

# Aug 29 2023 | Chai Can't Even | Chad and Katie Hensley

Wed, Aug 23, 2023 12:50PM • 1:08:36

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

congregation, church, community, graceland, youth, young adult, faith, ministry

## SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Katie Hensley, Chad Hensley

### **Robin Linkhart** 00:27

Hello and welcome to Chai Can't Even, a Project Zion Podcast series where we chat with young adults about life, faith, struggles and joys and why they choose to stay active in Community of Christ. I'm your host, Robin Linkhart, and today I'm talking with Chad and Katie Hensley. Welcome, Katie and Chad!

### **Chad and Katie Hensley** 00:51

Hello.

### **Robin Linkhart** 00:53

It's great to have you with us today. So I think I'd love to have you tell us a little bit about you, so we can get to know you better.

### **Katie Hensley** 01:05

Great to be here, Robin. So I'm Katie Hensley, and Chad and I live here in Lamoni, Iowa. I'm a speech language pathologist in the school system. Chad and I just celebrated our 20 year wedding anniversary this week. And we have a two year old named Ambryn.

### **Chad Hensley** 01:26

Yep. What she said, and I farm and like to work on old trucks.

### **Robin Linkhart** 01:31

That's awesome. I got to meet Ambryn, well actually, I'd met her when she was really little at church in Lamoni, but she was at reunion for a few days with Katie, and I got to meet her. Wow. Has she ever grown?

### **Katie Hensley** 01:48

Yes, yes.

**Robin Linkhart** 01:49

And I love her name, Ambryn. How did you come up with that name?

**Chad Hensley** 01:53

I just came up with it. We liked some of the "A" names, and I just kind of took two different parts and put them together and made it a real thing.

**Robin Linkhart** 02:04

I love that. I love that. So what was it like for you growing up in Community of Christ? And I know you both have been around a while, so take the time you need to just let us know what that's like. And Katie, we'll start with you.

**Katie Hensley** 02:20

Yes. So I grew up in a small, small town called Barry, Illinois, and was born and raised in the Community of Christ, formerly RLDS. My family was a part of the congregation in Hannibal, Missouri, which was about 25 minutes away. And my father was always involved with leadership there in the priesthood, was a pastor for several years, and my mother was involved in playing music, singing, and also helping with Sunday School and Bible School activities. So we were at church every Sunday, and I was baptized at eight years old. This was a congregation again, that was small, and was mostly made up of relatives of mine.

I was involved with visiting reunions, at Camp Nauvoo, and also involved in youth camps, when I could attend and retreats, anytime there was an event at Camp Nauvoo, I would try to be there. And my mother found it important that we also went to camps, so I appreciated that. She was from Independence, and so we would visit there several times a year, and would visit World Conference when we were able to and that was always really neat for me to be a part of that large, large gathering, even though I was from a very small congregation. My grandpa was also a part of some of the volunteer groups that helped when the Temple was being built. And it was just neat to see that progression as I grew and to know that he was a part of that in a small way.

In high school, my last few years, we moved to the Independence, Missouri area. I went to Grain Valley High School, and while there was able to become more involved with attending a weekly, young adult high school event called Harbor Nights, so shout out to the Harbor Nights Wednesday night youth group, found out about Spectacular and International Youth Forum and made sure to go to those camps as well. So anytime I could be involved and be a part of those youth events. I did that. I was a part of the Buckner congregation and also the Osage Hills congregation in the Independence area, and participated at Camp Doniphan for camps as well. So a lot of different options as I grew and I thank my parents for seeing that it was important, as well, to make sure I could have those opportunities and, and participate in those events.

**Robin Linkhart** 05:07

Thanks, Katie. That was great. I love hearing about all the places that you lived. And there's some heavy hitter locations, historic sites in there for sure. Chad?

**Chad Hensley 05:19**

Yeah, it's kind of interesting, some of the similarities and differences between, you know, our stories. I grew up in small town, Iowa, she was in Illinois, and I grew up going to church and Harlan and Atlantic, and both were very small congregations. Harlan was very much more of a traditional service, traditional, you know, congregation, they had a lot of struggles when women were in the priesthood, dealing with issues of communion and things like that. It was kind of a unique circumstance, and we kind of got called as a family to do something different. And it was completely different. We started having a church plant in our house and eventually moved it to, like community building in Atlantic and had lots of people that didn't quite fit into regular traditional church services and stuff like that. We just sat around and maybe sang a couple songs, but talked mostly about Jesus and what we believed and really helped me develop my faith. And so, but yeah, shout out to both congregations for being fundamental in my development, Council Bluffs Central was also kind of like the big church. That's where my dad went growing up. And so I'd go to youth events there. And we had Solid Rock, was a big one in Lincoln, Nebraska. That was a big, every month, I had to make it to that, because I didn't have any, like, I grew up in a Lutheran town. And I was Community of Christ, RLDS then. And so I was kind of the odd duck. And so it was really nice to be able to go to a really fun, welcoming environment with people that shared a, you know, same faith background and that kind of thing.

I did camps in Guthrie Grove, and that's a really special place. So we got to, I took Ambryn up there for the first time this summer, we went for a couple days of Reunion, so that was neat. And so yeah, and then some of the bigger camps, like Katie talked about, Spec was a huge experience for me, I was able to be in the 99, Celebration 99 trip to Tahiti. And that was incredible. Steve Graffeo was kind of one of the guys that helped organize that. And I saw it in the Herald. And I was like, I have to do this. Like, I'm going to do that. I don't know what it's gonna take. It was a lot of money for me at the time. But we, we actually sold some puppies and a litter of puppies, and I got the money to go on that trip. And it was just like, fate was calling me to go, you know, and so that that congregation, you know, the church in Tahiti has been fundamental to my faith development, too since then. They taught me a lot about, you know, the church, and just being a welcoming community. It was such a beautiful culture, such a beautiful place. And we were able to go back into World Service Corps, and spend some more time with the church there. It was a huge, huge blessing. And so, yeah.

**Robin Linkhart 08:59**

Wow, that's amazing. I've been to French Polynesia twice on mission trips. So I have a sense of what you're talking about. But you actually got to do World Service Corps there?

**Chad Hensley 09:10**

Yeah, yeah, we were I think we were the first couple that did World Service Corps there. And I think there's been a few since. We got to stay with Medora and Steve, and got to spend the summer with them there in Tahiti and we got to go to different congregations and do a couple sermons and just enjoy the presence of the saints there. It was wonderful.

**Robin Linkhart 09:36**

That is awesome. So as you all recounted your early life with the church, as a child and youth, a teen, as you think back on that, how are you treated as a kid in your congregation? Maybe who some of your mentors were or what stands out to you as you look back on that time? Chad?

**Chad Hensley** 09:58

Actually, one of the people that first came to mind was my Sunday School teacher when I first started going to church in Harlan. She just passed away this past summer, Nancy Fullmer, and she just like, scooped me up, and I became her little Sunday school kid. And she's, you know, always been supportive from then on. Bev Thompson was another lady in Council Bluffs, that every time I wanted to go to Solid Rock, I could stay at her house in Council Bluffs, and you know, my parents would pick me up Sunday, the next day, and you know, she was like, I don't know, a second mom or grandma. So there's, there's a lot of people that, you know, believe in you and give you support. I think one of the unique things about Community of Christ is how interconnected we are. And it's a new experience for people who are coming new to the denomination, you know, it's not like a lot of other denominations where you know a few people. But like, we know, everybody and you can go anywhere there's Community of Christ and find that kind of support and connections. But yeah, there's a lot of people, especially in Atlantic where, you know, we would just sit around and kind of chew on the gospel and figure out like, there was one Sunday, where a three year old who could barely talk, summed it all up in one small sentence, you know, and so it's kind of neat being a part of a community that can listen to each other, work things out, and, you know, be supportive. And I would say, you know, of course, my parents were a big factor in giving support. But yeah, just a lot of people in the congregations that said, "yeah, you can do," you know, "give this prayer, give this..." you know, "you can lead a Sunday discussion" and that kind of thing. So, yeah, it was great.

**Robin Linkhart** 12:06

That's awesome. How about you, Katie?

**Katie Hensley** 12:09

Yeah, for me growing up in that small congregation, you definitely couldn't hide. But I would say definitely more more on the traditional side. They did struggle with women in the priesthood. And I've only recently moved a little bit on that focus. So that's been great to see the development. But I knew I was always loved for cared for. It was fun to be there with my cousins. I was sometimes we play piano. But otherwise, I wasn't really doing prayers or different things yet, as far as leadership, but knowing that I could feel comfortable and myself, there was always something that I I enjoyed. Some of my mentors, you would say, I mean, my parents were very important, you know, making sure we were always participating. My grandparents were there as well, on my dad's side. And I had a relative named Roger Howell, called him Uncle Roger, and he was actually a seventy in the church. So when he would come, it was always neat to hear his perspective and see the different influence that that he had. And then when I moved to the Independence area, my Sunday School teachers were Dennis Young and Ruth Cox. They had a just a really open discussion-based place where we could be ourselves. We did joys and concerns, and just really had a place to be teenagers, and I hadn't had that before. So I would drive past my one congregation to go to Osage Hills for Sunday School, to go to that class, and then return back to my other congregation. But the they were also mentors to me. Participating in camps, the

camp staff became like mentors to me and just seeing how fun and vibrant they can be, and also their connection with Christ and, and their faith was just really a highlight of my growing up years.

**Robin Linkhart** 14:24

Thank you. It's fascinating to hear these stories, and you have so many connections. And we haven't even gotten to college yet. It's so fun to hear this. So let's move now to your early adulthood and describe your involvement in church during college and, and I'm guessing that might be around the time you met, but maybe not. But we'd love to hear the story of how the two of you connected. Katie?

**Katie Hensley** 14:54

Um, there's the basic story and then there's the real story as far as this meeting. Well, through going to Spectacular through actually I have an extended family that has reunion at Graceland every year, I'd go to that occasionally growing up, through the church connection, through my mom being an alumni and different friends attending, I only applied to Graceland University. Or I could say Graceland College, at the time. So I did go to Graceland and participated in the church leadership program for two years while I was there, out of my four years. I did attend worships pretty regularly and I just really thought it was great to see the different kinds of worships and the music and try new things that I didn't see in my congregations growing up. Through being at Graceland, I also applied to be a Graceland Admissions Representative, which is a program that Graceland has for summer. They send their employees, their college students to different youth camps and reunions all around the country, to be on staff, to volunteer, to recruit for Graceland as well. And so I did that after my sophomore year, for the first time. I loved it, it was the best job ever. And so I did it two more years, which is pretty rare for people to do three years. And I did it the summer after I graduated even, so I got to travel to many, many campgrounds throughout the United States, a couple in Canada, and I just loved it, loved meeting the people loved seeing the variety of ministry, the variety of worship. You know, speaking about Graceland, which I had a great Graceland experience, to try to just let people know, hey, we have a great church college here, I'd love for you to come. But it was always interesting to see that everyone had such a heart for their home campgrounds, and I had that too for Camp Nauvoo, and then to go in and still feel the Spirit in different places was really enlightening for me to say, hey, you know that Spirit is where you connect with it. So I enjoyed my years as a Graceland Summer Rep.

I actually started dating Chad, my last semester of my senior year. We did meet, we were both there. He was a freshman, I am two years older, and we had that church connection. And it turns out later, as we got to know each other, we saw in some pictures that we had both been at a retreat at Guthrie Grove Campgrounds. He was, as a camper, I was on staff, we didn't remember each other. But in pictures that we have, like, oh, we were both there. How interesting. So we started dating our last semester. And Chad was already in the priesthood at that time, and talked about how he wanted to work for the church after he got out of college. So that was interesting to think about, you know, as far as like our future together, and one thing that we did start doing early on that really bonded us was praying together. And that really helped our relationship. And we were engaged nine months later, and then got married nine months after that. So we got married the summer of 2003. But having that church connection during college was just a real light in my in my college experience, and just the different opportunities. I was on a traveling ministry team through the church leadership program. And we go to

some congregations in the area and spend the night at a church member's house to bring some ministry as a college group to that, and so just helped develop a lot of skills through that time.

**Robin Linkhart 19:07**

Thank you. You'll have to signal me when we go from the official story to the real story if that ever comes up. But it feels pretty real so far.

**Katie Hensley 19:17**

Yeah, that was the the real story of when, that we'd actually met at Guthrie Grove.

**Robin Linkhart 19:23**

That's awesome. Chad, how about you?

**Chad Hensley 19:26**

Yeah, so in sharing kind of with what Katie said, but I was Chaplain at Graceland in college and just always I've always felt connected to the church and and felt connected to my faith. I guess that's something I wanted to touch on is, you know, just it's always been the Community of Christ has always been my home, you know, and you kind of go back home when you're tired or need a rest or, you know, that kind of a thing. And I knew I wanted to work for the church in some capacity or whatever capacity I could. But I also knew I wanted to have like a good job security and things like that, being a young adult. And so I did take a lot of classes at Graceland, you know, religious classes and had a great experience with that. But I also got my degree in Secondary English so I could have a job as a teacher. And so I did ministry jobs, so we had, we were in Pensacola for three years, where I was a youth minister for the North Pensacola congregation.

And then 2009, I started a job in Council Bluffs, as a community minister, which was a real blessing to work for the church that I kind of grew up going to, Council Bluffs Central, and got to, it was kind of a youth minister job, but it was based on developing relationships with the community. So we did like a reading program with an elementary school in the church. We did like a team activity on Wednesday evenings. We did a community garden, we started a housing program for youth aging out of foster care. And it was just, it was a really cool job, I got to work with two good pastors and a good supportive congregation there. So it was a wonderful experience. And it kind of got to a point where we got the housing program started, we were, my position was going to either switch into like Housing Program Director, or I needed to find something else to do. And I was like, you know what, Kaylee Rogers was helping a lot developing the housing program, and she has her Master's in, you know, that field and stuff. And so I was like, I have somebody I can hand this off to, the opportunity to start the farm was kind of coming about. We went to a conference, and I was like, you know, maybe I could do this. This is the time of my life where if I'm gonna do this, I want to do it younger than older. You know, some people start a farm when they retire, and they're like, "Oh, we can't do it. This sounded so fun. I can't hack it." And so I'm glad I started it when I did, but I'm glad to that I had all the experiences with the church as well.

We've stayed active with the Community of Christ here in Lamoni. We go to Bloomington Congregation and just have a really nice experience there. They're very kid-friendly. It's a, you know, small, you know,



congregation, but it's open to do new things. If you wanted to come, if you were presiding on a Sunday and wanted to do something completely different, people would come in and chairs would be disorganized, and they'd all be like, "Oh, what are we doing today?" And I love that, because I've been in congregations where somebody comes in and something's different, and they'll turn around and go home. And so it's nice to be a part of a faith community that's just like, we love kids. We love doing new things. Let's, you know, somebody wants to decorate the, you know, the Family Hall, Fellowship Hall, sorry. Everybody's like, Okay, go ahead and do it. There's not a lot of committee meetings that have to happen or things like that. So that's kind of my experience with the church from college to now.

**Katie Hensley 23:56**

A couple of things that I wanted to add, some more shout outs is that, right after we were married, we moved to Warrensburg, Missouri. And we were the caretakers of the Liahona Student Fellowship Center, which was the Mission Center's young adult, college gathering area. And so we were on the leadership for the student-led organization, but also the caretakers of the building. So that helped develop our leadership skills a lot and we became involved with the Warrensburg congregation. And that's when I was called to the priesthood as well and began Temple School classes and was ordained to priest during that time. After we finished our degrees, Chad's Bachelor's and my Master's degree, we did get into World Service Corps, like he mentioned, and it did work out where they asked us to go to Tahiti and so we were the first married couple to do the short term assignment, and then the first World Service Corps volunteers to Tahiti. And that was just really amazing to learn about that culture, as Chad was saying, and then and their generosity and their strong, strong faith and Community of Christ.

And like you mentioned, we moved to Pensacola, Florida, and we're involved with youth ministry there. I started to help with the young adult leadership in the Mission Center there and we started a traveling ministry to go to congregations and help lead worships as young adults at that time. That helped make a lot of great connections, and develop ministry as well. Again, you see a theme, we moved again, we were in Independence briefly, and then we were in Council Bluffs. Through that I learned about their young adult women's ministry. They did frozen meals and gave to people in need and just connecting with women on that level, but also learning about the Open Table program, which was a group of congregation members that wrapped around a person in need, someone who wanted to make changes in their life, to move out of poverty to make some moves forward in their life. And so that was a really great ministry that helped focus on fellowship and that was just a really amazing experience, that Open Table person actually chose to get baptized in Community of Christ as well. And just last week, they came from California to Iowa to see their family and they came to visit us. So that connection lives on. As Chad said, we're in Lamoni, attending the Bloomington congregation. And I was able to be involved with the assistant pastorate group, and then an elder in the church, as well as Chad.

**Chad Hensley 27:02**

The worship commission

**Katie Hensley 27:03**

I was on the Worship Planning Committee, and then also helping as a Mission Center Counselor to the Mission Center President in Lamoni Heartland. We've helped lead Sunday school, and then I've just

become involved in a new small group ministry. So church has been a big part of my life and our relationship, which has been, has been great.

**Robin Linkhart 27:27**

That is incredible. And you've, you've already touched on this next topic quite a bit already. I'm wondering if you had anything else to add, because clearly, your involvement with the church has empowered you as you've gone through your school years, both public school and college, starting careers, becoming parents. Are there any other leadership skills or skills that you learned in your church ministry and discipleship that you have found helpful to you in your careers?

**Katie Hensley 28:04**

I know that listening skills and relationship building, that's a big part of the Open Table. systematic way of building relationships, and thinking about, you know, the person you're in a relationship with, what are their goals and their, their desires, not what you think they should do, or what you think their goal should be. But also just the, the ability for me to talk to anyone, go into whatever situation and try to be open and get to know the people that are there. Communication skills, team building, I remember doing trust falls as a Graceland Rep in our training and climbing a rock wall and, with the harness on and just thinking about how, you know, putting yourself in different situations where you have to trust in, you know, you're getting off an airplane in a town you never been in, and there's going to be a stranger to pick you up and take you in their car to the camp. So just having that trust in that faith that, you know, through that Community of Christ connection, that we all care for each other and want the best for each other. So definitely, those things helped me in my job as well, working with students and helping them with their communication skills. Definitely applies.

**Chad Hensley 29:36**

Yeah, it's been a, I mean, my career has kind of been in church a bit and education was, you know, my teaching background. But working with the, you know, the Pensacola congregation, we worked with a lot of at-risk youth that were, you know, coming from very challenging home lives, lots of behavior issues. And we got to a point where it was like, we had to figure out something because our volunteers couldn't take it anymore. Like we couldn't get congregation people to be willing to give their time because it was so difficult to deal with the youth. So that was a time where I had to figure out like, okay, what do we do here, you know, and the youth workers in the congregation loved the kids, you know, and they liked spending time with them, but there's, you kind of have a breaking point, when you're a volunteer especially. It's, you know, and we were reaching that point with a lot of our volunteers. And we had to say, like, we had to stop meeting, and we just did, usually we'd have like fun games and talk a little bit about Jesus and this and that. We had our dinner, and we stayed in the Fellowship Hall, and just talked with the youth and said, Okay, here's how it needs to be and kind of laid out some basic guidelines and like, let the youth workers talk about their feelings and like, what's going on. And, you know, we kind of had to, like, and I used it in Council Bluffs too because we work with similar youth, and, you know, like a three strike like, you know, hey, here's a warning, here's, you know, this, and you know, what happens after that. And so, it can be a challenge working with youth that aren't accustomed to being in a church environment. And so working with North Pensacola and Council Bluffs Central, and the good people who love the youth there, really helped me, then when I went into the classroom subbing when we moved down here, I was at a completely different point than when I finished my



undergrad, and, you know, did student teaching, I had developed a lot. And so I would have like, behavior issues, I'm doing air quotes, of these, you know, rural kids, and after I'd worked in inner city schools in Pensacola, doing subbing too, and you know, it was almost comical to see the "bad kids" giving it their best shot here. But I kind of developed some of those, you know, skills, you know, in working with the church. And so, you know, kudos to the pastors, and to the people who love the youth in those congregations and other congregations who were, you know, working with, at risk youth and showing them love and patience. It can be a challenge, but I think that's something that I can see in myself where, you know, I didn't come from an environment where I was interacting with, you know, people who were in extremely unstable environments and those behavior issues that come from that. But now I know how to deal with some of those those situations. So yeah, that's one way in which I've really seen the church help me develop those skills.

**Robin Linkhart 33:06**

That's great. Alrighty, so in the fall of 2012, the two of you established a chemical-free produce and cut flower farm in Lamoni, Iowa called Big Creek Farms. Tell us about that part of your story.

**Chad Hensley 33:24**

Yeah. So it was, we were wrapping up, like getting the housing program launched. I had Kaylee to hand it off to, I don't know, like, I was thinking, while we were talking, I don't know, if I didn't have Kaylee, what would have happened in that situation, if I would have even been able to have the courage to develop it on my own or not. But thankfully, we had handed that off to her and she worked with the church there doing that program. And we were able to come to Lamoni and start the farm in the fall of 2012. And I knew from the beginning that I wanted to work with nature. And so that was kind of a founding principle is to work with nature and not against it. Most agriculture is a naturally kind of, it's kind of a masculine, I feel, kind of thing like, "I need to control this environment, I need to kill these pests. I need to you know, kill that rabbit or that weed or that bug" and, you know, "I need to use chemical fertilizers to make things bigger," and you know, "I got to control everything with pesticides," and I knew I didn't want any of that. And if I couldn't do it that way, I didn't want to do it. And so that was kind of like okay, this is the found I want to work with nature and kind of figure out the way that God and nature work and enhance that. had to grow good food and flowers, and now we've gotten into beef. So that's kind of been the biggest, I would say, factor in getting the farm started.

Our biggest challenge has been marketing. You can learn a lot about production and how to grow things and, you know, figure out what you're good at, and, you know, kind of grow to your strengths, but that's one that's been challenging to us. But I'd also say that there's been a little lack of support from some consumers, Lamoni has been a very supportive town in a lot of ways, we have a lot of really dedicated customers that, you know, give us a lot of support. But it's, we were in an environment where, you know, we're rural, small customer base, but also in Des Moines and Kansas City areas, I think, kind of, our industrial food system has created this environment where steep, bountiful, unhealthy food is so readily available. And we, as a consumer base, have just become so addicted to it. The easiness, the cheapness, the, you know, and the food is designed to be addicting. And so there's some of those consumer things that, you know, we're working against, too. We try and, we base our prices on, okay, what does it take, you know, resources to develop to grow this food or flour, and how much time and that's where we set our price. So, in the fall of 2000, or in the summer of 2013, we set our

price for tomatoes at two, at \$3 a pound, and it was high. But looking at the numbers, that's where we needed to be. And it stayed there because our inputs haven't changed much, you know, our infrastructure has been paid for. And it takes the same amount of time. So you know, prices at the grocery store go up and down. But our our prices kind of stay the same.

It makes me think of, I don't know if there's any Bob Newhart fans that listen to this podcast, but there's a skit that he did, I saw on YouTube, I'm not quite old enough to watch Bob Newhart live on air. But if you Google "Bob Newhart Stop It," he's a counselor, and he has people come into his office, and he's like, his basic response to them is "stop it." It's a really funny skit, so if you need a laugh, check it out. But I think that would be kind of my message to the, you know, the faith community of listeners to about, you know, produce and eggs, your meat is just stop buying it at the big box stores. And even though it's so easy and cheap, you know, if we learned anything from the COVID shutdown, the food scarcity that we saw, the meat prices, the meat and availability, eggs, I mean, I can't tell you how many times I was at Walmart, and there was no eggs. I get my eggs from my neighbor out in the country, you know, and they'll always have eggs because they always have chickens. And they'll always have eggs for me because I'm their customer. And so, you know, I just encourage consumers to know their farmer and know their food and buy local. If you are buying your your meat, your produce, your eggs, things like that from a farmer, and you know, something happens to the food supply, you're gonna still eat like a king and your prices aren't going to change that much. We're not a bunch of price gougers. We're just here to, you know, get by and give people good food for a fair price. So I just encourage people to take care of your farmers and show them some love and put in some effort to buy local and support that kind of consumer movement away from the big box stores, to the farm stands and you know, know your farmer.

**Robin Linkhart** 39:42

Katie, did you have anything you wanted to add to the Big Creek Farm story?

**Katie Hensley** 39:48

Just that we, again, are chemical-free. We're not certified organic, but we go, we feel like, above and beyond those expectations. We want to treat the earth well, and we want to produce healthy food for ourselves, our family and for our community. And we try to stick with a lot of heirloom produce varieties where we can save the seed and just have a variety of colors and flavors and tastes. We also do a lot of varieties of flowers, we make bouquets. And also we have our Piney Woods cattle. They are all grass fed, grass finished. We do regenerative grazing, where they rotate to different pastures. And we try to make the best decisions that we know to make for our animals, for our land that we are renting. And one kind of cool part with doing flowers and making bouquets is I can, to me, sometimes seen as a ministry, where people are gifting flowers to people in their happiest times, like birthdays, anniversaries, but also in their saddest times where we've delivered to someone who had had a miscarriage, and even made flower bouquets for funerals. So just thinking about all the different milestones or events in people's lives that can be touched by a small gesture. So that's something that brings me joy in participating in this farming venture.

**Robin Linkhart** 41:27

That's amazing. It sounds so holistic, and as you're talking, and of course, we're talking on this rich foundation of a lifetime, in this faith community, Community of Christ. As you know, we have nine enduring principles, and three of those are Sacredness of Creation, Responsible Choices, and Pursue Peace on and for the Earth. And I can't help but think that those core teachings and principles impacted you on your path, but I don't want to speak for you. So I'd invite you to respond to that.

**Chad Hensley 42:09**

Yeah, I think, you know, Sacredness of Creation just ties in to the foundation of a farm, and that, recognizing that nature has things figured out. You know, you don't see monocultures in a natural environment, you see polycultures of hundreds of different plants. And you pick up a handful of healthy soil, and there's more microorganisms in your hand, than there are people on the earth. And when you stop and think about that, how the soil health is impacted by, you know, how I moved my cattle or what kind of plants we grow where, you know, you become part of a bigger picture. And it's really deeply rewarding to see like, I moved cattle last night and I just had to, it was an easy chore, I just had to open one gate and call them up. I pull into the farm and this little rabbit runs away from the roadside, and into the, you know, kind of down the hill a little bit. I go to open this gate, and I'm calling up the cattle and I see it scuttle a little bit more in the grass, and then the cattle start walking through the gate. And the little Rabbit pops up on the pile of rocks, and it's just kind of like watching me and the cattle. And he runs down, he's in the cattle path and like just watching like, recognizing I'm part of this landscape. And I was like, "Is this rabbit okay?" But I think he's just kind of used to the environment, you know, and so just being, you know, that peacefulness, that pastoral sense, and knowing that, wow, I'm a part of something way bigger than myself, you know, is really rewarding in that. I did a sermon one time where I showed, I was trying to get a very particular job done before it rained. And if it rained, I couldn't do it, you know, and so rain was coming in, I could see the storm clouds and I had my tractor and I was doing this job, and right in the middle of it, that tractor died. It just stopped running. And I was like, "Oh, God, what happened?" Like, you know, not using the Lord's name in vain, but I was just so distraught like, I need to get this done now, like not tomorrow, it's going to be too late. And then, you know, I look, I'm looking on one side of my dead tractor, dead in the water, like half way down the road it just died. And I look over to the other side, to the west, and there is a perfect sunset. And it just kind of helped me realize, yeah, when you're doing this, bad things happen, but then at the same exact time, God is right there with you. And you kind of have to hold the two in the same hand, you know, one in each hand, and be able to be comfortable in that space of like, tragedy and joy. It's a such a unique experience. I mean, you could have a tragic thing like losing a calf and, and some great other thing happened on the same day. And, you know, there's such a mix of experiences and emotions and stuff. But yeah, definitely those those enduring principles are reflected in what we do and, you know, how we how we do things too.

**Katie Hensley 45:44**

Yeah, I'm pulling out the word 'stewardship' as well, stewardship of how we're using the land, our time and also to see it as a form of ministry in a different way, connecting to creation and trying to make the most responsible choices that we can. And it definitely is a peaceful place to be, as Chad calls it his "cow therapy." Just being out in nature, and with the the calm and peace that that can occur at times, is restoring as well.

**Robin Linkhart 46:19**

I love that image. As you're talking, I'm reminded of the scripture, "to be a people of the Temple" and just this image of your Big Creek Farms bringing peace to the world and offering this wonderful vision and example of living in harmony with nature, with God's creation, and how that births peace and joy and replenishes the earth and comes into people's lives in your community and even further away in such tangible ways. So, as you reflect on your lives and your journey with this faith movement, this peaceful Community of Christ, from your perspective, what would you identify as benefits of religious communities in today's world, and of course, we understand you speak from your context and experience.

**Chad Hensley 47:25**

You want to go?

**Katie Hensley 47:31**

Yeah, for me, the benefits of being in this religious community is, I mean, in the first word community, having that group around you to show love, to show support fellowship. It's, to me, a healthy routine in my week, to make church a priority. And also to have a higher power for the greater good. And now as a parent, to have a focus to think about the teaching that we need to do for our little girl and to teach her about love and God as a focus in our lives. So those are some benefits I see in being a part of a religious community.

**Chad Hensley 48:21**

Yeah, you know, it kind of, in working with like, some homeless programs and things like that, it's important for someone to have a home, you know, and if you don't have a safe place to go to at night, or when you feel unsafe, it's very tenuous, and you're constantly under stress. You need a place that you can go to where you feel like you can let down your guard, you know, share your concerns and have people listen to what's going on. I think that's, you know, what the church can be for people, it's just, you know, a home for the spiritually homeless.

**Robin Linkhart 49:05**

What would you say has played a primary part in keeping you active and involved with Community of Christ all these years?

**Chad Hensley 49:15**

I think it's important to, one of the foundational beliefs is, you know, kind of highlighting the the Project Zion Podcast, that's been a big, huge fundamental factor for me is identifying that it's not just about what I believe. What I believe is fine, you know, you can believe what you want to believe and think where it's gonna get you where you think it's gonna get you when you die. That's all well and good. But when you actually read the Bible and listen to what Jesus said, he talked so much about building his father's kingdom and that's what's kept me connected to the Community of Christ is that that is fundamental to our faith, in that it's not just about me going somewhere when I die. And sorry, literally, to hell with the rest of you. I am responsible for making this world a better place. And it's part of my faith commitment, that if I say, I'm a Christian and want to follow Jesus, I am then committed to making my community more Christ-like more welcome, you know. And so that concept of Zion has been what

really keeps me involved. And now wanting to pass on, you know, faith to my daughter, is a big factor too, and helping her, you know, in little ways here and there, you know, she's only two but helping her understand concepts of, you know, things and getting her connected to church, she gets excited about going and things like that. So that's a big factor too.

**Katie Hensley 51:08**

For me, keeping me active and involved in the church, a focus on the enduring principles, especially Worth of All Persons, All are Called, we are open to all viewpoints and even if we differ in our many places along a spectrum, we can still come together and worship together and talk things through. I do love the interconnectedness that we have as small congregations and that we travel and that we keep in touch. And I love those those little God moments when you're connecting with people, and also a place for continuing revelation that God is still speaking to us and and guiding us in the changes in our world.

**Robin Linkhart 51:59**

What would you say the hardest thing about being a millennial in Community of Christ today is and how can the church continue to adapt to this constantly changing world of technology and the changing needs of our young people?

**Katie Hensley 52:20**

That's a big question. I think there's a lot of little things that we can do. I think sometimes if our congregation is very set in their traditional ways that it can be difficult. So learning to be open, and, you know, you don't automatically have all the answers right away, so that communication and checking in with young adults, brainstorming, helping their ideas happen, are some things. I think a challenge right now feels like we're, in a way, trying to grasp to keep our numbers and grasping to keep our finances going and keeping buildings open. I think that is a challenge that congregations are dealing with. And again, I don't have the answers, but being open to a variety of worship styles, a variety of time options for people's schedules, and also, try not to overwhelm someone who may be interested in being a part of the congregation. So small steps to building that relationship. I do appreciate that we have been able to connect more using technology through Zoom, through various means to open it up to, you know, someone in an isolated place to be able to connect. But again, just that communication and checking in and brainstorming together as a, not just young adults, but within all the age ranges of the church.

**Chad Hensley 53:51**

Yeah, for me, I had no, I just kind of feel like, well, this is my church and, you know, if there's something I don't like, then it's my responsibility to help make that change. You know, like with my Bloomington congregation, if there was something I have a problem with, and I need to talk to the people have a problem with and, you know, leadership in the congregation and just help make it better. But I've heard from, you know, other young adults in our congregation that, you know, they've had some roadblocks to doing a Sunday School class or to doing, you know, things like that. And, you know, I guess kind of just getting out of the way and not having everything set like, this is these are the programs we do this is how we do them. And if you want to fit into this mold, then you're welcome to. I don't think that's necessarily a healthy perspective for a church to have. I think we need to be more flexible and say, hey, here's somebody, this is their need. This is their talent. Let's meet that and come up with something,

you know, maybe we have to scrap, something we've been doing for 20 years and our congregation is known for. But if it's gonna welcome in this person and their family, and they, it's important to them, let's do it, you know, and just kind of being able to let go of some of those, you know, things that we like to hold on to sometimes in a congregation that can be detrimental to, you know, it being a really inviting place.

**Robin Linkhart 55:31**

That really dovetails to my next question about what can be helpful as we endeavor to actually empower youth and young adults today to step into leadership roles and to find value in Community of Christ. I really think when we empower people to be a full part and to actually be leaders, that there is a sense of value they connect with in a different way.

**Chad Hensley 56:03**

One that I saw today at church was, a mother came forward and, you know, just thanked the anonymous person in the congregation that supported, you know, her son and another kid going on a youth caravan trip, and the experiences that they had, you know, so just supporting youth camping programs and things like that, through an anonymous donation. You know, the Spirit works in ways that you get a little nudge, sometimes they give something or do something, and just being open and willing to respond to that, you know, maybe I should call this youth to, you know, do something in a service or, you know, this youth is really interested in, you know, this kind of activity, let's bring that into a church setting or, you know, invitations to partake in sacraments and making sure they feel welcome to do so on a Communion Sunday, or, hey, have you thought about baptism? We've been so blessed this this summer, Bloomington has had a lot of wonderful baptisms, from youth who were, some of the youth weren't even connected to the church before a year ago. And so it's just been glorious. To really say it bluntly, but just being open to and responding, you know, is really important.

**Katie Hensley 57:29**

I think some other ways are mentorship, where, you know, we just had these baptisms and, you know, if there is a new priesthood member, how can we continue that on instead of just after the sacrament? Okay, it's done, they'll figure it out, to try to be more aware of that, forming, continuing to form that relationship, checking in with that new member to see what their ideas are. So again, that relationship and talking with them and seeing what's important to them, and starting small and helping someone ease into a leadership role. Again, not, I know, we've, if we've moved to a new place, and shown up sometimes we've been asked to do three things on our first Sunday. And so being aware of the balance, we don't want to overwhelm new people. But we do want to support their ideas. And also, how can we support young parents as we are experiencing that, and how it's a whole other dynamic of okay, you have to focus on when naptime is and we got to get out of church right away, or we, you know, we can't come to this thing because of whatever. But we also want to demonstrate our faith to our daughter. And that's also something we can do in our community is just demonstrating our beliefs and putting the invitation out like hey, we have a congregation that would love to get to know you. And throwing out the invitation. So there's a lot of small things I think we can do to help people connect and empower them to to be a greater part of the congregation. It's not just about what happens on Sunday, but then going out and your your home life and your community life.



**Robin Linkhart 59:14**

I love the way you see the world and I hear such a sense of centeredness and a desire to have balance and a holy rhythm of life in the midst of an adventure of life that has joys and struggles all at the same moment. So speaking of struggles, what do you see as the biggest challenges moving forward into the future, as a church and what brings you hope, as we move forward together as a faith movement?

**Chad Hensley 59:46**

I think it's important to recognize and just be aware of the reality that we're in a post-Christian society. You know, most people don't go to church. They're not practicing Christians. And they're not in this habit of going to church regularly. And they don't have a connection to a faith community sometimes at all. And that's a tough gap to bridge, you know. But to the church's advantage, people, just the way that were created, have a natural tendency to wonder. And to think about, well, what if, or I wonder what, you know, there's a natural tendency to try and figure out a little bit more about God, you know, when they've got their life, to a point where they can, you know, manage to think about those things. Some people are in crisis mode, and don't have that capacity even. But, you know, it's important to realize that, yeah, people wonder and are curious about God. And also, God wants to have a relationship with those people. So we have two, disconnected things that are being drawn together. And we just need, as a church, to connect them. And stay out of the way to prevent that from happening. You know, I saw, doing youth ministry, how just being there, being present, listening to youth, having a relationship, even in the midst of their chaos, and then God entered their life. And whether it was through a baptism or, you know, just kind of an "aha" moment, seeing God work in that person's life and change them is just mind boggling. And so we kind of just need to get out of the way, but also be there and connect those two, the people who are, have no idea what they really believe, but they're kind of curious, and our Creator that's drawing them in, and just be that conduit, and, you know, just have the courage to invite someone. It starts with small little things, just being, you know, a good person and caring about people. But being welcoming and making those connections. And it's, I don't know, that was one of the my favorite things in doing daily ministry was seeing how God connects to people and the change that it makes. It's a real, it's a real thing that happens. And it's not something you can prove with science, but I've seen it happen, and it's wonderous.

**Katie Hensley 1:02:49**

For me, some of the challenges I see are the ability to make sure it's your priority, where again, we're being pulled in lots of directions, focusing on that time to, I see church as, worship as renewing. So to be able to maybe set aside some of the other things and find a time during the week to make that a priority. And then continuing to reach out, I mean, I have all these ideas of people to reach out to or things to do, and then the things I can actually get done, do not equal that number. So trying again, to find that balance and what one or two things, small things, could I do? So I think it's a challenge of we have all these ideas, and for me sometimes getting overwhelmed with that, and then not knowing for sure what to focus on. But it brings me hope that, you know, when we do get when we do share our story when we do help people experience that fellowship, that community that hope is given that joy is brought into people's lives and they can connect with God and the Holy Spirit and have that as an anchor in their lives.

**Robin Linkhart 1:04:18**

Yeah, I'm with you on all those things. And I never get tired of watching the Holy Spirit work in people's lives. Every opportunity that people have to witness that and be part of that, it just brings in such this overwhelming sense of love and there's a sense of peace with that but also this incredible excitement and energy and hope for the future. Is there anything that you would like to share about today that I haven't asked you about, Chad or Katie?

**Katie Hensley** 1:04:54

I guess something to keep in mind as, again, we're in this new season of parenthood, is being aware of those with children and trying to connect with resources or volunteering time or, you know, how do we raise Christian children? And how do we provide everything that they need and and to stay sane as well? So looking at that within our congregations, are we welcoming enough for young families? Are we providing opportunities for them to participate as well? And the new younger, the new, small group ministry that we're involved in has been focused on young families, so that's been and I think, a benefit for our group that, that we can share in those burdens and those delights with raising children and the questioning that we have and just showing that support so just becoming more aware of that stage of life too, if you've gone through it, or if you haven't, the that's another facet of our congregation that should be highlighted as well.

**Chad Hensley** 1:06:08

Yeah, I think it's important just to keep it simple, you know. I would say go and sit down, take 15 minutes, read the Sermon on the Mount. That's pretty fundamental to, you know, the Christian faith, and then just listen to the divine direction that you get and have your faith and put it in gear. It's kind of unsettling and scary sometimes, but it's not complicated. And sometimes we like to make it complicated to have reasons and excuses. I'm guilty of that. But yeah, I think that's a good challenge to the listeners, is to try that out.

**Robin Linkhart** 1:06:55

Well, Katie and Chad, I want to thank you so much for being with us here today and for sharing your stories with us. And of course, a very special thanks to all of our listeners. If you would like to hear more stories from Millennials, check out Chai Can't Even on [projectzionpodcast.org](http://projectzionpodcast.org). 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.