camps and being with the people at reunions and in their congregations. And it was, I said that Australia was a soul deepening time and California was, too, my my soul was deepened for sure. I was ordained to be an elder and then a high priest when I was in California, and I really took that call to be a minister of vision, which is the high priest role. I took that very seriously. And so I was working with Barb Carter's Mission Center President and then Ron Smith as Mission Center President and we tried really hard to develop a vision for the Sierra Pacific Mission Center. And it was, it's difficult and it's hard, but it's also pretty

wonderful to work with people when it comes to where they feel their heart leading them and where they feel God leading them.

Robin Linkhart 14:56

Yeah, so I met you at seminary when you start, I started in 2003 in seminary and you came about the same time, maybe a little bit after that. That's when I first got to know the one and only Carla Long. And Adam Wade from Australia was in during that time, too. And you too, are just like frick and frack together all the time. And with that special sense of humor, which I always struggled to understand, I've wasn't always sure I was understanding the punch line. But we had a lot of fun. And then, when you were in Sierra, Sierra Pacific Mission Center, in addition to being the mission center financial officer, it seemed to me because we've had the same apostle for a while. So we were in the same field, that you were also supporting a lot of children and youth ministry, is that correct?

Carla Long 15:45

That's true. I did a ton of camps. I was also actually the the young adult minister. So I was the named young adult minister. But I also supported pretty much every single camp that they did, I would definitely support them in that. And I actually thought that was just pretty normal thing for admissions that or financial officer to do, it turns out, it's not that normal, but I really enjoyed it. And I was a single girl with no children. And I had tons of time on my hands well, more than I do now. And so going into camps, and being around people is basically what I want to do with my life. So that was a really good fit for me, but I wasn't young adult minister for a while out there, too.

Robin Linkhart 16:23

Okay, so from there, you took on a new assignment. And I'm not sure how that all came about. So walk us through that next chapter ministry and relocation.

Carla Long 16:38

So I was in California from 2005, to 2011. And in 2011, I was approached by the church to think about taking a job as a Mission Center financial officer in Western Europe and the Eurasia mission centers, which is basically all of Europe. And I was shocked, first of all, and I also didn't really, I wasn't sure what I was going to say, because I knew it'd be a very, very different assignment that what I had in Northern California, and I didn't even know what I didn't know. So I haven't the adventurous spirit that I have. I went ahead and just said yes. And I moved back to Kansas City in October 2011, and made my first trip to the Netherlands in early November 2011. And it was just incredible. Not only did I get to see some pretty amazing spots, our church has ministries happening in the Netherlands and Spain and France and Hungary, and Georgia, the country of Georgia and Russia and Ukraine and England, and which was wonderful to get to see all those amazing places, but the people there were just absolutely incredible. To be welcomed into people's homes to be fed by people. It's a very different life, when you are assigned a place that you don't live because you are reliant on people and their hospitality and their generosity. And I really learned a lot about generosity from being in Europe, from sleeping on people's couches to eating their food, to, to the gratitude portion, it was it just shown me a much deeper look at what generosity is, and how we extend that generosity and why generosity is so important to making this church work, and helping people to learn how to be disciples of Christ. So it's a it was a very different assignment for me, I ended up meeting my now husband, Kuzma Brudsky, whose father

started our church at Ukraine. And I got to hear all these amazing stories from our Russian members to our Georgian members, Kuzman and I performed the first ordination that our church had ever had in the country of Georgia in the capital of Tbilisi, which was very exciting to think you know, that these things are happening, and I get to be a part of them. I truly enjoyed going to church camps in Germany Hülsa Haus because everything was in German, and my German is not great. So I again, I had to rely on the generosity of people to even tell me what was going on and to talk to me. And so I, I going back to that generosity piece people are just, when generosity is a part of who you are. It's it really really shows when you're a disciple of Christ to is beautiful. So in 2016, I was invited to become a Latter-day Seekers expansion minister in Utah and I I didn't even really know what that meant. I wasn't sure what that meant. And so I found out what that meant. It was really interesting because this was the first time in the church that I had not had a financial role. And this was not a financial role at all. This was a role where I just really got to sit down and talk to people about Community of Christ and Jesus and how we view Jesus and how we see our lives through the Enduring Principles. And because people really love the Enduring Principles, as there's a few of them that people love the most. But the Enduring Principles has been really, really important to my work out here.

Carla Long 20:44

And I, please don't tell everyone this Robin, of course, but this has been my favorite job that I worked for, for the church, because it's been purely ministerial. And it's, I think it's a really important part of who I am now is that I need and I really yearn for that ministerial part, I understand the importance of the administrative work to keep the church going. I totally understand that. But without that ministerial piece, and I imagine that every minister in the church would say this, whether they have an administrative role or a ministerial role, or both. But it's that, minister, it's that ministerial role, that is the most important part and the reason why I do what I do. And so just be a minister out here without the administrative part has been very fulfilling, very fulfilling, because Community of Christ is the coolest church in Utah. And I'm not kidding when I say that. We are the coolest church in Utah. And people when they hear that I'm from Community of Christ, their eyes almost always light up, and they're like, are you serious? We've heard about you, we've heard so much about you. And you guys are awesome. And I'm like, Yeah, we are awesome. So I feel like it's part of my job now is to remind people in the church, that we are awesome, and that we have done some incredible theological work, and that we need to be really proud of who we are and who we are becoming. Utah is also very important to me, because, you know, this is the first place I've ever I, I was married in 2016. And then we moved to Utah, and I had my children out here. My babies are Utahns. They have never known a life without mountains or surrounding them. And so I Utah is, I will always think of Utah very, very fondly.

Robin Linkhart 22:44

So then something really big happened in your life this year, tell us how your call to the Presiding Bishopric came about?

Carla Long 22:54

Well, this is actually a little bit of a funny story. And one that my husband wishes I wouldn't tell. But I think it's funny. And I think that our listeners will think it's funny, and it's very indicative, I think of who I am. So I received an email from Steve Veazey in July of 2022. And he said he had a ministry opportunity that he wanted to share with me. And as soon as I got that email, I knew exactly what I had

to do. So I started a new email back to him. And I wrote, "Dear Steve, I think your email has been hacked. And then I said, don't forget to change your password! Love, Carla." And when I told my husband Kuzma about what I had done, he said, What I'm like, why would Steve Veazey be emailing me about a ministry opportunity? He's just been hacked. It's no big deal. And so I immediately got a reply back from Steve, and it said, "Actually, Carla, I do want to talk to you." I was like, "Oh, okay." So we set up a Zoom meeting. And we for that afternoon, we talked and I asked Kuzma to sit right next to me out of view of Steve and I just needed to hold his hand because I just wasn't sure what to expect. And I wasn't sure if I was ready to move to a different spot. So he gave me some time to think about this new role and then Presiding Bishopric. And I prayed and I prayed, and I thought and I spoke to a few people that I could speak to. And I asked so many questions, you know, why me and a zillion more questions like that. And, you know, then the time came when I knew my answer. You know, I, I don't know if that's true. I think that I always knew what the answer was going to be. But there came a time when that answer was confirmed. And I gave the answer of yes. That I would serve as the Presiding bishopric even though it's It's not necessarily the place I thought I was going to be at this point in my life. I feel really called to it. And I, there's some excitement in the when I think about being in the Presiding bishopric. And knowing that this is an important role. And this is a necessary role. And this is a place that I can even expand who I am even further. So I'm, I, I'm nervous about it. But I'm also excited about it. And I'm looking forward to learning as much as I can about the administrative function of the church. So that hopefully, we can not change it up, because that's not really what I'm trying to do. But make it run more smoothly figure out ways that we can streamline it or, you know, whatever. I'm looking forward to kind of figuring out like a puzzle.

Robin Linkhart 25:59

Yeah, and this is, I think, extra exciting because the entire Bishopric is being reconstituted. So we have a new Presiding Bishop and two new counselors, to the Presiding Bishop. So, Wim van Klinken will serve as counselors to the new Presiding Bishop, Ron Harmon. And I just have to say, Carla, that makes it seem extra, like I don't know what like. Like, you get to start with a whole new crew a take on this whole big adventure. So how has the unfolding of this new chapter, this next step and your ongoing adventure with God changed things for you?

Carla Long 26:46

Well, if I'm honest, not much has changed so far, except, you know, getting to tell friends and family that I'm moving back to the Midwest. I love the mountains of Utah. And like I said, I love Utah. But when I traveled back to the Midwest earlier this year, and with a plane touched down in Kansas City, and I saw those open plains. And I could see as far as I could see, I realized that I'm a Midwest girl, I'm a plains girl, I love seeing as far as I can see, I'm Midwest to my bones. And so going back to the Midwest does feel very exciting to me, in a lot of ways, just because I, I understand myself better there. Sometimes I don't understand myself well in Utah. And I wonder what I'm doing out here. But like I said, not much has really changed, I got to go attend a meeting of the world church leadership council in September. And that was really, really interesting. And I got to, I felt like having a seat at the table was daunting and scary, but also really exciting. I got to see a bigger picture of, of church work. And that was really good for me. And, you know, like, we're thinking about all the practical things right now where to buy a house, and for the first time in my life, I have to actually think about school districts. I've never had to think about that before. So anyway, just the practical things we're working on right now.

But what has changed is that when I speak in church, now, I have kind of started speaking from a world church scenario, rather than just to Salt Lake City scenario. And so I realized that my words have power, I realized that things I say, can expand people's knowledge about Community of Christ. And that's what I'm trying to do now. So it's not that I never did that. But I am recognizing more and more now that I have this new role to look forward to.

Robin Linkhart 28:40

As you think about this, and look to the future, what are your hopes for the future? And how do you see God moving in the world in ways that connect with Community of Christ and God's invitation to boldly follow into the heart of God's vision for all creation.

Carla Long 29:02

So I mentioned this earlier. But I really love generosity. I actually don't think that we've explored the depths of what that word means and what it could mean for the church. Now, I don't want you to get me wrong there. We have incredibly generous people in this organization. But I want to talk about and think about and dream about and pray about what it could mean to move more deeply into what generosity means. I really think that diving into what generosity is and I'm not just talking about money, I'm talking about an expansive vision of what generosity is. I think if we really moved into what that meant, I think it could actually think it could change everything. So I don't even know exactly what I mean by that. But I do want to do like kind of an in depth jump into generosity. I think that can be a really important look. I've also been loving what I've been hearing in regard to mission around the world. You know, for me, God's vision is a place where we all feel accepted and loved for exactly who we are. It means that we really live into what Catherine of Genoa said, oh, so long ago, my favorite quote of all time is from Catherine of Genoa. And it says, "The me in me is God." And for me, that means that when we are truly who we are, when we are vulnerable, and open and compassionate for others, to do the same, that's where God lives. And that's where we understand God most of all. So I have a lot of hope. I have, I have hopes that we can really, really dive into what it means to be a generous church. And I hope that we can be in a place where God lives where God thrives, that we can live out of that place, within ourselves where God is and where we can understand God most fully.

Robin Linkhart 31:09

I love that vision that you just shared, Carla. And as you were speaking, I was capturing images in my mind's eye of stories of you in the Philippines experiencing the generosity of people that welcomed you in, and also in Australia and Europe, I think you're speaking to a really powerful dimension of walking with Jesus, and I'm hearing your prophetic voice. I'm looking forward to you being among the world church leaders. So Carla, as a disciple, and you've been a disciple, it sounds like since the day you were born, even before you were baptized, how do you nurture your relationship with God?

Carla Long 31:59

Ah, sigh Robin. So if I'm honest, I used to be a lot better at this than I am now. When I, before I had kids, I was much better at nurturing my relationship with God than I am now. I had time for meditation, and I had a spiritual director and so many other things. But now, I kind of just take that nurturing time where I can get it. So every night my daughter, who's four and a half, she and I go into her room, and I asked her three questions. What's a good thing that happened today? What's a not so good thing

happened today? And did you feel God in your heart today. And then we see a campfire song, and then I hear her prayers. And in her prayers, I hear my own. In her good moments of the day, I hear my good moments of the day. And in her not so good moments of the day, I also think of mine. And then I also think about when I felt God in my heart today. And so that's a really simple spiritual practice that has been part of my life for a long time. And I really love those moments with Leah, with my daughter, because in her, I can hear myself and I can recognize those moments with God. The other thing that I do is I try to be fully present in almost every aspect of my life. I don't always succeed because I have a two year old and a four year old, but I have found that when I'm intentional about being present, when I am fully immersed in what I'm doing, and everything I am is right there. In that moment, God always shows up, God is always present, when I am intentional about being in the exact place I am. So while I don't have as much time for meditation and for spiritual direction, like I used to, and I and when the kids start school, I'm looking forward to getting back into those things. I take what I can get, and in those moments, God is always present. And I recognize God in my life every single day.

Robin Linkhart 34:15

Well, it's a beautiful thing to hear you talk about your daughter Lia and how I'm walking with her being present with her fully present with her every night and in your nighttime ritual of reflecting on the day and praying is such a powerful and at the same time gentle and sweet treasure in your life. I can see how that brings you a certain dimension of closeness with God and with her at the same time and what a beautiful spiritual practice and discipline to be fully present to the best of your ability in every moment of life. I think, listeners, we can all take that one and start practicing it right away. Thank you so much, Carla for sharing from the depths of your heart and giving us a little window into your life. I've learned things about you that I didn't know before. And we've known each other for at least a long time in my life. I know you didn't travel as a youngster. And I did. So I had so many different places to live that I don't have that many friends that I've had since the beginning, the very beginning, but you are certainly one of my longtime friends. So thanks. Thanks so much for being with us today and sharing about this new chapter in your life. I know we will catch up with you again and get some updates over the next several years. And of course listeners, you know, Carla very well on Project Zion Podcast, as a host for Percolating on Faith and many other episodes. However, if you would like to hear more from Carla, I would like to recommend that you go to Community of Christ YouTube channel, and enter Carla Long in the search box. And you'll be able to find some other things that Carla has shared with us through her ministry. And as always, a very special thanks to you our listeners for spending a portion of your day with us. This is your host 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 36:36

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