

# Nice to Matcha | Joelle Wight | President of Seventy

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Christ, Utah, God, community, ministry, calling, Graceland, church, opportunity, Zion, spiritual practices, Seventy, invitation

## SPEAKERS

Joelle Wight, Robin Linkhart

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

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And today our guest is Joelle White, who was recently set apart as a President of Seventy in Community of Christ. Hey, Joelle. Welcome. Hello.

### **Joelle Wight** 00:45

Thanks so much for having me.

### **Robin Linkhart** 00:46

It's great to have you with us today. Well, I would love it if you would take a minute to introduce yourself to our listeners.

### **Joelle Wight** 00:57

Well, as you have already mentioned, my name is Joelle, and I was recently set apart as a President of Seventy. But kind of the more basic stuff about me is that I currently live in Washington, DC, where I work for the Chesapeake Bay Mission Center in Community of Christ. I live there with my six and a half pound dog who just joined us for this PZP recording, I hope that she'll stay quiet as we as we share.

### **Robin Linkhart** 01:29

Can you tell us a little bit about your family and how long you've worked for the church as an employed minister?

### **Joelle Wight** 01:37

Yeah, so I am the youngest of six children, I grew up as the baby of the family, which was wonderful. And, you know, I have three older brothers and two older sisters, and I love being the baby. It was great. I'm also the daughter of a former church appointee. He has since retired, but I was raised by a father who worked for the Church. And my mother, although not employed by the Church has always worked for the cause of Zion, and whatever she was doing. I have been employed by Community of Christ for I think, coming up on five years, this October. So just a handful of years, although I have been engaged with Community of Christ from the time I was born.

**Robin Linkhart** 02:29

So let's go a little bit deeper about that. So I'm assuming you were born into the church, we'd like to hear like your growing up years and what life was like, for you and your family, and anything that you want to share about that part of your life?

**Joelle Wight** 02:46

Yeah. You know, that's a really interesting question, specifically, as, as I share the answer on a kind of church related podcast, because for me, Community of Christ has always been woven into my life in different ways. It's always kind of been, at least in the background, a daily part of my life, I didn't really know life apart from it. And that's because I grew up in Blue Springs, Missouri, which is just 20 minutes away from the world church headquarters. And so on weekends, we did attend different church events and things like that. So for me, the norm was kind of swimming in a Community of Christ space. That being said, I also, you know, did non-church things as I was growing up. So I played a lot of sports. I played softball. I grew up with brothers who were very into sports. And so I was willing to try any of those things. I also debated in high school, that was a big part of my life.

**Robin Linkhart** 03:54

You mentioned that your dad was an appointee minister recently retired. Did that appointment ministry mean that your family traveled with him?

**Joelle Wight** 04:04

To a certain extent? Yes. When I was growing up, I would have the opportunity to go to various reunions with him throughout the United States. And so yes, there were times when we would travel with him. But that also meant in times when we couldn't travel, whether it was because you know, we had school or other things going on, that meant that he was away from the home, doing some of that church work. So I remember kind of this balance of sometimes being able to go along with him, but also sometimes having to send him out and being at home waiting for him to come back.

**Robin Linkhart** 04:41

So um, we talked a little bit of your growing up time and it sounds like in debate you were in high school and debate. Anything else in high school that comes to mind to you?

**Joelle Wight** 04:51

Well, I played softball through high school, so that one is another one that took up a lot of my time. But, that's also kind of when I started to own personal ministry, I had, you know, been involved in church growing up, but I hadn't really taken on myself. And so in high school, I started working with this after school kid's program that my mission center did, where we would kind of, you know, have fun activities and snacks and games and build relationship and talk about peace and other important things like that. And so, the first time that I really engaged in that type of thing was probably when I was a freshman or sophomore in high school.

**Robin Linkhart** 05:37

So tell us a little bit about your personal journey with God and faith as a child, and then as you say, you kind of got into a ministry, expression of that faith in high school.

**Joelle Wight** 05:54

Yeah, so I think that growing up there was there was never really a question about my involvement with faith, not because my parents forced it on me or anything like that. But just because it was such an important part of our community and our lives. So the congregation that I went to, you know, knew me from the time that I was a baby, my grandparents went there as well. So it also had some kind of family connections. And so it was never something that I really questioned or or thought about alternatives to it was just something that I did. That being said, I also kind of had some freedom to pursue other things. So I remember there was a big chunk of my life where softball games meant that I didn't make it to church every Sunday. And so even though there wasn't that, you know, weekly check in that weekly time where I would go to the congregation and be part of the worship services, there were still other ways that my parents kind of incorporated faith into our lives. So growing up, we would have a nightly prayer time as a family where we'd get together and mostly my sister and I, as the two youngest would just be trying to make everybody laugh the whole time. But it was, it's always a fun memory to look back on those prayer times, and the ways that we were able to share with one another. And so you know, they did things like that, like having prayer time, or my mom started on the sidelines of my softball games, I forget exactly what she called it, but it was the group of moms that would get together. And when one of us was having just a really bad streak in the batter's box, not able to hit anything, they would pray for us every time we went up, and, and so you know, they that taught me that church doesn't have to happen inside a building. And it's not just an hour and a half on on a Sunday morning. Faith is something that is woven into your daily life. It's something that you interact with, whenever you can. So like I said, it wasn't really something that I ever equipped for, thought that there was an alternative to and so then when I got into high school, is when I really started questioning Well, what does this mean to me personally, how is this lived out for me personally, and that's when I started kind of engaging with some of those other opportunities, outside of the things that my parents were doing and inviting me to do. Things that I just did on my own or found ways to connect with on my own.

**Robin Linkhart** 08:26

Okay, I think that takes us up through high school Joelle, and we're ready for your college years. So tell us about college and maybe a little bit in into launching into a career.

**Joelle Wight** 08:39

Yeah. So I attended Graceland University for college. And, Graceland University is affiliated, I guess you could say with Community of Christ. So when I went there, there were other Community of Christ students also attending Graceland with me. We were by no means the majority. There were just a handful of us that actively engaged in campus ministries and things of that nature. But it was nice to be able to go to a college that had association with Community of Christ, so I attended Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa. Lamoni, Iowa is a very small town. It was just a perfect fit for me. I loved it. Graceland didn't have a ton of students, which was also a good fit for me. While I was there, I decided to pursue a degree in elementary education because the teachers that I was interacting with in the education department were just some of the most amazing educators and human beings and even though I didn't plan on teaching long term, I wanted to learn more from them and to kind of benefit from

their wisdom and so I pursued a degree in elementary education. And then when I graduated from Graceland in 2015, I taught fourth grade for two years. For that job, I knew that I wasn't going to want to teach for the rest of my life, but I did want to solidify the education that I, you know, worked on over the past four years. And so I did that by spending some time in the classroom. When I came kind of the halfway point of my second year of teaching, I started to look at alternatives and think about what else I might like to pursue. And at that point, because of some of the social and political things happening in the United States, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in social work. And that really felt like it was meant to be because as I was, you know, preparing to apply for the Social Work program, and reading through the Social Work Code of Ethics, I began to notice very obvious overlaps between their code of ethics and Community of Christ Enduring Principles. So things like Worth of All Persons was a predominant element of social work. And it was a way that it allowed me to live out my faith, as I pursued furthering my education.

**Robin Linkhart 11:11**

So as you pursued your master's degree, did you work during that time as well.

**Joelle Wight 11:18**

I no longer was teaching, After the two years, I went back to graduate school full-time. But I was also doing things like substitute teaching and tutoring at a place that serves children in the foster care system. So I was to an extent working, but a lot of the time in a social work graduate program is spent doing a practicum. And so in addition to the classwork and the different assignments associated with that, I was also doing practicum work quite a bit of the time.

**Robin Linkhart 11:53**

Yeah, that takes up a lot of that type of degree program. My daughter is just finishing up in counseling Master's where again, this whole last year, it's been tons and tons of practicum, clinical work of that nature. Okay, so that takes you. Gosh, 2018-19. Is that ... ? When did you graduate with your master's?

**Joelle Wight 12:21**

Yeah. 2019, May of 2019.

**Robin Linkhart 12:24**

So tell us what brought you to working full-time with Community of Christ as an ordained minister?

**Joelle Wight 12:32**

Yeah, so when I finished my social work masters, I didn't know exactly what career I wanted to pursue. And I won't get into too many details here, because it would probably just bore listeners. But when it comes to social work, a lot of people with that degree will work in a clinical setting. They'll do counseling, and that kind of thing, which is referred to as micro social work, because you're working one on one with individuals. But I was really interested in something of Social Work, which meant that I focused on the systems and trying to fix the problems in our society that we're creating unjust and inequitable conditions for people. The problem with that is that the people who work in the macro sphere, don't realize how valuable a social work background can be in a lot of those positions. And so it's really difficult to kind of find places for social workers to live out some of that macro social work

education that they pursued. And so when I was coming up to graduation, I had no idea what I wanted to do and what jobs I wanted to be looking for. I was just kind of applying randomly, but also kind of keeping an eye on things in Community of Christ. At the time, when I was graduating, even in my undergrad, there weren't a lot of opportunities to work for Community of Christ. I just always kind of kept an eye on those things without really anticipating that there would be opportunity in that in that realm. But then a certain Robin Linkhart reached out to me about the possibility of applying for a position in Utah. And so I filled out the application and went through the interview process. And by that September, I was getting ready to move to Utah. So two days drive away from where I'd grown up living the furthest I'd ever lived from my parents, but I decided to take the leap and pursue that. And once I was out in Utah, I had the wonderful opportunity to work with and learn from other amazing ministers who had been doing this work longer than I had and I also got to engage with different people in relationship. Other people's faith journeys, and so that was really wonderful. Unfortunately, about six months into my time in Utah, the pandemic hit and kind of, as you all know, change the world as we know it. And so at that point, I came back to Missouri, and was working remotely, still doing the same job in Utah, but doing so from behind a computer screen rather than in person. And, over the course of that time, I was asked if I'd be willing to move, transfer and take up a different role in Washington, DC. And I agreed to do that. And I now work as an invitation minister in the Chesapeake Bay Mission Center out on the East Coast.

**Robin Linkhart 15:35**

And you're also a Mission Center President still, is that correct?

**Joelle Wight 15:39**

That is correct. I'm a Co-Mission Center President in that area as well. I wear a couple of different hats in my role as minister.

**Robin Linkhart 15:49**

So I want to back up just a minute because as we go into ministry, I think it would be helpful to kind of trace through your life when you first became an ordained minister and the various priesthood offices that you've served in.

**Joelle Wight 16:05**

Yeah, sure. So when I went to Graceland, I was a freshman at Graceland. And we had a new campus minister at the time. It was Matt Frizzell, who I met briefly before when I was younger, but I was getting reacquainted with him at Graceland University. And so, kind of early on in that process of getting to know him a bit better, he extended a call to me and a few others at Graceland. And so he called me to the office of Priest at that time. So I was, you know, a freshman at Graceland when that call was extended, and I have to tell you, you know, priests are family ministers. And so you kind of struggled with what that meant for a college student. But I'm really, really grateful for that call and for kind of the opportunity to wrestle with it, because it helped me realize that family ministry doesn't just have to take place in the traditional understanding of family. And so soon, I realized I was able to kind of live out that ministry, to the women who lived on my hall at Graceland University, we were a family. And I was able to live out the ministry of a Priest in that setting. I continued on as a priest until probably my first teaching I don't remember exactly when it was. But at that point, I was called by the leadership in my

congregation, back at home in Missouri, to the office of Elder and I served briefly, in the role of Elder before I was called to be a Seventy in Community of Christ.

**Robin Linkhart 17:55**

And you actually had already received your call to Seventy when you moved out to Utah, I believe, I believe, and you flew back, I did for your ordination. (I did.) So you, you're launched into full time ministry as a career, just as you're taking on the priesthood office of 70, which is very focused on mission and outreach and invitation and hospitality and sharing the peace of Jesus Christ with folks. And in Utah, you were in the thick of that walking with people and seeing how their experience in Community of Christ was opening them to new ways of experiencing the Holy Spirit in ways that were transforming and healing. Can you tell us a little bit about that ministry before you went into the pandemic?

**Joelle Wight 18:55**

Yeah, yeah. So what was wonderful about that ministry in that role, was that I had the opportunity to listen to people and to benefit from their willingness to vulnerably share their experiences. A lot of them were in the midst of some pretty difficult faith transitions, and some, you know, really painful things that happened as a result of that. And they were having to ask some really difficult questions. But in the midst of it, they were willing to let me walk beside them, which I you know, I think is really brave of them and is something that I'm really grateful for. And so, in that role, I got to listen to stories and kind of offer opportunity for new ways of encountering God and experiencing the divine. And so you know, you mentioned that I just begun my ministry as a Seventy at that time, and I don't think that I'd really taken the opportunity to reflect back on it, until I just heard you kind of rephrasing, the Ministry of Seventy. And I think that it really was a great place to live out that ministry because, you know, their opportunity to extend hospitality in various ways, whether it was in individual relationships, and in engaging with people, on a one on one basis, being hospitable in that sense, or whether it was, you know, the whole congregation practicing hospitality together as we opened our doors for any person who might stop by that week, with different needs, and different things weighing on their hearts. And so it was a great place to practice hospitality and to learn more about it. But it was also a really good place to explore Christ's peace and offer Christ's peace to other people. And to recognize the many dimensions of Christ's peace. I was able to kind of witness that peace, take shape in people's lives as something new in Community of Christ and kind of sought a new spiritual home that brought them peace that they had not been experiencing before.

**Robin Linkhart 21:17**

Oh, right. So this last World Conference, 2023, just a few months ago, really, you were set apart as a President of Seventy, we would love to hear your experience of that call, how it took place. If you had any sense of God inviting you into something new before that call was extended, just anything that you're willing to share with us about this unfolding chapter of your life?

**Joelle Wight 21:51**

Yeah, so again, as you mentioned, this is fairly recent. And so I am not sure that I've had a good amount of reflection time to think back on it, but I'll do my best to articulate it anyway. So I, I have to warn all of the listeners out there, if you ever get an email, saying that there's an opportunity for



ministry, just know that you're about to be asked to take on a new role or to accept a new priesthood call. And so I received an email, I believe it was Karen Peter, who reached out to me is indicating that she had a new opportunity for ministry for me. So I knew that there was something that I was going to be asked to do. But I'll be honest, no indication or no thought that I was being called to be a President of Seventy, it was a surprise to me. At the same time, even though I didn't anticipate that specific call, I will say that each time a new call has come, there's been a feeling of discontent, and it's not one that is constant, or that, you know, takes away from my involvement in the church or the things that I'm doing. But it's just kind of this, you know, in quiet, calm moments, this sense of there being something more or something new coming around the bend. And so I will say that I had that feeling a bit before, this call was extended to me. And honestly, I felt it before I was asked to move to Washington DC. And I felt it before I was called to be a Seventy. So it's a feeling that I've had before and I'm coming to recognize more as it comes. So Karin asked me to consider taking on this call. And I really, I wasn't 100% sure that I was going to accept it. But Karin was willing to give me some time to kind of think about it and pray about it and engage in some spiritual practices around it. And then I ended up accepting the call.

**Robin Linkhart 24:13**

So I think not all of our listeners will be aware that your dad was actually serving as the Senior President of Seventy when that call was presented to you, which is why Karin was calling you and not the Senior President of Seventy, because he's your dad. From the outside looking in, that seemed to be a very tender and sweet loving, kind of passing of the torch. How was that for you?

**Joelle Wight 24:46**

Yeah, so it when I was first called to Seventy, I remember coming downstairs because I'd been given that call while I was still living with my parents and I was given a zoom call by the apostle and another member of the Council of Presidents of Seventy. And so dad, of course, knew that I was being called to be a Seventy. And so I had no clue. And I came downstairs and I said, you couldn't even warn me, you didn't even know you didn't even tell me this was coming. And so when, when this call to be a President of Seventy, came, it was a similar thing, and kind of a, you know, a light joking moment, while underneath, you know, a very kind of important, shared spiritual experience. And it was, it was interesting to kind of be in that dynamic with my dad, especially as he was preparing to retire. And trying to balance, you know, asking him to share his experience and wisdom, while also allowing him to kind of transition away from the space that he'd been in most of my life and trying to give him space to do that. And so it's, it was, you know, an interesting situation to navigate, but one that will always be a special memory. And Robin, you mentioned from the outside looking in, but it seemed to be a very tender moment. So the morning that I was set apart, I was set apart with two other individuals, Humberto Rosario, and Joey Williams. And, you know, the three of us were kind of all sitting together on the front row in the Temple, and my dad's going through all of the different things that have to be said, you know, as we go through the setting apart, and then, you know, he finally gets done with all this stuff. He's held back his tears, the entire service. And then at the very end, as he's welcoming us all to the council, he starts to cry and has to stop talking. And in that moment, Joey leaned over to me and whispered, I always knew that he loved me. And I about lost it on the front row laughing. That those tears were, you know, for, for me as his daughter, but being able to laugh about it in that moment, as well.

**Robin Linkhart** 27:09

Yeah. So tell us how this new chapter has been that you've just finished up. I think this is your second round of meetings, because you had meetings right after World Conference, didn't you?

**Joelle Wight** 27:22

Well we had a day of meetings after World Conference. So this is the first time that we've really engaged in that week long process together as a council. And I'll be honest, I'm still learning a lot. So getting a lot of things figured out and figuring out specifically, what my role on the Council is, and what unique things I have to contribute. But it's been a really good week, literally, we just got done a few hours ago with our meetings. And it's been really good, we've had the opportunity to build relationship with another with one another, to talk about the future of Community of Christ and the mission of Jesus Christ, and to learn from one another because we do come from such different contexts. And so really, this past week has been a reminder to me about what it means to be a worldwide movement. I, you know, I live in Washington, DC, which is in the United States of America. And so I oftentimes, you know, my focus is very centered around the United States experience. And so, being able to serve on this Council is is really wonderful, because I get to hear how Christ's mission is taking shape in places outside of the context that I find myself in every single day. So it's been a good experience. I'm still learning a lot. I know, I have a lot to learn. But I'm really grateful for the companions that I have on that journey,

**Robin Linkhart** 28:52

So we currently have seven Presidents of Seventy. Well, I'll tell you what, I'll list off the names and you can tell our listeners where that person served. So the Senior President of Seventy is Karin Peter,

**Joelle Wight** 29:09

And Karin serves kind of on the the Western part of the United States, that is Karin's field.

**Robin Linkhart** 29:16

And what is your field?

**Joelle Wight** 29:18

I am the Central USA and Northeast USA mission fields.

**Robin Linkhart** 29:23

And our other USA President of Seventy, Larry McGuire, and he has part of the US and and what's his international assignment?

**Joelle Wight** 29:35

Yeah. So he has the Southern US and then he also works in the countries in Africa, as well as India.

**Robin Linkhart** 29:42

And then John Glaser.

**Joelle Wight** 29:46



Yeah, so John Glaser is kind of an interesting case because he is supporting another of the oncoming Presidents of Seventy. Although that role he's kind of transitioning, but he serves in Canada as well as Mexico

**Robin Linkhart 30:03**

And, Adam Wade, who is also the Secretary of the Council, where's he serving?

**Joelle Wight 30:10**

Yeah. Adam lives in Australia and serves in the Asia Pacific mission field.

**Robin Linkhart 30:16**

And then we have Joey Williams.

**Joelle Wight 30:19**

Yes, Joey just moved back during the pandemic to Independence, Missouri, but he serves in Europe.

**Robin Linkhart 30:28**

And last, but not least, Humberto Rosario, who you mentioned was set apart the same day as you.

**Joelle Wight 30:34**

Yeah. Yeah. Humberto is from the Dominican Republic. And he serves in the Central and Latin American mission field, I believe.

**Robin Linkhart 30:46**

Yeah. And, that's such an internationally diverse group of folks. (Yeah.) Okay, so let's look at some kind of some global concepts. Now, as far as big ideas, when you think about Community of Christ, what are your hopes for the future? And how do you see God moving in the world in ways that connect with Community of Christ and God's invitation to boldly follow into the heart of God's vision for all creation?

**Joelle Wight 31:23**

Yeah, I think the thing that continually calls me back to Community of Christ and has kept me a part of this community throughout my life is our commitment to Zion, the peaceful kingdom of God on earth, and more than more than Zion and peaceful kingdom, I really like the term shalom. I believe that we are being called to God's shalom, which is God's preferred future for all of creation. And so I think that that is what kind of on a large scale Community of Christ is being called to participate in. But I think that we are also kind of playing one instrument and an important instrument in a larger orchestra. And so as we move forward, I'm, I'm really interested in seeing the ways that we learn to play with the other instruments. And to a large extent, we've already done that, and I'm excited for us to continue doing that. So I believe that there are others who are also about this, of creating God's Shalom, and living that out in very real ways in our communities. And so as I look at the future of Community of Christ, I think that that's, but I also think that we have a unique call to be peacemakers, to follow Jesus, the Peaceful One, that doesn't mean that we are the only people in the world trying to build peace. But I think that in the context, we find ourselves whether it be in the United States, or the Dominican Republic, or Australia, wherever it is, I think that we are called to model and share with others what it looks like to

respond in an alternative way to peace. And so to me, that's what I'm really excited for, in the future of Community of Christ is us learning new ways to people in communities who are peacemakers, who bring about reconciliation, and who help us find alternative ways that bring us closer to God Shalom.

**Robin Linkhart 33:32**

So as you live, this wholehearted discipleship life in today's world filled with uncertainty and this constant changing world, Joelle, how do you nurture your relationship with God?

**Joelle Wight 33:52**

You know, that's a really good question. And it's one that I think I constantly wrestle with. And I almost feel like it's not so much that I'm nurturing my relationship with God, but that God in relationship with me, continuously reaches out to me and gives me that resting place that place to come back to I am most grateful for the fact that in my relationship with God, there is nothing that is too big for God, too dark for God, too scary for God to handle about me and God knows me and loves me. And so that constant reminder is one that continues to help me grow my relationship with God. I do think that there are some, you know, specific and intentional things that need to happen as we try to deepen that relationship with God. And so one of those is spiritual practices. I have found ones that are good fits for me that helped me to connect with the divine. And, you know, I do a lot of work with young people. And so when I talk with young people about spiritual practices, I compare it to like the practice we do for the sports we play or, or the instruments that we play. And when we practice, when we take that intentional time to get better at something, when we're in a real situation, whether it be a concert or a game, it helps us be more aware, and more prepared. And so for me, that's what spiritual practices are all about. They help us be more aware of God in the world, and more prepared to respond to what God is calling us to in the world. And so I think those spiritual practices are really important. In my mission center, ( ... ) also really leaning in to the idea of discernment. And I'm so grateful for the congregations in that mission center, who are willing to kind of learn with me, as we discern together, what it looks like for us to be Community of Christ in the context that we find ourselves in. And so I'm learning more about the discernment process. And I believe that that is helping to nurture my relationship with God. Then the other thing I would say is that my relationship with God is nurtured in the ways that I'm able to learn from others' relationship with God. And so, you know, we mentioned that I just got out of a week of meetings with people who I would consider mentors and friends. And so to watch, the way that they nurture their relationships with God really helps me to do the same as I learn from them, kind of do what they have modeled for me.

**Robin Linkhart 36:46**

I love the way you frame that, especially how God is reaching out in relationship to you. I love that sense of framing that God is the one who loves us first, right who's reaching out to us first. And as they're there no matter what. Well, is there anything else you'd like to share with us today?

**Joelle Wight 37:14**

I can't think of anything specifically. But I just want to say thanks so much for inviting me to share a bit and I look forward to hopefully meeting with some of the listeners as I am out in the mission field over the next few months.

**Robin Linkhart 37:31**

Well, thank you for being with us today. Joelle. If you would like to hear more from Joelle, I invite you to check out the following episodes on ProjectZionpodcast.org Episode 236, where Joelle talks about ministry in Utah, Episode 366, where Joelle talks about providing a Utah Kids Camp online during the pandemic, Episode 505. And Joelle talks about ministry in Washington DC with lots of innovative approaches, and Extra Shots 68, where Joelle talks about our small group resource sacred space and writing thoughts for children. You can also visit Community of Christ YouTube channel and put Joelle White in the search bar to find Sermons and Talks from Joelle, and as always, a very special thanks to you our listeners for spending a portion of your day with us. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care bye bye.