

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 our guest is Wim van Klinken. Wim was recently called to serve as a member of Community of Christ Presiding Bishopric. That call will be presented to the General Conference legislative session during World Conference 2023 for approval, and then Wim will be ordained at that World Conference. Wim, we're so glad to have you with us today, welcome. And I'd love it if you'd just take a minute or two to introduce yourself to our listeners.

Wim van Klinken 01:13

Thank you, Robin, I appreciate the opportunity to introduce myself to your listeners. So, my name is Wim van Klinken, and Wim, for those who are not familiar, I'm Dutch, and Wim is the Dutch equivalent of Bill. My formal name is Wilem van Klinken, which would be William van Klinken. I come out of a church family, and I have a wife, Debora, and one son, Max, who is 26, and who lives in Omaha, Nebraska. That's also where he studied. And I currently serve the church as the Chief Information and Technology Officer, and the Director of Business Operations. People might not be familiar what those terms are, so let me explain. So, the Chief Information and Technology Officer is really responsible within the church for all IT related issues, the systems we provide centralized. For instance, most people are familiar with Shelby, but we also provide other centralized services like mail services, office, etc., etc. And as Director of Business Operations, I'm responsible for kind of the business side that is interacting with the outside world. But that also includes, for instance, *Herald House*, and events, and we have at our facilities in Independence. Besides that, what can I tell, say more about myself, Robin? What do you want to know? What do you think the listeners would love to know?

Robin Linkhart 02:59

Well, I know that you're involved in the greater community here in Missouri and also that you have a home congregation. So maybe tell us just a little bit about that.

Wim van Klinken 03:08

Yeah, so my home congregation is Liberty, Missouri. That's different than Liberty Street in Independence, but the town, Liberty in Missouri, which is just north of Independence, northeast of Kansas City. I am somebody who is really involved in the community, and especially in Kansas City, in the Greater Kansas City area. When I came to the US, and I've got a lot of background in business and nonprofit world, but one of the first things I did was study at UMKC, and getting my Master of Public Administration, just to get the lingo, and to get the practices and the customs here in the US, and get myself familiarized with those. Actually, I immediately stayed with UMKC as an adjunct faculty member, and soon after also became a senior fellow at the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership. I'm very much involved in the nonprofit world in Kansas City, like I was in the nonprofit world in the Netherlands.

I've served on many boards in the greater Kansas City area, not all church related, but some church related. And I also support nonprofits through some consultancy activities as well.

Robin Linkhart 04:32

Thank you so much, Wim. That really helps us get a feel for your current context and all the things that you're engaged in. I know our listeners would love to hear about your growing up years, what life was like for you in your family and community, and obviously that's very different because it was not here in the USA. So, take us on a little journey of your early life up to about late teens.

Wim van Klinken 04:59

Yeah, so, so, I grew up in the church, and my dad was a convert to the church. He, he joined the church when he was in his late teens. And my mom also grew up in the church. I would be considered third generation in the church. My parents were very much involved in leadership in the church. My dad was, for a long time, the National Minister. My dad even worked for the church for about four years in the mid '70s, and my mom was the National Women's Leader. So, I really grew up as the kid of the minister, together with my brother, my younger brother. We just are one year apart. But the two of us grew up together really involved in church life at a time that we were still convinced that this was the only one true church. So, I'm talking about born in '64, and so, my formational years, as you're alluded to, up to my late teens, would be in the '60s and the '70s, at a time that most of the church members were convinced this was the one true church, and also in a environment in Western Europe, in the Netherlands. But this would be the case for all of Western Europe, where belonging to an American church was not common, and also where most people would belong either to a Protestant church, *the* Protestant Church in the Netherlands, or the Catholic Church. That was kind of, that's what you belonged to, and if you would belong to something else, you were clearly a minority. So that's also how I always, how I felt, like always had to defend myself, always be this odd ball out there that belonged to a denomination. So, and because of having to defend yourself, you really are also very well knowledgeable about the church. So that's kind of my upbringing as a child, very much in church life, going to, of course, going to school, public school, and being a very good, academics very well. No problem at all. And next to it, music was also the family's passion. My parents did sing. None of them really played an instrument, but from early on, our parents, kind of, stimulated that we were involved in music.

Robin Linkhart 08:04

So, I believe you are a gifted pianist as well as a lovely voice, so vocals. Is that correct?

Wim van Klinken 08:14

That's correct, yes. So, I studied off as a, playing the piano. From the age of six, I had piano lessons until I was 13. Then I had a short stint of playing the clarinet. That, my lungs didn't like that, so I had to stop really, with playing the clarinet. But from the age of, and I always sang in church, you sing, so that happens. But from the age of 18, I went to university when I was 17 already, and also then started to sing in the choir of the University and was introduced to a program to become a choir master director, conductor. So, I immediately did that. And I studied for five years next to my study as, for economics. I also went, studied as a choir. So, I'm professionally trained as a conductor, actually. Most people don't

know that, but, and especially then focused on choirs. So that's where my vocal studies come from, as well.

Robin Linkhart 09:30

One of the things I love about hosting interviews on *Project Zion Podcast* is I get to learn some of the most amazing things about people that I've known for many years, and I met, I met you, Wim, back when I was in seminary, so I started Seminary in 2003. We'll get to the rest of your story soon, so we'll find out where we crossed paths. Love hearing about this. So, you have finished your secondary education, and your, you touched a little bit on some of your studies as you went forward to university. Tell us about the rest of that and your professional career, and starting a family, and maybe, you know, how is your life with the church coming into this, and as you began to be engaged in ordained ministry, what that looked like?

Wim van Klinken 10:23

Yeah, so the educational system in the Netherlands is different than in the U.S. So, while in the U.S., people are familiar with going through K through 12, kind of everybody goes through the same and gets through high school, although in high school, you might have some specialties or electives. In the Netherlands, actually, everybody goes through the age of 12, through the same program, and then separates out, depending on your skills, and depending on your affinities. So, some people at the age of 12 might go to trade school, just to learn a trade. Some people might go to some general schooling. And I've been fortunate academically. I immediately go to a school that really prepares you for academic studies. So, by the age of 17, I graduated from that and immediately went to university, which would be my start of my master's programs at that point. And I started studying economics, macro/micro economics, and there specialized in business science, and the cross section of public accounting, with management information systems. So, I was the, the first cohort really doing that. And I was even the first student assistant at that time. At the same time, I also started working while I was doing that. I started teaching at my own secondary school, and I also kind of started in IT, and I was, from age of 18, I was conducting five nights a week. So, I'm a workaholic, as many who know me know. So, I was pretty busy studying, working during the daytime, conducting during the night, five nights a week. And then at the age of 22, I started my own businesses in IT in a time that was very fortunate in the '80s, and was, what's good, and founded several companies. And by the age, in my mid 30s, I sold them. But going back, that's, I met my wife, when, when I was 24. I think I need to go back now when, yes, 24, almost 25, when I met my wife, and we got married 15 months later, and our son was born 5 years later, yes. We married in '91, and Valentine's Day, actually, for people who are interested. Valentine's day '91, we got married and our son was born in '96. So, we were in our early 30s when our only child was born. So, by that time, I was in our early 30s. I was well to do, already had made a career. I also had started other studies as, as already told. I've studied economics and business science, and all of that, music, and I also done later post graduate studies in business administration. And I've done asset management later. So, I'm just, I'm just continuing learning. At the time I'd also done the European studies of the Comenius programme, which got me to study at six different universities throughout Europe for short stints. And I had my Master of Arts in Religion where you and I met Robin in the early 2000s at a time and then when I came here to the U.S. in 2007, I started studying several years later at UMKC to do my Master of Public Administration. So, I've got out two masters here in the U.S. because the system in the Netherlands is different. We wouldn't call that

master's at the time, but they are multiple master's equivalent at that, at that time. So, I had my businesses. I sold those in my mid 30s, wondering what to do. I was a bit disappointed, I must say, in the for-profit sector, because a lot what I encountered, let me phrase it that way, in the for-profit sector, was people generating a lot of money for themselves, and a lot of greed, and I encountered also corruption in for-profit world. And with my Christian upbringing, I did not think that that was, or my understanding of my Christian upbringing, that that would really change the world that much. So, I wanted to serve in the for-cost, that's how I call it instead of the nonprofit, the for-cost sector, and eventually decided to work for the church. I, let me go back. So, I had already served the, my home congregation in Rotterdam. So, I grew up in Rotterdam, in Netherlands. That's where I was born and raised. I had served, for a long time, my congregation, as the treasurer, as it was called at the time, and also, in my early 30s, I served the congregation as the pastor, all self-sustaining, then I became a self-sustaining leader for the church in the Netherlands. And then after I sold my business, wondering what I'm going to do in 2002, I decided to say, "Okay, I'm going to give half of my time as a self-supporting minister to the Europe region at the time." So, I became self-sustaining Associates Regional Administrator for the European church. And my focus was on Western Europe, actually. And I did that from October 1, 2002, to July 1, 2004. And because in July 1, 2004, I was going in full time ministry, as an employee of the church and became the first Mission Center President for the Europe Mission Center. Currently, you've got the Western Europe Mission Center, you've got the Eurasia Mission Center, at that time that was still one mission center. So, I've been employed by the church since July 1, 2004. And then in the summer of 2007, we moved to the U.S. where I became the Director of International Headquarters for the church. It's probably a long story there, Robin.

Robin Linkhart 18:14

Oh, I love it. I love it. So, let's, I just want to back up just a tiny bit and tell us about when you were first called into the priesthood. So, kind of your journey of ordination, on the back drop of all these wonderful things you've shared with us.

Wim van Klinken 18:32

I was probably, I don't know how old I was when I was first called into the priesthood, probably in my early 20s, somewhere, and I was called to priest at the time. And because it was kind of late, my younger brother had, was already called to the priesthood. So, I was far more what I would call mature, and not that I would now say, hey, don't interpret that my younger brother was immature. I'm not saying that at all, but what I'm saying is, I had had a lot of time to think about it. So, all calls never came as a surprise to me, not the calls really that I've had. And so, this was a call in my home congregation, Rotterdam, that really fed it at that time. Unfortunately, during those years, there was a lot of tumult, so I knew at some point, okay, I need to accept the call and also get myself in leadership roles to help the organization or the church out at the time. So that was, I was 20 or so when, 20-21, when I was called to priest. I am trying to recall the circumstances really, of it, so, at that time. And not long after, I was, probably three years later or so I was called to elder. And I was called to high priest in 2002. So that coincided, kind of, when I also started working as self-sustaining Regional Administrator Assistant. I recall that very well, my call to high priest, because my dad was aware of the call, but he died in between me getting the call and me being ordained. So, I was ordained as high priest a month after my dad had passed away. So that's, yeah, that was very special at that time, and got a lot of support and special, and then also get me the special bond with, unfortunately, the late Len Young and Kees

Compier, who were instrumental during that time. So, in my transition, as I said early on, so I grew up believing this was the one true church, and I think Len and Kees were very instrumental in keeping me with the church and transitioning or helping me understand that my rebel thoughts, I was not alone with my rebel thoughts, but that they had those same, what I was thinking was probably theologically sound at the time. And so, because they implemented a young adult studies at the, around that same time, shortly after I also went and listed in the Master of Art, Religion, the MAR, but that really helped me change and helped me better understand and, and really form my belief system to a point that would be more sound and really got my passion for the church during those years.

Robin Linkhart 22:20

Yeah, that's so important to have those key mentors in our lives that help bridge us and, in a sense, keep us tethered to the community and allow the space to grow and learn. But that encouragement, like you said, that you weren't alone in some of the things you were thinking. Okay, Wim, that brings us to your recent call to the Presiding Bishopric. And we just want to hear all the things that you're comfortable sharing with us about your experience of that call and how it transpired.

Wim van Klinken 22:55

So, this call didn't come as a surprise, as none of the calls came. And so, while I was working in Europe, I was, kind of, Len and Kees were my mentors and I had a closer relationship with them. When I came to the U.S., not immediately for the first couple of years, but soon, Stassi really became my mentor. And so, I've been working closely with Stassi for years, and really felt that call coming. First of all, the call to bishop, originally the call to bishop, which came by, I might say, four or five years ago or so, that one came as a surprise. So just a little story there. I was called and, or Stassi wanted to talk with me at that time, and it just happened after we had one of those first experiences where we had an online service, and the whole system didn't work. So, I was called to meet with Stassi and I thought, okay, I'm gonna get really chastised for, for that. That one I didn't realize and didn't see coming, but that was call to bishop. But the call to be a member of the Presiding Bishopric, I've seen that coming, working close with Stassi with Presiding Bishopric and for the years. I've served the church as the comptroller for Canada for a while. So, I've been in those roles where really my role in IT, completely understanding the finances of the organization, helping, or being instrumental in implementing a new financial system a couple of years ago, at headquarters. So, I've seen that coming, felt, felt that there was a call and felt also, okay, it's time, being prompted by the Spirit as to say, to say, okay, hey, Wim, it's time to, to not only be there on the IT side, but also help with the financial side of the organization. So, people might not know that, in my new role, I will still continue to serve as the Chief Information and Technology Officer. So, I will still continue doing that and being involved in that, but also now being involved in being the stewards, the trustees of the organization for its financial assets, et cetera. So, it's, it didn't come as a surprise, actually, I was, when I was called, and, as you know, those calls don't come from like, in this case, Stassi, or whatever. You're called into Steve Veazey's office, Steve Veazey wants to have an appointment with you, and you kind of feel what's coming at that point. And, of course, I had to confer with my wife, Debora. But within several days, I made Steve aware, President Veazey aware that that was, that I was willing to serve in this particular role.

Robin Linkhart 26:50

Thank you for sharing that with us, Wim. It's so fascinating to listen to your story as you experience the Holy Spirit moving in your life in different ways and, and to sense calls before they come. That must be a very grounding experience to, to have that be part of what not only sustains you, but all part of that calling process. So then, the big announcement was made, and the whole world knows that you are going to be serving with the Presiding Bishopric. So how has this new chapter, as it's unfolding, and this ongoing adventure with God, how has that changed things for you?

Wim van Klinken 27:40

So, I think the main thing that has changed is me starting to prep a bit more, being primarily focused on the IT, or the business side of the organization, and far less in ministry. Although I'm a minister, and I'm involved in ministry, I preach etc., but now it is different. I was in an, in a congregation yesterday and immediately approached by somebody who wanted to talk about the finances of the church, wanted to talk with me about what she read in the *Herald*. So that makes a difference. All of a sudden, you represent the church. We are representing the organization. And I can't be less, I need to be less blunt as a Dutch person, and not that I needs to be politically correct, that would be difficult for me, but you represent the organization in a different way, and people view you in a different way. Fortunately, my colleagues at headquarters, I've not felt that they've treated me differently or whatever. It's not, you know, so that's, that's good. I still have those same relationships, but you see it, how it works in the congregational life. So, the other thing that has happened in the meantime, I've been for the past years, the Mission Center Financial Officer for, voluntarily, for the Midlands Mission Center. That's a position that can't be combined with a position in the Presiding Bishopric, so since I knew about the call without them knowing why, I've said, "Okay, this will be my last term, my last year." And so, we've been transitioning for a while, and I've now handed over those responsibilities to others. Fortunately, we had a team of four Mission Center financial officers, of which I was the team lead, the one of record, as we call it, and the other three are continuing in that role. So, we've had several years of transitioning. But it became more important in this last period when it was clear to everybody that I was called into the Presiding Bishopric. So those are the kinds of things that have happened. And the two things I'm doing at headquarters, in regard to IT and the business side, I've got two excellent team leads, as we call it at headquarters, that for some longer time, now, I've more and more trained them, and that continues in training them and making them more and more self-sufficient. So, I can stay on a more strategic level, instead of having to do a lot of hands-on myself, although I still love hand-on stuff. I still love programming. I will continue to program and there's a lot of programs in the church that are made by myself, and they're maintained by myself, but I'm moving more and more on a more strategic level.

Robin Linkhart 31:10

That's all very fascinating information to hear, and I certainly can relate to that sense of gravity when you realize that you represent the whole church. And both of us have served at, you know, Mission Center levels and congregation levels, and indeed, we represent the church, but there is something different, a different weight when people are looking at you as representing the World Church. And I for one, am just delighted that you have been called and that you will be representing the church. Wim, 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.

Wim van Klinken 32:03

So, I am a very optimistic person. I think, I see a bright future. I know that the church is struggling in some ways, but all in all, there's a future for the movement. There's a future for the movement and that future will not likely be how the past has been. And I am excited to help shape that future and help people transition from what it was into what it could be. And there are some paradigm shifts to be made. President Veazey calls it, we need to have a metamorphosis that needs to happen. That just means, okay, we need to look at things in a new, and for me, exciting ways. So, I'm very excited. I'm very optimistic. And yes, it will be pain for some who want to hold on to the past. But I'm also know that there's a lot of younger people, I'm now perceived probably as one of the older folks, that are longing to this idea of being changemakers in this world, and being really the, the light, the leaven, the salt, the body of Christ in new ways, I would say that to be the church, in this world. And when I say to be the church, being a church is different than have church in the world. And for some, it might even mean be different than have a church in this world. So, this idea of being the Christ, be the church, being the body of Christ in this world, I think that's what's, that's what I feel passionate about, and I hope you hear it my voice at the moment, and people are longing to hear that. And I think for me, if you ask me, what is one of these, again, I'm a business scientist, what's the, one of the unique selling points of this organization is that we're an organization that is so diverse from different nations, and having that input, all those different ideas, instead of people only being in their own echo chamber as a small parochial church, but bring that all together, that, that has so much to offer to the world. And that's what I am passionate about. That's what I feel that's, that God calls us to. And I think the Spirit is already there, we just need to hop on. That's how I feel. It's just going to be different, and I don't know how it will look exactly, but it will be there.

Robin Linkhart 35:18

Well, like you, I'm an optimist as well. And I love the way you speak of this and give voice and shape and form and, and that you are very honest about, we don't know what it's gonna look like. You don't know what it's gonna look like. But there's definitely a sense of call, and purpose, and inklings, and glimpses into what can be. I think, Wim, when you said that in your mid 30s, you sold your for-profit businesses, that you had, in a sense, become disillusioned by the for-profit sector that were in it for the money for themselves, and the greed and the consumption, and then you said you wanted to work and move for the for-cause sector, we really hear that in your words, that passion and compassion that you bring to your ministry, and to your work. That kind of brings me to my next question. Wim, I think we've heard this weaving through your story in some ways, how do you nurture your relationship with God?

Wim van Klinken 36:29

Several ways. I'm analytical. I love to read a lot, so in my reading, and when I say reading, it's nonfiction. I love to read. I love to pause. I love to, chew and, and really getting in contact with what's beyond the words. So that's, that's one thing. So, I really love that. The other spiritual practice, as you might say, is just be out in nature. I don't know when this will be broadcast, but for those who are friends on Facebook know, I've just been to the Rockies and just being in Rocky Mountain National Park, Deborah and I love just to be out there and just be blessed by the wonder of the greatness, be wonder and be fed. So, for me, because, as I said earlier, I'm a workaholic, but I balance that very well, I think, with taking time just to, to come to myself, to come to my senses, to be connected again with

the greater wonder that's out there. And the greater wander that's out there that might be in the thoughts that other people share on paper, or what you just find in, out there. So that's, yeah, just love that balance in life. And, of course, music, and of course, music.

Robin Linkhart 38:26

Good. I was wondering if you would say that. I was certain that was part of how you nurture your relationship with The Divine. Wim, is there anything you would like to share with us that I haven't asked you about today?

Wim van Klinken 38:41

No, thank you for the question. And thank you for the questions. I am grateful for the opportunity to get to know people and people to get to know me. And I'm just looking forward to meet people. I've got connections with people in Europe, of course. I've got connections with the people here in the US that I've served, but there's parts of the church I've not yet met, and I'm looking forward to meet and get acquainted and serve together as a person, not necessarily in this role, but just as a child of God's meeting other children of God, and share passion, share a meal, share singing, whatever, just be with one another. And, yeah, that's what I'm looking forward to, and I'm very grateful for the opportunity you provided, Robin.

Robin Linkhart 39:47

And, Wim, thank you so much for being with us today. It's been great to catch up with you. I've missed being with you like we used to be at seminary when we could learn together, and sit in the library, and chit chat. Just been wonderful to hear about your life. And listeners if you would like to hear more from Wim, check out *Community of Christ YouTube Channel* under "Witness the Word", March of 2022, a release called "Thanks for Relief". And also, you'll be hearing more from Wim in his new role in the Presiding Bishopric. World Conference is April 22-28. 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. Bye bye.

Josh Mangelson 40:55

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