

WhatsBrewing|Beyond the Horizon Emerging Congregation

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

community, pandemic, online, Michigan, ministry, Christ, discussion, church, group, camps, participate, spiritual practice, world, mission

SPEAKERS

Linda Stanbridge, Brittany Mangelson

Brittany Mangelson 00:27

Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode of the Project Zion Podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson. And I'm going to be your host for today. And we are going to be bringing you another episode in our What's Brewing series, which is where we talk all about mission, and what's going on in the life of Community of Christ. So I have on my good friend, Linda Stanbridge, who is going to share a couple of things about what's going on in her neck of the woods in Michigan, one of those being the Beyond the Horizon emerging congregation that meets online and then just some other really cool things that are happening within her mission center. So Linda, welcome. And why don't you just give a brief overview of who you are and what you do for Community of Christ.

Linda Stanbridge 01:12

Thanks so much for having me. My name is Linda Stanbridge. I use pronouns like she and her. And I serve as the Michigan Mission Center Invitation Support Minister. So I work on some communication stuff, I work with congregations, and especially new expressions, help out with training and continuing ed and all kinds of exciting stuff across Michigan. We're lucky to have a really big mission center. So I have the opportunity to meet with a lot of different pastors and teams and ministers. I specifically participate with the Beyond the Horizon congregation, which started as one of our new expressions, and is our fully online congregation, which is pretty exciting for us.

Brittany Mangelson 01:53

Thank you for that, I am really excited to dive in a little deeper to some of the topics that you just shared in your intro. Starting with let's talk about the Beyond the Horizon congregation or emerging congregation. And before we get into what it is today, because I do think it's really unique. Let's talk about the history and the background a little bit, because I think that there are some really important lessons that we can pull from the transition to where you were to where you are today. So why don't you tell us a little bit about how Beyond the Horizon started?

Linda Stanbridge 02:27

Yeah, absolutely. Beyond the Horizon started in 2018. And I was really longing for something that was different. I was just really having a hard time getting my spiritual needs met, where I was at. And so I

invited a few friends to try something different with me. And so started sort of as a dinner church, we would just meet once a month for dinner and discussion. A few times, we would watch an educational video, or we might read an article together and have some kind of discussion over dinner. And that was really fun, because it was so easy for the kids to just run into the playroom. And I really enjoyed seeing everybody's kids and pets playing together. Sometimes we would meet at the park, one time we got pizza and went to the splash pad in town, which was a blast, we really enjoyed it. But we really had a need, a desire to be more active in our community. And it was hard to figure out what that might look like for a small group that was really just a dinner church kind of an experiment started out as a new expression. So we wanted to see what were some of the needs that were happening in our area, and there was a men's homeless shelter that had opened close to the time we did, maybe a half an hour from where we were usually meeting. So I got in touch with them, which ended up being kind of an interesting experience, because the church that sponsors the homeless shelter is very evangelical. And I think Community of Christ made them a little bit nervous because they weren't familiar with who we were. We had actually some pretty interesting discussions about some of the differences in our beliefs. And they really had a need for people to come and provide an evening devotion, people would come every day from different churches. So it was a really cool opportunity to interact with people. And really get to know some of the guys that were living there. We volunteered there, typically twice a month, we did that for long enough that I really got kind of attached to some of the people that were there. It was really kind of a special time for us to go and share a meal. And we would do spiritual practices with them. And they always liked when our group was there because we did something kind of weird and different and often hands on. So it was a really a special time for us. And we did that for quite a while until the pandemic started. And unfortunately, because there's a difference in our worldview and our politics, and we didn't really feel like that was a safe place for us, as far as our health and the vulnerability of the people that were in our group. And we did stop volunteering there during that time. And we thought, you know, we don't know what this is going to look like, let's just take some time off, you know, a few weeks like I think all of us that's, that's what it was going to be just a couple of weeks off. But it became pretty clear that that was going to be more long term. And I personally was getting really lonely for some spiritual contact, and just to connect with people that I already had kind of a trusting relationship with. We thought, well, let's just meet online one time, and we're just gonna do a spiritual practice together. And because all of us are anxious and scared, and this is time when we can really support each other. And it was so good to be online, that we decided, well, what if we do it again in a couple of weeks. So we did that every other week thing for a while. And over the last couple of years, it's hard to believe we're turning the corner on three years, since the pandemic really started here, at least, since then we've been meeting online. So now we've kind of moved to where we actually meet every week online, and we meet on Tuesday nights, which is great for people who have kind of a different work schedule, or especially if you have kids in sports, because they're constantly scheduling Sunday morning stuff. So that works out really great for our schedule. And so it's actually now we meet for an hour and a half every week. So it's kind of grown and changed as far as how often we were meeting and what we've been doing. But it's all really felt very organic. And we've had the opportunity to really have a discussion about whether our schedule is meeting what's going on in our lives and what's going on in the world. It's been an adventure, but it's been really, really cool to have it unfold together as a group.

Brittany Mangelson 06:18

So, just to clarify, you pivoted online, pretty much only before the pandemic, is that correct?

Linda Stanbridge 06:26

It would have been right after the pandemic started.

Brittany Mangelson 06:28

Okay.

Linda Stanbridge 06:30

It was really because we couldn't do our volunteering in the shelter, because we didn't necessarily feel safe there. They weren't following any COVID protocols, we felt pretty nervous about that. And that was really what pushed us to go online. Because we were so nervous about being together.

Brittany Mangelson 06:44

I think it's so important that you had an established relationship with the people, and that you were in the community doing things. And you were volunteering with an organization that may not have aligned exactly with your values but that probably gave your little core group some shared sense of camaraderie of entering into this space and being the hands and feet of Jesus in a way that was authentic to who you were. And then when the pandemic hit. And then when there was that continued tension or growing tension, because we all know how quickly the pandemic was politicized, it's just really cool that you were then able to pivot and meet the needs of your folks. And that you already had that established relationship and that it was a smooth transition online. And not every group was able to do that, like every group in the church was able to have a successful pivot like that. But I'm really glad to see that you all did. So I'm assuming that staying connected during the pandemic was really important. So how did that grow into what it is today?

Linda Stanbridge 07:53

When we first started meeting, we would just meet for a spiritual practice. And so that would be maybe 15 minutes, 10 minutes. And it was just sort of a quick check in, Hey, how are you holding up? Doing okay, nervous. And then everybody say goodbye. I think one of the things that was exciting was that we had people who would join us that weren't active in the church in another way. But were again, really needing a place to charge their battery. And so it was like, hey, at this time, I think we were doing Sunday afternoons, maybe at that time, hey, we're jumping on Zoom for just like a spiritual practice. And so it was really easy for people to invite someone along. And it was just so non threatening, because on Zoom, if you're nervous, you can just keep your camera off, and you can keep yourself muted. And there were people who did join that way, initially. And then over time, you know, relationships get built, and people were ready to be more vulnerable. But I think pretty quickly, we were all surprised at how cup filling it was to be together in that way. And I mean, I was very familiar with Zoom, I had done meetings on Zoom. I mean, a lot of us Community of Christ, folks, were using zoom for meetings for a long time. But this was the first time that I really felt a strong sense of community. And so we thought we thought we wanted to meet more often. But I didn't want to try to make myself do all the planning. Not that it's hard to find a spiritual practice every week. But I didn't want that to only be my responsibility. I really wanted everybody to kind of participate. So then we were just casually taking turns who would plan this who would plan that? And over time, I'm realizing, you know, maybe we

should spend some more time catching up. Maybe we should spend some more time getting to know each other. I wonder what if we did this or I saw this article that I'm curious what you guys think about. And so there was really a desire to grow our time together. I think where we've landed and we've been doing this for maybe a year and a half is a really good spot for us. But initially, we actually took surveys to figure out what day and we've done that a couple of times because we have had a few different meeting schedules times to figure out how much time people wanted to commit to being together. And what day of the week would work best for people's school schedules and work schedules. We have a lot of parents. So now we meet Tuesday evenings, and we meet from seven to 830. So we meet for an hour and a half every week. And that seems to be working really well for us. But it's been important for us to continually check in and make sure that's really still working for us, as our group has changed and continues to change, to kind of keep checking in to make sure that we're doing what is serving us and not just going through the motions.

Brittany Mangelson 10:26

Yeah, I think that it's really important to have those check ins and figure out if what you're doing is still meeting the needs of the people. So are these folks who meet with you on Tuesday nights, are they also engaged in brick and mortar congregational life somewhere else? Is it a mix? What does that look like?

Linda Stanbridge 10:48

Yeah, that's such an interesting question. For this group. There are two people who also worship in a traditional Sunday morning congregation, both were raised Community of Christ, I would say most other people don't participate in another Community of Christ congregation, about half of our congregation was raised in the church or baptized as a kiddo. The other half have come from a mixture of other faiths and denominations, we have a person who was raised in the Jewish faith, we have a couple of folks who were raised Evangelical, including myself, which has been very validating to have other people from a similar perspective, but also to be challenged by other people's perspectives and experiences. We do have one person who participates and comes from an LDS background. So it provides an opportunity for really rich discussion. And it's been exciting to see people inviting others and feeling comfortable bringing someone into a vulnerable space. This is by far the most fulfilling congregational experience that I've had in my time with Community of Christ.

Brittany Mangelson 11:51

That is really, really cool. And I'm just impressed that you all have been able to truly meet the needs of the people. And that it's been a collaborative thing. But it's not necessarily like one person deciding that this is the direction we're going and then leading, but it's been a very collaborative side by side, shoulder to shoulder kind of a thing. I am curious, because there seems to be two prongs of ministry, if you will. There's filling your own cup and doing things like spiritual practices and educational pieces for the people that spiritual nourishment that happens, quote, unquote, in the doors of the building, or in the zoom, or whatever it may be. And then there's like that outreach, right, like that missional outreach. And so I'm wondering if you've been able to explore any sort of outreach things, whether that be fundraising or getting people in touch with local places, because when it was before the pandemic, again, you were out doing things in the community. But what does that look like since you've shifted to online?

Linda Stanbridge 12:58

It's been tough for sure. And I think that we still kind of ache for the more in person type of ministry that we were providing, that even though we're organized as a congregation in Michigan, and we meet totally online, we have people from other states, I mean, Michigan's a huge state, but you know, a few of our people are at least four hours from me. So it's been hard to figure out what a more local ministry might look like for us. What we have done the last several years is we participate with Bread for the World. Every year, they do what they call an offering of letters. And that typically happens right around or just before lunch, too. So we've done our letters recently. And generally, it has something to do with ending hunger. If you're not familiar with the work that Bread for the World does. It's interesting. This year, their target was around renewing the Farm Bill. So that needs to be renewed every five years. And that helps address food insecurity, as well as getting food from the farms to the tables. And so for that we decided to educate ourselves about the Farm Bill, we have a discussion time, typically every week. So we watched a video together about what the Farm Bill is, and why it matters. We read a couple of articles and looked at the work that Bread for the World was doing to try and address hunger. And then we spent some time together online writing letters to our legislators to encourage them to renew the Farm Bill. And so that's been really a nice thing that we've done every year to continue to grow our understanding about hunger and poverty, which I think is really central to Community of Christ. And it's also something that you can share with folks who aren't necessarily going to join us every Tuesday, but might really care about poverty and about hunger. But I think it's something that we want to continue to wrestle with. And I think maybe that's for the best. I don't know that we should come to a really comfortable spot about where we're at in ministry, but it's been interesting figuring out how we stay connected to doing mission as an online group.

Brittany Mangelson 14:50

I love that because so many times I think that online ministries kind of get a bad rap. I mean, I know that Community of Christ is really open to that. And we were completely primed to jump online at the beginning of the pandemic, but I still hear rumblings of online church isn't real church, or we can't actually live in the community if we're just huddled by our computers all day long. And I still think that there's a lot of misconceptions that float around about online ministries. And so to know that you all have taken an active role in educating yourself on issues, and have figured out ways to live outside of the computer walls, if you will. And to say that the conversation isn't over, you haven't arrived at some place, you're still figuring out how to better utilize the spiritual nourishment and education and fulfillment that you're getting with each other, but also being challenged by what's going on in the world? And how do we as disciples respond to that? It sounds like you've struck a really good balance that I don't know if every online ministry has been able to do I mean, especially during the pandemic, when COVID is still around to be clear, but like, so many people just turned inward, right? And it just seems like you all took a very intentional path forward to reach out to other people and to educate yourself about what's going on in the world and also maintaining community and those relationships. I'm really, really impressed.

Linda Stanbridge 16:26

I'll take it, I appreciate the encouragement.

Brittany Mangelson 16:30

Well, and I need to be clear, there's no roadmap for this, right? There's no there was no book on like how to maintain community during a global pandemic in the 21st century, that doesn't exist. And so much of this is about experimenting, and trying to figure out how to not burn people out, and yet still maintain relevancy. There's so many factors to this. And I guess there's so many opportunities where it could go south really fast. And the fact that yours has not done that is just, I tip my hat to you.

Linda Stanbridge 17:04

You know, I think what has really helped with making sure that people aren't getting burnout is the way that we do schedule our time together. So we have kind of a rough outline, we have three things that we typically do every time we meet, which is our fellowship time. And that's usually a round robin, everybody shares. And we do a high/low like we would have done when we were campers, what was your high for the last week? And what's your low? Sometimes people just share a summary of what's been going on in their lives. But then we also have a Get to Know You question. You know, sometimes it's something silly, sometimes it's what book have you been reading, sometimes we just have a show and share, or to show us something that's important to you bring your favorite mug. But I think what that does is encourage everyone to intentionally share and make sure that everyone's voice is being heard. And we're practicing all sharing something that's maybe not super vulnerable. But sometimes it is, I'm really surprised how this group can show up honestly, in any topic that we bring on. But we always start with that sharing. And so someone facilitates that sharing typically opens their time with a prayer and we call that person, the presider. They're in charge of making sure the meeting gets started and ends. And then we share in a spiritual practice 10 minutes to 20 minutes, just depending on what we're doing and what we're working on at the time. And then we have a discussion, it's usually maybe 40 minutes, which is exciting. Some people don't stay for the discussion. So we usually have kind of a pause between the spiritual practice, if people have kids, they need to put to bed and they got to get off of the meeting early or if somebody has homework, they might leave. And the rest of us continue the discussion because we do meet for such a long time for an hour and a half every week. But to make all of that happen without having a pastor. Because we are an emerging congregation, we're free from some of those frustrations, we actually just have a giant Google sheet that we share. We've done it for a few years at least. And it has all the Tuesday dates with those three slots, the presider, who's going to bring the spiritual practice and who's going to bring the discussion topic. And then you just fill yourself and everybody has access to the sheet. And that's typically out there at least six months in advance. So when you have time you go through fill your name in on the days that work for you, and what ways it is that you're interested in serving, you might not be a person who wants to lead a discussion on a super complex topic, but maybe you're comfortable going on YouTube and finding a meditation that everybody would really appreciate one of our group deals with anxiety. So we do a lot of meditations and spiritual practices that helped us focus that together. That's a really nice way for me to feel seen especially. So you just kind of volunteer where you can. And then people keep an eye on the sheet. If it looks like there's some spots coming up that aren't getting filled in. There's a couple of things when people just need to be reminded because life is super busy. Or maybe dates not working for us anymore, because it seems like no one can sign up for Tuesday nights or, hey, we haven't done discussion in a while. Maybe we're meeting too long and it's not working out for people's lives. It helps us just to see where everybody is at and have a discussion and out it. Usually my sister-in-law Kim, we have a Facebook group chat that we share that helps us stay in touch, she'll usually put a note in there that says, Hey, everybody, the schedule is looking the wrong kind of holy, like h o l e y instead of h o l

y, which means it's time to get in there and sign up for some more jobs. But yeah, we have such a fun group. And I think because we do kind of share the burden, it doesn't feel like just one person is the leader or the responsible party, it has a really high level of buy-in, which is really cool and really fulfilling for me.

Brittany Mangelson 20:25

So it's so interesting to hear you talk about that, because I have kind of been a team lead of a little group of Latter-day Seekers called Forward With Community. And that started years and years and years ago, I think back in 2017, maybe is when we started. But we have always done formal worship services where there's been a sermon, and we've had a guest Minister come in, and this is all online. And we've done the prayer for peace. And we've done the offering. And we've done all these elements. That takes a lot of planning that one person is the shepherd or the presider. And it has been a lot of work. And we have burned through some folks, right just because it's kind of this grind of putting on a worship service all the time. And so the team now has kind of circled around again, circled back and tried to figure out okay, how can we simplify things? How can we have this be more of a shared experience. And so we're starting to explore some of the things that I'm hearing you talk about, which again, I just am impressed, because it's taken us literally years to get to this point. To say, okay, maybe we don't have to do a full worship service, like you would expect to see in a congregation, maybe the smaller groups can be simplified. And we don't have to jump through all the traditional hoops. And it can be something that is fulfilling that that buy-in is there. I'm just now learning lessons that it sounds like you picked up a long time ago. So I'm just...

Linda Stanbridge 22:00

Oh, you're so funny. I think it's been really nice to feel like this is kind of a shared project, and that we're working on something together not to say we agree on every single thing. But it's been really cool, because anybody can bring a discussion topic. We're all responsible for what it is that we're working on. We had someone who brought two awesome articles, we read about fatphobia in the church. And coming from an evangelical tradition, it helped me unpack some stuff I didn't even realize I was still carrying around just messages that I received. Right now we're working on the Harmony, Welcoming and Affirming Program, we're almost done with that we've been doing that every other week, online as our discussion topic. So anybody can bring something forward that they want to work through together. Recently, we did several weeks on a really great resource I found online about being better allies to the indigenous community. So it's really helped us just to have the opportunity to work through things that are relevant to the world and what's going on. But it's often something as simple as like, we're not going to, we don't have time, or honestly, the capacity to do a whole full traditional thing with a hymn sandwich. And it's just too much. So it's been nice to work on what's relevant to us what's going on in our lives. And it's minimal preparation, you just have one thing you prepare for maybe every other week or every third week, and it's usually a few days beforehand, throw an article in the chat that caught your attention, everybody reads it before we get together, and then we have time to work on it. We've used the Witness the Word videos, we've used some of the ministry stories from the church's website, but we also cover a lot of other broad topics. So it kind of gives everybody a chance to have some control over the direction of the congregation and what it is that we're working on together.

Brittany Mangelson 23:40

I love it. I love it. And what a good way to empower disciples to actually live out their faith. It's not like you're providing them this cookie cutter formula, Do this, do this and sing this hymn and this, like you said hymn sandwich. Suddenly, the outcome is supposed to be x, y and z. But it's an experiment. It's living into what it means to be a disciple. And it sounds like getting a wide variety of educational pieces that might be surprising. It's not like you're following some premade manual structure, whatever, again, this formula that will produce a certain kind of disciple, but it's like what is speaking to us today. And let's seek other voices and resources to pull in to help make us better. That's the whole point of worship, right?

Linda Stanbridge 24:27

Yeah. And I mean, we use a ton of Community of Christ resources we definitely do, but they're not all Community of Christ resources, because we do have people who come from so many different backgrounds and have different interests. It totally just depends what's going on in the world. And I think it's really cool to see how the resources and the foundation that we have as Community of Christ can be kind of relevant to what's going on around us how that affects the way that we behave outside of our hour and a half every week.

Brittany Mangelson 24:52

You're collectively in charge of what that looks like, right? It's not like you've just gone to a website to figure out what this looks like or read a book of how to do the thing. In a quote unquote, post pandemic world. It's flexible. You're letting the Spirit breathe all of these things that we want to empower our disciples to do. It sounds like you're doing it with success. That's exciting.

Linda Stanbridge 25:16

Yeah, we have a pretty amazing group of people. I feel very lucky.

Brittany Mangelson 25:19

Anything else that you want to say about Beyond the Horizon before we open it up and jump into other things that are happening in the Mission Center?

Linda Stanbridge 25:25

You know, I work as the Invitation Support Minister. And so it's questions that come up from time to time. And I'm not saying I have the answers. But I think it's good to hear about what's happening around the church related to sacraments and new expressions and emerging congregations. It's been pretty fun for us. Over the years, we've had folks who have come from a variety of traditions. But in the last couple of years, we've had a few baptisms, which has been really exciting, and a confirmation of a few people. So in addition to what we were doing week to week for our discussion, we had a Sunday evening, pre-baptismal class, and where we use the Of Water and Spirit book, as well as some other resources that were helpful. And it's been cool to see how the journey has been different for different people. One person who came from another faith tradition decided to just be confirmed, so we did the form "The Shared Understanding of Baptism", and we were able to talk about what baptism meant in her life. And it was really cool because we were trying to figure it out. She's like, "I think I was eight, I don't know, I was probably exactly eight," and had opportunity to actually dig through and found her baptismal certificate from when she was a kid, which was really cool to talk about her experience and

where she met God at her previous faith tradition. So we got together and had a camping weekend where we were in person, it was actually really neat, because many of us were just meeting each other for the first time. One of the gals who was joining us for a while, the first time I was able to meet her in person was actually on her wedding day. So the first time I ever saw her in person was her walk in her beautiful self down the aisle, which was really cool. But we were able to share during that time in confirmation of one of our new friends. And then this past fall, another congregation near here, the Croswell congregation was kind enough to let us use their baptismal font, and they even put in the heater, which let me tell you is a real gift. The baptismal font was pretty warm. And we had two baptisms, and confirmations, which was really cool. After our first confirmation we shared together in sort of a first communion on the beach. And it was during COVID, we had those little—I was calling them "Communion Lunchables"—where it's like the wafer on one side and the juice on the other. It's like a double coffee creamer packet. But...

Brittany Mangelson 27:38

Yes, yes.

Linda Stanbridge 27:40

It's been interesting to see how God is still made tangible through sacraments, in this kind of new way of being together.

Brittany Mangelson 27:48

Absolutely. And again, I just think that there's so much unknown with online ministries, and can it really be effective, and all the things that this is such a great story of coming together, listening to where God is calling us to go, choosing to remain in community with one another, and using the resources that both Community of Christ has given us and also use those principles to find other voices of justice and inclusion, to make us better, and then to yeah, enjoy each other's presence in sacramental experiences. And, I mean, I know it's not without problems, but it just feels really good to hear about something that's going great in the church right now. so.

Linda Stanbridge 28:33

I adore our group so much, it's just a zero drama place where people really do bring their best and worst selves. We've seen some folks in our group through some really tough things, people in our group who have been through things that I can really only imagine going through that has been incredible to watch how they support each other, and how much they love each other. We share a Facebook Messenger group, which normally I'm not a fan of group chats, but this one's very tame. But somebody can just pop in kind of midweek and say, hey, my Grandma's not doing good this week. And then you're surrounded by love and people texting you and checking in on you. It's just been so neat to see how this really can be possible, especially because I think we really are open to the idea that the forum that we're in right now might not necessarily be our final forum that we have to kind of keep being open minded. But they're all amazing, amazing people.

Brittany Mangelson 29:22

I love it. They've got a fan here in Utah, who's going to start implementing some of what I have learned in this interview with my own little groups and communities. Thanks for the ideas, friend. It's been good.

What else is going on in the Mission Center? What else can you tell us about that's happening? What's brewing in Michigan?

Linda Stanbridge 29:44

We got a lot of good stuff brewing right now. We have three congregations that are working their way through Harmony's Welcoming and Affirming Program which is really cool. Michigan is a really big mission center, we have something like 72-73 congregations. So it's quite a large Mission Center. But right now we only have three congregations that have gone through the Welcoming and Affirming Program. So it's one of our goals to like connect, because I think we have a lot of really great communities who would do awesome in this program. So we're working on three more folks, which would double the number of congregations we have in Michigan, which I think is definitely something to be celebrated. I think all three of those groups will finish the program before summer. And then I'm hoping to start a few more. Something that we really feel passionate about Diversity and Inclusion in Michigan, we have a great Diversity and Inclusion team that's led by Eric and I, that produces a lot of really great resources for congregations does some pretty important work here. And we're also ramping up for our summer camping season, which is a big deal here. As it is, in most places in the church. We have three campgrounds that we operate in Michigan, and each of them has three youth camps. So Junior camp, junior high and senior high. So we have nine youth camps and three family camps. So camping season around here is definitely busy. We have some amazing directors and staff that make all that happen. So thanks to all of you, the many, many people that make these—all 12 camps total—happen in Michigan. And we actually run all of that on a generosity model. So this is kind of the brainchild of our MCP, Dan Norwiski, who is a really great thinker when it comes to being fair about how we can participate in our community without making money the issue. So our camping program is supported through congregations and individuals and some Mission Center funding. And then in addition to that families pay what they can afford. So there's no set fee for any of our Mission Center events. And instead, we try to communicate what it cost us to run the event. And then people know about what the expenses are, and they give us what they can based on their ability, but that's never a reason for them to not participate. People are not having to come to us and go through kind of that shame process of asking for financial assistance. We don't ask people to fill out a scholarship to be able to come to camp, rather, it's open to everyone. And then we figure out as a community, how we're going to pay for that. And hopefully families participate as much as they can, and financing it. But I think it's just a really beautiful way that he has worked out making camps happen. And it's exciting to see how well the Mission Center has embraced that too. So that's been really exciting for us.

Brittany Mangelson 32:26

How was Michigan doing this so well? It just feels like the folks up in Michigan really value each other and being together in community. And so they're willing to do what it takes the fact that you have that many camps, and that they're staffed and that they're attended, it just seems like a struggle for other places to even pull off one camp, or one online worship. The other day, it was on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. I mean, I just kind of stumbled upon this service that you guys did and started watching. And it was so meaningful for me. And I was just on Facebook and accidentally scrolled by it, right. But it takes a thought and intentionality for that to happen. And for the camps to happen. And for all of these activities to happen. I appreciate it. Because even being here in Utah, I've been on the receiving end of that ministry. And so however you guys are doing it, if other places can model it, myself and my area

included, what a great church that would be right just like an all hands on deck mentality. And we're going to provide a place for people to feel loved by God loved by community. Yeah, it just seems like you guys are doing it well.

Linda Stanbridge 33:44

We have absolutely the best people, because it takes so many volunteers, like you said to make all that happen. So we do have a small Mission Center staff. There's our Mission Center, President and CFO, myself. And then we have a camping program coordinator, which is great because we do have 12 camps. And we run some youth camps and family camps and family retreats in the winter and offseason. So that's when he Johnston and she does an amazing job. But it takes an absolute mob of volunteers to make it happen. We are a big mission center. So we have an opportunity to provide a lot of ministry, but we just have so many incredibly gifted people. I'm like the MLK worship that you are able to join. And that was put on by our Diversity and Inclusion Team. They're called NCAC, or Naming Claiming and Acting the Change. And that's led by Eric and I. So that was the second year in a row that we've done that worship. Last year, we tried it out and it was so meaningful for so many of us and that's part of our annual thing together. But it's not that we don't have issues there's always disagreements and community and I think that's really, really normal. And we have to talk about that too. Because otherwise it feels like is it just us or we can't agree on carpet color. And it's like acknowledged and nobody can agree whether we need pews and chairs and that's just part of community living but I Um, yeah, we have some really, really amazing people here. I feel super blessed to have been raised here.

Brittany Mangelson 35:05

Yeah, absolutely. And raising your kids there to, like I see the posts and things on Facebook and how often you all are getting together and just being in community with one another. And it feels like when that is your foundation, when disagreements come up, whether they're about a carpet color, or something bigger, I'm assuming you can handle those challenges easier. Because you know, these people you love these people, these are your people. And that foundation of trust and friendship and a shared vision is probably really helpful to have in times where things get a little dicey.

Linda Stanbridge 35:43

Yeah, and I think if we weren't able to get together and connect as often as we do, it would be a lot harder. Over the summer, we had Tony and Charmaine as our guests ministers at one of our family camps, which is always a blessing, because Tony is one of our Michiganders, but over the summer, he was talking about how hard community can be and I can't remember which section of Doctrine Covenants says it's "arduous and even painful" and I feel that some days, and he's like, "I know community is hard. I know it is. But I promise you, it's harder without it." And it was just in that moment at family camp, when I was so stressed out, but also filled with so much gratitude for the people that were there that really gave words to those. It's not easy, it's a lot of work. But you know, if you share a vision, and you really work on the love that you have for each other, and you see how much good you can do in the community, when you're all working together on something, it makes it worth it. Now, it makes it worth arguing over the carpet color.

Brittany Mangelson 36:38

Absolutely, that's a really good point is when you see the fruits of your labor, and you see that together, you can actually accomplish things that are a shared goal and reflective of your shared values. It would make sense that you would want to keep doing that, right? The motivation just builds and you want to just live out Christ's mission within community. That's exciting. Absolutely. Thank you for telling us what's been going on in Michigan. If I haven't already made it clear. I'm excited. And I think energized by what you're doing. Also, low-key, mid-key high-key jealous.

Linda Stanbridge 37:14

Please move to the Mitten.

Brittany Mangelson 37:18

Hopefully, I can take some of this and contextualize it in my own area. But is there anything else you want to leave us with today, anything that you would like folks to know, or like if they want to contact you or get involved or just anything else that you want to leave us with?

Linda Stanbridge 37:33

Yeah, I always like to mention that I also serve as the Harmony Chaplain. And if you're not familiar with Harmony, we're a nonprofit that works to ensure full inclusion of the queer community in Community of Christ. And we do that through providing advocacy, education and resources. And you can check out what we do by visiting harmony.lgbt and you can also email me Linda@harmony.lgbt Talk to your congregations, talk to your pastors, talk to your leader teams about going through our Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program to work on how you can be better prepared to welcome the queer community. Then you can also check us out the last Monday of pretty much every month. We have a Sacred Pause worship service that meets online at 8 p.m. Central. And it's an awesome experience. If you haven't had the chance yet to join us. Come check us out.

Brittany Mangelson 38:23

Awesome. Thank you so much. And we'll be sure to put your contact information in the show notes below. And yeah, I just hope that our listeners if you're involved in ministry, can really use Michigan's all hands on deck model in your own area. So it sounds like you're doing really good work and that it absolutely takes a village and you have the village that is living Christ's mission in the world. Thank you so much for sharing, Linda.

Linda Stanbridge 38:51

Yeah, and thank you so much for having me. It's always nice to be here with you.

Josh Mangelson 39:02

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