

# Chai Can't Even|Tyler Horringa

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Graceland, community, ministry, congregation, Christ, mission, camp, young adults, youth, kids

## SPEAKERS

Tyler Horringa, Brittany Mangelson

### Brittany Mangelson 00:27

Hello, everyone. This is Brittany Mangelson, and welcome to another episode of *Project Zion Podcast*. And we today are going to be doing another episode in our “Chai Can't Even” series, which is where we talk to millennials, young adults in Community of Christ, and just talk about growing up in the church, and how Community of Christ formed and shaped them, and then what they're doing today. So today, we have on Tyler Horringa and we are going to chat about his experience in Community of Christ. So, Tyler, welcome.

### Tyler Horringa 00:59

First off, thank you for having me. It's a joy being here and have the opportunity to share a little bit of my story. So, thank you. Again, my name is Tyler Horrigan. I am 31 years old, I kind of had to think about that for a minute, and I have been a lifelong member of Community of Christ. I've been a youth minister for Central USA Mission Center for almost a decade now, and it has been an amazing ride, and before that, I was a student at Graceland for four years in my undergrad journey, and before, that I grew up in my older years in Michigan, and my younger years, mostly in Branson, Missouri. But I'll dive a little deeper into those experiences as we journey together here.

### Brittany Mangelson 01:44

Awesome. Thank you. I knew that you were a youth minister, which is one reason why I wanted to talk to you about growing up in Community of Christ, to see how your story impacts your current day ministry. So, we'll probably get into that in a little bit, but let's start with your story. You grew up Community of Christ, so I'm wondering what that looked like for you. Did you attend camps as a kid? Were you involved? How were you treated? Just talk about your growing up in Community of Christ as like a younger kid.

### Tyler Horringa 02:15

My earliest memories of the church were when I was really a little. While I was born in Michigan, my parents moved from there when I was about 18 months to Branson, Missouri. And that's kind of the core of my first memories with the church. If you've been to the Branson congregation, it's on this hill, and we lived right down from that church too. So, some of my first memories were things like pushing my grandma in her wheelchair to church, like we would walk to church on those really nice days. I have some really wonderful memories of sitting in Sunday school, or playing underneath the pews, little

games or drawing with some of my youth friends, or having movie nights at the church, like we'll have sleepovers. And this is even when I was 6, 7, 8 years old, kind of the first core memory in the late 90s. And they were amazing. Church was a fun place to be as a kid. I loved it. I loved seeing my church friends. Sean was one of them, and I would frequently go to his house after church or on weekends and we played games. We'd hang out. He would have a train set that we would play with. And that theme of relationships in and outside of church will continue to come up in my life story, but that was some of the core moments in my life at that young age. And then when I was eight, I got baptized on, it was December 3, 2000. And I really remember that because it was my mom's birthday, and she said, "Tyler, that was one of my best birthday presents I've ever had, was that you were baptized on my birthday," and that Walt Morrison was the one who baptized me, who I actually got to see, last weekend actually, and I was good friends with his daughter, and some of those memories where we would, families would come over to our house and we'd do different dinners and like a church service at our houses and kind of do like the house church thing. So, I felt like at that age, our faith community was very strong. My context was very limited to my congregation at that point. But yeah, that's some of my core first memories. And one of them specifically I remember was, during our name change, I remember when they were changing the signs from RLDS to Community of Christ, I looked up in the parking lot at my mom, I'm like, "Hey, what's going on there?" She's like, "We're having a name change, and we're changing it to Community of Christ. And they're putting it up, the new language on there." And I remember that too. And then a lot of happy memories, joyous memories, and some great friends during the beginning of my church journey there.

#### **Brittany Mangelson** 04:45

So that brings up something that I haven't necessarily asked a lot of people in these interviews, but because you brought up the name change, I'm wondering what your perception of that was. Being a kid at the time, were you aware of the larger umbrella of the Restoration or the church that everyone confused you with? What were those experiences like?

#### **Tyler Horinga** 05:07

Yeah, I have memories in Sunday School of watching the *Book of Mormon* cartoon videos, or talking about *Book of Mormon* stuff, but we'd also have traditional scripture. I don't have a lot of memories of using like *Doctrine and Covenants* and things, because even as a kid at that age, you're learning the Bible stories. That's kind of your core of how you're learning about Jesus. As a young child, I didn't really have a concept of the Restoration as a whole. My world was my little congregation in Branson, Missouri. We didn't really go to mission center conferences, or go to some of the larger things. For a long time, I wasn't aware that there was even a World Church. I was very stuck in my bubble, which is a little ironic now, but that's how I was. So even when the name changed, I didn't have any aha moments, like, oh, we're Community of Christ now. That's great. They just didn't quite click. It was a very limited scope for me as a young kid.

#### **Brittany Mangelson** 06:05

That makes sense. That makes sense that your focus would be more congregational and that you would be rooted in the Bible, learning the foundational stories of Jesus. So yeah, absolutely makes sense. How was it when you went into high school and continued to grow up? Were you involved with the camping programs? And I mean, did you go to Spec?

**Tyler Horringa** 06:25

Yeah, I'm gonna pivot a little bit, because this is an important context piece to my story. So, there was a time period where we moved across town to a neighboring town in Branson, and it was just far enough where we didn't really go to church a lot anymore, and this was not too long after my baptism. In the midst of that, there is a lot of deep pain and hurt in my immediate family. My dad was not the kindest to my mom. I mean, it was abuse, essentially. There was a lot of things going on. And my mom made the decision to take me out of that toxic environment. So, we moved from Branson back to Michigan as my parents separated. And that led to a period from, I think, 2002 until about 2005, 2004, 2005, a two, three-year period, where church wasn't present in my life at all, actually, because we were moving around a lot. My mom was struggling to make ends meet, of course, the drama of divorce and all of that. There was kind of just a lot of stuff happening. Where you'd think the church would be a good place to be in those difficult times, we just didn't have the opportunity. We didn't take those steps to go get back into it. And it wasn't until my grandma passed away that, if my memory serves me right, my grandma passed away and we got invited back to the Muskegon Congregation, to where my mom grew up. She's a convert, actually. I'm only second gen. Community of Christ. And this is where I like to plug in how important invitation is, because her friend invited her to youth group, I think it was in middle school, and youth group being the RLDS church and still actively involved she is and of course I am today. So, invitation is important friends. Invitation is important. But we got invited back after the passing of my grandma. Her memorial service was there and that was kind of the stepping stones back into my faith community. And I have many stories to tell, but I slowly got back into it. At first, I'll admit it, hit middle school and church was kind of boring. I didn't necessarily want to go. I thought hymns were boring and lame and, and sermons. Listen to this old person talk to me, why? But then at the same time, there were a lot of youth going to the congregations. I became friends with people like Arlonso and Candice, Endrico, Genacia, and Brett, and Ashley, these people who became core members of my youth group experience, and I built relationships with them. And it was amazing. At that point, it was early high school, and really in the middle of my freshman year, I found out, wait. There are other churches outside of just the Branson and Muskegon, where there's a whole mission center, there's dozens of churches, and the kids go to these dozens of churches? We do regional activities. This is amazing. So, I found out about programs that Grand Rapids, Michigan was doing and I'd meet more kids there. Then I got invested in a program called Youth Adventures for Christ, which is where we go to different congregations and put on the worship service on a Sunday, but it's like a retreat setting where we plan the service as youth but we do fun things. We go to host families and stay that night, a couple nights, and it was a really cool experience. And that was really, a really formational part of my youth group growing up, right? I met some even more amazing friends from all over the mission center. And then I find out about camp. Whoa, what is this camp thing? We have youth camps? So, my first year after my freshman year, we go to Blue Water. And then we established some deeper connections at Camp Manitou, and it was a little closer to us being on that side of the state. And I fall in love with camp. I fall in love with that community. And it ends up where these people in this Spirit and this Jesus, Jesus of love and peace is a place I find wholeness, that I didn't find at school. I struggled a lot in school. I had a lot of learning disabilities and had a lot of self-worth problems, and didn't ever think I was smart enough to do a lot of things. And it was my youth leaders who gave me the chance to understand I was worthy and smart enough to do something with my life and my passions, and that's being with people, serving with people. And it was at Spec, when I learned about Spec, and I have this

memory of me essentially like pouting like a little five year-old, "I'm not smart enough to go to college," and here's Jacob Blakesley and Mark Johnson, like, "You need to apply for this scholarship? None of this nonsense. Apply." And I apply, and I go through the motions of the scholarship, and I get to the last round, and I had this really meaningful memory of a few of my youth leaders taking me to get really nice dress clothes for the interview because I didn't have any dress clothes. They took me to get dress clothes. I mean that was a really meaningful moment that it took time out of their busy schedules to get me some clothes so I would look nice for the interviews. And it's moments like those, moments of community at that time that really showed me the importance of community, the importance of what it means to have a place at the table, and to be loved when I wasn't feeling that in a lot of other places. I know this was my priority with camps, youth group activities, and it led to a lot of leadership opportunities like leading youth-led youth group activities, and being a CIT at camp, and church was the place I wanted to be. It's the reason I didn't get a job in high school was because there are so many summer activities, that I wanted to go to all of them. I had so many youth group activities throughout the month, I wanted to be at all of them. It was my home. It was my safe space, my sacred place to be. My high school years were very formational and important for me in understanding the importance of community and faith, what it means to be a valued individual in a collective beautiful whole.

**Brittany Mangelson 12:39**

Oh, I love that story. How beautiful to be loved into community and to have that support that pushes you and lets you know that you are welcomed and worthy and smart, and all of the things, the validations that you need as a kid, especially as a teenager, and to find that in a youth group at church and with your ministers, and at camp, that's, that's really awesome. I'm wondering, what did your path to ordination look like? Or your path to then being a minister, right, so, from benefiting from ministry, what was that transition like to becoming a youth minister, but all that wrapped in to just continuing your story?

**Tyler Horrynga 13:24**

Yeah, I didn't win that major scholarship during Spec, but I still got accepted into Graceland and that was huge for me. That was a huge self-esteem boost that I needed, because there were times I remember, I say this now, something you want to brag about in high school, but part of that not feeling worthy were things like when I got my ACT score back of 17, that's really low, and I thought I wasn't smart enough to do anything. That was part of that reason was the world telling me I'm not smart enough. I took a job quiz, and they said in school, you can be a fisher and you can fish. I know how to fish, but that's like, what the test said I could be through my results and my education that I was comprehending and getting at the time and, and when those people in my life said, "You're smart enough. You can do something. You're a good human. You can go off and do great things." I applied for grants, and I got in, and it was at Graceland where I think my ministry really blossomed because I was given opportunities to blossom. And I took time for my faith and my spirituality to blossom. Where a lot of people have distractions during that time of their life, I made it a priority to go to church on Sunday, to go to Afterglow Sunday night, to do Chaplain stuff. I mean, I jumped in before I even left Spec graduating senior year. They recruited me to be on House Council, so I was jumping in to Graceland in leadership. So, it gave me a chance to lead and try to see if I can be a good leader, and I loved it. I loved getting involved in worships. I loved serving my house at Graceland. I loved being social, which was something that I was at church stuff, but I wasn't at school. I was introverted at

school, in high school, but I was an extrovert at camps and at church stuff. And that bridged from church high school into all of my Graceland experience. It wasn't like that at first. I was pretty reclusive my first couple of months, but as I blossomed, as I got involved in more things, as again, I felt a sense of community there and belonging there, I thrived. And I was chaplain my sophomore year. I also planned the Sunday morning worship services. I was a Sunday morning Worship Coordinator my sophomore year. Junior year, I was the Wholeness Coordinator, so I did a lot of some spiritual direction things. I lead retreats. I planned my first retreat. It came up on my Facebook feed. I led a Star Wars themed spirituality retreat, and I thought it was a train wreck because the church we stayed at, the plumbing blew up and then went bad, and we had to end the retreat early, but it became this pinnacle, hilarious experience where we did videos, and that was kind of the butt of the joke was the plumbing issue. As I went on Facebook to see some of the memories of my feedback what people were saying is doing that wholeness retreat was the first time I really saw myself as enjoying planning ministry activities, and providing a space for people to connect, a space for people to be in community, in a space where I could help other people feel included and welcomed. Then I had that opportunity my senior year, being on Graceland student government and Chaplain President. That was my first role of being like a mentor to others, where I worked with a group of chaplains to help them provide ministry for their houses while also learning from them and them teaching me in return. And it was a really great, really great experience for me to get to know some incredible ministers. I didn't know a lot of them before, but it was a really cool chance for me to work with a team and help lead a team, and then see again I have the ability to be a leader that I didn't think I had before, because those old insecurities were still poking at me, of you're not good enough, you're not smart enough, you're not equipped enough. Those moments of success and those moments of affirmation that pushed me further into ministry. I think it was going into my junior year, I can't remember the exact timeline because I got ordained as a priest my senior year, I remember sitting down and feeling the sense of nervousness and joy when I got the call. And like, I, maybe I can do it. I'll try. Because there are other students my age, who also got calls around the same time, and we talked with each other and our concerns, the things that we were excited about and looking forward to and there were several of us that got called during that time at Graceland and it was an exciting time for a lot of us. It was cool to kind of work off of each other and share our concerns and our joys about that and, and it ended up being, I was ordained, it was during homecoming, and I had people from Michigan come down and be there just for the experience. Gabriel and Rachel, shout out to them. I didn't mention them before, but they were in their early 20s when I was in late middle school, getting back into church and they kind of took our congregational youth group under our wing, and took us to all of these events and provided their leadership, and their ministry in the midst of their young adult life crisis that they were having being young adults and trying to figure out their own spirituality and their own roles in the church, and they came from Michigan to support me. And Mark Johnson, my youth minister, and Matt Frizzell ordained me, and my family came, Kinsey's family came. And it was a really beautiful moment. Most of my faith moments in my life converge into this one moment. And Kinzie sat next to me and held my hand as I was getting ordained. And it was just a really cool, really meaningful moment in my life where that convergence of these different moments in my life just came together, when I was ordained at Graceland.

### **Brittany Mangelson 19:34**

Again, I love it. And you mentioned Kinsey, and I'm wondering, one of my questions that I like to ask people, and it's probably because of my very Mormon background where you're only supposed to



marry someone within the church, but what was that messaging like for you? Did you have this vision for yourself of marrying a church member and raising your family in Community of Christ, and was that part of your plan?

**Tyler Horringa 20:03**

Yeah, I don't think it was part of my plan. Because my mom was a first generation, I was second generation, we didn't really have that deep historical rooted, a lot of these things. Like, I know legacy families or people who have been in the church for generations, there are traditions and expectations and things which I'm not saying are part of who we are now or whatever, but we joke around, as Graceland students, you come here to find somebody and get married and live a happy life. Like that was kind of the, a joke going around. And then it happened to a lot of us, actually, which we laugh about, now. It's fun. But I met Kinsey, literally the first couple of weeks of school, in choir. I liked Kinzie a lot. She was funny. I loved her singing voice. I love her singing voice. We were at choir together. That's how we met. I kind of politely pushed my way into singing practices with her and a few others, because I wanted to get to know her more, and the next few weeks kind of blossomed into a good friendship. And then her sister was her roommate, Autumn. And Graceland has this tradition called "screw your roommate date" where the roommate sets the other roommate up with somebody, a mystery person, and I was second on the list. I will say my good friend Ryan was first on Kinsey's list, but luckily, thank you, Ryan Pitt, for saying you were busy that night. Ryan couldn't do it, and Autumn, she's a nice sister a nice sibling and wanted to put Kinzie up with somebody who she would appreciate. So, she asked Kinsey, "Who are some people you might want to go with?" And I was number two, and Ryan said, "I can't." So, Ryan will claim that he's one of the reasons we were together, which is hilarious. And thank you, Ryan. That night, it was awesome. We watched a goofy movie that Graceland hosted, that we didn't really care for, but then we went on a late night walk and then we stargazed. I didn't know she loves stargazing. I didn't really stargaze a lot but we sat at soccer fields after our walk and just stargazed and talk for hours. And then our relationship just blossomed. And it had highs and it had lows, but what relationship doesn't. Our junior year, the engagement story was I essentially took her on our first date was our last date as boyfriend girlfriend and into our engagement where we watched a movie in the movie theater, went on the same walk. It started raining, so instead of stargazing, we danced in the field as it was pouring rain. And she knows this, I don't like getting wet, and I don't like getting dirty, and both of those things were happening because the soccer fields were muddy as heck. But at 11:11, I got on one knee and asked her to marry me, and the rest is history. So, I didn't plan on it, but it's just kind of how our relationship blossomed. And we grew together in times of celebration, in times of hurt, in times of learning, in times of joy. So that's that. It wasn't any plan, it just kind of happened. I know Kinsey had a different perspective, and I'm sure she may have the chance to share that sometime. That's that.

**Brittany Mangelson 23:12**

Well, I know the listeners can't see my face right now, but I had like a stupid perma-grin on my face the whole time you were telling that story, because it's so cheesy, and like knowing some of the people involved, cheesy, but like in a good way. A rom-com Iowa way.

**Tyler Horringa 23:31**

Yep. Yep.

**Brittany Mangelson 23:32**

I love it. I love it. And I mean, I do think that it's, not that I'm like a relationship expert, but having shared values and having a shared sense of community and a shared vision and shared goals, like all of those things are really important, obviously. And so, when you are part of a church that's very values oriented and mission oriented, a lot of those things overlap within your religious community. So, I can totally understand why it would just naturally happen, right?

**Tyler Horrynga 24:03**

Yeah, I will say for me, I think there was probably a part of me deep inside that said, I really want to be with somebody in the church and it ended up Kinsey was that human. And I could probably say that she would feel the same way, as well, because the church is a very important piece of who we both are, how we both grew up. We have very different stories, but the church is still a very important piece to who we are and who we are today as young adults. So, I won't speak for her fully but I think I can say that it was an important thing for her at that point too, probably different reasons and it ended up well, so.

**Brittany Mangelson 24:43**

And you've got two adorable kiddos. So, it did end up well.

**Tyler Horrynga 24:49**

Thank you. Yes.

**Brittany Mangelson 24:52**

Ah. Okay, well, let's just continue telling your story. So, you've now been ordained, you're with your spouse, what has your church involvement continued to look like? And then we'll move into just some few like general questions about church involvement and that kind of thing. But yeah, keep telling us your story.

**Tyler Horrynga 25:13**

As I was moving out of my Graceland experience and education, I was trying to figure out what I'm gonna do. Kinsey, going out of it, she went to school for teaching and focusing on special education, and she, she was working towards that. But I was getting a bachelor's in religion and philosophy and then in human services, which is essentially like social work, and I didn't know what I was going to do with that. Luckily, I had some great mentors that were helping me kind of wiggle out what I'm going to do. Bob Mesle was one of those individuals, Tony and Charmaine were hugely impactful on our Graceland experience, and ended up marrying us a few months after graduation. And another important person to me was Nancy Wallace. And if you were at Graceland at that time I was, you might know who Nancy Wallace is. Very formational, and an important member of the Graceland community for decades. She was one of those people, along with people like Tony and Charmaine, who continued that trend of being mentors in my life, to believe in me and push me to be my best self. She said, "Tyler, whatever you do, it's gonna be awesome." And she's like, "Here are some great schools that you can go to for getting your master's in social work." So, we did that. I explored a couple of schools. Kinsey and I actually traveled to Chicago for a Loyola University, for some social work stuff. And then an

opening came up to be a campus ministries intern. Kinsey and I talked because we were engaged at the time. And we were like, what do we think? And, and I applied for that, and I had that opportunity to do that. That's because people like my family, Kinsey's family, and my family and Nancy and Tony and Charmaine, people encouraged me to try this out. And I did. And I loved it. And again, that gave me an opportunity to provide moments of mentorship for young adults in their ministries, whether it was Sunday morning, or if it was the chaplain program, or Afterglow or planning retreats. It was there I found out I really loved it. I think being a chaplain president kind of started. But working with people, I know that's what I wanted to do, is working with people, being with people. Sitting at a desk is not something I want to do all day. But I want to be with community, and help others grow in their ministry, and provide spaces for people to feel welcomed and loved, and of worth, and I had that chance to do that, in that position. But then going into the end of that first year, an opportunity came up to be a youth minister for Central Mission. I was approached by a few people and I talked to Kinsey about it, thought real hard, and we took a breath. And we said, "Let's think this through." Before I actually said that, I called my old youth minister, Mark Johnson. I'm like, "Mark, here's this opportunity. We're not sure what to do." And he's like, "Tyler, go for the gusto." So, I took that breath and we moved to Independence, Kansas City that summer, and jumped in in 2014 to a wild, amazing summer. But that kind of led into where I am today in my ministry, almost a decade later, being a youth minister, which when you talk to a lot of youth ministers in other denominations, 10 years is a long time to be a youth minister in other denominations, specifically. But I love it. I absolutely love it. I love my kids. I love my Central Mission community. I love the relationships I've built in other areas of the church. It has expanded my perspective so much on who we are. I didn't know what the World Church was until almost my senior year of high school. My bubble was so small from little congregation to, oh, there's a Mission Center, and then there's this Spec thing, and then wait. There's a World Conference where people gather from all over? And then moving here, the house the Kinsey and I rented when we first got here, it was right by Stone Church. Our living room window, we could see the Temple every day, and it was awesome. It was beautiful. Another joy I've had is I've had the opportunity to sustain a lot of my Graceland community, because a lot of them are here now. At one of my best friends, Ren, moved from Wisconsin here and we still see each other today and hang out. And Ben and Daniel Harmon and Emily Rose are here now, and so many great, excellent connections are here now, and the community in our church is so rich. It is so beautiful, and it's inspiring, and it just makes me feel so good. Because as I reflect on my own journey and my own life experiences, where have I seen Jesus the most? It is the people that have been Jesus in my life. It is Walt who baptized me, or Derico in Jamaica, who were in my youth group, or Gabrielle and Rachel or Mark, or Jacob, or my mom taking me out of a toxic situation, or my friends from Graceland, or Kinsey, who is with me in the times of joy, times of pain. It's with Greg, my mission center president now. It's with Laura and Eli and Carol and the people who I get to see every day. And it's with people who are across the world who I email about preparing for World Conference. That's Jesus. That's how I see Jesus. That's how I know Jesus is alive. That's how I know the mission of Christ continues. It's the commissioning story lived out from the Gospel of John, "As God has sent me, now I send you." I get to see it every day in the camp directors I work with, in the volunteers who help out at my youth program, Elevate, at the youth. I have the opportunity to serve, but also feed me and feed my soul. I see it and it is oh, so beautiful to know how alive Jesus is even today. It gives me goosebumps.

**Brittany Mangelson** 31:31



Well, I must say, I am tempted just to immediately, following this, record a “What's Brewing” with you to actually dive in deeper about what's going on in your youth programs in Central Mission. So, not that I'm making any promises, but I might be reaching out to you just to go deeper into what's happening and how you're seeing Jesus lived out through the youth and through the adult ministers and in the things that you're doing, because I think it's so important that our message is lived out in the world, because I absolutely think that it is relevant today, just as it was relevant in Jesus's days. And so, let's talk about that a little bit, so the benefits of religious communities and the types of things that you were empowered to be and become, and then how you're empowering the youth in your mission center, and then keep this momentum going.

**Tyler Horringa 32:29**

When I was a little younger in my young adult ministry life, I would always say this as I first started being a youth minister in Central Mission: the people that believed in me, and pushed me, gave a lot, a lot of time and energy into me and others in our youth group, in our youth program, to be our best selves, to know we're welcome and loved. And I have this internal question always in my mind, saying, “How can I not, after everything that was placed for me, and with me, and before me, how can I not give back?” And that's the question that I'm always asking myself in everything I do, even on the times when I'm burnt out, or the times when I'm feeling energized, whatever that looks like. I need to remember and remind myself, how can I not give back to the people who believed in me, to my young people who are now I have the opportunity to be with? And I'm very impressed and very hopeful of our young people of today. Their wisdom, their experiences, their hope, is something that I think the Church needs to be aware of, needs to utilize, but on their terms, and be open to it, be open to what our young people have to offer, what they have to say. And I'm speaking for young people in their 30s to young people who are eight years old. And I'm using “young” loosely because I think there're young adults who are in that position as well, who they still have a lot to say. They're doing a lot. They're saying a lot. And they need to be heard. But we also have 14 year-olds who message me and say, “I have something exciting that just happened last week and I want to tell my peers about how my experience with prayer last week, when I was struggling, changed my day, and other people need to know. I want to tell people.” These are things that bring hope to me, bring joy to me. And these are stories people need to know.” Something that I think our church gets wrapped up in, the term, “the good old days.” We get wrapped up in the concept of “the good old days,” the days when auditoriums were full, or congregations were packed with 30 kids in their youth group. And I think we need to know there's a lot of context behind why church isn't what it was 20, 30, 40 years ago, and that's a conversation for another day. But I want to say to those people who reminisce on the good old days, and I will be the first to say, I have been that person to reminisce on the good old days, because youth group 20 years ago, when I was in it is not the same thing as it is today, and that's okay. We might not have the numbers anymore, but we can't get wrapped up in things like numbers. What we need to get wrapped up in now is quality, is meaning in safe spaces, and welcoming spaces, in places for people to grow in their discipleship in Christ, in themselves and in community. To me, that's important. And that's what I try and do in my ministry, provide those spaces. It hasn't changed a lot since I was in college. That's my goal in everything I do. It's part of my camping vision document is provide safe spaces for kids to connect with creation, with God, with themselves in various engaging ways, whatever we develop it to be.

**Brittany Mangelson 36:11**

And I think that that momentum, that forward movement, is so important, because we need to listen to the young folks, right? And we need to figure out what does the gospel look like in their context? Because the world has changed since you and I were in middle school and high school. And the world has certainly changed since our parents were in middle school and high school. Getting back in touch with the core tenants of Jesus's message and contextualizing that into today's world, I think, is so important. And that's what's going to carry us forward. So, this idea of thinking about how things were or what we used to do, or the numbers we used to have, spending time on that doesn't necessarily propel us forward, right? Not to say, look, it's, I'm a traditional church gal myself, and I can get nostalgic for times in the past as well, but the energy that is propelling us forward is absolutely different. And as difficult as that is, I think it's a good thing. So, what would you say is one of the hardest things about being a millennial in Community of Christ, kind of this in between stage where we're not youth, but there's also competent ministers that are older than us? We're kind of in this, trying to figure it out stage. What would you say is the most difficult part of that?

**Tyler Horrynga 37:34**

For me, a difficult thing, and I would say this was a little bit more difficult probably five or six years ago than it is today, but I still find it once in a while. It took a long time as a young minister, I didn't feel very heard. What I mean by that is, there are times I didn't feel respected. I guess I'll frame it like, "You're young, you have a lot to learn, so I don't know what wisdom you can provide." And that goes for all parts of my life as a young adult, right, not just in ministry. But, and I think that's gotten better for me now, but that was definitely a huge challenge for me as a young millennial in the church. Something else that I found difficult, I think Kinsey would also feel similar, because this would happen to us a lot as we moved here, moving to a new place, trying to find out where we belong, what congregation we feel led to be at, we went to a lot of places where they just wanted to be dumped on us all of these things. And as a young person, some people might think because you're young, you have the capacity to do a lot. You have the capacity to, to save us. You have the capacity to bring in more people, so being overwhelmed. And I've seen this from other young adults too of feeling overwhelmed, of too much pressure to get us out of this rut. You're the young ones. It's your job to take us out of this and help us blossom. I don't have any particular story, and I'm not thinking of any particular congregation or experience, but those have just been feelings I've had before, more as a member than even as a minister. You're young, you can do all of these things. You can save this. You can accomplish this. But it felt like it was just overwhelming. And I think that subsided a bit, but I think those have been a couple challenging things that I've wrestled with as a millennial in the Church.

**Brittany Mangelson 39:41**

That is a similar struggle that I've heard from others for sure. And, I think it speaks to that tension of passing the baton while also being mentors to those who we hope to pass the baton on to. There's a real generational tension there. And I don't know if it's necessarily bad, but it's just reality, right? So, I guess with that, my next question is about that passing the baton off to the next generation. How have you specifically tried to empower your youth in a way that it very much sounds like you were empowered? So, what are the things that you have found yourself doing with the youth that you're working in to help them step into those eventual leadership roles and really find identity and empowerment in Community of Christ?

**Tyler Horringa 40:29**

Great question. Going into my role as youth minister, my first couple years were really establishing relationships, getting to know the young people, getting to know families and parents, and kind of reestablishing myself in a new space that Kinsey and I weren't really familiar with. And as that's progressed, and as that's, I'll say, blossomed, I've had the joy of being here almost a decade, and with that, I've had the chance to see kids from middle school, to high school, to graduation, and to college, and then after they graduate. And I still have contacts with a lot of these kids, because they're going on the trips that we do, or they're CITs, or they go to Spec and camp, or IYF, or whatever it might be. And I work to be intentional. And it's really hard, I'll say. In Central Mission, one of the things I wish I could do better, I don't know if it's because there's just a lot of kids or whatnot, but I wish I could be better about my intentionality of being more personal, individually one on one. It's hard when we have a camp size of 80 high schoolers. It's a little harder to do that. But there are a lot of kids, especially those who become CITs, or they're counselors, who I stay in contact with, even after graduation. And I work with directors and other leaders to say, "Hey, here's some young people who I think would be awesome counselors coming back from their college experience." Or, "Here's somebody who was a leader throughout their high school experiences. Let me see if they want to be a camp director." And I call them. And even right now, there's two youth in particular, who grew up in their older years, as I started, late middle school and high school when I got here. And last year, Riley and Cecily, who are establishing themselves as young adults now, out of college, or getting a job, they rocked Junior camp last year in their early, mid 20s. And they did great. They handled difficult situations well and organized camp meetings and recruited CITs and recruited staff and, and I was inspired by their work. And there are other examples of that. The majority of my helpers on our bimonthly program, Elevate, they're all young adults who a lot of them came from my youth program, and I made intentional invitations, "Hey, the kids loved you at camp. Please come. Be a leader. Just hang out with us." And there were a bunch of them yesterday, laughing with the kids and participating in the activities, and sitting with small groups. And that's what I'm trying to form are building relationships and having young adults, younger than me in their early 20s or mid 20s, late 20s, whatever, get in these leadership roles, so when I'm 35, 40, there's going to be amazing leaders to pass the torch to, and I'm very hopeful. People who think the Church of old is gone, it is blossoming into something sacred, something meaningful. The Church is very much alive. Does it look different? Yes. Will it continue to evolve? Does it need to look different? Yes. But there are paths before us of many young people that we have to tap into, again, on their terms, and of their willingness and of their gifts and ministries, we have to tap into to progress into our continuing sacred community that we're called to be.

**Brittany Mangelson 44:18**

Tyler, I absolutely love everything you've said. I have one quick question. You've said the acronym CIT a couple of times. What is that?

**Tyler Horringa 44:29**

Growing up at Graceland specifically and getting involved in the Church, something I learned quickly was that the Church and Graceland love their acronyms. They love acronyms. So, when I said, maybe I mentioned that in our time together, and it's funny that came up. We love acronyms in Community of Christ. Woo who! CIT means Counselors in Training.

**Brittany Mangelson 44:50**

Ah, that makes sense. That's makes sense.

**Tyler Horringa 44:53**

Yes, so they had to be 15, they have to be youth worker assistants, go through the training and all that. We do a CIT training as well, specifically to our camping program. And then they work with registered youth workers and other counselors to be mentors. And if we have the chance to meet again about specific experiences in my ministry, especially with youth and young adults and ministry formation, I have several stories of the impact CITs have, even when I was a CIT in Michigan, and then even now.

**Brittany Mangelson 45:24**

Absolutely. Now I want to have this conversation even more, because here in Utah, and in my larger mission center, we don't have any youth ministers. We don't really have a robust youth programming. We are kind of making it up as we go, and basically starting from scratch. And the nucleus of that is the Salt Lake Congregation. And so, we're just kind of, it feels like throwing spaghetti against the wall trying to just provide community for these kids. Because up until this year, there really hasn't been a whole lot. And we have little kids, we have teens, we have kids that are graduated, who are now in their own university experience. At the very least, I'm going to ask you personally for your insight about this. But I do want to get you back on the podcast because I think it's important. And I think that that intentional mentoring, especially if you can pair it to our camping programs, is the best way to get younger people to feel like they are part of a community, that this isn't just their grandparents' church that has a hymn sandwich service on a Sunday morning. Which again, to be clear, love the hymn sandwich, I really do, but that it can be more than that, and that we can live Community of Christ and be Community of Christ in our own context in a way that makes sense to us. And the only way that we figure out what that is, is through intentional invitation and mentoring. So, you are speaking my language. It feels like you're five steps ahead of me here on the ground in Utah. We're trying to figure it out as we go. So, I'll be in touch with maybe some best practices, and some helpful hints and inquiries about that.

**Tyler Horringa 47:11**

I think that's really important. So, there's no need to reinvent the wheel, and there is all the need to collaborate and work together. And I think it's especially crucial now for our national and international Church to work together. I know we have mission centers, and I know we have jurisdictions, but at the same time, we're also a world church, and we can learn from one another. Something I'm really excited about is the Central Missouri Mission Center. They're joining us for the second year in a row in our camping program but we're building bridges with other mission centers. And there's no reason why we can't collaborate more and work with each other more on creating moments of sacred community together. I think that's part of our job as disciples is to work together like Jesus did. I am all for that. And I want to support you in your programming as well. So, I'd love to continue conversation.

**Brittany Mangelson 48:08**

Absolutely. Well, thanks for letting me put you on the spot like that, but I do appreciate it. And I will say we are collaborating with Rocky Mountain Mission Center. So, I'm in Inland West, and we're going to be collaborating with Rocky Mountain this year for teen camp. So, we sold one of our campgrounds in Idaho that was historically where our teen camp was, and at this point, most of the teens in the mission

center, not all of them, but most of them are from Salt Lake. And so, Sean Langdon invited us to collaborate with them. We have a lot of teens, and they have staff, and we have new members of Community of Christ that have never really done a teen camp before. So, I'm super excited because this is going to be a good experience for the kids and also a hands-on training for some of our ministers who aren't necessarily youth ministers, but just by default, we have to be, because we've got the kids, right? I'm all for utilizing the tools and the human power that we have, and using the effort to benefit the most people. And I think that hopefully that's what we'll be experimenting with. I have found myself surprisingly passionate about youth ministries. It's not something that I thought I was going to necessarily be, but I definitely see the fruits of that labor and how important it is to connect people, because I want my congregation to last longer than just my generation, right? In order for that to happen, you have to be intentional about including the kids. What gives you hope as we move forward together as Community of Christ?

**Tyler Horinga** 49:50

What gives me hope? It's funny, this question comes up now. I had a longer meeting with my mission center president than I thought I was. I had a couple of things to talk to him about, but as we kept talking, our conversation continued to evolve. It kept evolving into these amazing things that we're visioning for, and not only for youth ministry, but for stuff in our mission center, stuff for World Conference. And what gives me hope are the things that are happening not only in my little personal bubble, my little context of my ministry and youth ministry, but in my mission center and in neighboring mission next door, and seeing what the ministry is we have online and the collaboration that you and I just touched on, with places around. What gives me hope is the community that, we are, I think, is thriving, and who we are, I think, is thriving. And in some ways, I think we are more connected now than we have been in a long time. And speaking as a 31 year-old who's super old and knows how it was way back then. No, but, from my perspective, at least, even when I was a kid, 15, 20 years ago, I feel so connected to more than just what I have going on. And that's my hope, is seeing we have things happening in our church that are beautiful, that are sacred. And I'm looking forward to seeing those things evolve, to seeing youth programs evolve in other places, to seeing young adult programs, to seeing new ministries, Latter-day Seekers, and there's just so many things that are happening, pockets of things. It excites me. To those who claim the Church is not what it once was, or is declining, or whatever their despair may be, the Church is very much alive and I am honored to be a part of its continuing evolution of life.

**Brittany Mangelson** 51:47

Amen. I'm right there with you. It's so important to focus on those pockets of activity, like you said, those pockets of really exciting things that are happening, and to see what we can learn from that, to see how we can replicate that in our own context, and to get inspired and to just recognize that the message of Community of Christ matters, and it really matters in today's world. We're a good little group. I'm a fan.

**Tyler Horinga** 52:15

Yep.

**Brittany Mangelson** 52:16



I always like to end these interviews with just a, is there anything else you'd like to leave us with? But I also want to say thank you. This has been exciting. You've gotten me to have a perma-grin on this morning, which are always like the best interviews, when I just leave feeling excited and rejuvenated and pumped about mission, which is how I'm feeling right now. So, thank you for this conversation. And then yeah, is there anything else that you would like to leave us with today?

**Tyler Horinga** 52:44

First, thank you for giving me an opportunity to share a bit about my story and my ministry. I want to encourage listeners to be open to the Spirit, to be open to the voices of the young around you, whatever age the young is, because I don't want to limit that, but also, the voices of all of those around you, because we all have wisdom to share in our faith community, and to have our hearts be open to that, because we don't know what beautiful journeys we could end on as we listen and dialogue and engage with one another in authentic sacred community.

**Brittany Mangelson** 53:21

Once again, amen. Thank you. Thank you for this, and for your enthusiasm, and for your hope. And I really hope to have you back on the podcast soon to talk more about what you're doing. Yeah.

**Tyler Horinga** 53:34

Brittany, thank you. I look forward to that time for sure.

**Brittany Mangelson** 53:37

Absolutely. Thanks, Tyler.