

**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 00:34**

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long, and today I'm here with a wonderful friend, Susan Naylor. In fact, we were supposed to start this podcast about 15 minutes ago, but we were chatting too much to get started. So, Susan, it's so good to have you here today. Thank you so much for being on the podcast.

**Susan Naylor 00:51**

You're welcome, Carla. It is so good to be here, too. I always enjoy my time with you.

**Carla Long 00:56**

Me, too. Susan, you're going to be talking to us about World Conference. It's coming up in a very, very short period of time, in April of 2023. But before we jump into World Conference, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

**Susan Naylor 01:10**

Sure, Carla. Um, I live here in Independence, Missouri. I recently moved back. I had spent the last seven and a half years living in Virginia, which was an exciting adventure. But I just recently moved back. And I have two children, grown children. One is still in college. One is married. And I love gardening and books and spending time with friends and firepits and, you know, all of those community type of things.

**Carla Long 01:42**

All of those things sound wonderful to me, too. Maybe I can come over to your house someday and, and we could read books together next to the firepit. (That would be lovely.) That would be so nice. (Yes.) Um, and Susan, you also work for Community of Christ. What do you do?

**Susan Naylor 01:55**

I am the World Church Secretary and the Director of the First Presidency's office. And I am also the team lead for the World Conference directors. So,

**Carla Long 02:06**

Yikes. Which is why we're talking to you today. So, World Conference is a pretty huge deal in Community of Christ. It feels like, and correct me if I'm wrong, the day the last World Conference ends, you start planning for the next World Conference. Is that true?

02:20

That's pretty true because we spend a lot of time reflecting on what happened, what worked well, what we could, what could we do better. And every World Conference is different. And, so, um, a lot of people come expecting that same experience. And so I always caution people, you know, come open to the Spirit, open to the community that's gonna' gather, and, um, it is a big deal. And, so, yeah.

**Carla Long** 02:46

It's a huge deal. And you and your team leads. I know, they work so, so hard on it. So, can you talk to us about what it's like to actually get ready for a World Conference?

**Susan Naylor** 02:55

Sure. Usually, it starts with a conversation within the presidency's office of, Where do we think the Spirit is leading us? What does the church need as it comes together? And then we look towards scripture. Um, a lot of discernment, it goes into that process. And then as we kind of narrow down into what is the theme, what is going to challenge us as a church to move us out, back out into the world once we've come together? And, so, the whole point is that we don't come together and stay together. It's that we come together, we're renewed, we handle the business of the church, but so many people come for the fellowship, for the relationships, and to be encouraged as they go back to the places that they serve and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Carla Long** 03:46

I love that. I love that. And that was a very high level overview of World Conference. Don't worry, gentle listener. We are going to get into the nitty gritty as well about what happens at World Conference. So, before we jump into that nitty gritty, who helps you plan those things? Who's involved in the planning and the implementation of World Conference?

**Susan Naylor** 04:03

The presidency is definitely actively involved in the planning. And then we have a directors team. This is first time we've implemented a team. And, so, the team is myself, Jenn Killpack, who is Director of Communications, Tammy Lindell Lewis, who works in formation ministries and is taking a lead in the educational points of conference, um, Cara Casey, who is our events coordinator at headquarters and manages all of our kind of physical logistics between us and the city and the community and all of those things, Katie Harmon-McLaughlin, who works in spiritual formation, is the Director of Formation Ministries, um, is working with worship and with, um, formation ministries that happen during conference and that could be youth activities, young adults, conference kids--all those things--and I'm sure we'll get to that point in our conversation. And then Phyllis Gregg, who works in the Presiding Bishoprics office, but this time she is working with what we're calling hospitality services and teams, which is ushering and reserved seating and all of those working within a volunteer team, Rick and Diane Mopan are helping her. And, um, just how do we make our conference experience comfortable for as many people as we can. And then Joey Williams, who, Joey is multitalented and he works internationally, he works with, um, language. He, um, has a variety of ideas and is, he and I are working together on the, what we're calling, in the past, it's been the village, or the Village Expo, where people exhibit or display or sometimes sell things. This time we're calling the Mission Expo and it will focus on what those different groups are doing for mission. So that is our team.

**Carla Long** 06:07

Uh, that sounds like an excellent team full of very energetic people who, who have to be energetic in order to make this happen.

**Susan Naylor** 06:17

We've been in conversation and working as a team since 2020, actually the end of 2019 going into 2020. And, so, because we were anticipating a conference in 2022. (Right.) Yeah, we've been talking about this a long time.

**Carla Long** 06:33

Yes, you have. What is the scope of World Conference?

**Susan Naylor** 06:38

Well, conference is not just the week of conference. It starts with International Leaders Meetings. And usually that is a time for those who are coming internationally, to come together, to talk more about the global church, to learn more about what the global church is doing together. A lot of times they study scripture, they study policy, they look at the resolutions that are coming to the conference and how they affect the entire church, not just the area that is bringing that resolution. And that's usually two days or so, two and a half days before conference, that those groups will come in. That, you know, when we talk about being an international conference, right now we are in the process of helping coordinate visas, visa interviews, those who come internationally that need a visa to get into the United States will need a visa interview in their own country. And, so, we help provide all of the official documentation and paperwork which is quite extensive. And then they have to request an interview. Sometimes it takes two or three requests to get an interview. And, so, it's an, long involved process. It's not just hopping on an airplane and getting here. And, so, that is all happening prior to. And then, you know, conference, we think a lot about the adults' activities, but there's, we have Conference Kids that was formed for a conference experience for children of delegates and looking for ways that children could participate in conference. And so it's more than just daycare. It is actually a whole program for kids that are 6 to 11, I believe is the age range. And these kids, they, they get to interact with some of our international delegates. They get to, last time, because we were talking about the woman at the well, we talked about what comes to the well and somebody from the local area brought in several sheep from their farm and the kids got to go out and interact with the sheep, which was a very kind of cool. And then there's opportunity for delegates that have children that are under that age range. There's childcare. And there's coordination that goes into making sure that all happens. And then obviously, the legislative sessions doing the business of the church. Worship that we come together, and worship is not just, well, in fact, the entire conference is not just on-site anymore. You can view worship through YouTube. We are working on an opportunity, I can't say that we, we have it 100% nailed down, but we are working on and hopefully this all comes together, um, being able to register for a virtual or a digital balcony that you can receive a code to be able to view the legislative sessions if you're not able to be there. And, um, so, we're hoping that comes together. We are still working out the technology of how that all works. But, um, so, that's legislative session. And then just community that comes together over mealtimes, over standing in line, over, you know, I encourage people, this is hopefully a safe zone, greet someone. And, so, often people go, But I'm not sure I know their language. It's still, you know, a wave and a smile, and Google Translate or, um, uh, online with your smartphone translator. You know,

you never know what connections you'll make at conference. And, so, that conference relationship is way before and so many times, you'll make a connection that carries on because now with social media, that you will continue to connect after you get home. And there's opportunities for congregations to, who knows how congregations or groups continue to interact after conference? That was a long winded answer.

**Carla Long** 10:56

No, but it's so important because people can now see that the scope truly is huge. And there's a reason why you start planning conference the second the last conference ends. Like, the scope is huge. I mean, it's before conference, it's after conference, and then just the amount of activities that you, as a director, uh, are oversee is just, it's astounding. So, I'm really, really glad it was a long winded answer because people need to know that it's, it's a big deal. It's not just worships and legislation. It is so much more than that. (Oh, yes.) So, every conference is different, as you said, so what can I expect from World Conference? What can we expect from this World Conference and World Conference in general?

**Susan Naylor** 11:35

Let's start with learning opportunities. World Conference is an opportunity to learn about different people, about the church in different places. I mean, when we talk about Community of Christ, it's not a one size fits all. We talk about, you know, our Enduring Principle is Unity in Diversity and conference provides that opportunity to hear diverse opinions or diverse thoughts. But we still come together as one. And, so, this time, Sandee Gamet is doing a fabulous job with her team. And starting in January, there will be opportunity, we're calling them exploration sessions, and each week, starting in mid-January, we will take a different piece of legislation and there will be three to four opportunities in different time zones, you'll need to register, but to come together and in a small group exploration of here's this piece of legislation, what does it say? If it's passed, as it's written, what does that mean? You know, if I'm from another country, does that affect me? And also there's opportunity to learn from each other. Uh, these are truly exploration sessions. These are not final answers, but they are really to interact with the legislation before you get to conference. And then during conference, there's opportunities for discussion and information sessions, again, on legislation, and then this time our lunch and learns, we're getting ready to, we haven't sent out. So, if you're listening to this and you're a member of a World Church Standing Team, you may be going, I didn't know about this, because our invitations are getting ready to go out. We are inviting the Standing Teams if they would like to provide a lunch and learn because our standing teams do some amazing work in the inter conference period. And when I say Standing Teams, we're talking about Peace and Justice, Earth Stewardship, Human Rights, Ecumenical Interfaith, and I'm gonna miss some here, but I'll just name those that they are doing work that they have resources and opportunities for individuals, congregations, groups, that can take what they have learned and go back to their location and interact with it and learn and continue to grow. And, so, we are offering that invitation to those standing teams to provide lunch and learns. Right now they'll be over at Stone Church. To view conference as a learning opportunity is really a big deal for me as a director, that it's not just something you come experience and go home and you continue to do the same thing you've always done. I want a world church event to be something you come, you interact with, and you take something back with you, that makes a difference in the community that you're called to. So, that's learning opportunities. I'm sure there's more. And I will say that if you haven't

had a chance to, um, listen to or view or I know the transcripts are coming out, but make sure that you've seen President Veazey's messages, The Way Forward messages. I think it's a good foundation for our ongoing discussions at conference. And then, you know, when you said what to expect, legislative meetings, people think that's all that we do, but legislative means yes, it is a good portion of what we do. Um, this time, they will start on Saturday morning, April 22. I believe it's like at 10 o'clock. Yeah, we're gonna' jump right into it this time. We have a lot of things to work through. And as we have moved more into the area of common consent versus kind of an up and down vote that giving people an opportunity to listen to one another, hear more about how people feel, it takes time, it takes time to be in that conversation and to listen to one another. So, we will be starting on Saturday morning. And then moving throughout the week with legislative sessions. Worship obviously is very important. Saturday evening, that Saturday evening will be the International Peace Award will be given and the recipient will be there, they will also be interacting with, um, lunch and learns on Saturday and on Monday. And those will be in English and French, I believe, because their representatives, those are the languages that they speak, which is kind of cool. Communion is always a really, it's, it's an important service for so many people whether you're at conference or you're tuning in online. One of the things that worship is talking about so much this time is how do we try and create an equitable as possible experience in the room and online, that we truly are worshipping together. If you are worshipping online, that you are not just watching it happen in the room, that you are participating in that worship. And, so, communion may look a little different. And I will remind folks that it's about the sacrament, yes, it's about sacrament is about serving it is about you know those important elements. But it can look different, it may feel different. And part of that is because we are trying to be safe and healthy throughout the week and be responsible with the health of the group and our community that we have come into. So, Monday night is a Council of Twelve, Presidents of Seventy service. So, I'm sure we will hear stories and exciting how the gospel is being shared around the world. When I think about the Council of Twelve and the Presidents of Seventy, it's about their story and that they are called to the world to do, so. Tuesday night, we anticipate an ordination service of the new leaders that have been called and I think you know a little bit about that Carla. That will be in the Temple. And we're looking forward to that. Um, and then Thursday, Thursday night worship will be a celebratory sending forth, where do we go from here, because conference ends on Friday, this time, Friday at noon, so there will not be a Friday evening service. And so our big service will be that Thursday evening, and then we'll do a sending forth at the end of the legislative session. If you're listening and you picked up on that, well, she didn't say anything about worship Sunday evening or on Wednesday evening. And in the past, we've always taken Wednesday evening off. We've said it's a night off for our staff, which is true. But we've encouraged people to rest on Wednesday. Well, we find on Wednesday, there's retirement receptions, and there's affiliate receptions and all kinds of things going on. And, so, (International receptions.) international receptions. And, so, this conference, we're going to start that evening, um, probably 6:30-ish, with an international campfire on the Temple World Plaza. But the rest of the evening, it, it's a come and go. It'll be, if you need to rest, I encourage you to rest. If you need to be someplace else, I encourage you to do that, too. And that all fits back into Sunday evening we did not plan a service because, like I said, I saw your eyes when I said we're gonna' jump right into this on Saturday morning. The weekend is so busy. And as we look at our health and caring for ourselves, and I've been reading a book by Ruth Haley Barton which she's talking about Sabbath, I am having a new appreciation for what Sabbath means. Sabbath, not just in drawing away from the world and not doing anything, but taking care of ourselves which could be, you know, going to dinner, you and I may need

to go to dinner on that Sunday night, Carla, just, just to get away to care for ourselves. And, so, Sunday night, Wednesday night, as a director, I'm calling those Sabbaths in how do you take Sabbath and when we take Sabbath to care for ourselves, we are listening to God, we are getting out of that pressure, that busyness and that when we come back together, we hear and listen with different ears and eyes. Or where the church is being called in the world through our legislation, through our additional worships, through our other activities during the week. I want people to hear that Sabbath is important, just, not just this, rushing through the week, you know, and our concern is that we want people to stay healthy. When you bring a group from all over the world together, you bring a whole lot of other stuff with us. And we are such a huggy lovey group. We love to share and sometimes things that we've hoped we don't share. And, so, let me just say, we are highly encouraging people to wear masks when they're indoors just for their care and for the care of each other. And people have said, Well, are you going to police that? You know, you have to think of a group of 2,000 people or so. We're responsible disciples and we are highly encouraging people to be responsible, to wear masks inside, to social distance, and care for one another. So, uh, let's see. What else, what to expect at conference. I talked about youth and young adult activities earlier. A lot of times, and we will anticipate this again, youth ages 13 to 18 or so will have activities after worship. They may do a scavenger hunt. They may do a labyrinth worship. They may do a mixer. They may do games. I don't know what's being planned this time yet. A time to meet kids from around the world, especially if you live someplace where you're the only kid knowing that you're not, you're not alone in Community of Christ. And, so, those are, those are exciting things. Young adults, very same thing. Coffee house, all kinds of things to interact, to meet people and, um, learn from one another. And then, I still haven't quite figured out how we're going to do this, but, you know, our meal times are a great time to, if you sit down with someone, you know, that maybe you don't know the person across the table, here's your opportunity to, Hi, my name is Susan Naylor and this is what I do and where are you from? And then I, I haven't quite figured out how we're going to facilitate this, but just some question prompts. You know, some of us go, I don't know what to say after I've introduced myself, you know. Well, maybe there's some question prompts on the table or question prompts in our materials. And some of them may be silly. That's where we learn about one another is, you know, Carla, what's the one food that you do not ever want to eat ever again, you know. You know, it is through laughter and through those types of things that conversation and growth happens. And, so, our name is not by chance that we are community. We are a Community of Christ. And, so, this is our opportunity to grow in community with one another and that we are not isolated, you know. Right now we're in a period where people think, Oh, we're so small and we can't do this and we can't do that. It is one voice out in the world that makes a difference. And knowing that you are supported and claimed by a community is really important. I encourage people to do that. We will have three remote locations. We are still working through the details and obviously something could change between now and then. But right now we are anticipating a remote location in Honduras that will be Spanish. And so they, a reverse. They will be hearing in Spanish, kind of a reverse translations. I guess is the way I kind of explain it to myself. And then Congo DR and continent of Africa will be French. And we don't know exactly how many to anticipate in either of those sites. But we are trying this. I know earlier, we had hoped to have more sites, but this is truly a pilot. You know, as we talked about being inclusive, we are trying our best with the staffing and the technology around the world. And, so, this really is truly a test of how this is going to work. And then the third one is actually at Graceland University. Graceland is an affiliate of Community of Christ and their entire delegation will be participating in finals week, final exams, and would not have the opportunity to be an Independence.

And, so, we are trying this. And, so, we're hoping in the future there may be other sites that people will be able to travel to if they aren't able to get to Independence. But this is, it is a pilot and what I say today to you, Carla, may, may change in the next week or so. Who knows? But, um, it is exciting to think what technology has brought to us over the last two and a half, three years. I think if we had not had the pandemic, because we were already in these conversations of can we do this remotely. And I think we were thinking, It's too hard. And what the pandemic has forced us into an answer of, it is possible. And, so, we're gonna' to try. And, um, one of the final things is, I'll tell about an experience I had at the 2019 conference. I was walking through, as the director, I was walking through the north foyer of the Auditorium and I was watching the ushers and the information booth and the Youth Service Corps, oh, I didn't talk about Youth Service Corps. Um, so, if you're 13 to 18, again, youth, and you're coming to conference and you're not a delegate and you would like to have something to do with your day, Kevin McCullar is our coordinator for that. And he, he runs a fabulous group that helps us with all kinds of things at conference. And we need, we need those hands and those feet to run bulletins or run an announcement or help in the dining room or do different things and kids will tell me their favorite thing, they want to work in the coat room where you can check your coat for the day so you don't have to carry it around if you're wearing a coat. So, that's a, that's an opportunity. But I was walking through the north foyer observing conference and it was how it was happening. And I all of a sudden had this, in my world, I, if the Spirit kind of floods over me, and I had this realization that this is not an event that church headquarters puts on for the rest of the world. This is an event that we come and we do together. And, so, no job is too small even if it's being a greeter or taking up the offering or helping in the dining room. And when I say that, I mean, probably it's helping to wipe down tables or help people with where the trash might be, and that kind of thing. We just need hosts and hostesses. When we think about it, when we go to reunion, we all kind of jump in and help out. And, so, conference, we have become that. When we do that together, it creates a very different experience. And, so, I encourage people, if you're listening to this, if you're coming to conference, let us know and say, I'm happy to volunteer, and Phyllis, Greg, she is the one who's kind of putting that group together. And along with Bob Kyser and Diane and Rick Maupin and a whole host of other people that are fabulous, and you'll want to get to know them if you don't know them. Again, that's where, when you think about the more you know about someone or you meet someone, your world grows exponentially. And, so, conference is that time to grow your world. You know, when I sit at communion on Sunday in my congregation, Carla, I have to say, you know, I think about the people I've met at conference and know that on that Sunday morning, they're either taking communion in a building or they're taking it online, or they're sharing together. I don't do this work alone. And, so, I think that's what we are called to be as disciples is that we are in this together. And that's what conference is in Community of Christ for me.

**Carla Long 29:07**

I love that so much, Susan. I, I am definitely a conference junkie. I love going to World Conference and me, as an extrovert, like, I literally can feel the energy throughout my entire body because I'm surrounded by so many people that I love and so many people that I want to get to know. I love that you're thinking about having, like, question prompts at mealtimes because that relationship, I have come to the conclusion that relationship with each other is one of the most important aspects of discipleship is to be in relationship with each other and to care for each other. And, so, while, I mean, I rarely am at a loss for words for people. I know that's not true for everyone. So, I love the idea of just continuing and moving those relationships forward into a new place. I remember specific people that

I've met at conference for the first time and I have been a part of their lives since then and it's just so, so special. Everything you're talking about makes me very excited for April, 2023, to come even sooner, I bet you don't want that. But I do.

**Susan Naylor 30:13**

Yes. Yeah, we have moments of a little bit of panic. That's the nature of running a large event. And, so, I know it will all come out well in the end. And even through the hiccups that sometimes we have during the week, we pull together and it all, it all works.

**Carla Long 30:28**

It does. But like you said, it does not work without all of us. Um, and I think it's super important, too, for people who may not have had, quote unquote, job at, a job at conference before, friends, we need you. We need you to say yes. And it helps for the buy in and it helps to, you to understand what a really big job this is. And I love that you're asking people to get involved more than they maybe ever have before. I think that's super important.

**Susan Naylor 30:58**

Right. Well, there are a lot of people who say, Well, I don't want to be a delegate, so what is there for me to do? Oh, we can find lots of things to do, and you'll meet people and even if you're not an extrovert like Carla, there are opportunities to be your own person and find your own place at World Conference.

**Carla Long 31:19**

You said they should talk to Philly's Gregg if they're interested in serving in a volunteer opportunity.

**Susan Naylor 31:24**

There is an email address that comes to a general email box. And it's just worldconference@cofchrist.org. And, so, they can email that email box and ask any question or volunteer or however we can help. And, so, it comes into a general email box. Tammy Lindell Lewis is the one who kind of manages that and she kind of pushes emails out to those that can answer their questions or need to make the contact.

**Carla Long 31:52**

That's perfect. That's really helpful. Worldconference@cofchrist.org if you want to volunteer at World Conference, if you want to be a part of something, it would be wonderful. I hope that you get lots of emails after this podcast.

**Susan Naylor 32:04**

Yes. Communion servers, we love communion servers.

**Carla Long 32:07**

Yes. And if you think communion takes a long time to serve at your congregation, you will see that it is, it takes a while at World Conference as well, which actually I love. I love being able to sit and know that people are being served and know that people are being fed and just being in that space and in that



moment. I just love it so much. (Right. Yep.) So, Susan, is there anything else that we need to talk about about World Conference? It's coming up super soon.

**Susan Naylor 32:32**

Registration is going to open probably mid-November. And, so, that'll be online. And if for some reason you need help, um, email us. But it'll be online. Go to the World Conference web page and you can reach that from cofchrist.org. And I believe it's under Connect. And you'll see World Conference pop up and you can find the information from there. Yeah, it's under the Connect button.

**Carla Long 33:03**

Registration's opening in mid-November. Good to know. (Yes. Yes. Yes.) That's important. (Yes.) And you can register as a delegate, you can re, if you have been nominated as a delegate, you can register as a non-delegate. I'm assuming there's a lot of different categories for people to register.

**Susan Naylor 33:18**

Cool. Is there anything else that we should know about, um, about World Conference? I mean, this is a lot of information you've already given us.

**Susan Naylor 33:18**

Yeah. The registration, it just shows up. You just need to register. And, so, being a delegate happens kind of on the back side of what you don't see and, so, that you won't see that on front. Just register. We tried to make it as easy as possible. Christopher Shaw, who's our registrar in membership records office, all of that delegate information will be entered prior to conference through the mission centers. And Christopher will pick that up on the backside and he'll know. You will register, when you get your nametag you'll have a delegate number. If you're not a delegate, you won't have a delegate number. But everybody's registered. I thought of a really cool thing that we're going to do on Thursday night between the legislative session and worship. So, like, 4:30 to 6:30 or so, if you're registered, you can come tour the new Children's Peace Pavilion which is right across the parking lot from the Temple. It opens next week officially. It is so cool. I mean, you are going to want to do that. And we're, we're planning for food trucks in the parking lot so you can come over there, have your dinner, tour the Peace Pavilion. Very excited about that. So, that will be an experience I hope people will put into their schedule and want to do. (That sounds really cool.) Conference Kids will have the opportunity to spend two afternoons over there. I'm very excited about that.

**Susan Naylor 34:49**

Well, I think we're good for today, Carla, and, you know, if we come up with a whole chunk of information, maybe after the new year, maybe we'll do another podcast.

**Carla Long 34:58**

That sounds good because, listeners, I should tell you that I've actually done this podcast with Susan before, but everything had changed. We did it about two months ago and then there were huge changes. So, she's like, You can't put out that podcast. Things are different now. So, things are changing all the time. And, so, if Susan said something on here and you, don't put it in concrete yet. (Okay.) You never know what's gonna happen between now and April, 2023. (Right.) So, Susan,

thanks so much for giving us your time and giving us your wealth of knowledge about World Conference and just for, just for getting us all excited about it.

**Susan Naylor** 35:31

You're welcome. Thank you, Carla.

**Josh Mangelson** 35:41

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