

# 848827-episode-138-percolating-on-faith-ecumenism

Sun, 2/6 11:06PM • 1:24:02

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

church, ecumenical, christ, people, community, world, churches, called, ncc, seminary, meeting, important, talk, shared, denominations, interfaith, ecumenical movement, leaders, temple, christian

## SPEAKERS

Tony Chvala-Smith, Carla Long, Josh Mangelson, Barbara Carter, Charmaine Chvala-Smith

### 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 00:32

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long, and you're listening to a special edition of Percolating on Faith. As always, we have Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith on the program. But we also will be interviewing Apostle Barbara Carter. Why, you might ask? Well, I'll tell you. We thought it would be interesting for you to learn about the ecumenical ministries of Community of Christ. So Charmaine and Tony will be giving you a background and definition of *ecumenical* and Apostle Carter will tell us what it's like to be on an ecumenical group, specifically, the National Council of Churches. I hope you enjoy it. Okay, welcome back. Tony and Charmaine, thanks for being with us.

### Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Hey, good to be here, Carla.

### Tony Chvala-Smith

Our pleasure.

### Carla Long

So I guess we're just gonna jump right into it. What does the word *ecumenical* mean? And is it the same thing as *interfaith*?

### Tony Chvala-Smith 01:25

Good place, Carla, a good thing to talk about. The word *ecumenical* is, now you're going to like this Carla, it's a Greek word, or it comes from a Greek word. And the Greek word it comes from *oikoumene* originally meant the whole inhabited world, but in Christian circles, it came to be used to describe the

whole Church, Christianity everywhere. And thus, when we speak of ecumenism, or the Ecumenical Movement, we're talking about how Christian churches relate with each other. And, more importantly, what kinds of unity can Christian churches practice? So that's what ecumenism is about, it's about the unity of Christian churches in Christ and learning to work within that unity together.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 02:24

And the term *interfaith*, basically, is discussion and interactions between different world faiths. So here we would be looking at Judaism, Islam, Christians, Buddhists, Baha'i, various world religions who intentionally speak together, share together, discuss how there can be more harmony in the world, places where the different groups can work together for good in the world and to build understanding and respect. So that would be interfaith.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:09

This isn't always perfect, but a good rule of thumb is that the more open a Christian church is to ecumenical engagement, generally speaking, the more open they are to interfaith engagement. It doesn't work perfectly, but it works fairly well. So denominations that work easily with other Christian denominations, or try to, generally are open to working with other religions or trying to have some kind of understanding and genuine openness towards them.

**Carla Long** 03:48

Well that makes sense to me. I mean, sure. So what was that Greek word again, Tony?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:53

*Oikoumene*

**Carla Long** 03:55

Ooh. That is a fun word to say.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:57

For the first part of the word, *oikous*, means a house in Greek. So it has to do with the household of faith. That is the universal Christian churches imagined as a big household. And the issue is, how will all of the members of the extended family in this household relate to each other. And, of course, in the history, in the past 2000 years, sometimes we've not always related very well to each other. So, ecumenism, as well as interfaith activity, are really important for the cause of world peace and the cause of justice in every place in the world. So it's really ethically and theologically very important.

**Carla Long** 04:44

So in lay woman's terms for me right now, ecumenical is part of the Christian, just part of the Christian family, and interfaith is part of the world religions.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 04:54

Yep. That's right. That works.

**Carla Long** 04:59

I'm not actually sure that I have ever made that distinction. So that's very helpful for me. Thanks. So we're gonna talk a little bit more about Community of Christ and the Ecumenical Movement rather than Community of Christ and the interfaith movement, right?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:13**

Yeah, we will be talking mostly about the Ecumenical Movement. But I think, especially in light of what Tony had just said about, if there's an openness to one, there's likely to be an openness to the other. One of the things that we found kind of interesting and encouraging, is that Joseph Smith III, who would be the first Prophet-President of the Reorganization, as well as a couple of church leaders at the time, went to the Parliament of World Religions in 1893. And going to that, I believe, is what opened up Joseph Smith III and other leaders, to the idea of there being a basis for harmony between not just world religions, but among Christians as well. We have to remember that at that point, this is 1893, we were pretty much into proving we were the one and only true church, and we knew all the ways to show how we were different and better than other Christians. And just in Joseph Smith III's reflections back on the Parliament of World Religions, there's this awareness that, there's a sense that God is at work in more places. And so it's one of those places where involvement in some bigger interfaith gatherings provided some new images of how churches could work together as well.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 07:05**

It's also interesting that Joseph III, and Joseph Luff and WW Blair, who went to this parliament in Chicago in 1893, looks like they went with the intention.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:19**

Initially, they were thinking, they were gonna get to proselytize, and they had their pamphlets ready, and they were gonna, you know, have this opportunity to be introduced to a bigger world. And they were told they couldn't hand out their pamphlets within the park.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 07:38**

Right. It was simply to be a place of description and not proselytism. And they did get to do some describing but looking back, it was a good experience, a kind of opening to the other. In some respects, both ecumenism and interfaith work assume that the other is worth listening to. And that's another way of saying, Love your neighbor as yourself, I think.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:12**

Yeah, so kind of started out, well, maybe not started out, because there would have been interactions between church leaders and other denominations before this, but kind of going from that interfaith, then to a more openness to ecumenism or the interaction with other Christian churches. And one of the things is, there's a lot of things that we could trace from 1910 to today, that would show the growth of ecumenism within the church and openness to other Christian churches. But we're going to just hit some of the highlights. And one of them would be, that's probably easiest to begin to see, would be with FM Smith, who was the church's second Prophet-President. And he became the President in 1914. He had formal education in university. This was fairly unusual in that time period to have had that level of education.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 09:27

Meaning up up to the doctoral level. He had a PhD.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 09:31

But it becomes pretty apparent in in his sermons, in his language, that during that time as a student, but also then as he takes on leadership within the church, he's highly influenced by some other Christian leaders of the time, particularly those who are involved in a movement that is called the Social Gospel movement.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 10:05

Charmaine and I would refer to this as kind of informal ecumenism. There's different ways informal ecumenism takes place but one of the ways, which Charmaine is mentioning, is shared influences. Formal ecumenism has to do with the participation in actual bodies, like the World Council of Churches, or the National Council of Churches of Christ, or whatever. But in this informal way, people like FM Smith start paying attention to what other Christian thinkers are saying. And the Social Gospel movement, which I think we've talked about in other podcasts, the Social Gospel movement was primarily a movement among Protestants in the late 1800s, early 1900s, in the US, and to some extent in Canada, in which these theologians and church leaders were trying to deal with the problems of massive industrialization, and how massive industrialization was creating social and moral problems among people. And so, one of the key thinkers in this movement was the Baptist theologian, Walter Rauschenbusch, who had done a lot of his training in Europe. And Walter Rauschenbusch writes some really important books like *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. Oh, gosh, I'm gonna get the date wrong, probably right around 1903 to 1907. And I could probably show you in some of Fred M. Smith's sermons where he's actually using that book. And Rauschenbusch's most famous book is *A Theology of the Social Gospel*, which is a really significant work that's still worth reading. But anyway, Rauschenbusch's ideas about the social nature of human life, and how the church and the message of Jesus, and Jesus message of the Kingdom of God, is about social renewal and regeneration. Fred M Smith picked up on that and began using it in his stuff. He saw it as connecting to the RLDS church's views about Zion as the perfect community.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 12:19

And woven into this was the upholding of organizations like unions, that gave people a voice, that created equality in society. So FM Smith, but also other leaders in the church, saw those connections between structures within society that can help to bring us forms of equality and an awareness of the ways in which the systems that are part of culture and society marginalize people.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 13:02

But I think the cool thing is that from FM Smith on, now looking back, we can see that many, many leaders of the Reorganized church were fairly consistently borrowing and retooling ideas they were picking up from other Christian traditions.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 13:19

A couple of really good examples would be F. Henry Edwards, who started out his career and employment in the church as a secretary to FM Smith, eventually becomes a counselor to the

president, but really takes on the role of a kind of unofficial theologian in the church but had a great deal of impact. But F Henry Edwards was always quoting various Anglican theologians and other Protestants as well. In his books, he would note some of them. But many church members figured this was approaches, ideas that were unique to the Restoration, and didn't realize how much F Henry Edwards was drawing from a bigger Christian tradition. Another one would be Arthur Oakman, who also was from England, F. Henry Edwards was as well, and was deeply influenced by Anglicanism. And he had several favorite authors that he quoted almost verbatim in his sermons and writings, though in his sermons he hardly ever acknowledged where it came from. But some of it was William Temple who was the Archbishop of Canterbury.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 14:55**

Temple is one of my mentors. Temple was a great theologian and philosopher of religion. He was the Archbishop of York for a while, then he became the Archbishop of Canterbury. He's the only Archbishop of Canterbury, whose father before him was Archbishop of Canterbury. But Temple, interestingly, was highly involved in the Ecumenical Movement in England and Europe before World War Two. And so it's fascinating to me that his writings were so influential to Arthur Oakman, and to some extent to F Henry Edwards. So I guess, Carla, part of ecumenism and Community of Christ comes from the long experience we've had, now about 100 years, of our leaders being open to the influence and ideas of other Christians. I mean, if other Christians have something to say, you're already on the ecumenical trail, right? Does that make sense?

**Carla Long 16:00**

Absolutely. And I think it's actually really cool that we've been open to hearing what other people have to say since well, probably even before 1893, when Joseph Smith III went to the Parliament of World Religions, but at least since then. I think that's really wonderful. That we've been open to it.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:20**

And then starting in the 1960s, it kind of moved from the informal to the more formal engagement ecumenically. This started out in isolated congregations in different places in the church, becoming involved in ecumenical gatherings in their little town or in their city. Starting in the 1920s, maybe, and then again, after World War II, there was very strong impulses within many of the major Christian religions in the US, to come together. And this was beginning to influence the whole society by the 1960s. And so in communities, church leaders from different denominations were experimenting with meeting together and seeing how they could perhaps provide worship opportunities in communities, shared ways and affect social service needs within various communities. And so we find, in the 1960s, individual congregations and pastors becoming involved in some of these ecumenical associations or gatherings in their local areas. And at the same time, many individuals in the church, and it has to do with that whole generation of boomers who are wanting to experience everything, and seeing a bigger world to explore are also pushing the boundaries of their church. And in the openness to doing that, often there were many, actually, who sensed a call to go to seminary, to take the risk of being misunderstood by people in their congregations and families who quite often would say, if you go to a denominations seminary other than our own, or if you think anything outside of what you've been taught, you're being unfaithful or you're saying that we don't have the whole truth. But many of them persisted and began to create a cadre of people within the church who had education outside of

Community of Christ, religious education. And education that introduced them to our shared Christian history, which up to this point was not highly valued since 1830 was the beginning of the restoring of the church on the earth. What did we need to know about what came before that? But suddenly, we have a whole group of people who were becoming educated in other denominations seminaries and schools, and we were suddenly aware of where God had been at work over the millennia within Christianity. And in both of these situations, in congregational leaders becoming involved in ecumenical gatherings in their towns and cities and young people going to seminary, we as individuals were realizing God is at work in these other people in these other congregations. And here's a minister, who I sense is as called by God as I am. And we could no longer deny that other people's call and other churches sacraments were just as valid as our own. And that's the experience part of it. But it's also the discerning, that recognizing the Spirit at work in other places.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 20:57**

So what we're doing is, Carla, we're talking about informal ways ecumenical engagement was already taking place in the church. So there's the influence of other Christian thought, going back to Fred M Smith and then from that point forward. There's this local impulse among RLDS congregations in different places in the 60s and 70s to get involved locally with ministerial alliances. There's our own people wanting and needing to go to seminary, wanting theological training, and the church really quite intentionally encouraging them to do that. And we could say that this informal ecumenical involvement was really really a powerful transforming influence in the church. Part of it also had already been happening in the mission field in Asia and other places where our missionaries were finding that the old preaching chart theology didn't work. And in many cases started asking local, asking missionaries of other traditions who were working in the same area, How do you teach Christian faith? And, gracious, once you ask the Methodists and Presbyterians, Can you help me figure out how you guys teach Christian faith, that assumes you have some commonalities that run deeper than your differences. So pretty important, the informal ways this happened were really, really important for us.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:29**

And you begin to see how some of these informal ways, and I said earlier that the ecumenical gatherings and the people being called to seminaries is kind of coming towards that formal part, and these are beginning to be involved in organized religious community. But where it really becomes formal is when some of those young adults who had sensed the call to go to seminary, start working for the church. And so in 1968 and 1969, the reunion materials, which would have been widely distributed, people were used to going to reunion and having the reunion material remind us of our own story, remind us of being the one true church, help us to have arguing points when we went back home. But starting in 1968, some of these young seminarians, the material that they had written, was very, very different. And those two books in 68, *The Body of Christ*, and in 69, *For What Purpose Assembled*. First, they really disturbed people at reunions, because they recognized right away that this was a whole different focus, that these texts were focusing on something very different than what they had expected. This wasn't reaffirming our own rightness, but it was actually challenging our church to understand who we are in a different way. And it was relying on that bigger Christian story to challenge us.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 24:28**

For example, that 1968 book, *Body of Christ*, was written by a young man who was doing an internship at church headquarters. He had taken, I think he had taken a leave from Union Theological Seminary in New York, at that time one of the flagship, mainline progressive Protestant seminaries. And in that book, *Body of Christ*, Harold Schneebeck even says the church, in order to be faithful to Jesus, ought to be involved in ecumenical work. Not to dumb us or water us down, but because we have a shared interest with other Christians in the mission of Jesus. Quite interestingly, Carla, mission, shared mission was one of the things that started the modern Ecumenical Movement in the 19th century in the first place. Mission societies that went across denominational lines to find funding and support, and missionaries in different parts of the world from different churches, who got together for personal support and fellowship. So mission has been a powerful driver of the Ecumenical Movement since the mid 1800s.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:52**

Right around that same time, 1967 to 68, church leaders also recognized that they needed to have a bigger sense of what is the Christian story that unites us all within Christianity, and realized, I think, what a danger it was, how unequipped we were, because we didn't know that story. And so it was at that point that they started inviting professors from St. Paul School of Theology, which was a Methodist seminary, to come and do presentations for the Joint Council, which was the top quorums of the church, to come and teach classes and even encouraged leaders to take classes at St. Paul as well. And that was a really intentional step that made ecumenism, the recognition of our unity in the bigger world of Christianity, it highlighted its importance.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 27:13**

Subsequent to this, you began to see at World Conferences, particularly in the 1980s, regularly, jurisdictions then bringing legislation to conference to discuss on opening communion, on practicing open communion. And finally, by 1984, sorry 1994, our World Conference, the World Conference in that year, formally opened communion. That was a step along the way that previous 20 or 30 years of work helped make it possible. But also, people's actual local experience with other Christians helped make it possible. You come to know that the local Methodist pastor, as you sit on a ministerial local ministerial alliance, you become friends with him or her. And you finally get to the point where you just can't imagine not sharing the table together at the Lord's Supper. Plus in the international mission field, as people from other traditions joined with our movement, we increasingly had to deal with their questions about, so why should I be re-baptised? My baptism was a legitimate Christian baptism. And so there we're already in, definitely in ecumenical water, in what we call Faith and Order water in an ecumenical theology. Faith and Order having to do with beliefs and practices of the individual churches. So onward we go and increasingly the church locally and internationally became involved in various ecumenical groups, culminating in the United States with the church formally gaining admission to the National Council of Churches of Christ around 2010. It's quite interesting, too, that the National Council of Churches of Christ, at the time the church was admitted, they published a couple of statements about it. I remember one of their statements saying that the Community of Christ's being accepted into the National Council of Churches, and learning about their journey, is a perfect illustration of why the Ecumenical Movement is still important. The more we learn about each other, and the more we learn to value each other's stories, the more we want to be together in different ways. You could say an additional culminating step in this process of the church being involved ecumenically is Section 161 of

our *Doctrine and Covenants*, which has that marvelous segment, Claim your unique and sacred place within the circle of those who, I think it's with those who call upon Jesus Christ. In other words, when we finally realize and accept and canonize a statement which says, Our church is unique, but has a place in a wider circle, you are definitely at that point fully playing in ecumenical territory. And so that's kind of a brief history of how the church has gotten engaged in the Ecumenical Movement. It's been quite an amazing journey. And now we're at the point where in our own seminary, Community of Christ Seminary, we have Roman Catholics, we have people from the Unity tradition, we've had a Disciples of Christ person. So even our own Community of Christ Seminary has become a place of ecumenical engagement, too. And for quite a number of years, Dr. Purcell Eppinger, who's an American Baptist, was on our faculty. So it's been a pretty amazing journey for us.

**Carla Long** 31:24

That is amazing. Like, I honestly had no idea that it had been such an important part of who we were, especially since we were part of an ecumenical movement, even while we thought we were still the one true church, which I find incredible. We were even open to that. Maybe we were open to like, having people come join us, but we were still at least open to it. So you guys have kind of touched on this next question throughout the answer to the history question, but I'm sure that you have more to say cuz, I mean, I know you guys very well.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 32:06

We can go on and on.

**Carla Long** 32:08

Theologically, why is it important to be part of a wider Ecumenical Movement and or an Interfaith movement? Why is it important to be part of something?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 32:20

There's a lot of reasons, I think. One is that it's important to recognize that we are part of God's story, or part of Christ's story, and not the whole story. And that's one of the things that both the interfaith and the ecumenical involvement has provided for us; an opportunity to be humble about who we are. We're a little denomination who has a big dream for peace and justice in the world and a belief that that's what Christ emphasized, and that that's what God longs for. But we no longer have to believe that it's all about us or all up to us, but that God is at work in many places. And that many of the ways of creating that kind of a world is done in companionship with and support of, and being supported by, others ecumenically who share a similar belief in Christ and Christ's kingdom. So that's one thing. Another is the idea for ecumenism, is unity in the body of Christ. And that passage in First Corinthians about the different parts of the body, that they're all necessary but they have different roles. I think as a church we've begun to see that we are not the whole body, but we are an element of that body that in its own prophetic way offers something. But we're not the whole thing. Go ahead

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 34:32

Yeah, something on that. I remember a sermon long ago from then apostle Joe Serig who was at a reunion in Michigan. I'm thinking back a long time here, but I remember Apostle Serig in a sermon



saying this, it's exactly along the lines of what Charmaine is saying. He said, We were always called to be the leaven. But our problem was for a long time we thought we were the whole loaf. That's nice.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 34:59**

Tony's already touched on another one of the things that I think is really important, and that is to recognize that our sacraments, especially those that are recognized by other Christian denominations, need not be barriers between us, but can actually bring a kind of unity as we respect each others sacraments. For instance, baptism, recognizing and valuing the baptisms of other denominations and recognizing them as valid. Letting the Lord's Supper be the Lord's Supper instead of the church's supper. And opening that table to all who recognize Christ. The other ways that it's important is that it's because we can acknowledge God's work, Christ's presence, in other Christian denominations. We have riches in materials and literature and in biblical background. As church members became educated in seminaries, we suddenly had access to very good biblical scholarship that helps us understand the historical situation of the biblical writers. And that helps us to value scripture a lot more. One of the things that I think we struggled with for a time as a church was making a transition to a place where we were letting God and Christ be the focus of our worship, rather than the church. Because for a while there, it was about the church. It was about maintaining the church, it was about describing the church, it was about uplifting the church. And when we let our focus be, first and foremost about Christ and about what God is doing in the world, then our focus changed, personally, from it being about having the right list of beliefs or keeping a right set of rules. So usually it was you had to have the right set of beliefs if you were going to be a good church member, to now being intentional about your relationship with Christ, your relationship with God. And that was essential to happen if we were going to, as spiritual formation has become a focus for us spiritual formation comes out of a recognition that this is not about us, it's not about the church, but that it's about God. It's about our being willing to connect, our desire to connect with a living God in the world. So our openness to God at work in other places, has brought us back to the most personal and intimate of relationships, to recognize that if it's really about our relationship with God, then we are invited into a deeper relationship there. And again, we can look to the bigger Christian movement to find those practices that have been part of Christianity for centuries, those kinds of prayers or those kinds of practices that take us deeper.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 39:20**

So you asked, Carla, about why does this theologically matter? And, I echo everything Charmaine has said. I think Christ is the center of the Christian faith, and everything else, to quote Joseph Smith, Jr. strangely, in this conversation, everything else is an appendage. And so he said that in 1837. And I sometimes wish he'd taken himself a little more seriously on that. In other words, Ecumenical theology matters because it helps us keep first things first, and second things second. Jesus himself prayed in John's Gospel, that amazing prayer in chapter 17, he prayed for his disciples to be one. And when the text says he prayed for them that they would be one, he was not praying for denomination that everybody be one with that denomination. He was praying for His disciples, in all their varied forms, to be one. And in some respects, it's been a centuries-long scandal that Christians have been so divided among themselves. So it's really important for us to keep focused on the center. Ecumenical theology really helps us do that. Another thing, too, is that, I think I might be coining a term here but maybe not, I'm going to coin the term *insularism*. And that is when a community insulates itself from other communities and from other influences, it sets itself up to be shut off from the Spirit of truth, which is

wider and broader than just its own self understanding. And I think you can see in our own world today that *insularism* is the deadly enemy of peace. When a community no longer wants to be open to or listen to others, or be open to the other, then it has shut off its capacity to love anybody except those like itself. And that's ethically and spiritually dangerous, I think. The other thing, too, is that Charmaine mentioned the sacraments. And very interestingly, as we've mentioned in other podcasts, Community of Christ is fully and completely Trinitarian. And this has an important impact across denominational lines. Several years ago, I got a call from the local Catholic Archdiocese, and it was from the person who was in charge of Christian formation instruction. And he said, I'm calling you because we have a family, and the husband in the family is Community of Christ, but he wants to join the Catholic Church. And what we need to do is to decide whether we can accept his baptism. And so he started asking me questions about our doctrine of God. And when I explained to him out of our own documents, that our view of God is the Nicene view, even though we don't formally use the Nicene Creed. By the end of the conversation, he said, thanks, I can't see any reason why we did not accept this man's baptism, that is a Christian baptism. And so I will pass that on up. So it matters. And then it matters in reverse, we have to be open to that on our side, too. So, ecumenism is absolutely vital to the cause of justice and peace in the world, because religion is one of the chief sources of division. So getting our own house, our own *oikous*, in order is really part of what ecumenical involvement is about. It's finally about the Kingdom of God on earth, and creating those conditions of harmony, beauty, and justice that God has long dreamed of.

**Carla Long** 43:46

Well, I'm convinced. Gosh, you guys, this has been really fantastic. Thank you so much for sharing with us on your views of ecumenical and why it's important. And also you threw in interfaith every once in a while, too, so I appreciate that as well. Is there anything else that you'd like to say that I didn't ask that you wish I would have?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 44:15

Gosh.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 44:18

I think does there look like there's going to be any changes along the way? I would just say I think that the momentum is to keep this impulse going within the church. And the places that I think we see it is in those places where the church is working with and kind of combining forces with other groups and denominations that are doing good in the world. Recognizing and being unified in vision for what can happen for good in the world. And I think we see further interactions with denominations, not just in the US, but in other places in the church internationally.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 45:26

We've seen that in Africa, where the church's ecumenical involvement in other parts of the world has been helpful to our churches in Africa as they try to get involved in African ecumenical organizations. That's been really important.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 45:42

The church begins to be recognized then as thoroughly Christian in places where there might be suspicions at times. So we see this as a path that we're solidly on and that will continue to lead us into our own development as a church. As we uphold peace and justice, we have much to learn from denominations that's been their historical identity. And we've been in conversations with and church members have gotten their educations at Mennonite universities. So it's an ongoing deepening within the church body of interaction and gaining from and giving to other Christian denominations.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 46:37

One final thing I might add is that the single most ecumenical document in the church that we use week to week is our hymnal. Right? So *Community of Christ Sings* is an ecumenical document. It has hymns from Joseph Smith III, it has hymns from the Lutheran, Marty Hogan.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 46:59

It has songs from Christian groups across Africa.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 47:05

It has Taizé chants from France. So the hymnal, our music would be so much less rich, if it weren't informed by the larger body of Christ. And interestingly, even if we go back a couple of hymnals to the old gray hymnal, which was a kind of a one true church hymnal, they were still singing Methodist hymns there.

**Carla Long** 47:30

O For 1000 Tongues to Sing.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 47:34

Oh, my gracious, yes, Charles Wesley. So we can't help but be ecumenical. And every week when we sing out of our hymnal, it's a good reminder that the body of Christ is very large, and that we are one member of it.

**Carla Long** 47:50

Well, thank you again. That was an awesome reminder. I will be thinking about that in church tomorrow, actually, when we're singing. So thank you so much, Tony and Charmaine, for your wisdom. Thank you for being here. And we just so appreciate you.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 48:02

Thank you, Carla.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 48:05

We always enjoy talking with you. Thanks so much.

**Carla Long** 48:09

Well, I am super excited about our next guest. She's been a friend of mine for a very long time. In fact, she was my boss in my very first job working ... Wait, I should say that differently. She was my boss at

my very first paid job working for the church. And I'm super excited to introduce Apostle Barbara Carter. Hi, Barb.

**Barbara Carter**

Hey, Carla, how are you today?

**Carla Long**

I'm so great. I'm so glad to have you on this podcast. So Barb, tell us about yourself.

**Barbara Carter** 48:37

I'm a child of the Oregon coast, which basically means that I grew up about three blocks from the ocean in a place that my family homesteaded about 100 years before I was born. So that's where my roots are. That's where I go when I need to reconnect with my inner self, as well as my Creator, as well as my extended family. So that would be the root part of who Barbara Carter is. The external is I am a mother and a wife. I have a husband, Charlie, and a daughter, Chelsea. And that's our family unit. And we're a good triad. Although Chelsea has brought an external piece into the triad when she married Zach almost a year ago. Anyway, so that's kind of who I am. I work for the church. I serve as a member of the Council of Twelve. I'm assigned to the southeast USA field as well as the assignment of the Interfaith and Ecumenical Officer. I also work with the leaders of Spec and the leaders of the various IYF 's around the world. So that's kind of what I do. I've been working for the church since, gosh, I'm in my 25th year. Oh my.

**Carla Long**

Wow.

**Barbara Carter**

I think I just entered my 26th year.

**Carla Long**

Wow.

**Barbara Carter**

And yeah, that hurts my brain to think about right now. So that's who I am.

**Carla Long** 50:26

Well, thanks, Barb. Sometimes I forget you're a child of the Oregon Coast. Like, ah, how beautiful. That must have been amazing place to grow up.

**Barbara Carter** 50:33

Yeah, it was I miss it. I miss it.

**Carla Long** 50:38

What Kansas City doesn't look like Oregon?

**Barbara Carter**

Today it does. It's foggy.

**Carla Long**

Oh, fantastic. So I know that you've always been, or at least since I have worked with you, you have been interested in working with ecumenical groups. When you and I worked in California, I remember that the California Council of Churches needed a place to have an office and we offered part of the Sacramento Community of Christ building. I think we gave them for \$1 a year so that they could save some money because they were paying way too much money. And so that was really the first time that I recognize that you were interested in working with ecumenical groups. But maybe you started before that. When did you start working in ecumenical groups?

**Barbara Carter 51:20**

In 1994, when I first went to work for the church, we were assigned to the South Central States region. And actually, that's the first time I met Carla. And we lived in Springfield, Missouri. One of the congregations in town was starting a Solid Rock Cafe ministry for youth. It was a kind of a big thing in the 1990s. And we wanted to get the advertising out because it wasn't just for Community of Christ youth, it was for the youth of the city. So we approached several radio stations about advertising the events, and we were denied because of who we are, what our faith tradition is. So at that time, I was like, well, we can get around this. So I decided to get involved in the ecumenical associations in town, and was shut out of all of them. I think that it was a mixture of our faith tradition, but also my being a woman. And so at that time, I think it kind of, no I don't think it kind of - it made me very aware of our non-inclusiveness in the world of ecumenism. And so that just started to begin to stir up. And I was always looking for people who were part of an ecumenical group in their communities. And it was happening, it just was happening in smaller communities, you know, where everybody knows each other. So it was happening through relationships, rather than through denominational connections. Then we moved to California. And that was in 2001. When we moved into Northern California, the Southern California Mission Center leader was leaving, and he was serving on the California Council of Churches. So he called and he said, So Barb, how would you like to serve, you know, represent the church in California, on the California Council of Churches? And I said, I would love to do that. So a few months later, I walked into a gathering. It was in Hollywood, which was kind of spectacular, my first time in Hollywood, and walked into this beautiful Methodist Church and was sitting around the table. People were kind, they were friendly. When I was sitting around the table, they were discussing a letter that was going to be sent to newspapers and other media outlets. And there was a part of the letter that I felt was speaking in the same language of the letter we were trying to refute or have a different opinion on, and it seemed very aggressive to me. And so, I was kind of squirming in my seat with the question in my mind, Do I say something? You're brand new maybe you should be quiet? You don't really know what's going on here. And I would say the better part of me kind of leaned forward and said something along the lines of, I'm new here, I don't have all the background, but this phrase in the letter seems to me to be a voice that's not what I hear the people at the table wanting to convey. And the woman who was chairing the meeting, she just looked at me and she said, you are a member of this table, the minute you walked in you have full voice. You never have to be concerned with whether you know enough, or whatever you are going to say is appropriate or not. You have voice. And I can be a crier. I don't remember tears running out of my face, or out of my eyes at that point. But just thinking about it, it

was an experience of full acceptance. And there were times in my own community, in Community of Christ, when I was ordained, there were times when I would stand up to bring a message during a worship service, and people would get up and walk out. And here was this community of people who did not know me at all, and the first thing they say to me is, your voice is welcome and you do not have to hold back at all. That was such a liberating and overwhelming acceptance. So that started me on a new path for my Springfield experience, into this new path of how to be a part of an ecumenical and an interfaith group, and to be open and aware and engaging from the minute that you walk in. It's just been a very positive experience. So down the road from that in 2006, five years later, I was elected the president of the California Council of Churches. And then two years later, when we moved out of California, I stepped down from that. So it was a very positive experience.

**Carla Long** 57:33

Gosh, so you've been involved with that for... from the very beginning kind of it sounds like you kind of fell into it in Springfield, Missouri, and then from there, it just kept going and going. So now, Community of Christ is part of the National Council of Churches, right?

**Barbara Carter**

That's correct.

**Carla Long**

And what does the National Council of Churches do?

**Barbara Carter** 57:56

Yes, so the National Council of Churches has been, pretty much since the 50s, been a leading voice of witness to the living Christ. That's their purpose is to combine the different denominations, we call them communions, to combine those voices together to bring a witness to the living Christ. It's a very diverse community. Right now we have 38 members, which represent over 40 million individuals. About 100,000 congregations from Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African-American, and Living Peace traditions. So we come around the table and we work in working groups to promote a oneness in the message of Jesus Christ. Now, that's pretty interesting when you bring all of those together. So there's actually a group called, I think it's Theological Formation and Faith and Order, and they sit around and they talk about what can be our common message together. Dale Luffman, retired apostle from the church, continues to serve. He has served on the Faith and Order table for a long time and he continues to represent us. Janée Grover, she serves on the convening table that is about the Bible publication and serious, I'm trying to think of the correct word here, but authentic and responsible interpretation of the Bible and providing a Sunday School material as well as other study material. And Janée Grover serves on that table. So NCC is a voice of all these different communions coming together and speaking for peace, for the purpose and the mission of Jesus Christ. We do have a political voice, and that is for the cause of peace and upholding for the most vulnerable among us. The latest big push or big activity that we are doing, and we've said that we will continue with this for as long as it takes, but it's called Act Now to End Racism, and that is taking a lot of our resources. We're putting a lot of time and energy into that. So that's kind of NCC in a really concise nutshell, even though I took like, five, seven minutes to talk about it.

**Carla Long** 1:01:21

Oh, no, I think it's really cool. And I think it's really interesting, I'm really happy that we are part of it. So how often do you guys all get together and what happens when you get together?

**Barbara Carter** 1:01:33

So there are different parts. I mean, NCC has a staff I think of about six or seven who are constantly working. We have a Peace and Justice person who is constantly the voice of NCC in anything that comes up about peace and justice. So they may go and speak across the nation in different groups representing. So that is happening all the time. Now the communion members, which is called the Governing Board, it gets together once a year. And during that time, we also may have some of the convening tables come together at that time as well. But the Governing Board during that one-day meeting, is a time to talk about what has been happening and where energy's going as well as dealing with the business of being a non-for-profit entity. Meaning we have a business meeting, and we look at the budget, and we look at other things that are coming up and how we're spending our energy, and how we're spending our influence, how we're spending our money. So that's one of the things. The other thing, the other two events is Ecumenical Advocacy Days. NCC is a partner in that. This is a time when we come together as communions and interfaith groups, come together and talk about a certain focus. And it's usually having to do with something that is coming before the US legislature. And we look at that from all different avenues and aspects. And then on Monday, probably about half of the people stay for Monday, and then they go and visit the representatives on the hill, speaking to that topic, that as a full unity, a unified message, we are saying, This is how we would want our representatives to represent us, to speak for us. So that's Ecumenical Advocacy Days. The third gathering is called Church Unity Gathering. And this is another time that we come together with a focus and do some educating and then do some, here's some things that you can take back into your jurisdictions, into your member communions, and invite people to be engaged in. It's also a time when the convening tables that I talked about earlier, they meet during that time. So then there is the Executive Committee. And the Executive Committee is the President of the Governing Board, the Secretary, the Treasurer, and then three or four representatives. And I serve on NCC as the treasurer. So I am the chairperson of the Finance Committee and oversee the finances of NCC. I don't want anybody to get any big illusions that I'm diving deep into numbers and spreadsheets. We have a CPA who's on contract with us. So her and I work together to bring the reports to the committee. So that means that I meet with the Executive Committee four times a year. And it's usually in conjunction with other meetings as well. But that has become a very, very rich experience for me for the relationships that are being made, but also for the exposure that Community of Christ is having around that table. I'm very humbled to be sitting around the table with people who are committed to being the voice of the peace of Jesus Christ in the world that we live in. It's just a very powerful experience.

**Carla Long** 1:06:08

That sounds amazing. And I can tell that you have a lot of passion for ecumenical-ism. How do you say that?

**Barbara Carter** 1:06:18

Yeah, ecumenical work.

**Carla Long** 1:06:21

Let's call it that. So I can see that you have a lot of passion for it. So why do you think it's important to be involved with this ecumenical work?

**Barbara Carter** 1:06:34

It's a really good question. Many voices together can accomplish so much more than single voices. The relationships created when you are working with other denominations, when you're working with people that you don't know, are so powerful and affirming. It's affirming to who we are, who Community of Christ is, but it's also affirming who the Baptist's are, or who the Methodists are, and who the Presbyterians are. We each bring an aspect of who God is and who God is calling all of us to be. We bring that to the table. If you're thinking in terms of weaving a fabric, it just brings this really beautifully created and strong fabric together for the cause of the kingdom. That is so powerful. I believe that we are stronger when we're together, when we are different. We are stronger together. It's amazing. And I think a lot of it comes out of, I mean the joy that I find in it, comes from growing up in a time when the message that I heard in Community of Christ was that we were the one true church. I don't know that anybody ever said this to me, or if it's just something I adopted, but other churches were almost to be, you were to stay away from them. There was something to fear about them. And it's just not my experience. And so this is a big liberation from the faith of being a young child into junior high years probably, to what I know and experience now. It's very liberating and empowering. So, yeah, it does excite me. And the possibilities for the message that Community of Christ brings is amazing. Let me give you an example. A year ago right now, a year ago in August, we're in September aren't we? So a year ago August, the Executive Committee had their meeting here in Independence at the Temple. And I was so excited. I was so excited for them to come and to get a glimpse of who we are. Because we're pretty brand new to most of them. I think it was in 2004, 2006, that Community of Christ was accepted into NCC and we're new to people and they're trying to figure out who we are. So we met, we had our executive committee meeting in the Council of Twelve conference room. And the Executive Committee brought the Prayer for Peace on the day that we met. And, oh my gosh, what a wonderful experience, not just for me, it was a wonderful experience for those members of the Executive Committee. And then that afternoon, we met with President Veazey, and Bishop Cramm, our Presiding Evangelist, Jane Gardner. And we took them on a very, very abbreviated tour of the temple. And Jane led the tour, and she was amazing. She did not do a history tour of the temple, but she took us up the worshiper's path and she led us on a very spiritual journey of what that the path is about and then led us into the sanctuary. And when we walked into the sanctuary, people just kind of spread out and set primarily on the aisle seats of several pews. And we just kind of sat there and people would make comments or ask Steve a question. And it was this free-flowing idea or free-flowing conversation about Community of Christ and what we face, and who we are, and what this temple represents. And my favorite part of that time together, we were there for about 45 minutes, was two of the women on the Executive Committee, when they had walked into the temple sanctuary for Prayer for Peace, everybody just wants to stop and take it in. And I had to be the one to say, we don't have time to stop and take it in right now. But this afternoon, I promise you, you'll have as much time as you would like. And I said, you can even lay on the floor and look up into the spire. And so two of the women are laying in the aisle, and their arms are linked. And they lay there for the entire conversation.

**Carla Long** 1:12:45



That is so cool.

**Barbara Carter 1:12:47**

It was just so empowering. As we walked out of the temple, one of the women who was actually the President of the Governing Board, Sharon Watkins, at the time she was the outgoing President of Disciples of Christ. She sidled up to me, and she said, Barbara, I don't know that I've ever been in a place where every aspect of the building was not only purposefully thought of, but it was theologically thought of. I mean she was in awe. I'm not gonna say she was in awe of us. She was in awe of her experience with the Holy Spirit during that time. And she continues to talk about it. Susan Naylor, a church member, works now for NCC as Executive Secretary to Jim Winkler. And many times when Sharon is in the DC office, she will engage with Susan in a conversation of what she experienced during that time. It was a powerful time for our community to be able to share, not just the temple, but to share a piece of who we are and let that be our witness. So yeah, it was a beautiful time.

**Carla Long 1:14:33**

Well, that just gave me chills. Thank you so much for sharing that story. I appreciate that very much. So I know that you love being a part of the National Council of Churches, but what is like the coolest thing that you've done with them?

**Barbara Carter 1:14:49**

It's hard. I've got two and I'll try and be succinct because I'm looking at time and realizing that I'm speaking quite a lot. The first one, the first privilege of all, as I've said before, is sitting around the table and representing Community of Christ. That's a long journey since 1994, when Community of Christ was not allowed to sit at an ecumenical or interfaith table, from where I was sitting in my experience. Second thing would be the Act to End Racism March that happened in Washington this last spring. I was able to co-lead the liturgy, the opening liturgy for that event. It was an event that started at the Martin Luther King Memorial. We marched in silence, probably around 10,000 people marched in silence to the mall area. Then we listened to stories of people who were striving to end racism, have experienced racism. It was very powerful just to be there and to be engaged in that event was very humbling. And just a few weeks ago, the Executive Committee met in Havana, Cuba. We've had a long relationship with the Cuban Council of Churches. And we continue that deep commitment for religious freedom for the people there. So we took our Executive Committee meeting to Cuba, to meet with them, with the Cuban Council of Churches, and to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches. We did that in the evening in an overpacked, I mean, I'm talking hardly any breathing room at all. If they have occupancy regulations in Cuba, we probably exceeded it by double in this overpacked, 100-plus-year-old church. And we met to celebrate the relationship with the World Council of Churches, but also honoring those who've led the Cuban Council of Churches and their persistence through the years. It was just filled with joy and celebration for the freedom to worship. The other thing that happened is, some government officials learned that we were in town. And we ended up meeting with a representative from the Cuban government as well as a representative from the Communist Party, not in the same meeting. We listened to them talk about their hopes for Cuba. Both of them spoke at length about Cuba being in the process of bringing together a new constitution and the process that they're going through to get the voice of the people involved in that new constitution. So in that space, there was this one moment, I think it was when we were meeting with a government

representative, that I'm looking around the table and I'm thinking, Community of Christ is sitting at this table. You know, it's not Barbara Carter sitting at the table, it's Community of Christ is sitting at this table listening to the stories of people who are longing to have religious freedom. Not only that, but longing to have a relationship with the United States again. It was just very humbling to see their perseverance, to see their struggles, but also to see their immense joy and happiness and being supported and being able to share with the National Council of Churches of the US. So, overwhelming times.

**Carla Long** 1:19:28

How incredible how awesome, Barb, that's so so cool.

**Barbara Carter** 1:19:33

So that's all well and good, but the message that I would want to leave for people is the ecumenical and interfaith work happens wherever you are at. It's just like any other movement or organization, the power is at the local level. When we engage with denominations and interfaith presence in our community, it ties us together in bonds that are very difficult to break, and it makes the fabric of our community, it makes the fabric of our Christian witness stronger and more vibrant. Our members are called to be in the midst of those faith communities. And we're called to work together to bring forth the kingdom of God. So Community of Christ is all over the place. They are joining the witness of others, and they are making a difference in the world. I'm just amazed when I go places and I begin talking with people to find out the depth of Community of Christ presence in interfaith and ecumenical work at the local level. That's, that's huge. It's finding expression, not only in our congregations, but it's finding expression, and Community of Christ is finding voice in larger settings in our communities, and having influence to the message of Jesus Christ. And that's the bottom line, that's what it comes to. How can we bring the message of God's steadfast love through Jesus Christ to the places that we work, live and play?

**Carla Long** 1:21:43

Well, Amen, sister. Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences, Barb. I really appreciate it. And I think it's so exciting that Community of Christ is involved with these kinds of things. I mean especially since we haven't, at one point we weren't even maybe wanted in those groups. And now that we are, we can see that we are part of a larger community and a community that desperately needs to hear our voice just like we need to hear other voices.

**Barbara Carter** 1:22:12

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Carla Long** 1:22:15

Well, thank you so much for being on the show, Barb. It's just been so great to have you and to hear about your experiences.

**Barbara Carter** 1:22:23

Well, it's been my pleasure to be with you. And once again, I invite everybody to take a step outside of their norm and to engage at some level in some way into an interfaith experience or an ecumenical experience. You'll be blessed.

**Josh Mangelson** 1:22:50

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