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SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Josh Mangelson, Barbara Carter

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 00:34

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And today is another episode in our Holy Ground series, where we discuss spirituality, spiritual practices, and how spirituality connects with faith in the everyday aspects of life in today's world. Today, our guest is Apostle Barbara L. Carter. Barbara was ordained as an apostle and member of the Council of Twelve Apostles at the 2013 World Conference. She is assigned to the South East USA Mission Field, which includes the following mission centers, Brush Creek, Kentucky-Indiana, Western Ohio, Bountiful, South East, Florida, and South Central. She is also the apostle for the International Youth Forum, and Spectacular events, which are major youth events sponsored by Community of Christ world church. Additionally, she serves as the Community of Christ Ecumenical and Interfaith officer where she represents Community of Christ on the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches, and serves as the treasurer at the NCC Executive Table. Welcome, Barb, we're so glad to have you with us today.

Barbara Carter 02:11

Thanks, Robin. It's good to be here.

Robin Linkhart 02:14

Barb, we need you to tell us a little bit more about yourself, your family, and how you came to be a member of Community of Christ.

Barbara Carter 02:24

Well, it goes way back. I believe I am a fourth or fifth generation Community of Christ. My great grandparents helped start a congregation in Hamburg, Iowa, which is the southwest corner of Iowa. And they, I think that was in the 1860s when that congregation was started. Then in the late 1880s, their family boarded a rail train, shared a car with another family and migrated to the Willamette Valley

of Oregon, and then just kept going and homesteaded on the coast of Oregon in Lincoln County. So so that's where the family began. And that just continued. My grandmother Louella Calkins Tooze, she raised her family in the church, she would write back to World Headquarters and ask for the Sunday School material. And so they would receive it, she would send her children, sometimes not all the time, to the Methodist Church in the morning. And then when they came back, they would have lunch, and then they would have Community of Christ Sunday school. So she raised her children, even though there wasn't a presence of the church there.

Robin Linkhart 03:56

That is awesome.

Barbara Carter 03:57

Yeah. So that's kind of where my, my beginnings came from, was from that deep faith that they had at that time. I was baptized at reunion, we uh family camp when I was eight years old, confirmed in my home congregation. raised in a family that was very devoted to church. My father was pastor for 26 years. And the only priesthood I think, for about 18 of those 26 years. So if the church was open, we were there.

Robin Linkhart 04:34

So how many people were in your congregation?

Barbara Carter 04:37

I would say it fluctuated. So this was a congregation on the coast of Oregon, a town of about 4500. Basically a logging and tourism town. So on Sundays, there would be maybe 15 And it was primarily my aunts, and my family. I am the youngest grandchild on that side of the family. So many of my cousins who came to church when I was real little, you know, by time I was in my teen years, they were long gone. So about about fifteen. People from the district would come in and be guest speakers. And it was always fun to have them there. And they always enjoyed coming to the coast, you know, for a day or for the weekend. Then there were times when families would move into Lincoln City, church members, and they would be a part of our family for, you know, three or four or five years until, you know, they would move out. So I would say around 15-20.

Robin Linkhart 05:55

So you were in this tiny little congregation, from the time you were born up through your teen years and going to college?

Barbara Carter 06:06

Yeah.

Robin Linkhart 06:06

So tell us a little bit more about your faith journey, as you recall, learning about the church learning about Jesus and how that kind of evolved and you grew from childhood to young adult and beyond to now. We just kind of went to take that journey with you.

06:24

Sure. So I grew up with with faith, with Community of Christ, it was RLDS uh then being a major aspect of our lives. You know, my dad, I said, my dad was pastor. So, you know, we were always engaged in the church. And that was just a part of our life. So, so I believe I grew up being taught the stories of Jesus. I grew up being taught about and believing in a God who was always present, always they're always available. I grew up understanding that, that I was loved unconditionally, by God, no matter what I did, no matter what I could do, would do, that God's love was always there for me. And I have a really powerful testimony of that. So being raised in this really small congregation, when we could read, we started doing the Sunday School warships. And so I think I was probably about 10 years old, when I had a group of friends who told me that I was going to hell, and it was because I attended the wrong church. So I believed in the wrong god. And that was very disruptive. For me, it was hurtful. And so that was happening in my life, the same time, I was assigned to do a Sunday school, morning worship. And so I had the books that my parents, you know, had kept for us. One was Conversations with God, if some of you want to go to your church's library, you will probably find a copy of that in there. And books like that would have a scripture, a story, and sometimes even a little prayer. So it was like instant, Sunday School worship, you know, in the palm of your hand. Anyway, I couldn't find the story that I liked, or the prayer that I liked, or the scripture that I liked. And I had the book sitting by my bedside table, when I went to sleep on Saturday night, the night before. And sometime in the middle of the night, I wrote on the paper that I had sitting there, I the LORD God call you out of love, not out of fear. So this was when I was like about 10 years old. Wow. And that spoke to me in regards to the relationship with the friends I had, who told me that I needed to be afraid because I was going to hell. That shaped me in a huge way. I still have that paper, you know, in my childhood Bible. You know, so there's obviously a mystical part of me that, I don't know why. Well, I do know why. You know, it was God speaking to me and saying, I'm claiming you now. And that's that is what began that foundation, that I know that God's love is always there for me. And that at times, I just not need to be concerned about other things. So that shaped me and the opportunities that I had growing up in a small congregation, along with my parents who you know, always made sure that we had room and were present for those opportunities to experience the faith community outside of our family. So outside of that small congregation shaped me and made me aware of a larger community, that was the that was more than who we were. My aunts taught me Sunday school. So, uh, you know, I was framed by them, and impacted by them. I went, I found an old quarterly, which was the Sunday school resources when I was growing up. And I found an old one. And inside of it, it had really teeny tiny writing on a little teeny tiny piece of paper. And it was a prayer that my Aunt Lela had written. And it was a prayer for that, that Sunday school lesson. And for those who were in it, and, you know, there could have been another person, I had a cousin, that was my age that attended sometimes, but not all the time. So it could have been a prayer for both of us, but it was for the class. And I'm just very aware of the dedication that my aunts had, you know, they prepared a lesson for me every Sunday. And so I kind of feel like there was this cloud of witnesses that shaped me and formed me. And then, you know, sent me out. Because after I graduated from college at, you know, I never went back and lived in Lincoln city. So it's like they, they could Khunde me, they prepared me, they sent me out.

Robin Linkhart 11:52

That is an awesome experience. And how precious to have that. Yeah, I think sometimes when we think about our small Community of Christ congregations, we don't recognize that there can be this

deep intentionality resident in in just a small group of people who envelops their youth, their children and youth and young adults in ways that have amazing impact and nurture in the life of that young person. So here you are, and then you're, you're in high school and you're graduating. So tell us what happened after that.

12:37

Oh, let's say I went to Graceland College, straight straight from high school. And while I was there, I majored in psychology. And everybody's thinking, what do you do with a degree in psychology? It's a really good question. And while I was at Graceland I met Charlie Carter, who later became my husband, and we, we began a venture of moving across the United States several times, as he took positions with the church. And then I began taking positions within the church.

Robin Linkhart 13:19

So before um, you take us more deeply into your role with the church and your expanding role with the church. Were you engaged in campus ministries at all at Graceland College or Graceland University and for our listeners who don't know that is the Community of Christ sponsored affiliate University in Lamoni Iowa?

13:44

Yeah, I was in my second year. So my sophomore year at Graceland, I was elected to be the chaplain for my house, which was Solah, sisterhood of Love and Honor.

Robin Linkhart 13:55

So the dormitories has all these different, what we call houses in the wing of the dormitory. So you were in Solah, and you became the chaplain,

14:03

I became the chaplain for my sophomore year. And actually, that's how I met Charlie, because he was the chaplain for our brother house Agape.

Robin Linkhart 14:13

Wow.

Barbara Carter 14:14

And yeah, after that, that was all I wrote. It was done.

Robin Linkhart 14:20

Okay, so now you and Charlie are married. And Charlie is engaged in ministry with the church as an employed minister.

Barbara Carter 14:28

Yes, he was an executive minister, working in the Santa Rosa area of California.

Robin Linkhart 14:36

So what year would this be?

Barbara Carter 14:38

That would be 79 to I think we left in 81 or 82.

Robin Linkhart 14:42

Okay, so we're getting into a really important time. Yeah. In the life of the church in regards to the role of women. So take us into that and how things unfold for you.

Barbara Carter 14:52

Yeah. So um, gosh, you know, Charlie and I worked pretty much as A team, I did have outside employment, I began working for a bank, and was doing training for a large bank. And during our spare time, you know, we, we were engaged with the youth group. And if anybody from risk management is listening to this, we may or may not at one time, squeezed 13 youth into our Toyota Corolla. Anyway, so we were deeply engaged with youth and engaged with the women's group, which I tried to get involved in, but it was kind of difficult. They were, like 40 years older than I was. But I tried. It was interesting. Yeah, again, good time. San Francisco, er Santa Rosa was a part of the San Francisco Bay Stake at that time, the Stake had a great group of young adults. And while we were at the extreme northern end of the Stake area, Charlie and I were able to participate in activities with those young adults. And that was very enriching. In fact, we we have really good relationships with some of those friends that we made during that time, even now. So very, very formational very supportive. For the most part. And you were in that area, when World Conference 1984 happened. No.

Robin Linkhart 16:33

Okay, so what happened between then and the next place you are?

16:37

Yeah. So when World Conference 1984 happened, Charlie and I were living in Wichita, Kansas. I was working for a bank, but I was also getting my Master's in Counseling. And the week of World Conference, 1984, I was preparing to take my orals. And so I did not attend conference. And I don't believe Charlie did, either. I believe neither of us went to conference, which I could be wrong about that. Charlie may have gone. I was studying, I wasn't paying attention...

Barbara Carter 17:20

...to what he was doing. I should have asked him about that before. And so when, when the resolution was passed in 1984, that open to the way for women to be ordained. I will, I will fully admit that I was kind of wrapped up in my schooling at that point. And I was in a congregation, that was a very cohesive mix of people who were supportive of women in leadership roles, and people who were not quite as comfortable with it. But you know, once in a while, that's okay. And in fact, I think it was a 1982. It could have been 83. During an 11 o'clock service, I gave a—they called it a talk <right> you know, so basically, I gave a sermon, but it was called a talk and there was no, um, there wasn't any negative reaction to that happening. So looking back on it, I think I was kind of in a safer congregation. There were some congregations around who struggled a little bit. But even today, they're still still very active

and strong congregations. So in some ways, I think I was a little bit protected from some of the reaction that we felt across the church after section 156 of the Doctrine Covenants was included. Or approved,

Robin Linkhart 17:20

Yeah, right, deeply into it... Right. So as this is happening at World Conference, and of course, this is way before cell phones and internet. <Yeah> Were you and Charlie aware that this was going on?

Barbara Carter 19:24

Yeah, yeah. We knew that it was coming before the conference. Well, no, we didn't we we thought it would be coming before the conference. I believe his mother called us she was there. It you know, and Charlie could have been there. I wish my memory was better about this. But you know, we soon we soon knew, and neither Charlie or I had any issues with this at all. In fact, we we were supportive of women in all aspects of ministry. Shortly after that, we moved up to Lawrence, Kansas for a couple of years. And the congregation there was very supportive. There were some calls that were being presented to women there. And Lawrence is just on the east side of the Kansas City, west side of the Kansas City area. And so it was very close to some other reactions. <oh yeah> And I felt like this little congregation was very insulated in some ways about that. After that, we moved back to Oregon. And so this would have been in 86, that we moved to Oregon. And it was then that I was called to the priesthood. Charlie was the pastor. And so the call came through the Regional Administrator, and was sent to me in a letter. It wasn't presented in person. And so that was kind of interesting. It's not, it wasn't what I had expected a call, how a call would be presented. But I understood because of the lines of the administrative lines, <yeah> that that's the way it was.

Robin Linkhart 21:12

Charlie, as the pastor would not be permitted to process a call for a member of his family. And, and the letter then came advising Charlie, and he actually presented the call to you.

Barbara Carter 21:24

Yes, yeah. Yeah. But it was officially communicated through that letter. That's right. It was authorized through that letter, which is very different than the usual call. Absolutely. Yeah. And then I don't know why the missions, or the District President wasn't involved with it. I don't know.

Robin Linkhart 21:43

Yeah, interesting. Yeah.

Barbara Carter 21:45

However, my call was then considered at the district level, and the district President presented my call. And it was voted on by the district, so that I was ordained in 1989. And my daughter had been born in 88. So she was about 1415 months old. When I was ordained, my arm was in a sling. Because I had fallen kind of out of an apple tree and left my arm up in there after I fell. But anyway, I dislocated my shoulder during that time, but it was, it was a very powerful experience. I knew this call was coming. When when we were living in Lawrence one Saturday, Charlie and I went out to a reserve area that has a fire tower. And fire towers in Kansas are towers that are I don't know what may be 40 feet high, and you climb up them, and there's a platform, and they use them to spot wildfires, because in the in the

fall, and in the fall of the year, the grass is dry. And if a thunderstorm comes through, and lightning touches the ground, it can start a fire. And sometimes people will be up there watching for those fires, so that they can see them sooner and get to them to put them out. So anyway, so we were up on this fire tower. And we'd been talking about our future and what it meant, and where was God calling us to be? Where did we feel our giftedness would be usable, valuable, you know, in the kingdom of God, and in the church. And we had been praying about it together. And you know, then we were just kind of spending some quiet time up there. And I remember having, you know, standing at a railing and having my eyes closed, and I'd been praying, and when I woke up, there was just this very calm, sense of peace over me. And I looked down on the railing and somebody had etched in the wood. The word Oregon, Oh, wow. You know, well, of course, I jumped on that in a nanosecond. Like, see, Charlie, it's a sign we need to move back to Oregon. Kind of wherever we did, but I remember also feeling I didn't feel like yeah, Barbara, you're gonna be called to the priesthood. That wasn't part of it. But it was the sense of assurance that my faith walk was where it needed to be. And, and to go west, my daughter go west, moved to Oregon. So that's what we did.

Robin Linkhart 24:39

That's awesome.

Barbara Carter 24:40

Yeah.

Robin Linkhart 24:41

So your first call to the Office of Elder and ordain, we know that now you serve in the council of 12 apostles. So just give us kind of a high level overview of how your ministry unfolds from the time of your first ordination to now?

Barbara Carter 24:58

Yeah, so Um, served as an elder in Salem for a few more years. And then we, we began this constant move, you know, following Charlie working for the church and we moved to South Carolina. South Carolina was a difficult place for me. I went there as an elder. I went there, as a stay at home mother, with a two and a half year old. The first two and a half years of Chelsea's life, Charlie was a stay at home dad. So I find myself all the way across the country from my family. I am at home alone with a two and a half year old. And I don't know anybody, I don't have any friends. I will say I spent more time in timeout than my two and a half year old daughter did. It was a hard transition. However, it was in that congregation that I think my ministry began to blossom, and to be used in in new ways, I began to stretch myself, I began to stretch myself in a particular way, there was a woman that I met at the park. You know, parks on Thursday mornings are kind of subcultures. This is a subculture of people who are stay at home parents. And you know, Thursday, 10 o'clock, you go to the park, and you go to the swings, you know, and stuff. Well, anyway, I found myself in this subculture, and a woman by the name of Kathy approached me. And we began what I call the long dance. We were close friends, for the four years that we lived down there. And during that time, Kathy was very inquisitive about my faith journey, my walk with God, she asked a lot of questions. And we spent hours on the phone. I had white cabinets in that house. And so when I was on the phone with Kathy, I was always washing white cabinets. So so in my mind, I have this visual of exploring what Scriptures mean, and where they lead us, and how do

they speak us today. And in my mind, I'm washing or wiping down white cabinets when that happens. But I learned a lot from that. I, Douglas Hall, I think wrote a book called Professing the Faith. And for me, those years were a time where I was called, to profess my faith in a one on one situation, and my faith grew, and it took root. Because, I believe for me, when I profess, God becomes a step closer to me, it's one thing for me to contemplate and read. It's another thing for me then to speak and profess. And I kind of believe that if I'm not engaged in that kind of an activity, if I'm not professing faith, that my faith begins, or my faith or my awareness of God begins to pull back. Because it's in that act of professing that I continue to grow and learn more. I think it's because it involves another person. Yeah, you know, and you get that, that energy and that feedback. So it was a very powerful time for me. It was also then that I was asked by the church to become a volunteer Regional Stewardship Commissioner, which would be the equivalent of a Regional Bishop today. And I said, Yes. And 18 months later, I was asked to go to work for the church as a Stewardship Commissioner, then I was ordained a bishop, or high priest bishop. And there you went.

Robin Linkhart 29:28

And there she goes. <yeah, yeah> And in 2011, you were called to the Council of Twelve Apostles and served as a designate for a couple years.

Barbara Carter 29:37

Right.

Robin Linkhart 29:38

And actually worked with the USA Apostles in the journey to the National Conference, which brings us to being fully inclusive for LGBTQ in the USA Community of Christ and then you were also officially ordained at that 2013 conference.

Barbara Carter 29:56

Right. Right.

Robin Linkhart 29:57

This is really a rich adventure of faith and journey hearing your story, Barb, thank you so much.

Barbara Carter 30:07

You bet.

Robin Linkhart 30:07

So that gives us a really good backdrop to kind of understand who you are and where you come from and a sense of your relationship with God and your deep commitment to discipleship and ministry. How did you first learn about or discover spiritual practices?

Barbara Carter 30:30

So I grew up, learning to pray, learning to study, talked about having that that foundation. Also, learned to discuss primarily that was at youth camps, you know, they would put us in groups, and we would discuss a biblical story, or a scripture. And so I grew up kind of learning how to do that. I also, I spent a

lot of time on the ocean. Our house was four blocks from the beach, and just want to let the listeners know that this is not a warm Caribbean Beach, we're talking about. The water's 55 degrees, and it's often windy and a little chilly down there. But that was my beach. And I can claim it, I will claim it today, anytime. But I would spend a lot of time walking down on the beach. And there's a I don't know what... but there's rocks that are right in the middle of the beach, you know, and sometimes you can't get to him because the tide comes up around them. And sometimes it's like they're sitting in the middle of the sand and the tide is far away. And this rock is has two sections. So if you look at it from the side, it almost looks like a map of the Americas, you know, like there's a big section, and then you go into the connecting. And then there's another big section. And right in the middle of that connecting part. It's like there's a naturally made chair, and that chair faces out into the water. Now you have to kind of look around the other pile of stone in front of you. But it faced out into the water. That place became a very, very important place for me, I contemplated a lot of relationships. And to be completely honest, and not look too spiritual, that's when I contemplated what a relationship with certain boys would be like, if they were to ask me out. But it was also a time of prayer and closeness to God. I can't think of, for me, any way to be closer to God than to be on the beach, with the waves crashing around me. And it began there. And so it was on that place that I would sit and I would pray, I would ponder. And that's where I think my spiritual formation, I didn't call it that. But that's where it began to stir. And I remember saying lots of times to my parents, I just need to go to the beach, you know, and most of the time, they would say go, you know, go to the beach, you know, and it's, it's, it's where I did my work. So in hindsight, I look back and I go oh my gosh, that's where my spiritual formation now I put that language on it, then it was just like, I need to go be with God. I need I need to go sit. There was one time that I was sitting out there and I must have been dealing with a lot because I became unaware of the tide and the tide had come in. And the the water of the Pacific Ocean on the coast there is about 55 degrees. And I have to jump into the water, now not waist high or anything, but it was it was close to my knees. I had to jump into the water to get up so that I get off that rock before the high tide came in. So for me that was really kind of losing an awareness of what was happening around me. So I must have been in pretty deep contemplation to lose awareness of that. I knew the dangers of the water and I would not have stayed out there past the time when I knew it was safe to get off that rock. But I did at that point and I got off safely of course but I had to get wet.

Robin Linkhart 34:54

And cold.

Barbara Carter 34:55

Yeah. One more thing about that. About ten years ago, my daughter Chelsea found a picture of that rock. And she painted a picture of that, because she has heard me talk about that that's where my spiritual formation began. So that that picture that watercolor is hanging in my office in the Temple now. So it continues to be that spot that I go to, whether it's actually sitting on the rock, or you know, contemplating the, the the watercolor in front of me.

Robin Linkhart 35:34

That's beautiful. As you're talking, I can just envision in my mind's eye, and the next time I walk into your office, I will go and find that so I can look at it and have a specific, accurate mental picture of that. As you talk about spiritual practices, Barb, you allude to the fact that you have language for that now

and we know in the life of Community of Christ, our own awareness as a people as a denomination has broadened and deepened. How has your culture and context impacted your understanding of spirituality and spiritual practices?

Barbara Carter 36:14

I think the one thing that has shaped it the most is by naming them. You know, we have contemplative prayer, we have Lectio Divina, body prayers, singing prayers, breathing prayers. We we give names to things that we may have always been doing, but but we just called it prayer, or contemplation, but now we name it. And I think that that has changed how I look at it. I think in some ways, it causes me to be more intentional of the different ways of prayer. Because of that. I'm also influenced more by others now. You know, with the internet, and the speed of information and the speed of sharing comes an availability that I didn't have growing up to the ancient writers you know, Julian of Norwich? Somebody of Hippo like it was it St. Augustine?

Robin Linkhart 37:26

Yes.

Barbara Carter 37:28

Whooh! Pulled that one out of the brain. And then today, some some people who really have an influence on me would be Jan Richardson. So they have really influenced me and helped me to shape and maybe even not maybe, and have helped me pull more and expand more in my own personal prayer life and in my collective prayer life with with others.

Robin Linkhart 38:02

What spiritual practice do you use to best connect with the Divine in more recent time in your life? And and why do you think that is a best way for you or or a good way for you to connect with God?

Barbara Carter 38:19

So my go to is meditation and mindfulness. I use Headspace.

Robin Linkhart 38:27

Is that an app?

Barbara Carter 38:28

It is an app,

Robin Linkhart 38:28

Okay, good to know.

Barbara Carter 38:29

Yeah. And it has, it has really helped me not in being mindful, not in meditation. But it has helped me be diligent in the practice of it. And I am a firm believer that when I engage in that my days, I will even label them as more holy than days that I'm not that I that I don't. I am much more centered. I like myself better, which usually means that I like others better too. So that mindfulness and that meditation time.

And there are times that I am running late, and I will grab five minutes. And then there are other times that I extend it and I allow myself 15 to 20. But finding that time to be engaged in that is, well it's life giving. And so it's a practice that that I try and do daily.

Robin Linkhart 38:31

It sounds really deeply connected with how you're you're allowing your self, your mind, your thoughts to deepen when you sat in your your rock chair and we know that now you live in the middle of the USA with no ocean close by. But <yeah> it just sounds like you have been able to connect with that early practice, and enrich and deepen and take it with you on the go. <Yeah.> With with or without your beloved ocean and rock chair.

Barbara Carter 40:15

Yeah, you know, hadn't thought about that, Robin, but I think you're right. Yeah, so it goes back to an early practice, and it's just finding a different way of engaging with it.

Robin Linkhart 40:29

And the intentionality of <Yeah.> We would really love it, Barb, if you could kind of walk us through a spiritual practice that you might recommend for our listeners to try. And we know, some folks listening today may already have spiritual practices incorporated into their daily life, and others may be hearing about spiritual practices for the first time, and people all in between those two ends of the spectrum.

Barbara Carter 41:04

Yeah, so um, so I have a practice that I call holding others in love. And this came out of a very trying time, for me, a personal time for me, when I was dealing with hard stuff, I was dealing with disagreements among people. And I remember praying about it standing at my window. And what I heard God say to me, not in an audible voice, but what I felt God say to me was, you need to love them. And my response was, God, there's not enough in me to love them. And the response was, then hold them in my love. And so I've cut my hands, you know, and I reduced them down to about two inches. And I did take pleasure in that. And I held them in my hands, and I pictured God's love swirling around them, and through them. And just so you know, for me, God's love is kind of an iridescent blue. So anyway, so out of that, came a very powerful practice for me. And I call it holding in God's love. And I have two sets of porcelain hands, that aren't any bigger than two inches in along maybe an inch and a half wide. And I have little jewels or gems or little rocks, I have a Tahitian Pearl, sitting in the one of my office. And daily, I will dump the stones, jewels in my hand. And I will think of people who need God's love surrounding them. Not that that I don't love them, not that I'm having a problem with them. But who I know, and I'm aware of. And sometimes I've just dumped the whole bunch in the hand and say, God, you know, you know, way more than I, because I don't have enough room in that hand to cover all of the pain. And so I have a set of that on my dresser at home. And I have a set in the office. And sometime during the day, I will sit down and remember people and I hold them and God's love. I don't know what's happening in their lives. But either they're resting on my heart, or I'm aware that tough times or they're hurt or they're in pain. And I place them in God's God's love. God's love is healing for me. And that's a practice that. Well, it has saved relationships. It has saved me. And so anyway, it's one that I do on a regular regular basis. The other thing is, is at one time, I bought I think ten sets of those hands.

Robin Linkhart 44:31

Oh wow.

Barbara Carter 44:32

And so there have been times when I've been able to leave those hands with somebody else. So that they might find a way into that practice of when when when I know that another person needs God's love that I can place them in that in a prayerful and it's not that, that placing has magical it's it's being intentional about thinking about a person and holding them in the presence of God and, and God's love,

Robin Linkhart 45:12

I love that I have never heard a practice described that's, that's just like that. One of the things that comes to my mind as you're talking about these hands and about God's love is that hands are a sign and symbol in many of the sacraments of the church, and what a precious, embodied way to have a spiritual practice. And on behalf of others that that is really, really beautiful.

Barbara Carter 45:44

Another area that I find that this is really important for is forgiveness. You know, if I'm working on a relationship where I have done something that I have offended, and I need I need to be authentic, about forgiveness, not just saying, oh, yeah, yeah, it's fine. We're okay. But to be authentic, and I'm going to say pure, because for me, pure means that forgiveness is complete. There's there's not residual. This practice is about forgiving. And if the first step is to admit that right now, I don't love them, but I'll hold them in God's love until I can, yes, it, it facilitates forgiveness. And I think I know that we need to learn how to forgive, and to uphold and love each other, even when there are differences, we can still forgive and love each other.

Robin Linkhart 46:48

Powerful, powerful stuff. Thank you so much for sharing that. Barbara, are there any tips that you would share to help someone who might be either trying this practice for the first time? Or maybe is just new to the whole concept of spiritual practices in general?

Barbara Carter 47:08

Yeah, I think the first thing is to not be afraid, there are no mistakes. You know, when you're trying to interact with God, you go with what works for you. And be open to that. So obviously, I think the first spiritual practice that you know, we, we cut our teeth on is prayer. And whether that's your, when you're sitting with another person, and they are praying, or when you yourself lay down at night and put your head on the pillow, and you say a prayer. And maybe it's even just a partial prayer, because you fall asleep before the end, that that's where you began. And that's good. And there isn't a ranking of less than or greater than. Every step along the way is good. So if you're just starting, you know, start with with a prayer, or start with finding a prayer that's written, that speaks to you and pray that prayer. I have a book it's written by, and the name just went out the window...Richard Foster. And I got it when I first started working for the church. And it's a book of prayers. And I usually carry that with me wherever I go. Because I will admit, there are times that I just don't have a prayer in me. So I look in that book and find one that I can pray. So sometimes if you don't feel that either you're worthy to pray, or that, that it's

just too painful, or the words just aren't there. Then find another one or open your scriptures and go to the Beatitudes. But find a prayer, you know, and open up that line with God, even if you've yet to believe that that's even a possible thing. Take a step in believing. That would be that would be my first thing.

Robin Linkhart 49:23

That's a great tip. You touched on this a little bit earlier in our conversation. How does doing a spiritual practice or perhaps the ones that you've described with us change you or change your day? And how might that have an impact on other people who try to incorporate intentionally spiritual practices in their life?

Barbara Carter 49:48

For me, it opens up myself to others. It takes me outside of myself and makes me aware it helps me to see other people and I think that does the same with all of us. We don't we don't live in isolation. And we're connected. So I think that's, that's how Prayer can change us. It just makes us available.

Robin Linkhart 50:19

Yeah, yeah. We've talked about individual practices. Barb, can you share a little bit with us about the differences between individual and group practices, and maybe how you find them meaningful in different ways.

Barbara Carter 50:37

So individual practices is usually something that I view as doing myself, it may be in a group, but we all separate and go, you know, out to our own tree or something. But but we're all in a group. But it's an individual work that we're doing, we're just doing individual work at the same time. Actually, I think that could both be considered individual and group work. And group work for me is when you are combining your energy together for a certain purpose. So if a, if a congregation or a study group or a family is in the middle of discernment, they're trying to make some decisions. To me, that would be a group prayer, a group coming together. Both, both have deep places in the faith movement in the church, and in our faith lives. Personally, I'm way more comfortable with individual. In fact, sometimes, okay, don't tell anybody else, but there have been times that I have excused myself from a room, because we were going to do a group prayer time. And it's not that I don't support that and believe in that. But sometimes there are things going on with me that I feel too vulnerable if I, if I participate in a group activity, I am not a hider. Meaning if there's something going on, all you'd have to do is look at my eyes and you know, you can, you can see what's going on inside of Barbara. And so if I'm dealing with something, and I'm not ready for others, to see that I'm in conflict or whatever. Then I will, I will very gently and try to be stealth-like as I extract myself from the group. So for me individual, prayer is much more comfortable, however. And in working as a group. I mean, it can bring people together. The Council of Twelve has had some powerful times when we've been worshiping together, that prayer has just really, really brought us together and opened us up to receive God's blessings and awareness. Yeah.

Robin Linkhart 53:20

I'm kind of like you. I'm an introvert by nature. <Yeah.> And group, doing spiritual practices as a group can feel really scary sometimes. Because like you say, there's a certain level of vulnerability that's associated with that. I want to share for just a minute, because when you talked about the Council of Twelve having powerful times together, that includes spiritual practice, there's something we did a few years ago, which was really comfortable because it was an individual practice. At the same time, it was a community practice, or a group practice. And that was when we went to the roof of the Temple and walked the labyrinth together. And so we each were on the labyrinth at the same time, and we entered at different intervals, so we were at different places on the labyrinth. And it was an individual practice and we were walking that. But because we were all on it at the same time, there was this sense of community. And even without a single word to one another and we're passing on the different channels and routes of the labyrinth, pausing for meditation at different times, just depending on the individual. Brushing hands with one another, touching shoulders as we pass. And I'm getting tingles, just you know talking about is there was this deep power of God's Spirit, working with us without a word ever exchanged, and then each exiting the labyrinth as their time came to leave. And we all silently walked back to the counsel room. And, and again, with that a word ever being spoken, just a sense of knowing that we had all communed with one another and God, <Yeah> and that was really super powerful.

Barbara Carter 53:59

That was a very special time. I actually was one of the first ones out. And I took pictures of us up there. Yeah, so that was a very special time.

Robin Linkhart 55:33

Barb you serve in a field in one nation, it's in the USA. But the field that you serve is very diverse, throughout.. So as you serve among very diverse people, how do these folks integrate spiritual practices into their lives and their life together as a congregation?

Barbara Carter 56:02

This is a huge question. Because you're right, they're so diverse and have completely different backgrounds with each other and Dwelling in the Word has found a deep place in, in this field. It is not uncommon for some congregations to have that as a part of their weekly worship. And whether it's in the classroom, or whether it's part of the the Sunday morning service. They use that a lot. The wish... the Mission Prayer, has found its way into the lives of individuals and conversations. And the Mission Prayer is kind of in its second form. Right now, there was one that came out, I don't know, in the late middle 90s, in a resource that was produced by the Seventy. In the in the Missionary Tool Kit, I think it was. And so that Mission Prayer has been around for a while, are the two versions. And so I think that has found its way extensively into the life of individuals and congregations, I don't know that you could go anywhere in my field that they would not know, or be using the Mission Prayer, which I think is really good, because number one, prayer is what's on our mind. Yeah. And so saying the Mission Prayer, puts witnessing, and being aware of others around us who were, who are seeking a relationship with God, the Mission Prayer places that on our mind, so that we are attuned and much more aware, Dwelling of the Word I already said that is popular. Prayer continues to be foundational for those involved, individually or with a group. And as you spoke labyrinths are are finding way into the Mission Center. Several of the campgrounds now have labyrinths. And some congregations have congregational retreats, and they are using labyrinths as a part of that. I find it exciting because our kids

are growing up with labyrinths. Now you know, and it's not just one that has a little ball, and you have two knobs, and you're kind of trying to control where the ball goes, and you want it to get to that hole. It's not that kind of labyrinth. So I'm very excited about that. That they are growing up knowing about that practice that spiritual practice.

Robin Linkhart 58:46

That, that is awesome. As you talk about this, I reflect back and realize that spiritual practices, as you know, even having the concept of spiritual practices and names for different ones in the Community of Christ journey is relatively new. And as you're talking, I'm realizing, wow, it's like our kids are growing up in that awareness. <Yeah.> And we even have a Project Zion Podcast interview with someone who has developed spiritual practices that are kid friendly, and which is awesome, I think.

Barbara Carter 59:24

Yeah.

Robin Linkhart 59:26

So Barb, is there anything that you would like to share or talk about that I have not asked you about today?

Barbara Carter 59:33

Yeah, I think that people are engaging in spiritual practices, but don't necessarily name it as such. They're practices that they learned on their own. Maybe or, or it's a latent memory someplace in the brain from when they were a child or something and it finds its way back in but they don't name it as such. Leonard Sweet a a writer from probably like the early 2000s wrote a book Learning to Dance the Soul self, Soul Salsa, (Learn to Dance the Soul Salsa) I kind of liked the name. In it, he talks about sacramentalizing, the ordinary. And he talks about, you know, if you have, let's say, a dish that was your grandmother's, and you use that dish. Well, when you use it, when you're preparing to use it, you might be rinsing it off or washing it. But first, you think about that person and their influence on your life. Or if it's a contemporary person, you know, and it's a dish they gave you or a vase that they gave you or a piece of jewelry or a scarf, or they... that those things become sacraments, meaning they become a sacrament, because we are touching with another person and recognizing their influence on us, recognizing how much we cherish them. And honoring that relationship, it's a huge practice for me. I have, I have many things from my mother, and I deeply miss my mother. So, in those times, I will mix missing my mother with a little bit of housecleaning. Meaning I will go and pull—she liked the little bluebird—so I have a couple of her bluebirds. And sometimes all it takes is I go and get the bluebirds and I wash them. <Yeah.> You know, and I dry them. And I put them back in their place. Sometimes, I go through my recipe box, yes, I still have a recipe box. And I look for the ones that are handwritten, you know, and I think about my mother, it's not a time of sadness. It's a time of connecting, you know, in a way with what she gifted me and how a part of her finds expression through me. So, you know, sacramentalizing the ordinary, the ordinary things. One time when, well, it was after 2000 no 9/11. We had just moved to California, and I found myself on the freeway systems a lot. And I felt very disconnected from everybody. And so I started praying for the cars around me, because we didn't move very fast. And, you know, there would be times that I would travel surrounded by the same four cars for maybe 10-15 minutes. And that gave me lots of time to pray for the individuals in those cars. And in a

very weird way, it made me feel connected at a time in in my life, that because of actions within our country, I was feeling very disconnected. And it helped me so it's it's sacramentalizing the ordinary when you're in your car, and you see somebody else. You know, if you're questioning your life, just putting your seatbelt on, you know, the act of putting your seatbelt on and clicking in is saying my life is valuable. I'm sacramentalizing that action and saying, my life has value. I'm doing this because I value my life. When I went to Graceland I was afraid that... I was concerned I wasn't afraid. I was concerned that my relationship with God might become less. And so I would put a rubber band on my ID and a rubber band on the doorknob, so that when I touched those things, I would remember just to say a prayer of thanks to God, that I know you're with me, you know, and "here we go" kind of thing. So touching the ordinary. And when you do make it a sacrament, to remember how much we are connected and how much God connects us.

Robin Linkhart 1:04:43

I love that. I will never look at rubber bands the same again.

Barbara Carter 1:04:48

You're welcome.

Robin Linkhart 1:04:49

This has been great time to share with you today, Barb. Thank you so much for being with us.

Barbara Carter 1:04:56

You're welcome. Thank you.

Robin Linkhart 1:04:58

And a very Special thanks to all of our listeners. To hear more from people who actively practice spirituality in their lives look for Holy Grounds in the categories list on our website. To hear more from our guest, Barbara check out episode 12 Exploring "Restoration Heritage and Community of Christ Distinctives" and also episode 138 Percolating on Faith on the topic of ecumenism, featuring Barb as a special guest with regular Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith. Today, Bard mentioned the Mission Prayer. I want to leave those words with you. "God, where will your Spirit lead today? Help me be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant me courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace." This is your host Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care. Bye bye

Josh Mangelson 1:06:22

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