

What's Brewing | Reaching Out Centre | Canada

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

James Clark, Blake Smith

Blake Smith 00:28

Hello, and welcome to What's brewing a Project Zion Podcast series, where we focus on the questions, what is mission, and why does it matter. I'm your host, Blake Smith. And I'm here tonight with James Clark, CFO of the reaching out center in Ontario, Canada, which is part of the Canada East Mission Center. Welcome, James.

James Clark 00:50

Thanks for having me, Blake. I appreciate it.

Blake Smith 00:53

Well, as you know, we're here to talk about the Reaching Out Centre. But before we do that, how about you tell us a little bit about yourself so our listeners can get to know you better?

James Clark 01:03

Sure, will do. So, James Clark, I've been involved in the Community of Christ since I was three. So I've been I've been I've been a member for a very long time, being 38. Now you can do the math on that yourself. It's kind of been an interesting journey, being part of Community of Christ. It's been in my life and been out of my life. And I sort of come back to it. And now with the Reaching Out Centre, so as you mentioned, being CFO there, taking on a different perspective of the Community of Christ and a different perspective on mission. So it's been a very interesting time. And, you know, being a dad myself, I've got I've got four kids. So, you know, for Yes, everyone always gets excited. And guys, like,

Blake Smith 01:47

Bless you, bless you.

James Clark 01:49

Yes, yeah. So you know, having kids of all ages like that, it's very interesting to, to see them grow up with a dad involved and get their perspective as well. So very, very interested to talk to you tonight and talk about our story.

Blake Smith 02:04

Great. So just real quick, what's the age range of your kids?

James Clark 02:08

Yeah, so they range from age 15 to 8. So it's about two years in between all? Yeah.

Blake Smith 02:13

Okay, great. I have two daughters. And they are between 25 and 33. And so I still get their perspectives, as well, because they've been around the church. My daughter did tell me one time, my oldest daughter did tell me, she says, Dad, I love you. And I love the church. But I'm just telling you right now, I'm never marrying a minister. I was gone a lot. But that's alright. Anyway, so very good. Very good. Well, let's jump right into it, then. Can you tell us a little bit about the reaching out Senator and just tell us what you think we ought to know.

James Clark 02:54

Sure. So Reaching Out Centre is kind of new-ish in that, you know, we sort of became an official congregation and official group in March of 2019, obviously, you know, big starry-eyed dreams of having a building and a space that we could call our own. We were kind of coming out of the separation of a congregation. So we were part of a larger group that split off and sold that building. The proceeds of that then, part of that came to us to start our own mission and our own our own congregation. So we, we knew we wanted a building. So we started in earnest and found something in the Streetsville area, which is about 25 minutes outside of Toronto. So, you know, right in what we call the Golden Horseshoe, where lots of people living lots of multiculturalism and lots of inclusivity. So a really nice spot and, and the other side of that we noticed was that a lot of underprivileged people live in that area, people in between homes or those who are in, you know, social housing, things like that. So we, you know, found this great space and just as soon as we found that everyone was not allowed to go outside, due to lock downs, and everything else with the pandemic. So, you know, we set about in earnest to revamp and renovate our space. Our building was a Christian bookstore. When we bought it, it was it had been there for 25 years or so. But what it allowed us to do was go right back to the studs, right back to the basics. And think about what was it that we wanted in a building? We knew we wanted there to be things like, accessibility, so we have an elevator, we are 100% accessible in our in our building. We have things like ramps, we have washrooms that work. So all those kinds of sort of new accessibility features we wanted, and we also knew that we wanted to, you know, make it a space that was open and welcoming to anyone. Our mission and our goal is (our credo) is "for anyone born a place of the table," we borrow that hymn, we feel like that's important. It's really it's something that's plastered on our walls, we use that. It's in a lot of what we talk about with other people in the community, as well as other people who are friends of our group. So we knew that it was important to have a space that was a storefront. That's what this is right on Main Street, which is lovely. And the end goal for us is to open a soup kitchen and have that in the in the back space for us. We're on the way, but as you know, it takes time. In the process of going through and trying to build this building out, we'd also had to consider what programming would we want to have and be involved in our, our leadership team is interesting, in that it is primarily women led. While I am the CFO, are our sort of youth director and program manager, she is, she's been a teacher for years. She's fantastic with our youth, and really works towards getting programming geared towards them, but also incorporates an intergenerational

spin on it. So that we have the buy in and support from some of our more seasoned members. At the same time, our administrators, chief administrator, she has been involved in the Community of Christ for 50-60 years. So you know, she's allowed us to have that awesome stability and the understanding of how to move forward on certain things when we're stuck or don't know where to go, she has been an invaluable asset for us as well, in our times of both greatness and in our times of a lot of despair and frustration over the last couple of years, for sure.

Blake Smith 06:50

Well, that's great. I, you know, I one thing I want to pick up on, I just really appreciate this connection of mission to the hymn, "For Everyone Born, a Place of the Table," and just the real sense that I've gotten in my conversation with you even before today, just that you're really living that. I mean, we sing a lot of hymns, and we say a lot of things a lot of times and what we believe so to hear that you're living it out there, that's really exciting for me.

James Clark 07:21

We're trying I mean, you know, you ever been ever Yeah. As are many groups were. But you know, one of the things that has been a path for us is trying to understand and be ready for whatever walks through the door. We just don't know, are we going to have someone walk through our door? Who is Muslim? Are we going to have someone walk through our door who is full of hatred, we don't know. And so you know, we're trying to understand how we are in the community in a way that's positive, but also in a way that allows us to be inclusive. You know, part of that hymn is for abuse and abuser, a place at the table. That is one of the hardest ones that we have had to grapple with. And to be able to allow that and figure out how that fits within our wider group is is one of the tougher ones, but we are working on it.

Blake Smith 08:17

That in itself is probably an incredible story. I don't know if you're aware, as I understand it, when they were putting together the hymnal, that verse that you mentioned, is almost the reason the hymn was not included. Yeah, because they're really, that's a really difficult text to live. So...

James Clark 08:35

And if we are to live that way, that's how it's gonna be.

Blake Smith 08:40

Good. Good for you guys. That's, that's great. So I want to clarify something. What's the name of the town where the reaching out center is?

James Clark 08:49

So it's a little town called Streetsville. But it's, it's incorporated into the larger sort of City of Mississauga. Streetsville has been around for 150-160 years. It's been a long time. And an interesting, another interesting fact about our building is that it was an original forge. So it had the Yeah, so it had the anvil and it had the work and it was the main spot in town because that's where everybody went to get horseshoes and nails and everything else. So, you know, we've tried to lean into some of those things about forging our destiny and, and you know, tempering ourselves in the community and things like

that. So it's it's really interesting to have that history tied there. And you know, so it's very, it was always something that you're finding out about a space like that.

Blake Smith 09:39

Yeah, what a cool analogy to have as kind of your foundation and always pushing at you. That's really cool. Really cool. So one of the things that I am interested to know, because a lot of our congregations, and so probably a number of of our listeners, those who attend congregations, a lot of those congregations are what we you might call commuter congregations where people they don't live anywhere near and they're driving in, they have a hard time connecting with the community they don't live in. What is what is the... what is the situation? They're in Streetsville? Are you is are the people close by? Or is it that most of your folks commute in?

James Clark 10:22

Yeah, we, most of them community, there are a few that are close by in the area, we picked it specifically because it was, (a), there was the need there for some of the members of the community. So we knew that we could have an impact that way. At the same time, it was somewhat centrally located for the members we did have at the time. So those two pieces were drivers for us. At the same time, we do offer hybrid services, and we try to do as much work on zoom as we can. Still obviously learning and evolving despite the pandemic, you know, there's, there's all sorts of hilarious things that can happen with people, people springing off of mute, or, you know, dogs barking it, it happens, right. But you know, if we're going to be doing church or going to be doing mission, and now the 21st century, we really do have to have that as one of our offerings. So we do have members who who are unable to commute and unable to get to us, whether it be they don't drive or a Canadian winter is never know. So we do try and offer that as much as we can.

Blake Smith 11:23

Wow, that's, that's great. So you're talking about some of your members, and some of them logging in via zoom, not able to come to Streetsville. And you talked about the three of you that are kind of the leadership team? How many people do you have as a kind of a core group?

James Clark 11:41

Yeah, I'd say our core group that attends, whether it be zoom, or or, or in person is about 25 to 30 is our core group, depending on what we're running, if it's one of our sort of larger events of, you know, a Christmas gathering, or our annual picnic, or what have you, we can see upwards of 60 or 70 people, it just, it just kind of depends on the time of year. But you know, one of the things we've really tried to do is diversify our offering, and try to be open as much as we can at the building. So that could be anywhere from, you know, two to four, maybe five times a week, depending on what we have going on. So that we felt like that was important as an open space for people that is not just ours, it is everyone's in the community. And while we don't have everything in there that we want, I mentioned the soup kitchen, we will get there. And that's the plan is to make that a community space.

Blake Smith 12:37

Okay, out of your core group, and I'm asking this question, because I know a lot of people get discouraged when they're, they want to do something, they say, Well, yeah, we've got 25 people who

attend, but then there's a percentage of that, that are really kind of engaged and doing a heavy load of the work. Is yours pretty well ... do you find that because of what you're doing, it's engaging more people, or is there still, you're still at a stage where you've got that core group that are really carrying a majority of the weight.

James Clark 13:11

It's, it's interesting, because, you know, while we were getting the building and renovating it and everything, there's only so much people can do. But now that the building is open now that that vision and goal has been achieved, we've really seen an influx of people wanting to help and do things and be involved, whether that be, you know, a reading in a service, or whether that be to actually help serve food, or what have you, it has opened the floodgates a bit for a lot of the things that we really want to do. And we know that service is a key to what we do. You know, we come from a time of potlucks, we come from a time of, you know, opening our doors and letting people come in and welcoming them. And making them feel welcomed is a key part of sustaining any kind of relationship with anyone who comes through our doors. So in trying to get people in that mindset has been, frankly, easy. Now that we have a space that everyone can be proud of and be involved in. What the next step is, is the training that goes along with that. I mentioned earlier about how we never know who's going to come through the door. So that means we have to educate people from 14 to 94 about how to speak to people, and how to sort of work on understanding of, here's some I'll call them frequently asked questions or FAQs. Here's some FAQs about reaching out. Here's some FAQs about Community of Christ. Because not everyone knows who we are. Not everyone knows what we stand for, and what our guiding principles are, etc. I know you know and your listeners know, but for anyone who's out in the community, it is something where we really have to shout it from the mountaintops about what we are.

Blake Smith 14:57

I think that's very gracious of you to say that most of us know. I think unfortunately, there are a lot of folks even within the tradition, who aren't really clear on where we stand on particular issues. And that's part of what we try to help with here at Project Zion Podcast so, I think the idea of training is definitely helpful. I want to ask about, I noticed on your website that you refer or, and I say "you" I'm talking about your community obviously, refer to your ministry as a new expression. And I'm interested to hear what makes Reaching Out Centre a new expression?

James Clark 15:36

So it has been a a long time of discussion about what is it that needs to change, just being open on Sunday from 11 to 12 is not going to cut it anymore, as many of us know. So then the question that I think a lot of congregations and groups are tackling or trying to tackle is the idea of, well, how do we change to make this better? And we have always considered that we don't actually know. And the reason why that admission is important, is because we need to understand from the community what's important, we need to understand from where we're going in the community, who where's the need, where what is not being facilitated, that needs to be, we know knew that a building would be a crux of what we're trying to do, from a simplicity of existing and saying, "Hey, we're here." But we've tried to do a few things that are different, we have something as simple as a washer dryer in our building. The reason for that if someone who is between homes or needs a washer and dryer for clothes, because they cannot afford a laundromat, or what have you, they can do that at our facility. We have an

accessible shower, same reason, if someone needs a shower, it is there for them. We're also, as I mentioned, trying to get to that soup kitchen phase. So for us, we're moving to try and be we're trying to reach out for lack of a better term. That's kind of the genesis of where that name came from. We sort of all sat and had some names come up. But reaching out, somebody mentioned it and it just stuck. And so we are trying to live that through everything we're trying to do. And what I think is important with that new expression, is the fact that I don't think that we talk about our not just us, I mean Community of Christ as a whole. We don't talk about our acceptance of LGBTQ rights, for example. We don't talk about that enough. I have had questions from people on Facebook and other places where they asked, Do you even support LGBTQ rights? Or should we even try not even bother attending? Or should I not even bother talking to you? And that says to me, well, first there was a communication issue. But be we need to be talking about this more. There needs to be more of an emphasis on that. So we have taken a step to purchase pride flag stickers that we're going to put up on our building, to showcase that we are LGBTQ friendly, we have gone through some Harmony training, which we can talk about in a bit if you'd like. You know, we've done that as well. So we are trying to break the mold of church, and trying to be more about a reaching out center where people can feel welcomed and feel like no matter what their walk of life, they have a seat at the table.

Blake Smith 18:38

That's amazing. Question, though, James, did you find that that was a natural move for your group as you began to consider moving forward? Or did you find some of the difficulties that many of our folks do with kind of breaking through that first admission of a need to change and not being just absolutely petrified by the idea?

James Clark 19:04

Yeah, it's, it was tough in the beginning, because, you know, you have grandiose plans, and you have ideas about what this can be. And everyone has thoughts of that. But when it comes to presenting them in front of a group and trying to get buy in and support, I have to say that we have been extremely blessed by the change that has gone on and the change that has been accepted. We did not find it difficult, whether it was Harmony or or trying to do some new programming or what have you. The people in our group have recognized and pivoted in a way that I did not think would have happened as quickly as it did. In a great and fantastic and profound way. I think that we are well poised and have built quite an atmosphere there that anyone would be proud to be a part of.

Blake Smith 19:53

Yeah, I'd be proud to be a part of it. I gotta say I'm just a little bit jealous, but

James Clark 19:59

We know we are unique and every group is, is and there's going to be challenges. And sometimes there are people who have been decided to walk away, it happens. But, you know, the understanding of change for us has been quite profound. We have not seen to have many hurdles in that way. And so, so far we have been blessed.

Blake Smith 20:19

That that's great. And hopefully, for our listeners, there'll be some encouragement there that, that it is possible. And even though it may be difficult, that change is important. And you've mentioned so many reasons why that is important. I want to just pick out specifically the piece of saying what does the community need? Often we talk about, well, what do we have the ability to do? Let's do this. But starting from the point of, okay, this is where we feel God is calling us. And what does this community need? A clear, clean slate, so I just really appreciate that. So

James Clark 20:59

That's one of the things that's interesting about our situation of where we are in Mississauga. Mississauga is a bit of a bedroom community. And, you know, so people travel a lot for work, some are working from home, obviously. But in the latest census, there was a lot of data about people who commute to work, it's about 80% of people commute to work. So in my mind, to get them out on say, a Saturday would be easy if we can take the fact that it's free and local programming. So that is something we've started to do to say, Look, you don't have to go far and a lot of driving, I know it's a Sunday, but you could do it. Or if it's a Friday night, we're doing board game night, from 7 to 9pm. We're not far. We're 10 minutes from your house, you drive 15-20 minutes or an hour to work. 10 minutes is nothing. So to be able to lean into some of the data and statistics has helped us grow a little bit. And we're really looking to do more of that in this year.

Blake Smith 21:53

Excellent. Well, I know that you do several things you've talked about potentially being in the facility, five, six days a week, but what I see on the website is two primary focus areas, and one is the Coffee and Conversations and the other they All in Sunday. Can you tell us a little bit about those?

James Clark 22:13

Sure. So Coffee and Conversations we have on Sunday are programs that we ran previously, in the previous building that we had, it was a little different in that we, for Coffee and Conversations, it was more topics. So we had a place, you know, sort of North of the city that we went and west of Toronto as well. So it was more like that. But this is solely at the building on a weekday. Coffee and Conversations are about trying to invite people into our space and have conversations that aren't necessarily religious, but are conversations that engage people and you know, sort of engage different point of views around something as simple as fellowship over a cup of coffee or tea. It has proven to us that there is an appetite out there for community and space where people can feel free to express themselves. I know that there is a lot of polarization in terms of politics and other things in our society that we kind of just have to deal with. But we're really trying to have something that goes against that a little bit in that, you know, we can disagree and still get along and still see each others to say hi, when when we talk about difficult subjects. So Coffee and Conversations has continued to be a place where we get new people to the building. We may never see them any other time of the week. But it is beneficial to keep those connections going for a lot of people that we may never see. It for us, it has been important to get that learning. So that one is going to Yeah, go ahead,

James Clark 22:17

I just want to say about what I want you to repeat that... It's okay to have people come in that you may not see any other time. You mean they don't have, you don't have a requirement that they have to show up and be in your pew on Sunday morning in order to participate.

James Clark 23:59

Clearly there's a need if they're showing up, but they don't show up at any other time, we are satisfying some kind of need for them. So for us, it is about making connection. You never know when that connection is going to come back to you in the form of a person in the form of you know, a donation in the form of someone just showing up you never know. So it's difficult sometimes to put that investment in there and not get it back right away. I could see how some people could struggle with that a bit. But again, we have people show up to Coffee and Conversations that we don't see it any other time. But is that beneficial? Yes, I would argue it's very beneficial for them specifically, because they are going to go and talk to their friends about and say, Hey, I was with this group. We had a great time while it was an in depth conversation and no one was offended. It has turned into something where people can feel safe about expressing themselves, which is the start of relationship building.

Blake Smith 24:52

Absolutely, absolutely. Of course I was being facetious. So I do have a question about that though. So, are your coffee and conversations? Are they structured in terms of you have a topic that you advertise you're going to be talking about? Or that you have in mind? Or is it just casual conversation, what comes up when people arrive?

James Clark 25:13

Yeah, so it's a bit of both, it just kind of depends, we try and integrate people easily. So having a theme where people can sort of think on it and bring ideas to the table doesn't always work. We want to try and make sure everyone has a chance to speak if they wish to. But sometimes we do. Sometimes we have themes, it just kind of depends on what's going on in the world, obviously, you know, Christmas is a time where we think very differently than we do other times a year, we should think about Christmas all the time. You know, think that way all the time. But, you know, Israel and Hamas war, that's something that people you know, that's really something that bothers people. Same thing with Ukraine, and Russia, all these things that are difficult. In Canada, we're still dealing with inflation and high housing prices and people who are out of work, it's, you know, it's things where it's things that really affect people's daily lives. Sometimes we talk about them more heavily than others. But we try to make it so that everyone can have a chance to, to discuss and be involved in a conversation.

Blake Smith 26:10

Great, great. Sounds like a great opportunity for people to gather and be able to express those we try, like, like you've mentioned, those are difficult topics. And so we tend to avoid them. And so, so good for you for creating that safe space for that.

James Clark 26:28

We try as much as we can, you know, and then the other program that sort of our stalwart, and the one that we put a lot of emphasis on him working is All in Sunday. All in Sunday is an intergenerational

program that is geared towards children, but it's geared towards a larger sort of idea of everyone is all in. So we start with a morning gathering that usually includes lessons and sometimes science and sometimes math, and we utilize the stem way of teaching for those. So yes, we have done science experiments in church, it happens. And we have found that it has invigorated the people who are involved, not just those who are helping run the program, but also any of the kids and youth and adults that join us. So we start with that gathering in the morning, then we have a potluck lunch. And then we will have an activity in the afternoon, for example. So in coming up in February, for example, we are going to our program leaders' house, they have a couple of acres, and we're doing maple syrup all afternoon. So we are watching the process of making maple syrup, eating maple syrup, all kinds of things. So it's these sorts of experiences that we're trying to bring on a monthly basis. So all in Sunday happens every single month. And we usually get a pretty high turnout for those depending on what's going on. And depending on how far flung we are. But it's been one of our programs that has been something that I think is incredible, and I think highly templatable for other congregations should they feel it's something they could do, I really do think that it's a great path forward for Community of Christ. At least for us. We're finding success with it.

Blake Smith 28:13

So you when you say, templatable, I would assume that it would be okay. If folks wanted to reach out to the reaching out Senator through your contact information and, and perhaps ask more questions about that.

James Clark 28:26

Absolutely. Yeah, we can you can reach us at our at our you know, even our website has our info on it reachingout.ca. You can find out more there or, you know, there's contact info there as well just let us know. But we I really do think that this program is is a fantastic offering for any community.

Blake Smith 28:44

Well, I appreciate your willingness to share that. I'm sure that there are some of our listeners who would definitely benefit from that. So as you think about this journey that started back in 2019, right before the pandemic, oh my gosh, I mean, just as if starting a new program weren't difficult enough that in completely world changing circumstances. If you were to narrow down maybe even to a couple of things, what are some of the key things that you've learned on your journey? Whether they were things Oh, my gosh, we should never do this or why this really worked? Or, or what? What are some learnings that you got?

James Clark 29:26

Yeah, I think I never knew that plywood and doors could be so expensive is one of them. So that's, that's one. Nope. I think one of the things that has been very interesting and difficult, truly difficult, has been making a shift from exclusive to inclusive language. We have been trying to brand ourselves in a way that showcases who we are and trying to answer the questions that we may not even know exist about our existence. So in doing that, we really do have to take the time to think about how we want to talk about ourselves. Just because we say communion, what does that actually mean? What is communion at the Community of Christ, we need to talk about that. We need to talk about our building and show pictures of our building. You may not want to come and visit us, but here's what it looks like

on the inside if you came to visit us. You know what, it's something as simple as that, that showcases who we are and what we are. I think language is extremely important, not only in trying to convey who we are and what we stand for, but what it is that makes us us. And how do we do that in a new community, where we know ourselves, we've known ourselves for 120 years, right? But right, someone who's coming in our doors tomorrow knows nothing about us. So how can we speak about ourselves in a way that makes sense, but would have an impact and at the same time, conveys exactly what we're all about?

Blake Smith 31:00

So does the Canadian church use as many acronyms as the US church does?

James Clark 31:06

There's a lot of acronyms. Yes, sir.

Blake Smith 31:09

That the outsiders might not know.

James Clark 31:11

Even the word that we use to use a lot, "colloquy." Like using that word, it's just discussion, it's just a discussion. So for me, let's, I know, there's sometimes feelings and things attached to the use of those words, but, you know, we really try to showcase our transparency, we I really think that's important, both from our feelings and what we say, but in our money, we showcase our monthly business updates, we do our open business reviews, we really try and make sure that, you know, if you give to Reaching Out, not only is there minimal overhead, because we're volunteers, you see it goes right to programming, and you can see that working in and of itself. That, to me is extremely important in this day and age.

Blake Smith 31:59

That's great, and just not assuming that everybody understands is gonna be really helpful, really helpful.

James Clark 32:07

And that's the same thing with our members in that training is, you know, even something as simple as Harmony training or understanding why pronouns are important to some people, and why that needs to be a part of what we do. All of our name tags for those who are willing, have "he, him", "she, her," whatever your pronouns are, if you're willing to put it on your nametag, go ahead. And we allow that and we encourage people to wear their nametag. So if you walk into reaching out, you can you can pick me out of a crowd because my name is on my nametag. It's simple things like that. Even something as simple as we've talked about, how do we get people from the front door, to show them where the bathroom is? Who does that? Who does that? Or do we put something on the floor? Do we have a floor plan? It's all these kinds of rethinking ourselves and things that we just know innately? How do we project that outwards and make people feel like it's their building to?

Blake Smith 33:04

So it sounds like the all in Sunday is not the all the only all in you guys do you guys really are all in? That's, that's amazing. We are making it, go go ahead.

James Clark 33:17

I was just gonna say it's an ongoing progress is ongoing. There's never an endpoint, it's always just progressing and trying to get better. There's so you know, we kind of go in with that understanding and just try and work through that as best we can.

Blake Smith 33:32

Great, great. I want to pick up. You've mentioned Harmony, and you said you might want to talk about that later. I do want to talk about that just a little bit. We could probably do a whole episode on just that process. But if you could, James, take a few minutes to tell us about that journey with Harmony and maybe how was it received by the group? What have you learned from that? And your what did you learn about yourself, your your group as as a people in that process? I mean, how did that work for you guys?

James Clark 34:09

Yeah, we had a very interesting time with harmony because it sort of came about during the pandemic for us and not having a building and doing fully online church services and gatherings and, and needing something to take up our time. We knew that we wanted to do this as a group. I think the genesis of that came from us thinking through where we were going, what we were doing and who are the kinds of people we wanted to attract to our new space. We knew we wanted to get younger, we knew we needed to ensure that we had a way to speak to younger people. We needed to show inclusivity because again, that sort of Toronto Mississauga that Golden Horseshoe area is so multiculturalized we've got everybody from all walks of life and all different countries in the world which is fantastic. But at the same time I do not speak Mandarin. As an example. So, you know, it's one of those things where we have to pace ourselves and think through what makes sense. And this was sort of a natural progression for us, to encapsulate and encourage, you know, a specific group of people to join us. But we had to do that legwork. Part of the thing we found with Harmony that was difficult was trying to work through the process. It wasn't people, it wasn't thoughts, it wasn't misconceptions, it was just trying to go through the process. And what I've come to learn from that is, it's because we were already there, mentally, we were already there. We needed to go through the steps. But the frustration came because people were saying, Well, of course, or de Yes, we have to do this, or, you know, that makes total sense to me. I know not every group and congregation is like that. I know, there are some difficulties with acceptance and working through that process. But we wanted to be a space where people could come and feel welcome, no matter their persuasion that everyone born a place the table piece that we've been talking about. So the process was the toughest part. But in getting through that I have seen change that I did not think was possible. I have seen people who in their 80s, in their 90s, are embracing this. It's not that I didn't think they couldn't, is that I didn't know what the reaction would be. But I believe that the vision from the top down of trying to figure out where we need to go and what we need to do solidify the need for this. And in going through that process, we found that there were people who were became disengaged, there were people who were not wanting to be involved with that, and as a result, have not come back. But at the same time those that have stuck around, we're all

the richer for it and we cannot wait to invite those first few people from that community into our community.

Blake Smith 36:52

Right, I want to pick up on something that you said, because I hear it from others. And I'm not sure that they are where you are. So you mentioned some frustration or some block, if you will, because you're hearing things in the process that you're going we're already there, we're already there. Do you think that is because of the multicultural setting that you live in, In the midst of that? Because, again, I think a lot of people say, oh, yeah, well, we know that we were already there, we're already welcoming and affirming. And they don't realize how far they have to go. So I'm interested to know, what creates that sense that a lot of it was not new knowledge, but kind of just putting it into action.

James Clark 37:42

Yeah, I think I think there was definitely some understanding going into this, that this was sort of the way forward, just one of them. You know, the I think what we wanted to make sure was that this didn't, this wasn't the be all end all of things. It wasn't that church is changing to this or that our gatherings were changing to this. It's that this is one facet and asset of our mental capacity and our abilities that we can go through this process come out the other side and be better for it. We were still doing regular services, we're still doing things that are in general, I think this is just an offshoot. And what has ended up happening is it's, it's become a thing that has united us in a way that I did not know, it could or didn't think at least would, because it's something that we can say probably every one of us to anyone we're talking to. That is powerful. That is impactful. That is extremely exciting to be a part of. And I think that that genesis of them in the end, the end, the endpoint of that, for us, has really been the start of something new that we didn't know was going to even be there. So the fact that we were able to complete that harmony training and get to the other side and be better for it is all the reason why I would recommend it for as many groups as are willing to do it.

Blake Smith 39:03

And do you think of having been through the process also knowing where you kind of began the process already being fairly inclusive minded and aware of the need? Do you think that a congregation or a group coming into that process from scratch really not having any idea, Is it something doable for them?

James Clark 39:29

I think it depends on I think it depends on who your leaders are. That's part of it. I think it really comes down to that whole, "Alright, grab my hand, let's do this together." But at the same time, there has to be buy-in. It can't be a mandated thing, nor should it be if your group is not ready for that, so be it. But what are you also not prepared for in that instance? Are you prepared for a continuing decline in membership? Are you prepared for you know, not being able to talk to someone who walks in the door who may be interested in joining the group or being a part of what you're doing, but because you don't recognize yourself as a safe space or speak their language, as it were. How are you going to be able to integrate them and make that a part of it? So I feel like if groups are willing to take the step, it, I think it really is important, but they have to understand that there are ramifications to every decision. As we know, this is not a microcosm of itself. It really is important to understand that, should you choose to do

this, there may be people who will not join you on that journey. It's entirely possible, and you never know where that's going to be. But I do feel strongly that going through this process has opened doors for us that would otherwise have stayed shut.

Blake Smith 40:48

I really appreciate you sharing your thoughts on that. I know that this is not an episode on the Harmony process. And again, it probably will be something that we will do, hopefully in the near future. But I think because of your focus on inclusivity, it's, it's a piece that is really concrete for people to grasp on to and say, Okay, this is an example, and just one piece of the inclusivity. Because you've mentioned other world religions, so you don't know who's gonna walk in. So, but I really appreciate you sharing that because I think some folks are hesitant to step into a process like that thinking that's way too much. But to take the step and to hear from someone who's been through it, I think will be helpful in all, again, all areas of inclusivity, not just the Harmony process. So again, thanks for that. The the last thing that I really want to ask about, and you may have some other things you want us to cover, but the last thing I want to talk about, I've noticed on the website, again, an emphasis on the marketing piece, it's in some of your blogs that are on the website, and that kind of thing. And so I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about how you market your ministry, and why that has been such an important element in your ministry?

James Clark 42:09

I, I love answering this question because it's unconventional. And what I mean by that is I, I am a digital marketer myself, that's my primary occupation, outside of Reaching Out, of course. And so I look at marketing a little bit different in that, you know, I feel like Zoom is a is a marketing tool. Reason why I say that is you can engage a ton of people in a hybrid way. People, as I mentioned, who cannot get to us, for whatever reason are able to be involved with us, that is a big marketing tool. It's not marketing in the sense of oh, we're going to put this on social media, etc. But it is an important marketing tool. You mentioned it already a few times the website itself, that coupled with talking about ourselves in a way that is impactful, and a way that is inclusive, has been a real benefit for us. We have seen a huge increase in traffic on our website, partially because of we're new and there's a newness to what we do in the community. But at the same time, something as simple as an events calendar on our website that gets updated with regularity has been a huge success for us. Oh, I saw on your website that you're having a board game night, next this week, I'm coming, or, I saw you're doing cardmaking hey, I want to be involved, what are the details. So that has been beneficial as well. I would say the website is our biggest marketing tool right now. We would love to get into other things like press releases, and eight ads and things like that. But it's just it takes a lot of work. You're in the content game, you know, it's a very, it's a very busy and difficult thing to try and keep that going. And then we have things like social media, and we have our, you know, some of the main things that we do there. In fact, one of the things we're trying to do in 2024 is to use way more use of AI to develop some content. Not everything is going to be used from AI. But I think it's important to round out your calendar, we can post every week about the events that we do. But there's a level of engagement that people are looking for that isn't necessarily tied to the things you run in your building. What are the things that you do online, so that's important. I'm trying to start up a SMITH program. SMITH, obviously an acronym but for one of our founders. It's called Social Media Intern Training and Harvesting. And what I'm trying to do is, I'm trying to get youth involved to help post on our social channels, which in turn would allow them to get their 40

hours community service, which is mandated by the government for high school students, and we would be a reference for them on a job. So if someone was trying to get a job in the social media space or elsewhere, we would back them up and be a reference and say look, yes, this person, Blake did help us for a year on social media and we absolutely will agree to that. So I'm trying to engage reengaged that Add for this to not only have a larger presence and talk to our audience in more ways, but engage a group of people who are so savvy with this in a way that I could never be, and give them something in return. I think that could be super powerful.

Blake Smith 45:16

Excellent, excellent. Well, all of this has been just incredible, I want to ask you and just see if there's anything that I haven't asked that you'd like to share about Reaching Out Centre or the ministry that you're providing.

45:31

I think that, you know, for those that are thinking about how to take the plunge on anything, whether it be change, or, or Harmony, or just trying to do something new, the experimentation of that, and the testing of that is super important. I'm a big proponent in my personal and professional life of failure, or the zone of failure, as I call it, take the leap, if you fail, at least you learn something. Okay, that doesn't work. Maybe we try this, that, to me is just as valuable as trying something new and being successful, I would much rather find out that something doesn't work so we can focus our attention. Everybody at our sort of space, and in our group has the whole issue of, well, I only have so much time, I only have so much energy, and only we only have so much money. So how do we how do we maximize our effort? And I think that that's one of the things that is super important in this day and age is the experimentation on trying new things, and being okay with failure, knowing that failure is not the end. And I think Churchill said that, you know, "success is going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm." And it's so accurate, that, I like that. So it you know, and someone of his stature that went through what he went, it has minimal meaning to us. But it makes total sense. And it absolutely is. So that zone of failure and being prepared to fail, but taking from that, and learning from that is huge. And that has served us well and continue to serve us well. As we go through it. The only other thing I want to say, Blake, is thank you for this opportunity. It's been lovely to chat with you. I appreciate the opportunity. And I think the Project Zion Podcast is great. I continue to listen as I go and I'll be very excited to talk to you again, if I get the opportunity.

Blake Smith 47:21

Well, I've got some ideas for some other conversations game. So I may hold you to that. As a matter of fact, I'll just say I will hold you to that. Excellent sounds. And thanks so much for taking the time to be here with us at Project Zion Podcast. Your energy is infectious and contagious, and encouraging and hopeful. And I think we need that. I would say to our listeners, if you've listened to this podcast, and you're going, oh my gosh, there is no way, I couldn't do all of that. Do not be discouraged. If, if this episode does nothing else than help you think outside the box, then I think we will have been successful. We don't need... everybody doesn't need to be somebody else's ministry. You need to find out what God's calling you to where you are, and be encouraged that if you are doing that, even if you're failing, thank you for that James, if you're failing, as long as you're moving forward, it's a great thing. So I just again, James, I really appreciate you sharing your story and your missional ministry, all

that you guys have been going through over these last years. And we'll continue to hold you in prayer as as we go forward, that ministry, which will be a model to all of us, can continue to be successful. Thanks also to our listeners here at Project Zion Podcast. Again, I hope this episode has been helpful for you, especially those who are seeking to be a part of Christ's mission in the places where you live and serve. If you'd like more information about the Reaching Out Centre, you can visit their website at reachingout.ca. And of course, if you'd like to hear more from the What's Brewing series, you can go to [Project Zion podcast.org](http://ProjectZionpodcast.org) and choose what's brewing from the series menu. You can also find us on all of the podcast platforms. So, wherever you can find us we invite you to look us up. We'll be sure to include the links to both the reaching out center and to Project Zion Podcast in our show notes. And hope that you'll find us there. That's gonna wrap it up for tonight's episode of What's Brewing. Thanks again for joining us, as our executive director, Apostle Robin Linkhart often says, Go out and make the world a better place. Thank you.