

# Fair Trade|Alex Guerro

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

congregation, community, church, people, Christ, queer, faith, Mormon, grandmas, transgender

## SPEAKERS

Josh Mangelson, Alex Guerrero, Brittany Mangelson

### **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.

### **Brittany Mangelson** 00:33

Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode of Project Zion Podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson. And I'm going to be your host today for you guessed it another episode of our Fair Trade series. This is where we talk to folks who are new to Community of Christ. We talk about their faith transition, their faith journey, how it was leaving another religion and finding Community of Christ. So, I am thrilled to have my good friend Alex Guerrero on today. Alex is a member of the Salt Lake congregation. And he is actually on the pastorate leadership team this year when I started serving as pastor of the congregation. And Alex is one of my counselors. So, I'm thrilled that we finally have him on to tell his story. So, Alex, welcome.

### **Alex Guerrero** 01:22

Hi, Brittany.

### **Brittany Mangelson** 01:23

This is gonna be good. This is gonna be really good.

### **Alex Guerrero** 01:25

I'm excited.

### **Brittany Mangelson** 01:26

What did faith and religion look like for you when you were growing up? How involved were you in church? What church did you attend? How important was God, that kind of thing when you were just a young child.

### **Alex Guerrero** 01:41

I grew up Mormon, and I grew up in Ohio. And church was very important to our family. We were pretty good Mormons. We were definitely like, be there every Sunday. I remember going to activity days growing up. I'm trans. So... I grew up. People thought I was a woman. So, I went through the women's

program and activity days and that sort of thing, while I was Mormon. there were definitely times where we like skipped church every now and again or didn't do family home evening. But we all on all were pretty devout and me especially church was very important to me. Out of me and my brothers, my mom would always say that I was the spiritual giant and church was something that I spent a lot of time on throughout childhood and teenage years.

**Brittany Mangelson 01:58**

That's helpful. Being dubbed the spiritual giant, and being socialized as a girl. How was that? Because I'm assuming that you recognized pretty early on that boys and girls were very different in the LDS church, and you were being pushed down one funnel one conveyor belt, if you will. How was that?

**Alex Guerrero 02:52**

It was interesting to say the least. When I was really young, I did not quite understand some of those, you know, when you're four or five, and you're just... I have a memory of being about age four. And I wanted a Gameboy because my little brother had one. I asked my mom, if I could have a Gameboy when I turned into a boy. And she said, "You're not going to turn into a boy." And I guess I was kind of mom is being kind of accused and being like, "Oh, well but are you sure?" you know. And I can remember, it might have been as a result of that conversation because it was definitely around the same time. But I can remember hearing my mom reading me and my brothers a conference talk, where it was essentially, boys are boys and they shouldn't pretend to be girls. Girls are girls and they shouldn't pretend to be boys. I remember looking at my mom and saying, but I kind of do that. I like boy's stuff. I like playing with boy's toys." And she kind of explained to me "No, they're not talking about you liking boy things, they're talking about you dressing as a boy or saying that you are a boy." And even little me I was like "That's the kind of stuff like me, but okay." As I got older, though, I definitely got better at sort of falling into the role as a girl you know. I went into the young woman's program and really hit the floor running. Like I got my Young Women's recognition award, I got the Honor Bee and really dove sort of into that. Which is kind of a common trans experience, actually where you cling to the gender that you're assigned at birth in hopes that you can make it work. But realizing that I am queer, because I realized that I was bisexual first before I realized I was trans. And as far as being the spiritual giant and was one, was kind of devastating because that was my identity, I was the good child I was the spiritual giant, I was (queer) and ran in direct opposition. I could not embrace that in any way, and still be a spiritual giant in any meaningful way. So, as I started to realize those things about myself, sort of losing that part of my identity was hard, you know, or feeling like I did at the time.

**Brittany Mangelson 05:26**

I can only imagine having those labels put on you. And then you're trying to figure out who you are and your own identity while living in a construct of being in the quote unquote, one true church and the one true way to think about things and to do things, and to behave, and to act and to dress and all the ways that little kids in American culture, but for sure Mormon culture are gendered and stereotyped in that gender. And so, my heart broke for little Alex just thinking of you being like, wait, but actually people around you were like, oh, no, but this is what we mean. And you're like, wait, but that's me too. And probably that was really confusing. And really, I'm assuming just some amount of devastation where you're like, wait a second, I exist. I'm right here. Why aren't you seeing me how I see myself? So that's tough. That's heavy stuff for a kid. And I know that it is a familiar tale to the trans community. But yeah,

I just want to highlight that, that that's a particular bit of your story that I think just makes it that much more complex of these labels that were put on you that you were assigned at birth and that you were typecast. So, as you grew up, then went through the young women's program, talk about college years or anything else that's relevant about growing up?

**Alex Guerrero 06:52**

I grew up in Ohio. And so, there weren't a ton of Mormon's around growing up. My high school, I think that there were like six or seven of us all together throughout the four classes. And because of that, we kind of stuck together, but it wasn't like being in Salt Lake. But when I went to college, I went to BYU, where everyone is Mormon. And when I went to BYU Idaho, I knew I was bisexual. And I had kind of started questioning things about the church, but not intensely at all. I was still very much wanting to be the good Mormon gay, where I was like, Okay, I'm gay, but I'm not gonna act on it and to like follow the teachings. That all sort of fell apart at BYU Idaho. To anyone listening if you weren't aware, BYU Idaho is not the place to have your faith crisis or your gender crisis. There are rules there specifically about not being allowed to date people of the same sex. And I was not allowed to medically transition in any way. I was not allowed to leave the Mormon church, I had to live the rules, I had to have a certain attendance at church, trying to live that life, while also figuring out who I was. And in saying that I definitely did not follow all of those rules, probably should have been kicked out of the university. I definitely dated people that I was not supposed to be dating. And while I was there is actually when I started regularly attending another church which is also against the rules. So, I can't really tell my story of my faith transition without talking about my good friend Avery. I met Avery, when we were kids, when they moved into our ward. And they had started realizing their issue with the church in their own weirdness around the same time that I did. And so, they had left the church and started attending Community of Christ. And this was back when I was in Ohio, that they started attending. I wanted to check it out. I decided to go to the congregation that was there in Ohio. And I didn't tell my parents I was going, I might have been 18, I might have been 17. And I snuck there with another friend. And my parents found out and I got grounded. And so, I never went back to that congregation, unfortunately. But when I went out to BYU Idaho, I think I was in maybe my second semester there. And I got a text from Avery saying, hey, if there was a house church in Idaho Falls which is right near where BYU Idaho is. And I'd said Yeah, absolutely. So, I went to house church and it was me and three grandmas. And I absolutely loved it. All three of them became my grandma's. And once a month, one of them would drive to Rexburg, and pick me up. And we founded Idaho Falls. And we would meet one of the members apartments. And we would do house church. And I did that for years regularly while I was at BYU Idaho, and other people joined and left house church, but I was I was probably the most constant person that attended. And that really provided an escape for me from Rexburg, I was going through all these different transitions to who I was having that sort of out, once a mnth take a break from it all. It made it bearable, I guess, you know, I don't think I would have made it through without that.

**Brittany Mangelson 11:01**

So, can I ask what it was about house church or the three grandmas as you called them? I love...

**Alex Guerrero 11:11**

They are my grandmas.

**Brittany Mangelson 11:14**

Yeah, and they're legitimate grandmas. I mean, it was not...it was accurate. Um, but I'm just like painting the picture, you know.. So, a queer college student who's trying to figure out gender and sexuality, and religion all at once. Those are three very big things. Getting picked up, and then having meetings with three grandmas? What was it about those meetings? What were the things that you were learning? What were your conversations, like? What kept you going back?

**Alex Guerrero 11:47**

For house church specifically, I think what kept me going back was the community of it. I enjoyed spending time to talk. And they gave me space to explore my faith, and my thoughts about stuff. And it was a space that I had never really been provided before. I had always sort of been told what to believe. And that only really changed when I started going to Community of Christ, and there was discussion, and there was sort of diversity in belief. To sit there and have these conversations with them. It was something that was kind of groundbreaking. Honestly, I can distinctly remember actually, one of the very first times that I've ever come to Salt Lake congregation. And this is when I was still attending BYU Idaho, but I come down to Salt Lake to visit Avery. We were doing like Sunday school, and different pastor at the time. But one of the people in the congregation got into like a back-and-forth debate with the pastor at the time. This was Roy and Blair by the way, if you're curious. And I can just remember sitting there shocked, being like, Is this allowed, this feels like this shouldn't be allowed. But it totally was and no one even really thought much of it, you know that they were having a back and forth. And so, I appreciated that more than anything I think about Community of Christ was that there was that space. And it's something that I still appreciate now, because I am a member of Community of Christ, and I am on the pastorate leadership team. And I will be the first person to say that, I don't know. I don't know anything about if there is a God, or if there's an afterlife or any of that for sure. And I am not the only one in Community of Christ, the shares that sentiment. I don't know. And that's fine. So yeah, that's what kind of drew me to it. And also, like I said, with house church, specifically, it was definitely an escape. They were some of the first people who used my correct name and pronouns when I came out. I can remember it being really, really meaningful to me. That one time I got picked up from Rexburg, and I was just not having a good time. School had been rough. One of my family members was very, very ill at the time and was in the hospital. And they offered to give me a blessing. And I took them up on it and I got a blessing. And it was the first time I had a blessing with my proper name. And that meant a lot to me. In the religion I grew up in my queerness and my face sort of ran in direct opposite. So, to have them come together was something really beautiful.

**Brittany Mangelson 14:50**

Thank you so much for that. I think that you said so many important things and authenticity is kind of how I would sum it up. You were able to just be yourself, and you didn't have to have all the answers, you didn't have to have a firm understanding of the three big things that you were wrestling with gender, sexuality and faith. It's not like anyone expected you to just have all the answers right then and there . It was presented to you that you could explore and that you could figure out what you believed and figure out who you were in a safe place. I think that that really shows what ministry with seekers is in Community of Christ, is ministers trying to provide a place just to rest and be, and to figure out who you are and who you are in relation to the Divine, whatever the divine looks like for you. And you don't have

to have all the answers and you don't have to have things sorted out completely. That's really, really, really beautiful.

**Alex Guerrero** 15:52

Yeah, and as I said, having that space was so important to me, especially when I felt so trapped at school. I felt like I couldn't leave. And so having the space where I was able to explore in the midst of that was really helpful.

**Brittany Mangelson** 16:08

So, can I ask, what were some of the things that you were curious about? You're going through all of this stuff, deconstruction reconstruction, and as far as Community of Christ goes, what were some of your biggest questions?

**Alex Guerrero** 16:23

Obviously, one of my big questions was the treatment for queer people and what their policy is on that. And by the time I started, I knew that they were queer friendly, because Avery had started attending first and let me know that. So that was one of my big things. Because that was one of the things that first started to disillusion me from the Mormon church obviously as I was queer. But I've gotten to see the treatment of queer people firsthand. And the church now, in that queer people are welcome. A lot, I mean a good portion of our congregation is somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum. And that's really cool. And so, I definitely felt comfortable and welcome as a queer there. I was comfortable walking into a Salt Lake congregation, and Idaho Falls house church. And I know now that I've investigated more in Community of Christ, I've learned there are policies in place. That was one of the big things. Another one of the big things was, I guess the best way to put it is sort of autonomy. The Mormon Church growing up there was very much like a list of rules that you have to follow. You have to do this, this and this, to be a member, you have to do this, this and this to be temple worthy, rules that you are expected to follow. And as I started to become an adult, and realizing who I was I realized that I was not okay with that. And so that was something that I was definitely curious about to coming into Community of Christ. And it really, it really isn't much of that at all. You know, it's very much come as you are, I chose to get confirmed into the church, and a lot of people that are there are just like friends with the congregation and they just hang out. And that's equally valid. You know,

**Brittany Mangelson** 18:21

Those are common curiosities and things that make people excited, right. I think earlier in the interview, you said something about how you had been told what to believe. And so, it sounds like the experience that you've had with Community of Christ has been completely different. And that yeah, there's autonomy, you can be a queer person and be accepted and welcomed.

**Alex Guerrero** 18:44

Which in a lot of ways, I'm not gonna lie, it is easier to be told what to believe. Like, now I have to figure it out. And that's scary and hard. And like, definitely worth it, not having that space and that autonomy just does not jive with me anymore. But it definitely is a step-up challenge rating wise.

**Brittany Mangelson** 19:09

No, it absolutely is and I still have moments even I don't know I'm a decade into the beginning of my faith transition. And I kind of wish somebody would just give me easy answers every once in a while, like just every once in a while, but I have to...

**Alex Guerrero 19:26**

Just as a treat every now and again. Someone, give me the easy answer.

**Brittany Mangelson 19:31**

Oh throw me a bone. Exactly. Ah, but I guess the good thing about Community of Christ is that we do wrestle with those questions within community. So, we're not alone, which is good. And makes for really entertaining Sunday school classes, I guess.

**Alex Guerrero 19:47**

Is this allowed? This feels like it shouldn't be allowed.

**Brittany Mangelson 19:52**

Oh, yes, it is allowed it is allowed to question and doubt and all the good things. So, you're at BYU Idaho. First of all, I don't think I even acknowledged the fact that you got grounded for going to Community of Christ. That is level up commitment.

**Alex Guerrero 20:10**

It was the only time like throughout my teenagerhood that I got grounded, like I was a good kid. So now I have to tell people as an adult, like, oh, yeah, the only time I got grounded as a child was for sneaking out to church.

**Brittany Mangelson 20:25**

And I also just want to acknowledge what you put on the line for even attending Community of Christ. Because the reality is, is you could have been kicked out of your university. It sounds extreme and dramatic to maybe some folks who aren't used to the BYU ecosystem, but particularly the BYU Idaho ecosystem is extra intense. And so, you can legitimately lose your housing, your job, your schooling, everything, if you're doing that, so I want to underscore how brave that was for you.

**Alex Guerrero 21:00**

Yeah, I mean, I was kind of joking around about it earlier, like, oh, I should have been kicked out ha ha. But no, genuinely fully. It was scary. And I could have been kicked out for several things that I was doing, not just attending Community of Christ, but for dating, for drinking coffee, those sorts of things. There's not like a grace period, I saw people get kicked out. And they were like, Okay, you're out. You have like three days to vacate your apartment. And there were times where it came close, where me and my roommates got the bishop called on us. Yeah, I mean, it was scary. And I know what I said about I don't know, if I would have made it through without having those great teachings at Idaho Falls, have house church and have a place where I was able to be myself.

**Brittany Mangelson 21:56**

Yeah. And in addition to all of that, Rexburg is pretty geographically isolated. So, it's not like you're in the middle of this huge city. It's a tiny, tiny, tiny college town. And almost everything is connected to the university. So, you can't really readily find other housing or other employment, the whole universe revolves around the university. So, if you are kicked out of that, I mean, you pretty much have to leave the state that sounds really dramatic or like moved to a different part of the state, right?

**Alex Guerrero 22:26**

No, I would have had to go back to Ohio. And that's part of it is they don't give you enough time to make other arrangements you pretty much have to go home to your parents, you know?

**Brittany Mangelson 22:38**

Yeah. Well, luckily, that didn't happen. And you ended up moving to Salt Lake. So, talk about that a little bit, I guess, going from a little itty bitty house church meeting in someone's home and coffee shops and things like that to then going to a congregation. I also know that you moved back relatively close to when COVID hit. And so, things were weird almost instantly, So, just keep telling your story.

**Alex Guerrero 23:02**

Like you said, middle of the pandemic, I left BYU Idaho, because of the pandemic sort of, the university got closed down in the middle of the semester, because of COVID. And leaving then was the...me leaving Rexburg. I finished my last semester online back in Ohio. And then I got a job out here in Salt Lake and moved out here, the summer of 2020. So very much peak COVID times and definitely was spending some time getting settled and navigating, learning to live on my own and all of that jazz. And it took me a while, actually after I got out here to start coming to Community of Christ regularly. I would pop in every now and again for a while, but it was I don't know maybe six months to a year before I started coming most Sundays, getting to be back to being part of the community again, partially because of the COVID craziness but also just craziness moving and stuff. And I think a lot of me was still recovering from a at BYU Idaho. And all of that. I started coming more regularly to Community of Christ. I had come to Salt Lake congregation a couple of times prior to moving out to Salt Lake. It was so few and far between that your kids don't even remember me previously. I started coming more regularly. And I really started to feel at home with Community of Christ again. And it was definitely an adjustment. It's a different vibe from house church where house church was more chill and just sitting around in the living room. And that was kind of hard, I'm not gonna lie to have more of the ceremony of it all where you are sitting in a chapel, and the pews. I don't want to say the vibe is similar to a Mormon church. But it's more similar than like sitting in someone's living room doing church, you know. That was sort of hard for me to reconcile at the beginning, I don't want to sound dramatic, but not have the PTSD flashbacks of oh my gosh, I'm like a Mormon group today. And it's something that I definitely adjusted to. And now I very much love coming to Salt Lake congregation. And it definitely feels like, these are my people. I know congregations can vary widely in Community of Christ, which is something that I love about Community of Christ. there is space for a variety. And Salt Lake congregation is full of a lot of very cool people. So, I started coming more regularly. And eventually, as I was coming more regularly, one of my grandmas, from Idaho Falls Church, reached out to me, and pretty much just asked if I'd ever thought about being confirmed. And I had thought about it a little bit, but not a ton. And as I kind of thought about it, I was like, you know, for better or for worse these are my people. And this is where I feel at home at this point. So, I officially joined last summer. And I decided to get confirmed, I think the

week before reunion. And so, then I got to go to reunion. And I had fun there. And now I'm part of the leadership team.

**Brittany Mangelson 26:44**

Alex, as you were telling all of this, I just kept thinking about how myself and my family and my kids plugged into this story. And I remember when you first moved, and I was thinking you moved before the pandemic, but you're right, it was right at the beginning a few months into it. But we would sneak out and have coffee together and we would have it in my car because we couldn't go inside because all the coffee places were closed. So, I just remember like grabbing Starbucks and just hanging out in the parking lot. And you worked in basically a COVID lab and I was taking the pandemic seriously. And we were just two friends getting together and catching up. And just hearing your stories from BYU Idaho, were just a punch in the gut over and over and over again. And just recognizing how much of a better place you were in having started transitioning and recognizing that you were out of that environment and you were in a place that you could be who you are. And then I'll never forget, when we were in the McDonald's parking lot, one time after church, and you had mentioned something about, "Oh, my mom made me wear this dress." And...

**Alex Guerrero 27:55**

Yes, it was, "My mom made me wear this dress." Yeah.

**Brittany Mangelson 27:58**

One of my kids was like, "Wait a second. Alex, are you trans?" Well, like she met you so many times before. Yeah, like at least three which is significant in like a year's time. That was actually the same kid that didn't recognize that someone in the congregation was gay. Like, a literal six years of knowing them. And this person, bringing partners and stuff, it was hilarious.

**Alex Guerrero 28:24**

This van is the most FYI van.

**Brittany Mangelson 28:28**

My kids are very observant, and they're very open about gender and sexuality. So, it's just no big deal to them. Right. And then of course, you were confirmed the same day that we baptized my son Grant. And you stayed with us at reunion, which was another wild thing.

**Alex Guerrero 28:47**

Yeah, the Mangelson family has been instrumental on my journey into Community of Christ.

**Brittany Mangelson 28:52**

I mean, if you can put up with us, then you're golden. You are golden.

**Alex Guerrero 28:57**

Well, I will say this something that I really appreciate about watching your kiddos is that they give me so much hope because we have these conversations right. And you know where coming from as someone who also left the Mormon church. These concepts are foreign to your kiddos. I can remember one of



your twins being like, "What do you mean when we can't have the priesthood? That doesn't make sense?" I've seen your kiddos talk about people actually taking scriptures literally. And I'm like, "Yes, growing up. I believed the scriptures were as true as what was being taught to me from history books." And so that is almost inspirational to me that your kids will never know what that was like.

**Brittany Mangelson 29:40**

It still is shocking to me sometimes how different my childhood was compared to what my kids are experiencing. But I love that in our community they're going to church with trans folks and queer families and people of all sorts of diversity that they would not get if we were just going to our neighborhood church, I mean, there's no way they would be met with that level of diversity in humanity. And we've got a really good bunch in Salt Lake, I'm very happy about it. And..

**Alex Guerrero 30:11**

Yeah, I am definitely not the only trans person that goes to the Salt Lake congregation regularly. And that's cool to have a group of queer people that are figuring out worship and stuff together, when a lot of the queer people I know, never want to set foot in a church. And that is valid. They don't. Like I understand that. But it is cool to be with other people who are kind of trying to make spirituality work in ways. So, I enjoy the fact that I can go to a church, and that I can make queer jokes at pastorate meetings and in the middle of Sunday school, and people think they're funny, and I don't get weird looks.

**Brittany Mangelson 30:54**

Absolutely, absolutely. And I will say that the Salt Lake congregation is hoping to become a welcoming and affirming congregation officially through Harmony and their new program. So, Alex is going to be on the team that's leading us through that. And so, I think it's really been helpful to have that diversity in our congregation. So, there's multiple voices at the table, building the table, serving from the table, all the table analogies, we really have tried to be intentional about whose voices we want leading us.

**Alex Guerrero 31:27**

And I know that for your part Brittany, you were very intentional about picking your leadership team, and some of that to make sure that there was a variety of voices.

**Brittany Mangelson 31:38**

Yeah, I've really wanted the leadership team to reflect some of that diversity within the community. So, Alex with joining Community of Christ, I do have a question about maybe some of the reactions of your friends and family and I know that you were deconstructing and reconstructing gender and religion and sexuality and all the things at a rapid pace, but overall, how has that journey been from the perspective of family and friends?

**Alex Guerrero 32:10**

So, my family, I don't really talk to them a whole lot about Community of Christ and stuff. They know very basically, that I attend, but I don't have those discussions. My chosen family, however, and my friends have been very supportive of me. When I was in Rexburg, the only people that knew that I was going to Community of Christ house church, were my queer roommates, who I was really close to time.

And they were super supportive. And I told them, they could come along anytime that they wanted to. They never chose to, which is super valid again. But they were very supportive of me going. And then my chosen family here has been supportive of me coming to Community of Christ, even though a lot of them are not interested in having any sort of religion or anything like that. But yeah, a lot of support from like friends and chosen family. In my journey with Community of Christ, and I've found a lot of support friends, from Community of Christ. Like you and some of the other members of the congregation have been huge, huge supports since I've moved.

**Brittany Mangelson 33:33**

Awesome. I was hoping that you would bring in your chosen family of all aspects of your life, because I know that, especially particularly for the queer community, that chosen family is so often just right at the same level of your biological family and your family of origin. Because those relationships can be complicated. And so I'm just really glad that you have support back in Ohio from people you knew in Rexburg. And then here in Salt Lake.

**Alex Guerrero 33:59**

Yeah.

**Brittany Mangelson 33:59**

So, we've talked a little bit about what you've been able to do since joining Community of Christ officially. But is there anything else that you want to talk about as far as like what your church life looks like now? And then yeah, are there any things that you particularly enjoy about being part of a religious community because you bring up a very valid point, a lot of people in my generation, your generation, you're a little bit younger than me, which is great, but you're technically Gen Z.

**Alex Guerrero 34:29**

I am.

**Brittany Mangelson 34:31**

A lot of people our ages are leaving, right and they don't want to have religion. So, what are the things that you have enjoyed about maintaining membership in a religious community? Why is it important to you?

**Alex Guerrero 34:45**

I enjoy having the discussions that we have at church. I like talking about these things like what does faith mean to you? What does it mean to live in Faithful Disagreement? You know, I Like having these discussions about some questions and hearing other people, I think that's something really valuable. I enjoy the community aspect of it like I look forward to, and like seeing the people that I see at church, and I like the atmosphere. I could sit and chat with you over coffee, we can go to Starbucks and have conversations. But I have gotten to a space where I like the community as a whole and the vibe of us all being together. That's important to me. And some of the people there have become really important to me. And I like being able to help provide that space for other people. Because I remember being like twenty years old, and having no idea what I was doing, what to believe, and feeling very afraid. And needing that place where I felt safe enough to figure it out. And so, if I can help provide that space to

somebody else who is scared and needs someone to let them know that they're welcome, and that it's gonna be okay, then I want to do that.

**Brittany Mangelson 36:16**

I love that answer. And that is very, very similar to my answer of why I maintain relationship with membership in a faith community. I think that being challenged by one another's ideas and opinions and theology and challenge usually has a negative connotation, and I don't mean it to. It can be a growth experience, right? Not getting in your own bubble and echo chamber and being around people who are different from you, and being around people who are similar from you, that can be really important, especially here in Utah, because we are isolated for a lot of different reasons. So yeah, I just relate to everything that you said. And so yeah, I just really appreciate that perspective. And I relate a lot to it. One of my final questions is, what are your hopes for Community of Christ? And then what would you tell seekers? When you encounter people who might be interested in Community of Christ? What do you tell them?

**Alex Guerrero 37:16**

My hopes for Community of Christ is that basically, we can just continue to grow and become more accepting. One of the things that I really value about Community of Christ is that they aren't stagnant, and they're constantly trying to improve and become better as a people, you know, I would just like to see that continue. If I could tell seekers, something, I guess the biggest thing that I would tell seekers is, this is a safe place to stop and rest. If you decide not to hang out here long term, no one is going to judge you for that. If you do decide to hang out long term, then that's great. But for me, that's what it was more than anything was a place to rest. And I always want to throw out the message to seekers like it's gonna be okay. You know, you're gonna figure it out. And you're not going to figure all of it out. I still haven't figured all of it out. None of us ever do. But you don't have to have it all figured out.

**Brittany Mangelson 38:17**

Thank you for everything you've shared, I relate and agree with all of it. Usually, I end these by just saying, Is there anything else that we missed, but I must say, first that I just want to, I mean, I want to thank you again, for sharing your story. I know that it can be really difficult opening up and talking about your faith transition story. And then when gender and sexuality intersect with that, that's a lot. I do think that your story will be helpful for folks and even just lifelong Community of Christ, folks who may have forgotten about how great this community is, and maybe aren't feeling fully confident in our message. I think that it's really, really important to know, there was a queer, BYU Idaho student whose life was literally saved by our message by our welcoming, and by three dedicated grandmas who were just willing to have conversations with you. So, is there anything else that you want to leave us with before we say goodbye?

**Alex Guerrero 39:18**

One of the big things that like I appreciate about Community of Christ and the people there, like, the grandmas, the lifelong members, is that they always try. There was one particular Sunday school where another queer member of the congregation was sort of giving a lesson on the LGBT community and just going through some of the acronyms and displaying the different identities. It was very much like Queer 101. And there were other people in the congregation who sat there taking notes because they

genuinely wanted to learn. And I'm like, "That is so cute and I love that for you." And I love the diversity of it because you have Charly, who was like 60, and sitting there taking notes because he doesn't understand what the word intersex means. And then you have the other trans people in the congregation being like, nice gender did your mom pick it out for you. And the fact that we could all be in this class together, and we're like helping each other learn was fantastic.

**Brittany Mangelson** 40:20

Alex, I just appreciate your openness in recognizing that Community of Christ is not perfect. We have folks in the pews that might not understand all the identities and all of the complexities of being a Gen Z. But we do try, right, and we do it together in community. And that's the biggest thing.

**Alex Guerrero** 40:41

That's the most important thing is genuine effort. And you can see that.

**Brittany Mangelson** 40:45

And I think that that's how communities are transformed and they're changed. We're not going to change people's hearts and minds by slinging mud. The way that we come together is being face to face being vulnerable, sharing our stories, and being open minded to encountering new possibilities or a new perspective. And I just really appreciate that you're willing to share yours, while also recognizing that you're part of this community, too. We can just all learn from each other. Thank you so much.

**Alex Guerrero** 41:15

Thanks, Brittany.

**Josh Mangelson** 41:25

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