

What's Brewing| “A Path Forward for Chicago”

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Robin Linkhart

Robin Linkhart 00:27

Hello and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host, Robin Linkhart. And today is another edition in our series, What's Brewing, where we explore how God is showing up in the neighborhood, and people of faith are living out mission and transforming ways. Today we are here with Blake Smith. Blake is a lifelong member of Community of Christ and has served the church in a number of ways including youth and young adult minister Graceland Campus Minister, SPEC worship team, Mission Center President, church planter. And currently Blake serves as the Chicago Mission Center President and Financial Officer. He has also been an active writer and contributor for many Community of Christ resources and curriculum, including the Pastor and Leaders Field Guide and Sacred Space. As of January 1, 2023, Blake is also serving as the Project Manager for Project Zion Podcast. Welcome, Blake. We're glad to have you here.

Blake Smith 01:41

Good morning, Robin. It's great to be with you.

Robin Linkhart 01:45

Blake tell us a little bit more about you.

Blake Smith 01:48

So I live in Elgin, Illinois, which is about 30 miles northwest of Chicago. I've been married for 36 years to a wonderful woman who is actually from Chicago originally. So, we met in Up With People back in 1984. So I'm originally from Pensacola, Florida. We moved to Florida. And she says that I promised her I would, I would someday move back to Chicago. I don't remember promising that because I love beaches and being in the warm weather. But God and the Church saw fit to get me to Chicago. So here we are. And we actually love it. We have two daughters. And they are also both in the Chicago area. One who lives downtown, sold her car and lives the urban life and absolutely loves it. And then one is a little closer out to us. I love dogs. I love woodworking. That's probably my greatest love right now in terms of hobbies. I wish I had more time to do it. And I look forward to working in that direction. But that's a little bit about me.

Robin Linkhart 02:55

Well, that's great to hear those things about you, Blake. And every time you share a little bit about your life, I pick up on maybe one or two things I hadn't known before, even though we've known each other for a while now. In 2020 COVID-19 propelled the world into a global pandemic. In March 2020 Community of Christ closed all buildings. After a few weeks, it was really apparent that sheltering in place would be with us for a while, much longer than we ever imagined. Church leaders began to explore new methodology to support congregational life and all the other ways that disciples and seekers need to gather together and share life together as they journey in faith together. Blake and his team ramped up regular worship services offered by the Mission Center available weekly throughout the pandemic. Now we know that other mission centers and congregations across the church did very similar things. We learned a lot during that time. And now that we can meet in our buildings, what we have experienced during the pandemic actually continues to inform us. In Chicago Mission Center, the "both/and," the physically present and remote participation of what gathering can be, is birthing something new called The Path Forward. So Blake, I really want you to tell us about your mission centers initial response to the isolation of the pandemic, and how that experience germinated the seeds of what is taking place now, and The Path Forward.

Blake Smith 04:44

But when we began, actually, when the pandemic hit, of course, like everybody, it just completely took us off guard. So we began having immediate conversations about what this might look like and what the needs of the Mission Center were. One of our congregations jumped right in. They had already been doing online conference calls every week for prayer gathering and one for a Bible study. So they already had the mechanisms in place and just hit the road running. The rest of the mission center took a week or two. We knew that we needed to do something we weren't sure what that was going to look like. I wasn't sure how congregations were going to respond, or what their needs were. So I went online, I actually went online to see what MidAtlantic Mission Center and Eastern Great Lakes Mission Center who had combined together for online ministry, I went on Sunday before Palm Sunday, that first year, just to see what it was. And is this anything we could do. I had scheduled a meeting with the Mission Center Presidents to say, how are you doing this? What do you need? I actually on that first Sunday morning, in this online community with Eastern Great Lakes and Mid-Atlantic Mission Center, I was in the Sunday School portion of the class and met a young woman who was in my small group, and she was introducing herself and she gave her name. And she said, "and I'm from Chicago." So when it got to my turn, I said, "Well, I'm Blake Smith, and I'm from Chicago, but I don't know you. And I'd like to get to know you." And so that person now serves on our mission center Council has been an active member from the next week on. She's been an active member of the Chicago Mission Center, and has provided a great amount of ministry here. So just those quick experiences, I knew that there was something to this, that we had to move forward. By the very next week, we had a Zoom account, and we logged in and had a tremendous response from the Mission Center from those congregations that didn't have something going yet. So it became something that was incredibly life changing for some folks. One thing, though, about the Chicago Mission Center, people think, oh, Chicago Mission Center, we ought to be together all the time, we're only you know, 30-40 miles from each other. But Chicago traffic makes everything same, a lot longer. People don't like, you know, they're in the traffic all week going to work and that kind of thing. And so when the weekend comes, they're not interested in traveling somewhere. What that has caused is a real siloing of the congregations that I did not actually realize the effect of that was having. Well, when we began to meet online, we began to find that people

didn't know other people from the Mission Center. There's the core group who comes to Mission Center conference, and that kind of thing, but for the most part, a lot of these folks didn't know each other. And so one of the things that we added right away was a fellowship group, after worship, so we would do worship, and then we would open fellowship, the breakout rooms, and invite people to stay and visit for a while. Originally, we planned those to be 20 minutes. And then there were groups that stayed on for an hour after worship and just shared. There were some other needs. So we began doing some other things. We started coffee time, two mornings a week. About six days a week, we had online ministries. Of course, people began to get tired of zoom and tired of the pandemic. And so it began to lose a little bit of its excitement and thrill. But underneath all of that were still these new budding relationships that had begun and people wanted to get together. We had a brief period where congregations were able to open, but it was a very short-lived piece. So we decided that we would go back to doing the worship. As things began to progress again, and congregations were able to choose, we had congregations that were going back and meeting, but they were struggling because they were small in number or aging or busy with a million other things. And we decided that we would go back online with a hybrid, one of our congregations that was gathering had some equipment that we thought we could use, and that congregation decided that they wanted to offer a hybrid option for Sunday morning worship. So we extended that invitation to all of our congregations. We had one congregation that quickly wanted to do that. And we had a lot of people who were in a transition stage that they weren't comfortable going back to public spaces yet or were unable to for physical reasons. Or maybe they were just too far away from a congregation. And so this provided something for them. And so we began to do that, and that slowly has emerged into a piece that has become part of our Path Forward. But there's another piece in that and that comes from the mission side. As we began to come back together in this hybrid worship, my leadership team and I were talking a lot about what do we really need to focus on? A lot of my time at that point was going into online ministries. I was providing leadership for most of those online ministries that were happening throughout the week. And the missional aspect of our mission center was beginning to wane because there's only so much bandwidth and capacity that our folks had. So I happened to be at one of our congregations, and I was cutting the grass and in prayer about God, what are you doing, I've got congregations that are on the verge of closing. Because of numbers, they have a hard time putting together worship, but they're engaged in mission in the community. Mission was beginning to build again. And I just had this overwhelming sense of the presence of God that said, "I'm not done, I'm not done." And I let that go, I don't know what that looks like. But I am sure that God has not done here, we need to continue on this path.

Robin Linkhart 10:55

So Blake, it sounds like there were a lot of adjustments during the pandemic, but also when the pandemic began to recede, and people could return to normalcy and realizing some gaps in what people needed. And just struggling, as you said, you know, from low numbers or folks' health needs, aging congregations. And also, I'm hearing that congregations still had a hand in mission and connected with their community in ways where they were living our mission for the benefit of others. So tell me how The Path Forward in this new hybrid model is addressing that bandwidth issue and maybe liberating people in ways that this "both/and" becomes almost "less is more" in a way?

Blake Smith 11:53

Well, I think the important piece here was the desire for mission was growing. But the bandwidth and capacity wasn't there, we also realized that the quality of our worship was hit or miss, I mean, some there was some good worship going on, and some just getting by worship, if you will. And we had experienced a really positive response to worship during the pandemic. And we realized that part of that was a combination of human resources. We have only a few congregations that have musicians, most of our congregations were using the audio tracks from Community of Christ Sings or videos from online or whatever, but they didn't have good quality music. They were struggling the same persons having to preach you know, two to three times a month, depending on who was well and who wasn't. And so there were a couple of things that we decided we were going to focus as a Mission Center leadership team on, worship and mission. So if we could provide an opportunity and a meaningful worship for the mission center using the resources of the Mission Center, not doing it for them. Although one of the great benefits that we had, of course, and other jurisdictions have had during the pandemic was, we were able to have guest ministers from all over the church that we didn't have to fly in to be the guest minister, they just had to log in to be with us. We even had some pre-recorded when we couldn't have the person live. And so we realized that we could have the best of the best preachers, we could have good quality music, we could still engage folks from any of the congregations, whether they were gathering in a congregational building, or whether they were logging in from home, and we could take the burden of worship off of these struggling congregations. So we have this worship team that now plans the worship and involves all of the people from the participating congregations. But they don't have to go through the process of weekly planning of worship, struggling to find out who's going to do what they can just focus now, all of their attention on mission. So for instance, we have a congregation that has a walk-in homeless ministry two Sundays a month over the last 10 to 15 years, they have welcomed in persons from the homeless community and offered support, sometimes having breakfast, sometimes just giving support and friendship and then inviting them to come upstairs to worship and be a part. There were many Sundays where there were a number of them there. But it was a real struggle for this congregation to do adequate ministry and mission while trying to prepare for worship at 11. Now they can focus on their mission and then come upstairs and join in the worship that has already been prepared and planned for them. We have taken some funds for mission in the Mission Center and we have set up each congregation who wants to participate with the audiovisual equipment, they need to fully participate in a hybrid manner. So we might have a presider in Wisconsin and a preacher in California, and the prayer for peace in Indiana. And we use people from all over. So we take care of the worship piece. And that is what we call CMC Sunday. And then there's this other segment, which we took from The Table ministry that I started with a young adult pastor in Indiana in 2016. And we're using that as an umbrella for the missional side in the Mission Center. And so we're beginning to see congregations that didn't have time for both being able to live out that desire to do mission.

Robin Linkhart 15:47

That's fascinating. And I think this piece that you just shared with us about how you and your team are equipping congregations with the technology and the means to provide a fully integrated experience where they are fully participatory, in what's happening on Zoom is really key. And it's a dimension of The Path Forward, that I think is exceptional and visionary, because it's seeing where the gaps are to make this really deep and wide and relevant and meaningful in people's lives. Can you tell us just a little bit about, because I'm sure we have people listening that are wondering, oh, my gosh, you know,

how can we do that? Or how do we set up our congregation so that we can fully participate in that way? Are there some basics that people need to have? Or do you have a sense of just a basic cost of what it would take to, to set a congregation up realizing not everybody has the same exact two Wi Fi service, etc?

Blake Smith 16:53

Well, of course, internet service is important. But we have congregations as we've been building on this that started with a hotspot on their phone getting good enough service. When we originally started, we thought, okay, we've got to get projectors and screens in every building. And we were looking at about oh, \$5,000-\$6,000 per congregation. But as we did some investigation on this, we've come up with a way that we can do it for \$1,500 or less. So instead of buying an expensive projector, we have put a 65 inch TV in each of those congregations, which we were able to get for around \$300. Instead of \$3,000 for a projector and several \$1,000. For a screen, it's all in one, we provided each congregation with what is called a mini computer, it's not very large, it's probably about a four by four box that attaches to the back of the TV, and it's a full running computer. So it's able to receive the Zoom signal and be the login point for the congregation. We provide them with a wireless keyboard and a mouse so they can run it just like a computer. And then we put in an audio connection. And they have to have a wireless microphone with that so that we can get good audio. And the last piece that we have is a webcam, one of the things that that we found, and we were constantly evaluating this as we go. But one of the things that we found when we first started back was that the experience was diminished for those who were remote in their home. So if you think about this, those who are familiar with Zoom, you can see the whole gallery of everyone that's on. So for the two years, we were in the pandemic, it was like being with everyone because you could see everyone's face. When we first went to this hybrid worship, you had the faces of your individuals who were logged in, and then you had the podium or who was ever at the podium, but you didn't know who was in the congregation. The same for our remote congregations. So we have purchased a webcam that points back toward the congregation. So there is a frame a login in Zoom, and you can actually see everybody who's participating in worship at all times.

Robin Linkhart 19:13

That is such a key dimension and sometimes we don't realize what a big deal it was when we were on Zoom and nobody was able to be gathered to have those little tiles and faces of people and going to hybrid to keep that dimension in which is really really important and which you and your team have a dress to have one extra piece of equipment that can bring that visual image to the table where everybody has a place at the table on Zoom right? I love that

Blake Smith 19:44

Right? Exactly. Now our congregation where we do most of our broadcasting from has some extra equipment because we are you know we have the sound equipment there. Everything runs from there. We have an extra-large TV in the back because we teach Sunday School now, as part of our hybrid gathering on Sunday morning, we start with Sunday School. And we have people logging in from all over the Mission Center. And those tiles that we're talking about are on that back screen. So our teacher can see when someone raises their hand, and we can call on them. And they can unmute and speak as part of the class. It's truly a two-way experience.

Robin Linkhart 20:23

Yeah, I think that's incredible. So you've moved into adding the Christian education dimension. Can you tell us a little bit about how that's playing out? And like, who do you have engaged in that? Is that also a guest ministry thing, or are you focused on the mission Center and the people? Just flesh that out for us a little bit.

Blake Smith 20:45

So another one of the things that we found was that we wanted a consistent quality worship that was connected to the identity, mission, message and beliefs of the church. We wanted to be in alignment with the church, the reality is, in individual congregations, they may not really understand what we believe. I mean, the church has grown in its understanding of God and in understanding of concepts. And sometimes in the smaller congregations, that message doesn't filter down. And so in some conversations about how do we make sure that we're aligned, we decided one of the things we need to start with is having some classes on "what do we believe," and help people understand really who we are. So we're not using guest ministry for classes right now. And it's based on the need that we perceive in our mission center. However, I would believe for my ministry around the church, that it is something that would be valuable to anyone. So we're using the Percolating on Faith series from Project Zion Podcast. And we take one at a time and we go, however long it takes to get through it. I am actually facilitating the class, we of course, encourage everybody to listen to the podcast. We provide the transcript, which is on the Project Zion Podcast website, I also put a copy on our website. So it's easy access. They can read along and study in advance. And then we have discussion and dialogue about it. We've had some incredibly healthy and helpful conversations about what we believe. We hope to expand then our speakers and designers knowing that we can put them in those roles, and they will understand and represent from the pulpit, who we are.

Robin Linkhart 22:29

That's really exciting. And I love the way you and your team are trying to be in touch with, "what do we have available to us?" so let's not reinvent the wheel if we don't have to, and pull bits and pieces in your deep understanding of the people and the context and the culture, be able to bring information that's helpful and relevant, and have lots of opportunity for kind of debriefing and discussing that as you go along. I can only imagine how exciting it is to go on a journey together with basically your whole mission center. And journeying along together and bringing the stories of their lives and to that as well.

Blake Smith 23:12

in the Christian education experience, we can do it in a pastoral way too. We're able to have conversations that are non-threatening. And people can share their concerns. One of the things that's come out of our time together online that I didn't mention early is a real sense of sacred community. So we have built a trust among one another, and me being able to be a part of that. At first, it was a little tough because I was the Mission Center President and people were afraid to say what they thought, because they thought there might be consequences or that kind of thing. And as we've been able to go through this pastorally, I think we've built some sacred community where we can have some honest conversations. And, people have done that respectfully.

Robin Linkhart 23:57

That is so good to hear. It continues to amaze me the depth of relationship and connection we can experience remotely with one another. And certainly, that's the experience that you all have. And you're living into that and deeper ways every week. So Blake, you are no stranger to exploring mission and ministry in the diverse context of your field. I also know you played a key role in an expression that you've mentioned already, but it was a new expression of ministry called The Table, which is now finding new life and The Path Forward. As you briefly mentioned, can you tell us about how that ministry came to be and what it looks like now?

Blake Smith 24:48

Absolutely. So when I came to the Chicago Mission Center, it was right after the 2013 World Conference, where the USA Conference had some difficult conversations on the LGBTQ community and how that we would be able to respond to that. It caused some upheaval in one of our congregations. And the result of that was a young adult Deacon was asked to be pastor of this congregation. And he had grown up in the congregation his whole life, his mother and father have both been pastors. And so he said, "Yes." But he said, I will only do it if someone agrees to walk along the journey with me. So he and I were meeting weekly for coffee, sitting in the coffee house, just having coffee, talking about pastoral ministry, what that meant those kinds of things. And, what I noticed in our time together was that this young adult had a lot of connections. He knew a lot of people, probably 90% of those who walked into the coffee shop while we were there, including the owner of the coffee shop, he was good friends with and had been friends with for a number of years. And so we began to talk about that. One of the things that he was struggling with, as a young adult is he loved he deeply loved the people of his congregation, but they were very traditional in terms of their worship style, and he was feeling really called to Nisan. He was just going stir crazy. He didn't want to leave the congregation behind. Again, he loved them. They had loved him through a lot of stuff in his life, but he needed something more. So with this number of connections that he had, I said, why don't we start a coffee house ministry? Why don't we just gather together for conversation around the table at the coffee house and start this new gathering? We'll meet on a weekly basis, we'll put it on meetup, we'll put it out there on social media, and just invite people to come for in depth conversation, get to know one another and have quality in-depth conversation. And so we did that. We began this ministry, we decided to call it The Table. And one of my favorite hymns is "For Everyone Born, A Place at the Table." I just love that visual concept as well as, as the ideas behind it. And so we decided that we would start this ministry called The Table, "building sacred community, one cup at a time." Now, what happened over the next several months is that group began to grow. The coffee shop that we were meeting in, though they loved having us and then we were a regular, they would start putting tables together before we got there on Thursday nights. But we outgrew the space. And so for a little while, we actually moved back to the church. And then we found a new place that we could gather and there would be room for us. This group continued to grow. And then they began to get restless with the conversations. I mean, they loved the conversation. But they said we want to do something more. The first idea that came out was that we wanted to do a Little Free Pantry at the church because we have a large homeless population in the Northwest Indiana area. And this congregation where we were meeting, the pastor was from Indiana. So we built a Little Free Pantry, and we had a big grand opening. A week later, there was a 23-unit fire in a local apartment complex. And one of the members of The Table and his wife had been passing by and saw the fire, decided to stop, went to the Red Cross tent and said, "Is there anything we could do to help?" And they said, you know, we're looking for a church or an organization that can be

our point for sending contributions, donations, that come in and to send the families to then after they settle, to come and get supplies that they need to set up a new home. And so this young man got on the phone called us and said, "hey, they need a place to bring donations. Can we do that?" It was a Friday night, myself and the pastor got on the phone. We said let's do it. This is wonderful. We've got a group of people that are excited about this. Let's make it happen. We thought that we would have until Monday. Within 12 hours, the church was full of donations. And from that point we've had connections with the community that still exists. Another thing that we began during that period was a Packs for Pals program. So the food ministry comes because The Table was providing a weekly meal at the church at that time. This was pre-pandemic. We were serving food to kids in the schools. So anyway, the meal became our focus. What we did then was we changed our name for The Table from "one cup at a time." It's now "building sacred community one meal at a time." The Table is still meeting. We're still meeting online, because the coffee house that we were attending had closed during the pandemic. But there was this concept behind The Table, this "building sacred community" that had been so powerful and meaningful in the community where we were, that I decided to go back to this young adult pastor who had been the Co-leader from the beginning, we kind of came up with this idea for The Table, and I said, I'd like your permission to take this idea and expand it across the Mission Center, and let it be the umbrella for mission and the missional component across our mission center. So each congregation now as we are beginning to build mission is taking on the moniker of The Table. So we have The Table Highland: Building sacred community one cup at a time. We're working on The Table: Lombard: Building sacred community, one conversation at a time. So it is not a one size fits all. But it's this idea of welcoming everyone to the table. That is what that's what's at the core and foundation of our missional work here in Chicago. So we're trying to use that to kind of create this common spirit of opening the table. I've shared in congregations in a lot of places where I've spoken that, for me, when you will think about a table, the table is a certain size, and you can fit however many chairs around it. And in that concept of the table, and it is the way we have lived a lot of times, is that in order for there to be room at the table for someone new, someone has to get up and give up their seat. So instead of that, we are always talking about expanding the table, the table has to have room for everyone. And that means a diverse group of people with differing opinions and different perspectives, which is who we are as Community of Christ. It's wonderful. So we're trying to help folks here in the Mission Center bridge across political divides, and religious divides, beliefs. I mean, we are a church that has a wide variety of beliefs. And so this table and the expanding table gives us something to focus on and create purpose, I guess, if you will, for those missions. So whatever they do in each individual congregation, it can be personalized, because it's built around this idea of welcoming people to the table.

Robin Linkhart 32:21

I love that and I love building sacred community one blank at a time, like like filling in the blank, and reimagining that image of table which in and of itself is sacred in a Christian community as representing the Lord's table, the sacrament of communion. But reimagining that in a way that it's ever expanding, which I get tingles, just thinking about having that dynamic concept of table that is ever widening, ever expanding so that there is always a place for all no matter what we have to do to stretch it a little bit. Right?

Blake Smith 33:04

Right, right.

Robin Linkhart 33:06

So, no doubt some of our listeners are getting tingles too. And they're thinking, okay, so how can we do something like this in my Mission Center in my community, in my neighborhood at my table? So Blake, what are some principles or maybe guiding questions or tips that you can share to help folks begin to explore possibilities in their context?

Blake Smith 33:31

At the beginning, there has to be a time of discernment. And I admit I am a 70, through and through and like to get things done, but taking the time to spend time with God and say, "God, what are you doing, and what are you calling us to do?," is an important guiding principle or has been for us. I think often in the church, we say, "well, here's what we want to do. Let's ask God to bless it." And we want to go at it from a different perspective of saying, God, what are you doing, and how can we be a part of it. The other thing is a guiding principle is that we've been trying to get people to give themselves permission not to do everything. Before ministry, I was in the restaurant business. And I have noticed over the years, you go to some restaurants, and they have a 20 page menu. And it's got so many choices, and the food is good. But you know, they don't have one thing that they focus on. And then there are other restaurants that have a very small menu, they have found what they're good at. And they focus on that and the food is excellent, the quality is great. We need to give ourselves permission in our congregations to to be comfortable with who we are, and what we have the ability, the capacity and the passion to do. So again, one of the things about The Path Forward and The Table portion of that is by combining resources, we're also communicating across congregations. So if someone is in a congregation in one in place, and wants to be a part of the missional ministry that another congregation is doing, they can be a part of that because it's one larger community. At the same time, we're very flexible here. So we have a couple of our congregations who are doing their own thing. They have a number of people and adequate number of people in priesthood. And they are able to do that the community that they serve, it's very important that they be focused on that. And so they're doing their own thing. So we have a variety, we have individuals that are not connected to congregations. We have congregations that are gathering and joining in to this online hybrid community. And then we have congregations who are still operating individually. It's not, "okay, this is now how we do church." We're constantly evaluating that. But our communication across congregations has increased tremendously. And so people can find their place in mission and still be a part of their home congregation. We are CMC Sunday. We are a hybrid worship. But we're doing that so that our congregations can find and live into their identity in mission.

Robin Linkhart 36:11

I love the way you've really helped us all see, and feel these different dimensions in your mission center of ways of being, which speaks to the authentic culture and context of each congregation. And at the same time speaks to unity and diversity in those ways of being, with a focused eye on living out mission in our daily lives. And at the same time, providing that sacred space, to build community to celebrate and worship together and learn together. Like as you think about the future, what are your hopes for Community of Christ as we live into the future?

Blake Smith 36:57

That's a huge question. But I think one of the things that I'm learning through this is, I hope that we can continue to be a church that lives with integrity, that lives in that space of vulnerability. I think for my ministry, and I have made lots of mistakes in ministry and in life, but I try at least to own up to that. I think, for me, as I'm looking at and engaging with persons outside the church, that's refreshing for folks, it's not about me, but it's about realizing that people can be who they are. And when we say "All are welcome," "all are called," "the worth of all persons," it's important that we live out that idea of welcoming people where they are. We are growing in that as a church. I love the direction that we're headed, what we say we believe. My hope for the church would be that more of us would catch the vision that the church is casting and that God is leading us into. I have said many times it is both a blessing and a curse to be in a church that has such a wide variety of beliefs. You can stand so many places on the spectrum and still be part of the community. That is an incredible blessing. The diversity of that is wonderful. In some ways we've moved forward. I think that there are folks outside the community watching, saying, "Do you really believe and live what you say you believe?" And I think we do we have an incredible message. I just hope that the Church will move forward with that continue on this path moving toward the Peaceful One. But I believe God is leading us and I believe there are a lot of people out there who are hungering for what is at the heart of who we are.

Robin Linkhart 38:49

Thank you, Blake, as you're sharing that. I'm reminded of you talking about your experience in prayer and meditation with God as you mowed the grass and this profound sense of God's saying I'm not done.

Blake Smith 39:05

I'm not done.

Robin Linkhart 39:07

Yeah. As we draw this conversation to a close, Blake, is there anything else that you would like to share with our listeners today?

Blake Smith 39:16

I don't think so. I think I've probably rambled on enough.

Robin Linkhart 39:19

Well, it's been truly life giving to listen to your stories and get glimpses into Chicago Mission Center and the journey that you all together as a community are taking to build a sacred community. one life at a time, one cup at a time, one meal at a time, one conversation at a time. Thank you so much for being with us today. Blake. We really appreciated the opportunity to get to know you better and to hear the stories of what's going on in your mission center. And a very special thanks to all of our listeners. If you would like to hear more stories about mission, check out our What's Brewing series. If you have questions for our guests, Blake Smith, you can contact him at B as in Blake Smith at C of christ.org. If you want to hear more from Blake, check out the new Coffee to Go series posted weekly under Common Grounds. This is your host, Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care. Bye bye.