

Whats Brewing | Chesapeake Bay MC New Expressions Panel

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

John Wight, Ryan Pitt, Robin Linkhart, Joey Williams, Mark Sadler, Nancy Ross, Joelle Wight, Linda Stanbridge

Robin Linkhart 00:26

Hello and welcome to What's brewing, a Project Zion Podcast series where we explore the question, "What is mission, and why does it matter? This is Robin Linkhart. And today's episode features a dynamic panel discussion hosted by the Chesapeake Bay Mission Center, a Community of Christ jurisdiction in the USA. The interviewer is Seventy and Mission Center President Joelle Wight. featured guests are Ryan Pitt, Nancy Ross, Linda Stanbridge, John Wight, and Joey Williams. This panel interview was offered via Zoom and includes audience participation, as the guest panelists explore the many dimensions of new expressions of Christ-centered communities in today's world.

Joelle Wight 01:19

Go ahead and introduce yourself, and maybe tell us what does the term "new expressions" mean to you?

Ryan Pitt 01:26

I'm Ryan, thrilled to be back with the Chesapeake Bay folks, our stories, and paths intersected there for about three years. Emma is in the other room, I know she's usually the favorite Pitt, but you have to settle for me tonight. I serve as the Mid Atlantic Mission Center president and we live in Bayonne, New Jersey. New expressions is such a unique term, but the part of the term that I'm drawn to is "express." I think it's an invitation for a group or community or individual to live and express their authentic self through the love of the Divine. And we'll just ... some of my other thoughts kind of tie into that, but I'll just leave it there. So when I hear new expressions, I like the core of Express. Glad to be here.

Joelle Wight 02:30

Glad you're here, Joey, do you want to go ahead and jump in?

Joey Williams 02:34

Sure. I'm Joey Williams. And now I work at the Independence Temple. I just started a new position in January where I have two positions. So I work in hospitality. I arrange the Temple tours and kind of tried to define what it means to be a people of the temple when you're not in Independence. What does

it mean to be out in the world? And and how does the Temple live out there in the world? And, probably a good way that that made sense to me was working for the last eight years in Europe, where I served as the Mission Center president. And then another job that I have now is working in Formation Ministries, trying to develop international resources.

Joelle Wight 03:19

Awesome, thanks, Joey.

Joey Williams 03:22

I'm supposed to tell you what, what new expressions are. And I think this term is up for grabs. So my definition is definitely correct. But I've been thinking about that. And I think one of the most important things for me, in the context of Community of Christ, and my work with the church is space. So what space are we giving? So that kind of that mission prayer, God, where will your Spirit lead today allows the space for that to grow, and for something to actually happen there. So we look at what we're doing, we identify what is extremely important and has to continue, and we keep doing those things. And then I think we look at what we've been doing and we say, You know what, we might be able to give some space, we might begin to let some things go to make sure we have space to respond to where we feel that that Spirit is leading us. And then if I were to add anything else to that definition for me, there's also a sense of freshness in this. And so when I think about new expressions, what doesn't come with the heaviness or the burden of responsibility, or things that I've been doing in church that now feel like work? And maybe those help us identify what are those things to begin to let go of or do differently so that we have the space for something fresh that energizes us. So that's my, my working definition.

Joelle Wight 04:53

I love that. John, would you like to share?

John Wight 05:00

My name is John Wight. I reside in Blue Springs, Missouri. I am officially retired, technically retired, however, the First Presidency asked if I would continue in retirement to serve as the Senior President of Seventy, President of Quorum Three and the various things that go with those two functions, so it doesn't really feel like retirement yet. What does new expressions mean? To me, I'm pretty generic about that, for me, anything that is different than the status quo, anything that that we are trying to do differently than, then we've done it for a million years, that can be a small change, it can be a big change, it can be a small activity or a big activity. It can be done by a congregation, it can be done by an individual. So I'm, you know, I'm pretty broad, it's just any thing that is not within the bounds of what we would regard as the status quo.

Joelle Wight 06:04

Awesome. Thanks, Nancy?

Nancy Ross 06:07

Hi, so I am a professor in southern Utah, and I have a new new responsibility and new job and my mission center, I'm an Emerging Church Practitioner. And that is kind of exciting for the Pacific Southwest International Mission Center. So I have a day job and a little bit of a side job, and that's kind

of exciting. So and I think that new expressions are like an experience or group, a something and more focused around people. That is a new way to live into either our Enduring Principles and or our Mission Initiatives that doesn't look like a traditional worship experience. So so like, how do we do the Community of Christ thing where the Community of Christ thing is largely described by our Enduring Principles and our Mission Initiatives in a way that doesn't involve a traditional service? So I and I imagine that as being, like John said, being pretty expansive.

Joelle Wight 07:13

Thanks, Nancy, and congratulations on the new role. I didn't know about that. That's exciting. Linda?

Linda Stanbridge 07:21

Hi, everybody. I'm Linda, my pronouns are she and her, and I live in Michigan. And I serve as the Invitation Support Minister here. I did that part-time for a while, and I'm now doing it full-time, which is exciting to have so much more time to give to new expressions, and all the other exciting things that are going on. I'm with Joey, I think I have maybe a working definition. I thought about this a lot, because it's so hard for me to nail down and be real specific. But I decided, I think it's an expression of church that's different or new or somehow fresh, something we haven't done before, some kind of way to connect with God in a community. And I think that's as close as I can get right now.

Joelle Wight 08:06

Well, thank you all so much. What I love about what we've already seen so far is I we have five panelists here. And so I thought that there would maybe be like a little overlap. But that's not the case, each definition of new expression was a little bit different and brought a little bit different perspective. So I'm excited to see how that happens with the other answers tonight as well. So the next question I have and again, anybody, panelists, just feel free to jump in. And if you don't want to answer you don't have to Why do you think it's important that we explore new expressions? And I guess it's an extension of that? Why do you think it's important we explore new expressions in this moment?

John Wight 08:45

Okay, I'll jump in then.

Linda Stanbridge 08:47

Say one of us have to be great, go John.

John Wight 08:52

Let's see I've got what 47 minutes left to address this one. Well, it's a kind of a multi tiered thing for me. Why do I think it's important? Well, I go all the way back to what the Apostle Paul said. He said, "when I was with the Jews, I became like a Jew. When I was with the Gentiles, I became like a Gentile, I have become all things to all people that by all means, I might save some, I do it all for the sake of the gospel." And so for me, that's what this is really all about, to find new ways to connect, he found out what it was to be a Jew, he found out what it was to be a Gentile so that he could communicate the message and mission of Jesus Christ in ways that those people could understand. So I think, you know, that's why it's important for us to look at new expressions, rather than saying, well, here's how we do church. Why don't you come over and act like us? You know, we need to go and say, How can I

communicate to this person? And then of course, there's always the Great Commission, "Go ye into all the world, preach, teach, baptize, etc, etc." That's always been there since Jesus's time when he gave us that. Doctrine and Covenants 165, the most recent one, "continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives forward. Additional innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting groups of disciples and seekers are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world." And there are a number of other passages from the document covenants, but 165, you know, we don't have to go back decades, that's the most recent one. God's telling us, God's giving us this council new, additional, innovative approaches. So that's why I think it's another reason that it's so important. And then, of course, the cultural developments that are described in the book Beyond Resistance gives us some very practical reasons that we should be pursuing new expressions.

Nancy Ross 10:55

Just building on what John said, I think it's really important to be able to respond to our contexts. And I think that that's one of the things that our new expressions can really do, which is that we don't just invent and decide to do something. That we're often ... new expressions or responding to needs, or themes are things that emerge within the community that are maybe unique to the community, and then try to lean into that need or that desire. And so I think that that's new expressions are just give us a lot of flexibility to respond to what God is calling us to in our particular context. And that's always going to look different. And I love that element. You know, we're, it's not that all of our worship services on a Sunday are going to look exactly the same. But our new expressions are really going to be responding to the needs of people on the ground. And I think that that's one of the most important things that I think of when I think of new expressions.

Linda Stanbridge 11:56

Yeah, I had written down something similar, you know, part of our calling is to constantly reinterpret the gospel for our own time. And new expressions have such an ability to do that. And I think it's also often a softer entry point into the church. If you are unchurched if you have church trauma, to be able to connect in a way that's new and fresh and feels different, it can feel safer, and be an easier place to practice invitation.

Ryan Pitt 12:27

I promise I'm not a pessimist here. But my response to the question is because the church is becoming more irrelevant to newer generations, we have no choice. We have to explore new expressions. I mean, the statistics, and I'm speaking the US context, right now that the statistics are just staggering. And how many folks are finding depth and meaning that once was found in religious environments, but they're being found on golf courses, they're being found out in nature and hiking, they're being found in book clubs, they're being found in these new, innovative online and virtual spaces. So if we don't adapt, then I think the church is going to be in trouble.

Joey Williams 13:31

So when I started this, this job, eight years ago, in Europe, my most recent time in Europe, one of the questions that I asked people all over the place was, "Why Community of Christ?" And often and especially in Germany, I got the response. I live in Vegas, Scott, which means a living God. And so

there was this idea of you know, that's connected to this idea of a prophetic people, but a living God, when we go back to our Doctrine and Covenants, so many start with, listen, or lift up your eyes. So see, and listen, that requires context. And this living God, I think, just continues to call us into whatever context where we find God at work in a life. And so, as kind of John said, we're kind of just called to make sure that we respond, where we see God is at work. And like Ryan said, that is we're discovering that that's in many places that maybe we haven't looked or listened before.

Joelle Wight 14:31

Awesome. Thank you all so much. I want to bring everyone's attention to the chat for just a moment where Mark has provided a good summary for us about potato chips, so something that's very relatable to me as well. I'm checking really quick to see David has a comment. It's I don't know that we need to adapt, but we definitely need to reach beyond our current ministries to new ways of reaching people. Definitely. So with that in mind, we're gonna move on to the next question, which, when I, when I sent these pre-planned questions out to our panelists on this one, I said, you know, if you're involved with more than one new expression, pick one or two favorites, a couple that are really that really stand out to you. And I mentioned that because each of these individuals, I don't know for sure. But my feeling is that they're involved in lots of different kinds of new expressions that, you know, like was said in the first response are maybe small activities, or large activities or small events, one time events, or, you know, things that happen on a recurring basis. And so, again, these take different forms. But the next question is, what new expressions are you currently involved with? And how did you become involved with them?

Joey Williams 15:47

So before you start that Joelle, well, I just wanted to let people know that I'm putting in the chat, I could not determine like one or two, the highlight. So I am putting a list of new expression, what I think are some new expressions that I've been working on in the chat. And if there are any of those that speak to you, or you're like, I want to know more about that. Let me know, and then I'll respond to that. So I'll wait. I won't go first.

Joelle Wight 16:12

I love that approach, Joey. And I have to say, the reason that you were invited to be on this panel is because I had the opportunity to sit and listen to you talk about each of these. And for the folks that are here tonight, literally any one of these that you asked him about is awesome and cool. And it'll be great to hear about. So whatever speaks out to you feel free to throw that in the chat.

Ryan Pitt 16:33

So we've got a couple up here in mid Atlantic, and I'll speak to the first one being Movie Club. We a couple, I guess a year and a half ago, we started a online book club, realized it was growing pretty quickly. And but it wasn't reaching the audience that I wanted it to reach. And so we started a movie club, essentially, people watch movies found on Netflix on their own. And then they're invited to respond to discussion questions on Facebook. And then at the end of the month, we're going with the last Monday, picked arbitrarily, and meeting for an hour just to talk about the movies. And we're really intentional in the movies that we select. Most recently, for the month of January, we picked Dances with Wolves, and Tarata. So we wanted a movie for all generations, like tiata, and then a movie that would

be that's appropriate for older audiences, being Dances with Wolves. And so we ask questions about identity and culture and appropriation. And this incredible conversation just starts out of nowhere. We don't start with a prayer, we there's no scripture, there's no centering moment, there's no spiritual practice, other than sharing in the round, we just asked one question, what scene, interaction, or character, or image stood out to you. And the conversation just starts from there. And it's very, very new. We are in our fourth month. And I will say that, from the very first session, we always find this place of kind of natural centering around a God moment, or some particular scene that brought this emotional, theological response from somebody in the group. It always happens towards the end, kind of like a campfire, you know, everyone's excited, and then we get to the that moment in the campfire where we really just feel in the Spirit. And it's happened. three out of three times, it really is amazing. And so this just started with what are the interests of the group? And how can we tap into this? How can we make it convenient. People watch the movies asynchronously, come on work on their own time. If you can't make the zoom session, you can do it all you can post your responses. If you are an introvert, you can log in and just listen. So to Joey's point about making space, this was a good example of that. The second one is a larger project and more operating at the Mission Center level. We have three congregations that are merging into one congregation right now. It's a hybrid experience that is still being worked on and figuring out, we haven't had our first worship for congregational experience outside of the leadership coming together and trying to figure out what we're going to do. We don't even have a name for the congregation yet. We're so so early in the development of this new entity. But one of the homework assignments, if you will, I asked our leaders to think about is, what passions do you have? And what talents and gifts would you like to offer? This congregation, we're really trying to break the mold of what a congregation does is and get back to the heart of being a group of people, group of Christ's followers, taking care of one another, and living the mission of Christ in our communities as best as possible. So I'm sure there'll be more to share as time goes on. But that's a project that I'm really, really excited about.

Nancy Ross 21:07

So I want to share a little bit of a couple of things that that I am involved in, I would say that my congregation my tiny emerging congregation in southern Utah is its own kind of form of new expression. We only have a handful of adults, there are between us, we have about 13 children. And most Sundays the adults meet and discuss a text. Before the pandemic, we would also sing hymns that would go with our text. Sometimes our texts came from the lectionary. Sometimes our text was a short story or a poem or some other kind of reading. And we spend a lot of time digesting our text through the practice of typically through the practice of Lectio Divina. This has happened on Zoom. And, and we've been meeting largely outside since the beginning, since this past spring, so we continue to meet and discuss texts, though there is no singing at present. We also after a number of conversations about wanting to do something for our kids, but not really having a lot of resources to throw at children's ministry, we decided to adopt Harry Potter and the Sacred Text is our children's program, which kind of became a an everybody program before the pandemic, where we would read one chapter from, we're now on book four, we started it book one. And every session, we would have read one chapter from the book, before we start, we pick a theme, we do a spiritual practice that's usually been sacred imagination, or Lectio Divina. We're working, we're experimenting with a different practice called Havruta at the moment, which comes from the Jewish tradition. And we bless characters, and that is that moved online in the pandemic, when that at which point we lost most of our kids who had been

participating. And now we have a smattering of different adults. But that is a ministry that really reaches people who struggle with a Christian identity, but who want connection and community and be to be discussing values. And so I feel like that, that has reached a lot of different kinds of people who would always hesitate to set foot in a church. And because of that, we have never held it in a church space. We've always tried to hold it in a public space or on Zoom. Another last thing that I want to mention is that emerging out of a number of discussions that we've had over the years, in our congregation, we are partnering with our local Unitarian Universalists to offer the "Our Whole Lives" sex ed curriculum for middle schoolers. And so I'm helping to co-facilitate that. That is not something I would have ever imagined as an emerging, emerging church sort of thing. But it fits in so well with our sense of the worth of all persons, responsible choices, and pursuing peace with some of the particular harms of and religious trauma that the folks in my congregation carry. And so I think this is another example of the need to respond to particular contexts, and our new expressions can do that.

Mark Sadler 24:13

Nancy, can I ask a follow up question about that one specifically? Is that program? Is it only for the youth or does it also include a section for the adults, the parents of those youth? And the reason I asked that is because when I was in youth group growing up, we we collaborated with another church in the area. And we had, it was a it was an extended weekend workshop. That was for both the parents and the youth to talk about sex education and a lot of strange things. And they had different sessions. Some of the sessions were separated, some of them were mixed, and I think it was a fascinating way to do it to have the parent I'm involved in that as well. And that whole program made a pretty big impact on me. So I was just curious.

Nancy Ross 25:08

That sounds amazing. We don't have necessarily the human resources to do all of that, though. We, we tried it. So it's just for the kids what we're doing, we report back to parents after every session, and we're like, Hey, this is what we covered today. And in a general sense, here were the questions that came up without trying to like pick out the particular kids, everybody knows that we're all mandated reporters. But we are, we ... there are some good books for parents, and we're going to start recommending them in some of those emails after the class. Because we want this opportunity to be generating conversation between parents and kids. My kids are in the class. We had a lot of good conversations stem out,

Mark Sadler 25:50

I was gonna say that was the key to the whole program. Is that conversation opening that conversation? Safe conversation between the kids and the adults? Yeah,

Nancy Ross 26:00

No, I love that suggestion.

Linda Stanbridge 26:03

I can share. Thanks for sharing that, Nancy. That's super interesting. Now I made a note because now I'm curious to hear for myself. So as the Invitation Support Minister, I get to work with the new expressions leaders in Michigan, and we have quite a bit going on, we have six-ish, that are active and

are meeting regularly, six new expressions that we meet monthly or weekly, it's you know, of course, it's different for everybody's needs. And then we have five that are in sort of a discernment or planning stage. So it's getting, it's getting to the point where it's feeling exciting, we're going to start getting together as a group to learn how new expressions leaders can support each other better, because we know that the challenges are different for every group. But there are some common things that we can either roadblocks we can remove, or ways that we can work together. So that's exciting. My favorite one is the one that I'm involved with. And it's what got me excited about new expressions. It's called beyond the horizon. And so the name comes from D&C (Doctrine and Covenants) 161. And it started actually, as a dinner church. And so we would just meet once a month, and this was, you know, long before COVID. So we've been around for about four years, we would go to the park, we would take the kids to splashpad, or, you know, we would do some kind of an activity and get pizza or somebody would make a big thing of spaghetti. And we'd get together and we'd have discussion, and which was great for kids, because, you know, they're running around, and they're just being kids together, but they're absorbing the experience. And when the pandemic first began, of course, everybody thought it was going to be temporary. So it was like no big deal. We'll just we're gonna skip like this month, and then next month, we'll go to the next person's house, it's, you know, it's just fine. But we started realizing that we were missing that connection so much, even though we'd only been getting together once a month, we started a group chat on Facebook, which normally I'm a person who hates group chats, because they're risky, you get so many notifications. But this group really stays connected throughout the week. And, you know, one message. hey I'm really having a hard day today with my anxiety. Will you guys pray for me. And you know, within a few minutes, it's like, oh, my gosh, yes, I'm praying for you right now. You know, call me if you want to talk the relationships. It's not an obnoxious chat. It's really is keeping us connected during the week. But we started meeting once a month online, or once a week, excuse me just to do a spiritual practice, like 15 minutes. But we continued to want to go deeper, and people were feeling so lost, it was a really easy place to invite others too. So in the early few months of the pandemic, we saw a lot of growth, where people were bringing friends a place to connect, that's really safe. But again, we kept finding more. So it's just kind of changed and expanded as we've gone. But you know, this far into the pandemic, we meet once a week for an hour and a half. The first portion is like a fellowship time and that it depends, it's 30 to 45 minutes, it's really a big chunk of what we do. But we have a GET TO KNOW you question, which we added maybe like six months ago, because we wanted to continue going deeper and getting to know each other better. Sometimes silly things, you know, what's your favorite ice cream topping. And sometimes it's more serious. Bring your favorite coffee mug, and someone might share that, you know, that came from their grandmother or you know, a close friend or they have a story connected to it. But it keeps us in a practice of sharing and getting comfortable talking to each other and sharing back and accepting those stories. And we also do kind of a like a high/low like what you would do in middle school like a junior high camp or senior high camp and what was your high and what was your low for the week, or just share a summary of what really week was like and a lot of vulnerable sharing comes out of that, especially as the same group meets week to week and we're taking this big chunk of our time together to really focus on what's going on in each other's lives. And then we usually follow that with a spiritual practice. which is about 15 to 20 minutes, it just sort of depends. And then at that point, the group kind of breaks. And there are some people who leave, that's what they participate in, they go on. And then I would say maybe half the group stays for the final. It's supposed to be 30 minutes, but frequently goes over sometimes will go as long as two hours, and which is the discussion part of our group. And so we

pick out... we use Witness the Word, we use Daily Bread, we use the Mission Stories, and we'll use the small group resources as well. And we're also doing some videos right now from Bible Project, which is cool. And so that someone whoever's in charge that week will send out hey, this is what we're watching for this week. It's a 15 minute YouTube video, or hey, read this article. Sometimes it comes with prepared discussion questions, sometimes we just get there. And it's like, hey, what you guys think? What came up what felt uncomfortable? What was affirming? And, amazing conversation comes out of it. Last week, we watched a video from Bible Project about God. And I thought, I'm gonna start with this, like the one of the more basic videos from here, and it was like we were, you know, level 10 deep. And what do you think that is, like, you know, some of these amazing discussions that have just pushed me so far in my own spiritual growth, I think the other thing that's kind of unique about that is that no single person is in charge. So we have a Google sheet that we share. It's somebody's in charge of making sure it gets pushed out six months or whatever, but you just plug your name in when it works for you and mark it on your calendar. I mean, typically, we don't have a hard time getting that filled out. So everyone has a chance to be the presider, who welcomes us with prayer who picks the "get to know you" question for the week, you get a chance to be to pick the spiritual practice. And we have some resources, places that we suggest to go, but people can also just Google it. And we find some really great crossover and other programs. And then same for the discussion. And people feel really comfortable to come for all of it, or part of it. Maybe you're just busy this week, or you don't have you know, the mental capacity to deal with discussion, you're still gonna come and chat and get that spiritual renewal. So that's become probably my favorite. My favorite experience. I think this is the most spiritual fulfillment I've gotten out of a church ministry in my life.

Joelle Wight 32:22

Really quickly, and I want to ask a follow up question, you mentioned that some of your new expressions are in kind of like a time of discernment. And I think sometimes we get so eager to just get started to just go. So about how long has that discernment time lasted for the groups that you're working with?

Linda Stanbridge 32:39

That's a really good question. And it varies a lot, I would say, you know, typically, at least a few months, depending on what the person is planning, it could take six months or longer. But I would say usually at least a few months. And part of that is I don't usually not to say it couldn't happen. But I don't usually suggest that someone starts that on their own. Because that was what I tried to do. When I when I started working with Beyond the Horizon. And I started that because I was at like spiritual zero. you know, I needed something that was going to fulfill like my hole that I had. And I said to myself, like, this is the last, this is the last thing I can try, I have to find a way or I'm gonna have to just step back because I'm getting so burnt out. So part of that focused few months is also forming a team and building some support, doing a little bit of planning, putting out feelers, getting to know each other. Because I just I think you have to have people backing you up so that you don't get to that low point, and you can continue to move forward.

John Wight 33:42

I will answer the question very quickly, I will talk very fast. One of the disappointments in my life right now is that because of my assignments, I am not able to be involved on an ongoing basis with a new

expression. You know, some of my stuff is global. As the Quorum President of Quorum Three, I cover the entire United States. And so it's just anyway, I won't complain anymore. But I do get to be kind of indirectly involved with a lot of new expressions. I work with too, with the MCISMs (Mission Center Invitation Support Ministers) to try to provide support and coordinate some things with them. So you know, I feel like I'm connected to a lot of them. I was asked quite some time ago to put together a collection of new expressions that are going on in the US and so I do maintain this. It's available free of charge out on the church's website. It's a it's a grassroots thing. It's not slick, it's not shiny, it's just reports from the people who are engaged in those new expressions, in their words, I don't edit anything and they're just out there for people to read and get ideas from and so, you know, I feel connected to a lot of new expressions because of that. And then I try to provide whatever support I can. I really miss that ongoing stuff though through The years the various things that I have been able to to be involved in. So I'm going to use that experience to answer the question, share a bit about how the idea came about and what you do for each. Well, I can't do that. But I can tell you how the idea came about. It was God. In all cases, you know, it was God. And that goes right back to what Linda was saying about discernment. So I won't say anything more about that. But I would, I can't take any credit for it.

Joelle Wight 35:27

Really quick, throwing your in the chat specific ones you want Joey to talk about. But I also want to draw your attention to a question that Ryan answered about discernment in the chat. So be sure to check out that answer as well.

Joey Williams 35:39

I'll start with one that's not in the chat. And it's a program that actually goes throughout many different churches in the UK right now. It's called Coffee Mornings. And people literally just show up at churches and, and drink coffee. But what I noticed was, it's helpful that entire communities, several churches, and denominations and even different faiths are doing that program. And so what it does is it builds a trust level for people in their local communities to just walk in and step in and not have to have prior contact with those congregations. So I found that to be a very interesting aspect of that program is that when several churches around the neighborhood are doing it, you get people that will walk in, and you can get people that traveled to different groups, because they want to go to Community of Christ on Monday, do a Lutheran church on Wednesday. So depending on the dates that you set that up, but that's been a really interesting thing for me to be involved in, it sounded really simple. And almost all of the different groups that I have visited in the UK that have a Coffee Morning, it has grown into something else. So at one location, a lot of the people that attend that also are part of a Food Distribution Program that our church helps to set up and to deliver in that area. In another place. There is a congregation that is in the it's like kind of in the middle of all of these housing developments. But they probably get around 30. They said, I think last week 35 people came to their Coffee Morning. I mean, obviously, there's a lot of people living within that community, and many people walk much more than in the US. But they're in the UK, you know, people are walking and coming to be a part of that. Then another thing I wanted to bring up are peace colloquies. So one of the first things that I did when I got to Europe is I put together a peace and justice team for Europe. And we came up with nine things that we wanted to see happen. And one of those was as simple as defining peace and justice for the Europe context. So that was just a definition of peace and justice for the Europe context. The biggest dream was that Dunfield house, one of our big campgrounds in the UK would become a peace and

justice center for exploration and peace topics. So that that has not yet found its complete, I guess realization, but it might someday. But one of the other things that we had was a peace colloquy. And so we began to basically copy what we saw before at the Temple in Independence, tried to put together these peace colloquies. What was really interesting and wonderful is that we invited people who were studying who had PhDs or studying PhD programs. And we were intentional that half of our speakers came out of the academic world, from, that were not Community of Christ members, but that would come and talk about their issues that they were working on for peace. And then we connected. And I think this was real creative for the very first one that we did, because we connected it to sacraments. So we had someone come and talk about peace advocacy. And then we had a Community of Christ person for 15 minutes make a connection to priesthood. So what does it mean as a priest when you accept priesthood to become an advocate for peace for your community, for your congregation, and for the world? And that really helps people bridge 'Oh, peace advocacy is this in a world level. And this one might be able to mean in my local context.' Out of that experience, the very first piece colloquy we had our our main speaker in our award Peace Award person was Sam Walton, who was a Quaker. And he, he just he, I don't know, he just spoke to the people in a great way. But his question was, what banner do you stand under? And that just seemed to illuminate the UK for some reason. He asked that question, what is your band? What do you what would you carry a bit, what parades would you go and stand in? And out of that people began to move and want to be a part of that. The second award person that we gave the Peace Award to and has his art keynote speaker was a man named Keith Hebden. And he works with a program called Citizens UK. And if you look that up there might be some interesting things for your community, but he's basically a community organizer. And citizens UK works and tries to identify what are the issues in your community and how do you want to address them. He came to my house and sat down with me. Andrew Bolton was there, I didn't know what was going on, Andrew makes these things happen. And within months, all of a sudden, this small congregation where I lived in Leicester, England, of 12 members maximum that run all of the things that they do in that congregation, these 12 people were an essential part of this movement of Citizens UK, and organized a mayoral debate between the camp the current mayor and the other candidates that were running for mayor. And these were minor candidates. These were not necessarily the main people running but it was to hear uplift, some of the other voices, organize the place to do that. We had a little girl from one of our youth clubs, who was the timer and I will never forget, this little girl, nine years old, one of the Timekeepers sitting up at the main table, as these mayoral candidates are talking and debating. And she when that time was up three minutes of talking would ring this bell. And at one point, the current mayor was like, No, I'm going to speak a little bit longer. And she just rang it again. It was just this amazing moment. But out of that, the Leicester congregation from their participation in that then got involved with a prison visiting ministry. So out of just their community organizing, one of the things they identified was, there's a prison in Leicester, and they have a program for when they're just about about six months before someone is released. They identify who's going to be released and wants to stay in the Leicester area. And then they bring in some volunteers who will come and meet them. But it's always organizations. It's not like one on one. So when someone comes out, if they walk into the Leicester congregation, they will not feel like, oh, no, these people don't know me what's going to happen if they find out I've been in prison. But it allows people to know this is a safe space, or place where you can come once you are out of prison. So that was a really neat ministry and, and a new expression, I think of what now the Leicester congregation does. And then another thing, they also began and this is probably because of Andrew Bolton moving now he now lives where I lived in

Leicester. And they do interfaith forums now. So that small little blue church that can only house maybe 30 to 40 people, you can only get 30 or 40 seats in there. This congregation of 12 people that they have, they have an event twice a year, where they invite five or six people to form a panel from all different faiths. And then they cover different topics. One of their topics was dressed how you dress in school, or and one of the topics was the role of women and in Leicester and in our society, and from faith perspectives. And they even invite you know, they invite people who represent even the atheist perspective and Wiccan perspective, as well as some of the popular more popular faith movements. So that was, I thought a really neat thing that came out of that. Joelle. You also mentioned, I see in the chat, the Rome pilgrimages, and I'll just tell you, we did a pilgrimage three years ago, the year before the pandemic started and took people from our mission center, because we had a member, Michael Wright, if anybody knows him, who lives in Rome, and he runs a program for Duquesne, Pittsburgh University, Duquesne University over there, he has a campus, that's half of it is a what do you call that? I want to say a nunnery is that the word you use? A convent, half of it's a convent. And the other half is for the students the space that they have. And it's on kind of this beautiful little small campus, just outside of the city of Rome. And so because Michael lived there, he said, Why don't you come at a time when our students are gone without their things here, and you can use that space. And so we did a pilgrimage. And then after that, we were like, We need to repeat this because you can have this small, wonderful experience and then have kind of that same program over and over with either the same people or different people because obviously everyone can't go to that one time. So there will now be another pilgrimage that will be at the end of this year. It's been scheduled now for November.

Joelle Wight 44:57

Can I invite myself is that appropriate?

Joey Williams 44:59

You Can. we did have people that were outside of the European Mission Center last time that came. So that's awesome, definitely able to go.

Joelle Wight 45:08

So I, I got a private message from my dad that said, See, this is why I asked about time. And he's right, because I still have six questions that I was planning on asking our panelists. But to me, it's important that you all have time to ask some questions as well. So I'm going to ask one final question, and then turn it over to all of you for any questions that you have. But the reason I want to get this last question in is because as I'm listening to our panelists share, I feel myself getting excited. And you know, there's so many good ideas and so many cool things happening. But I also know that, that sometimes when we engage in new expressions, things don't always go the way we plan, you know, they haven't gotten to the point where they're going well, and we can share about them. And so they're not at that stage. So the question that I want to ask the panelists, before I turn it over to you is, what challenges have you faced in new expressions? And how have you handled these challenges?

Nancy Ross 46:07

I feel like one of the biggest challenges that we have is that we are a small, my, my congregation is super tiny. And so we have a human capital, like pretty hard limit on what we can do. And in the earlier life of our congregation, we probably over committed to big things, even if we felt that those were things

we really felt passionate about different different kinds of community projects. But I think that thinking if you want to commit to a program that you're going to offer longer term, you've got to figure out how to do it in a sustainable way. When I first started facilitating Harry Potter and the Sacred Text, I tried to do it every week. And I felt like that was like way too much. What I've realized is that if I do it every other week, that that actually works really well, that feels really sustainable, but not trying, recognizing what are the limitations of, you know, what is something really going to cost, you know, not just in terms of money, but in terms of time, and then making sure you can commit to that maybe sometimes you only do things for a stretch, you know, and you commit to so many times, but you can do that. And then you and then you do something else, or you take a break. And I think that's being really honest with ourselves about what something costs is really important.

Linda Stanbridge 47:22

Yeah, I really agree with that. And I mentioned earlier, having a leadership team that's kind of formed. So it's not everything on this one person. I think that's really important. To Nancy's point. You know, we we might I mentioned, we share this Google Sheet for planning and you just go and you plug yourself in wherever it works. My rule is that if it doesn't get filled in, we're not doing it, because obviously, we don't have the capacity to do it. And so we're gonna choose not to see that as a disappointment, like, oh, Beyond the Horizon is failing, because we didn't have discussion last week, it's like, nope, everybody has too many irons in the fire. It's not a bad thing. We're not, we're not going to panic, we're just gonna say nobody had this glimpse this week. And that's okay. We're just not going to do. Right. So you know, being very reasonable with yourself in the future.

John Wight 48:06

Hey, I have a button that illustrates one of the biggest challenges I've faced through the years, it says. But we've always done it that that this way. And coupled with that, is the term homeostasis, which I'm not a scientist. But as I understand it, it means that built into us as human beings is a desire to not change to hold on. So I think that's been one of my biggest challenges. And then having people who are very inward looking, hence the Doctrine and Covenants, quote, that says, Look, also beyond your walls to the far flung places where the church must go. Good counsel there, because we tend to hang on. And that's been one of my biggest challenges.

Nancy Ross 48:58

I think with that comes also the challenge of is this Christian, like, you know, or when I try and talk it sometimes to other people, or when I was in seminary and talking to other people about my congregation, or some of the things we were doing, the question often came up is like, is that Christian? Or is that this enough or that enough? And I have just had to rely on the fact that if this is something that we have discerned as a group, right over time, and through the influence of the Spirit, then it is exactly what we should be doing, even if it doesn't look X enough, and doesn't meet the expectations of how we have always done things.

Linda Stanbridge 49:35

I think that's something that's actually gotten a little bit better in the last couple of years with new expressions was that we used to get a lot more pushback from congregations and congregation leaders who feel spread very thin, understandably, and are frustrated about new things because we already

have all these things that are so in that are so hard to do, and it's like why are we trying? Why are we going to put all our energy in this new thing? I think that it's shifting a little bit, at least in our mission center. But I do think that's asking ourselves and each other is this really what we're supposed to be doing is that Community of Christ? You know, it's I think those are normal questions. But I do think the attitude is changing a little bit, at least in our mission center.

Joey Williams 50:15

Just to be very honest, probably in everything that I was a part of in Europe, there was a key person who had a passion for whatever that was. So I mean, hopefully I was support to that person. And I think if you're working with somebody else who has a passion, try to drive that and say, Okay, where do you want to go? And how can I help you get there and be the support that you can be? But I also wish that I would have probably earlier said, Let's, from the beginning, identify collaboration with someone else? Or who do we name as, this is your mentor this person doing this that's got this passion? Do you want to be mentored? Do you want to be a part of this and then grow it with this person? I wish I would have done that a little more. One of the things we did with World Service Corps is, from the beginning, I asked the Mission Center to dedicate \$50,000, basically, or euros to that program, which gave me a lot of flexibility. And I know there's the question of money. Not every congregation has that. But what it allowed was over a period of five years, for us to have over 12, I think we had 12, or 13, World Service Corps people that either served for three months. And then we had three that served for over three years, one of those being Sandy Gamet, who, for the last three years was completely self sustained. And she stayed for a total of six years in Berlin, Germany, and worked on projects for us. So that was a really helpful thing to identify from the beginning just, you know, finances that could help drive some things forward, when we identified Hey, go there and do that.

Joelle Wight 51:54

And, Ryan, if you have an answer to this question, I do want to hear it. But just on Joey's note, a reminder to everybody in Chesapeake Bay, we do have funds available, and you can fill out an application to access access those. So definitely a great point, Joey, and we do have that available. Ryan, did you want to add anything before I turn it over to the group?

Ryan Pitt 52:16

The there's just been so many obstacles and challenges, I think one of the biggest that I encounter within myself. So I'm being 100% honest, is not projecting what I want out of the ministry or the new expression and allow it to be what it needs to be at that particular time. For that particular group. I can go in with an agenda. I can go in saying, okay, you know, this is going to be the Mission initiative we hit tonight, or, this is the direction I see this conversation going about Dances with Wolves, I should prepare myself and have some articles and things to throw out there. It'll never go that way. It's good to prepare, right? So you can have that conversation. But just to let it be what it needs to be and get your hands out of it. Let the Spirit guide and that's not easy. I'm still working with that.

Joelle Wight 53:19

Well, folks, I am incredibly sorry that I've technically left you with two minutes. So I'll say we might go a bit over if you need to leave anybody if anybody needs to leave know that that's just fine. And I do

apologize. But I do want to turn it over to you to see if there are any questions from the group. So feel free to unmute yourself or to put your questions in the chat.

Unknown 53:40

Let me ask I think I have the ultimate in new expressions. And I asked this question in another group. Last week, week before, Joelle. Reading from Doctrine and Covenants section 151:9, "you who are my disciples must be found continuing in the forefront of those organizations and movements, which are recognizing the worth of persons and are committed to bringing the ministry of my son to bear on their lives." Now I know this is decades old. My question is, should we as a people, a Christian church, maybe not directly affiliating ourselves with the church, but shouldn't we be participating and possibly leading in protests and activities supporting such causes as maybe Black Lives Matter, racial justice, support for women's equal rights, voting rights, and those could go on and on and on? I mean, I just picked a few of these out of the news today.

Nancy Ross 54:50

So I want to jump in and say that my congregation has done all those things. But we aren't right like a group of white ladies in southern Utah is not going to be leading by clubs matter, but we are going to show up when they have events and when they have protests, and we're going to, we're going to be there and support. And we have shown up at Pride every year that we've had a Pride Festival out in the open. And we have showed up for our local women's march and many things. And sometimes it's appropriate for people in my group take a leadership role. And other times it isn't. But we have an eye and I'm looking around at this group. And I am sure and competent that many of us have participated in these sorts of in these sorts of things. Maybe we haven't always been singing about it really loud online. But I am confident that that we've all been doing a lot of this work, which per you know, to pursue peace in our communities.

Linda Stanbridge 55:49

Yeah, I think it's been difficult because we meet exclusively online now. But we did have a retreat last summer. And we have people in three states. So it's been difficult for us to understand what it really looks like to be missional as a group. So we've done a few things. A couple of years for Easter, we've done the offering of letters for to our state representatives, supporting legislation to you know, feed people who are hungry. We are working right now, we just finished a document called native hope, which is a guide for non-native allies. And so we worked through that over a number of weeks, and we just covered a lot of topics that we wanted to go deeper with. We went to the I can't think of it, what is it land, native land might be able to think of it anyway, you can look online, you can figure out whose land you're on, what are the treaties and sessions that happened so that, you know, the indigenous populations lost their land to this country. And so you know, we've been doing some of that work on our own, and then trying to take that and translate it into our individual lives, because we are spread out what are the ways in our local communities or in our interactions with others, that we can, you know, unpack our own stuff, help other people unpack theirs? And, you know, share the peace of Jesus that way?

Joelle Wight 57:09

I'm seeing in the chat that Ryan is responding to Sally's question, which I'm gonna go ahead and throw out there. Sally asked, How often do you evaluate the program, and Ryan just said, I've developed a new mantra, if you build it, they will come when they come, it's time to rebuild it. Bottom line, we constantly look at what we're doing. And anticipate change. Definitely. And he said, he goes on to say a little bit more, but I think that I'm seeing a sequel to Field of Dreams coming out of that. So yeah, if there's anybody else that has a comment on evaluation, feel free to add that as well.

Linda Stanbridge 57:44

Yeah, I would just I would just reinforce Yeah, a lot. Often, we do surveys periodically so that people can answer anonymously if they need to, what is the schedule still working for you? This is Tuesday at seven still good? What's good, what's bad are your needs being met? We tried to do that maybe every six months or so just to check each other. And we do it anonymously. I think everyone probably feels pretty comfortable sharing. But just so that we know there's there's nothing that would keep people from being honest with each other.

Ryan Pitt 58:12

David, when I think about your question, I think about individuals who are already in professional positions doing that work. And the importance it is how important it is that Community of Christ learns how to listen to their voice, to let them be the subject matter expert, to allow them to guide our movement. I think about the talent and resources in Chesapeake Bay Mission Center, and how connected folks are, and have been continued to be, and really listening to their voice in ways that we might not have done previously. Same can be said about mid-Atlantic, Southwest Pacific International, you know, I'm sure that every mission Mission Center can can learn something from this, but we already have members and friends doing incredible things. And so how do we learn to listen to their voice, but also give them the platform they need to lead us? And that, you know, that doesn't happen overnight. That's the whole leadership development conversation. But there is a relationship, in my opinion, a relationship between leadership development initiatives and new expressions. They do go hand in hand. So your question I think, opens pathways for those ongoing opportunities.

Joey Williams 59:57

And I would say if you are leading a new expression, you need to find someone that will hold you accountable, that will pull you aside and say, let's evaluate how you're doing, see where you're at, see what's going on and what what are your needs. But like I said before, if you're a person that's in a position of working with people in new expressions, then check in and see what those are. Because some will love for you to set up a Survey Monkey survey, and send those out and others just will not work that way. So it really is cultivating the talents and skills that people have and then trying to support people with others maybe who have some of those supplementary skills to help make sure that their whatever they're doing is either successful. I don't know what that means when I say successful, but that it that it has support.

Nancy Ross 1:00:46

I like that you bring up the point, Joey of success. And I think, right, it's important that we are clear when we begin new expressions about how we're going to evaluate success. And I would really encourage people to generally speaking, not value success in terms of numbers, like heart numbers,

but rather whether people are experiencing something that is meaningful, that is meeting a need, that is helping us lean into our community relationships or family relationships or relationships with the divine, and to, you know, that it's creating something deep and meaningful. And, and not just, you know, did we get the numbers we were hoping for.

John Wight 1:01:28

I also think in addition to that, that we need to give people permission to fail, it's okay to fail. As Thomas Edison said, I didn't fail 2000 times I learned 2000 ways not to make a light bulb. And so we need to be aware of that. Mark mentioned that in the chats, I think David referred to something about it as well, that it's okay to do it for a while and then close it up. That's fine. You know, it doesn't have to go on indefinitely. And as long as I have the mic, I don't want to overstay my welcome. But since this came up before I just, I just have to share this. I am such a huge believer in the discernment process that Linda talked about, and I think Ryan maybe did. So I just want to give you a couple of of things that I have found very useful. This is called the Justice Primer. And you think it should be primmer because it's a book, but the guys that rodents are former House Painters and I want to make sure everybody knows this isn't the end result. This is the primer coat. But this is an aid to the point of how long should you spend? This is an eight week process that helps small groups go through that discernment process to say, Okay, God, where are you leading this? Where do you want us to go? And similarly, this is one that's available free of charge through the church's website. It's just a tool to use for that discernment process to find out where is it that God wants to? Thank you.

Joelle Wight 1:02:59

What are the record? I did not mute him, he muted himself halfway through that sentence. So I was not being a dictator of the mic over here. Well, I really hate to do it. I think I could talk to you all for at least another hour and half an hour worth of questions. But just to be respectful of everyone's time. I want to draw the panelists attention to the chat with with the folks saying thank you so much for coming tonight. And I just want to say that, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for sharing. It's been wonderful to hear about these things and to hear about them honestly. And so the last thing that I want to ask of you is if it's okay for us to get in touch with you, before you hop off, will you leave your contact information in the chat for folks if they have questions about anything you shared tonight.

Robin Linkhart 1:03:46

A big thank you from Project Zion Podcast to the Chesapeake Bay Mission Center for sharing this interview on our platform. Find contact information in the show notes to follow up with Joelle Wight, or panelists Ryan Pitt, Nancy Ross, Linda Stanbridge, John Wight, or Joey Williams. As always a very special thanks to you our listeners. If you would like to hear more stories about Michigan, check out the What's Brewing series on our website. This is Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care bye bye.