

What's Brewing | Europe and Beyond: Our Global Mission

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Mision, young adults, Christ, Community Connections, global community, Europe, online ministries, peace, authentic relationships

SPEAKERS

Richard James, Robin Linkhart

Robin Linkhart 00:27

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? I am your host, Robin Linkhart. And I'm here today with apostle Richard James. Welcome, Richard. It's so great to have you with us today on Project Zion Podcast.

Richard James 00:50

Thank you, Robin is good to be back with you again.

Robin Linkhart 00:55

So, Richard, you have been a guest on Project Zion before. And actually, quite recently, we posted a wonderful interview with you about the world hunger team. But I always like to start off with a few minutes of introductions. So if you would introduce yourself, and please include a little bit about your ministry responsibilities and the fields you support.

Richard James 01:21

Well, I live in a little village on the suburbs of Cardiff, in South Wales in the United Kingdom. My wife, Claire, is now retired, she was a school teacher. And she's just enjoying life. My favorite things is just taking a book and go to the ocean. It's 10 minutes away, and reading. So it's a nice life. I think since the last time I did a podcast with you, in June '21, we have two new grandchildren. So we now have four. So as some of you may have grandchildren, they're the love of your life. So we have now four children and four grandchildren. And I continue to serve in the Eurasia mission field, which is the bridge RS Mission Center, Western Europe Mission Center, and Eurasia Mission Center that encompasses part of Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia. And also, as Robin you just referred, I'm involved in the Council of 12 team on world hunger, and that's exciting. And some good work involved. And ministry, change lives change communities have changed. And I think that's what Jesus was about, is about changing lives and communities. So it's good, it's good to be back.

Robin Linkhart 02:51

Yes, and I also want to make sure our listeners know that you serve as the secretary for the council of 12. So you are a very busy person.

Richard James 02:59

Well, overy busy right now, as we are in the process of discernment of the next prophet, President of the church. But we are a team. We are a very diverse Council. But it is wonderful to serve. And we are blessed with each other on this June.

Robin Linkhart 03:18

We are. So this summer, I was reading a news update from inland West Mission Center, which is part of my field. And I saw this great promo for their upcoming reunion at Sammamish Island, which they were doing in partnership with Canada east and you were one of the guests, ministers there. And I was captivated by the topic title that they gave, which was "Europe and Beyond: Our Global Mission, especially that global mission, because I really, really, really think we have yet to fully live into that as as a church and to gain a lot of deeper understanding of what that means and what it looks like. So I reached out to you. And I said, I really want to hear about this topic. And I think it would be a great thing to have on Project Zion Podcast. So here we are. So Richard, please tell us all about your guest ministry, Europe and beyond our global mission.

Richard James 04:27

Well, thank you, Robin, I love talking about mission. I love talking about people. And I love trying to pay attention to what God is doing in people's lives. And so when I look at mission here in Europe and in a global context, it is really paying attention to the invitation of God. But God is at work, and we need to be doing that hard work of discerning, listening, awakening, risking, and blessing. Because in that process, we discover our true selves, and our sense of core. When I shared in June 2021, I listed some of the things that I saw happening contextually in Europe, I'm going to share some of those with you again, because things are the same, and things have changed. So I was saying in my field, and you might see some of these as well, we are seeing an increase in nationalism. We've seen a rise in fascism, and in many nations. Racism is creating division between people. And sadly, some politicians are also helping to create those divisions. Immigration is rising and creating tensions among those people. And a once strong European Union is being questioned about its role. There is homelessness, people trafficking, poverty is rising in nations, and very sadly, the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer, the divide is getting bigger. And there is gender and pay inequality. Sexism is rife. And people are saying they are spiritual, but not religious. And they are not wanting to engage with authorized religion that has failed them. And the other one that I said, at that time was, there is a growing threat from Russia, in Europe, and Europe is concerned of what the future may hold. And it really does concern people in Europe, that there is war on our continent, this continent, the war in our continent. And as we look at it from a church lens, there is violence, when we are pursuing peace. And since I shared we've had the COVID pandemic, and different nations have been dealing that in different ways. So that's the big context where it's happening, some of it is the same, some sadly deteriorated, be more aggression. And, but still, we have this affirmation that God is at work with us. At work in Europe, and around our world. God is up to something. And our challenge is to pay attention. I like what our good friend Larry McGuire said, and I've written this down and it's in front of me, my my laptop all the time. "It is time to think about the church we are becoming and not so much of supporting what's

already in place, significant shifts will be happening. And if we only look to what exists, we will be missing a future that is going to be different." And that is the challenge for us here in Europe. Things are changing. And as we pay attention, we can find a bright future for the church, not only in Europe, but in a global basis. So let me maybe update you on some of the things that have been happening since we last spoke, and maybe one or two new things that happen. One of the key things that we've been wanting to do here is to develop our young adults and our young leaders into leadership. It's been very intentional program over the last 10 to 12 years. And it's been really pleasing to see some of these young people stepping up into leadership and taking taken us on. We've had a number of events in Rome, in Italy, where we have been focusing on our youth and young adults and leaders. It was in last July 2022 that we had one on peace, Christ's peace and Pax Roma. It was amazing to see the opportunity to engage with what Rome has to offer and also what Christ has to offer us. And for me, this is an example where Rome is on people's bucket list, they want to go there, they want to engage in an amazing lively city, but also to learn of a way to live together in community, and to learn of the ways of Christ's peace. I'm really, really pleased to see some of our young adults in Germany. Now we're getting involved in the national leadership. This has been a long process. So Carla has been very involved in this over many years, Joey. And now we seem to have our young leaders taking up national responsibilities. And we don't know what the future holds for us. But it's really good to see people willing to try and be disciples of Jesus in their context. One of the challenges that are in the British Isles Mission Center, has been some of the changes that are happening, organizationally, for the church, and balancing that with what mission is emerging. So there's been a very intentional discernment journey in the British Isles, looking at what is mission calling us to? And how can we shape our structure our organization to support that. And it is interesting, what is starting to emerge just very early in that process, because I think sometimes we get literal windows open for us is not a clear path forward. But we have a good sense that this is where the Spirit is leading us. And it's definitely in the movement of peace, and in our community. Having community hubs, we continue to have a number of congregations are supporting food banks, but in the community, they are needing, help and support. I would say as I look back over the COVID pandemic, the congregations that were invested in the community, were meeting community needs, like a food bank, or some youth programs, the community is now responding and saying thank you for being there. This could be my church. This is something that I would like to be involved in. And so as an example, is probably about a year ago, one of our congregations that has a very active Food Bank and youth program. They regularly hold Messy Church, Messy Church is an integration of very active dynamic, Sunday activity. And many of people will normally come to church, but not there on that particular Sunday. And the parents from our neighborhood come in, and they said, We can do it for you. That's a huge step forward. They said, This is my space, this is ours. We are in this together. And I'm really pleased to see how those relationships that we have been working very hard, very intentionally. And a very authentic, people are saying, Yes, this is from me too. One of our congregations that started an eco-garden, looking at the environment. And so they built a labyrinth in their sort of grounds of the church. They made some flour, grow some vegetables, and it's open to the community. There's a movement in in the UK called Eco-church, and they signed up to that. And so they're looking at how you care for the environment. I think some of the ways that discernment is shaping the pressures Mission Center, can be seen in the resolution that was brought to the World Conference of 2023 on climate emergency. There's a strong desire and passion amongst our young people. And some of our little ones a bit older, have the need to stand and do something and take action about a climate emergency. So this resulted in this resolution that was

supported, has now come to World Conference and the church declaring a climate emergency, so they continue to look at ways that they can be authentic and live out their values. Also, as with the recent sort of war we see in between Israel and Palestine, as we are starting to build our ecumenical links, were able to take a stand with the faith and non-faith people and share our voices. We have some people who are taking the opportunity to write to our local politicians to state opposition. I think in the context, this is something that we've done before. And maybe an individual might have done this. But collectively we are finding a voice. I mentioned that last podcast in 2021, a part of the Peace Colloquy message came out and said, which banner are you going to stand behind? And this banner here of nonviolence, of working for peace, it's given us a lot of confidence and advice to say, yes, we believe in peace. And so it's really good to see how kind of the theory of saying yes, we believe in peace, but it's taken action to what that means. And also, our young adults are starting to find their voice from the summer camps or reunions that they've had this year. They've brought a resolution to the British Isles Mission Center conference, should look at marriage and the cohabitation, maybe in the past, they might have had opinion, and maybe they might have left. Now there's a we have a voice, and we want to do something about it. And I think that's, that's a big step forward. And that resolution was adopted by the conference. So I'm really pleased to see how young adults and young leaders are finding their place in Community of Christ, and saying, This is what this site looks like for me. And it's okay. So it's been, like I said, a very intentional program over 10-12 years to work with our young leaders. And now, we find ourselves in this place. So we have a Peace Colloquy, a European Peace Colloquy next March, the 15th-17th. And again, very intentionally, this has been designed and developed by young adults and young leaders across Europe. So, again, what I see is young adults are saying, we are really passionate about environmental justice, or social justice for social and personal justice, we can do this. And it is a delight to see how people are responding and they use their creativity to make this event. So this is our third Peace Colloquy. And this is the first time it's been led, planned, organized by a different group of people. So when I look at what is good for Europe, a global mission is to be relevant in your context. And to me, this is one of the texts that says, we started to be relevant to our own people. And we're also being relevant, starting to be relevant to our communities, because they're saying, Yes, this place can be my place. So that's sort of a summary of the British Isles. If I jump into Spain, I give you an update about what has happened in there and the excitement, and the joy that comes from people of finding the church. We continue to have worked with our Filipino community. They were severely affected by COVID. And but they meet every Sunday, and pleased as to, to come and worship and praise God. We had another retreat in Malaga in Spain, again, helping to shape authentic expressions of community. In Spanish. We were blessed to have Joelle Wight with us, and for her to share in her journey of discipleship. We have focused now in Madrid working with people from Central America, particularly with Honduras. People from Honduras don't need a visa to come to Spain. And so we have a very large community from Central America. We are blessed to have Seventy Erasmo Gonzales now with us from Honduras, he used to be employee of the church and his daughter Mercy. So we are now renting our second building in Madrid for them. But we know that space is too small, so we got to look for another place. So there is definitely growth happening and people are finding Community of Christ in Spain. We continue to have our quarterly online service in Italy. Yeah, it's it's really wonderful to see new seekers find a new church wherever they may be. And here in, in Italy, we meet regularly with online services with translation, but there's a service dedicated to the Italian language. And this circle is starting to grow a little bit bigger. In Belgium, where we have a group of people, mainly from the Congo Democratic Republic, have been refugees, and now they have very active membership in Brussels and

in Belgium. Again, you've been there, Robin, you know, the people, I think the wonderful piece now is that we have indigenous leadership from that group, you know, there is priesthood, there is leadership. And they are leading that expression. It gives them dignity, gives them purpose. One of the things that I like they do that they've organized what they call a core citizen project, you may have heard some of these projects before, I think that what is evolved through the COVID period, I think is probably worth noting here is that most of the education went online. And a lot of the immigrant families didn't have access to computers or laptops. Or if there was something provided, it might just be one for family and these families are large families. And so what they were able to do with some funding from Community of Christ, they were able to get some used laptops. So not just every family had one, but every person in the household had one. That's a big shift to access education for these people that would normally be left behind. But what they also did is that they looked at themselves and say what skills that we got, and they said, we can help with an after school club, we can help these children, we can help them ensure that they continue to be focused. So this is a continuing program that's rolling on. And I like that. So that's a practical way of helping people focusing on the youth focusing on the young adults. And they understand as they start to look at 2024, we might be starting a choir there. Music is such a part of their culture. So maybe this is a space to watch what might happen. Coming out, and that draws people from that community. And you might have been in Brussels when we tried something like this with Kailani and Joey, and singing for peace. And that was wonderful how community was responding. I think this kind of choir might focus more on sort of their culture and identity. But there's something in music that draws people and draws people together draws people in, and it also draws us closer to God. So I'm looking forward to see what might happen there. I think as I look at sort of France, France continues to be a wonderful vibrant expression of the church. It was wonderful to see so many people from France, wanting to be delegates at the 2023 World Conference. We've never had so many people come in from France. They were so excited. And I know they're already planning on attending the 2025 World Conference. It's it's really good to see people wanting to be together in community and find that it's relevant. It's vibrant, is life giving. And the messages and stories come from that. And this summer in the reunion we had more on a foreigner from originally from French Polynesia, as our guests minister and the online ministries continue. I think when I look at online ministries, this is where it really does go global and there are no boundaries. One of we have a number of online ministries. Let me pull up the first one for youth and young adults are mainly focused on young adults. At the last Saturday of every month, the young adults across our field meet together for some worship or time together. But the boundaries are not just Europe. My field are paired with Apostle Catherine Mambwe's field and so we have youth from Zambia from Kenya join in and participating in that as we can learn from each other. And I think that's a really good example of our global mission. How right it is to contextualize. We live it in this place, but that is something that binds us together in Christ that draws us together and so that the young people here are finding authentic relationships online with people that they've never met. But they have a sense of oneness in Christ. We continue to explore, to expand to experiment with Community Circle, is now fully organized online congregation. They have a disciples toolbox once a month, the education and learning experience. They have living spiritual practices once a month. And they have the regular meetings, which are now in Spanish, Italian and English, with volunteers doing translation. And again on the Zoom platform. One of our challenges in Europe is that we might have seekers that join us, but they're from remote places where we haven't got communications. And this is an ideal opportunity to connect with people. But it is local. Whilst the propensity is in Europe, it does cross to the America, it does go into different places. And I think that's part of our future, is how do we

support expressions of authentic community that don't know any national boundaries. And so I'm excited how that this small team of very innovative, are willing to experiment but have a really sense of being shaped and formed as disciples of Jesus Christ. And others are a finding a sacred home. We continue to also have Community Connections in the British Isles, which is a weekly service that joins people together from around our world. So I think it's safe to say that there are things happening. But it isn't easy. You know, coming out to the COVID pandemic, the dynamics have changed. You know, I think you'll see that in many places that there's less people wanting to be together in church. But there are people that want to be together in relationships. And so our challenge is how to we make those places meaningful? And when we have those. So we have 30s, meaning 30-year-olds, wanting to come together at one of our campgrounds? And how do you make that sort of an authentic expression of what they are looking for? They're searching, they're seeking. And, again, for me, this is the way that we just need to experiment, try some new things and just see where they will take us. It isn't easy having one less member of staff, Joey Williams, some of you might know, that incredibly gifted person, he had reassignment during the COVID period, and he hasn't been replaced. So life is hard, you know, was just one member of staff in the field plus myself, trying to balance the discernment. And a sense of God is inviting us into this new way of living, new way of being. And sometimes we have to make some tough decisions. And I don't think I can do that quite right, right now. And that probably hurts me more than anything, because you can see opportunities. And we have to prioritize some of those. That's to be wise stewards of the resources that we have. I think when I look at sort of Europe, that is something bubbling up here. I take great strength and encouragement from the young people stepping up, because they want to, it isn't going to be the same. But it's something that they want to express themselves in mission. So okay, I've talked quite a bit there. Those are the like the updates in bits that have been happening, Robin. So...

Robin Linkhart 29:01

That's exciting to hear. I have a couple questions. Um, you've, you've mentioned several times this intentional effort to develop young adults the past 10 to 12 years and one of the things I'm hearing is a real, intentional, incorporating them inviting them into leadership and participating anyway, that they can have a voice that impacts what you're going to do. Are there other intentional things that you've done over the past 10 to 12 years to focus to develop young adults?

Richard James 29:39

Yeah, I think it's setting out this as a direction that we want to do not that the is because it's the right thing to do for me. You know, I can remember myself has been a young leader. I was a pastor when I was 18 years old. And I thought I could do anything you know, and if you provide the right mentoring the right support around you. It can be a wonderful gift to the church and also feeling valued, that I have something to offer. So we've looked at different education opportunities. We're interested in the British Isles Mission Center, one of the discernment responses have been, that the younger young adults are saying we want some more education opportunities. So it's, it's really good to see that. So I, I see it as you provide opportunities. And they might say, No, that this time, this is the wrong time. For me. It's not No, I don't want to do this. But it's probably the wrong time for me. So provide different channels, different opportunities, the some of the either our camping program, some of these activities we've tried in Rome, or intentionally sort of have mentors around people. So it's not just one, one thing is working. I think it's also in the context where we are right now where we are, I feel as Community of Christ, we're

in a good place. You know, we have done a lot of hard work in respect of some value equality issues, and our inclusion is still lots of work to do. Our work and justice and peace, and these are things that mean a lot to our young leaders. And so a place that they feel either they're finding, or that they have been brought up in this faith edition, now has meaning for them in a new way. Now, we're not perfect. No, we are we missing lots of people as well. But I think that there are some people that have responded to that. And it is it is really good to see, to see that our last mission center conference in the British Isles Mission Center, there was an opening worship and closing worship done by our young adults, completely, you know, and it's whilst we might see that in many places. They were the first to say I want to do this. Rather than have been invited, would you like to do this? No, instead, we want to do this. It's a shift. And that's what I'm pleased that it's a step forward, but I would say it's making the focus the journey of, we want to engage with young adults, young leaders. So what does it take?

Robin Linkhart 32:24

Yeah, that's exciting. And I know we've seen a bump and young adults reaching out to go to Community of Christ seminary, and many of them have been students from from your field. Yes. Also, I don't know if you've seen this, it sounds like you might have, but we're seeing a resurgence of young adults who have not been active in the church for five to 10 years, who are starting to come back to, like the camping gatherings or other gatherings. They have kids, and they they're not sure where they personally are with church, but they have this inner sense of longing. And it's really exciting to see that. Are you seeing that as well?

Richard James 33:11

Yes. Isn't it amazing?

Robin Linkhart 33:12

It is amazing.

Richard James 33:14

It is. And I kind of smiled to myself, because I think, God, I shouldn't be surprised. This is how these little surprises happen. God shows up. And you're right there, we are seeing a number of these families, I see that they are connected by their fingertips. They share values, that participation in what's been in the past hasn't been for them for various reasons. But now they're saying yes, is sometimes associated with the campgrounds where they've had experiences. And they want their children to experience that or they want their friends to experience that. They have this wonderful Spirit of invitation as well to come and see what we're doing. So yes, Robin, it's maybe it's a part of the global missions that we merge of people saying, there is something here for me. And I think the big shift, though, is that that might be the expression of community and connection until the next time. Life has got a different pace and different rhythms than before and sort of long term commitments are hard for these families and individuals, but they definitely find meaning that's authentic, and their connection with God and with one another.

Robin Linkhart 34:31

And what a blessing that we have since the pandemic, which kind of poured kerosene on the sparks of online Ministries which we already had started but just a handful, right. And now these young adults

and their kiddos can connect as they can with their schedule from home remotely. If that's something that works for them. The relationships can continue to be fed that way, which is, which is wonderful. Which brings me to another question. You talked about Community Circle. They're meeting regularly. They're now a congregation, right? You mentioned that you have folks attending from outside your field, do you have international, official members of that congregation as well?

Richard James 35:25

So we have participants from around the world. At this present time, I'm not so concerned where membership is certainly where people show up

Robin Linkhart 35:37

Right.

Richard James 35:39

And so I think maybe the actual membership is very small. And I'm fine with that. Because where people are showing up and saying, Yeah, this is my home. But I find my friends and I feel there's something here for me. So yes, we do have people from various places around the world joining this Community Circle. And some people just show up for three, four or five months, and it's meaningful, and then they eat. But there's this core group that is very loving, very healing for people, and reconciling. So I, when I look at sort of online ministry in this way, it is an experiment. But it is amazing how that we think we get it. And then the Holy Spirit says, Yeah, you don't. Do something bigger than this. And so I think that's where these global boundaries are going to be that new frontier. And the Spirit is saying, okay, you've been practicing, you've been paddling your canoe, you're climbing up the creek. Now, let's see what can happen. And I'm very, very pleased with the way that the leadership of Community Circle have been very intentional about providing a safe place for people to find a home. But what does that mean on a global basis that people can show up and find meaning in for their life, in community, and, and to be in a Christ like community?

Robin Linkhart 37:16

Yeah, as you say, it's when we're gathered together, whether it's in a community circle online, or a community circle, in a room with chairs, in a circle, all are welcome, and all belong. This is, there's a place for you at this table. And it's beautiful to see that blossom online as well as in person. And you see the mix of that, because a lot of people that are fully engaged in online ministries also have face to face elements of discipleship, life and ministry that are taking place in parallel.

Richard James 37:59

Yeah, yes, yes, there are. And I think that as we look at sort of younger generations, they interact in social media in a totally different way. And I think that's the challenge that we are now facing things, Zoom is a very good platform for some people to connect. But I think that there are other ways that we need to experiment with the social media platforms that speak to a different generation. And that's a very fluid, sort of global mission for us. I think I would like us to see experiment a bit more as maybe as the young leaders themselves can see the mission potential. So I think that's what I would like to see things happen in future ways, is using all the pieces of social media to reach people, invite people into this sort of inclusive group, because we get that, we created, we're really good at it, when we do it. I

think we have to work on an invitation, and live that hospitality online. And I think we can get there, that state of mind. So I think invitation is going to be really important for us and using the ways the social media can open up for us. As you know, I'm also attracted by the possibilities of artificial intelligence, AI, and what does that mean for us in mission? And I think that is opportunity for us to use this, this tool to be to be sharper, to be focused to be reaching to embracing more people.

Robin Linkhart 39:38

Yeah, I have some big picture questions I want to ask you, but I have one other thing I want to touch on, while we're on this topic, Global Mission, I hear you refer to the global south from time to time around the circle with the Council of 12. I'm wondering if you could address that just a little bit with us today?

Richard James 40:03

Okay, well, I think when I use the word global south rather than the global north, it isn't necessarily north and south. But if we look at sort of where Christianity is growing, a lot of theologians and writers use the term Global South, which tends to be sort of the African continent, the South American continent, in parts of Asia, where we are seeing a rapid growth in all faiths, pieces, particularly in Christianity. It's still a vibrant expression. I was in a meeting with Apostle Bunda [Chibwe] and Catherine Mambwe this week, and they've said they've had 1500 baptisms this year [2023] to date. You know, that's amazing. That's wonderful. Praise be to God. And so we are continuing to see a growth of the church in that area in those areas. And we'll continue to be the other part of that is the global north or the westernized nations, or developed nations where we are seeing people less interested in organized religion, and with the secularization. And so we have seen decrease in attendance in churches, and faith traditions. It's interesting here in Europe, as I've looked at data and statistics, Christianity is growing in the big European cities, rather than in other areas, and part of that is migration of people that are coming from the Global South. And so in some ways, that's what we've tried to do here with our immigrant groups is to tap into the really strong people of faith. And they're looking for an expression of authentic community, and they find that in Community of Christ. So on a global basis and mission, we definitely see assets and resources in developed northern areas. In the Global South, there isn't so much resources, but a huge resource of faith and spirituality, and a willingness to, to gather together. And in many of those places, time isn't a factor, you can gather for three, four or five hours. And then they have a wonderful celebration that's vibrant. It raises challenges as far as a denomination as a church, as we align our resources. And as we respond to what is happening. But I also think we can learn so much in the Western nations and global north, from those expressions. What does it mean to experience a dependency on God, or to live out your faith in their context, the context is different. But you hear stories and hear in to how they express their faith. It can be uplifting, it can be challenging for us. Sometimes we might say, well, it quite doesn't work like that for me. But I think that, for Community of Christ, if we can keep our Global Connections, we can be blessed immeasurably. We pride ourselves, we love it, that we are worldwide church and have these relationships all around the globe. And I think we really need to make sure that we keep those links working. Because we learn so much whether it's partnerships, whether it is just connecting online, the rich diversity, as we say unity in diversity. We are really blessed and uplifted by each other. So the global south is where the action is. The action is that that's where the growth is. I'm not losing the global north, or the westernized nations, God is really at work with us. It's just that we need to pay attention. We keep doing our own things. And

some things have changed and moved on. So I think we just need to pay attention and look for new ways of creating authentic Christ-like community. And as we ascend, we just seen glimpses of that starting to happen. And now young people are also saying, Yeah, I think this is what I want. So yeah, I think there is hope for the church globally. We have to live in a tension of resources and how those are applied. But I think that it is good, the global south. It's so thrilling to your stories, to see how the church has gotten into new nations or whether it's congregations that are doubling size, and then our congregations may be closing down or getting smaller. But, I think if we also listen to the Spirit that they are sharing, it's uplifting, and it can be challenging for us. You know, just as an example, we have a very strong church family in Nigeria that are part of the leadership there. And their daughter, Ima, is now in Ukraine studying medicine. Every Sunday, every Sunday, she joins our online Community Circle congregation. So our global family is working in ways that we couldn't even imagine. And so we have been blessed by that in these different relationships that we...

Robin Linkhart 45:42

Well, and I think that is something that I see young adults all over the globe, very excited about having these international connections, I mean, authentic relationship. And it's lovely at World Conference to see folks who have connected deeply online see each other in person. And it's, it's just beautiful. So I think, yeah, the Spirit is on fire. And it feels very challenging at times, but yet, so rich with possibility and already spilling blessings everywhere.

Richard James 46:19

Yes. When you mentioned World Conference, Community Circle, some people were delegates at the 2023 World Conference. For a number it was the first time they had met each other in person, you know, and so yes, similarly, young adults are able to get those authentic relationships.

Robin Linkhart 46:38

So you've touched on this a little bit already, Richard, but how do you sense God calling Community of Christ into the future?

Richard James 46:45

I think it is about being relevant, and being authentic to ourselves. I think it is a willingness to, to try an experiment. And don't just say we've always done this in the past. I think it's definitely centered around peace, of being a follower of Jesus, a peaceful one. And that as I look at our mission initiatives, we have five ambitious initiatives by people of Christ. I'd say in the Western nations of the world, we need to embrace that invitation, invitation, invitation. I think the idea of abolish poverty and end suffering and pursue peace on earth for the earth, I see a huge change in the dynamics about refugees and immigration is going to change, we're going to see increased demand on food security and water security. And so I asked myself, What does it mean for the church to be past passionate about justice and peace, in our context, and to live that, I think is about realizing that we can abolish poverty and suffering, we can work, we can collaborate, we can stand together, with with colleagues, friends, other associations. So I would say, to be looking at our enduring at our mission initiatives, and to see where it takes us, to be practical, in helping people but also to work on that the hard work of building sacred community. We can do all our good works, and not be together following Jesus where we want to follow. And so I think that's going to be a challenge. And I think forming Christ's like communities is

going to be reported for us. And it can look different. We can worship, we can gather, we can learn in different ways. But it's Jesus we follow, and so I think that's what I would say is form sacred community that's authentic, that's relevant, and also do things in our communities. And I think some of our do and we haven't done so far we need to be following Jesus. We need to go to work.

Robin Linkhart 49:23

What are your hopes for, for the church going into that future?

Richard James 49:30

I would say that we can realize that we are good enough, that God's invitation to be a prophetic people is a realistic call for us. And as we realize that we are not alone. We have sisters and brothers in Christ. We are a community. Do we have other people of faith that we stand with? But I think it is about realizing ourselves that we are good enough. And when we realize that we can do anything with God with us. So we live in a syndrome of maybe doubting ourselves and we look at numbers, rather than realize that the it isn't about us. It's about what God is doing. And a god is much bigger than Community of Christ or any one faith tradition. But we have a place that we can claim. So I say claim it. Yes. Claim it is ours.

Robin Linkhart 50:44

Richard, is there anything that you would like to say today that I haven't asked you about?

Richard James 50:50

I think you're a really good interviewer as we talked together, okay. I think you touched on many of the points. I just want to affirm that I do believe that the future's bright for Community of Christ. I'm very hopeful. Now we realize that we're still in transition, and we might close some congregations. But what I am hopeful of is that we are a prophetic people. And if we believe in that prophetic voice, as a people. There is a time when we just need to speak, and act. And that's what I'm finding, I would say people are finding their voice. We're finding our voice in a small device at the moment, and they can just shout a bit louder. We find in that we have a voice. When I look at sort of on a global basis, I really want us to hold together that we are a global church, to hold each other accountable, but also hold us together in mission. And that is a blessing for us.

Robin Linkhart 52:05

Well, thank you very much for being with us today. Richard, it has been a total delight. And a very special thanks to all of you our listeners. If you would like to hear more stories about mission check out our What's Brewing series. If you have questions for our guest, Richard James, you can email him at rcnjames@cofchrist.org. To hear more from podcasts featuring Richard I want you to check out episode 382: Mission in the Eurasia Field, episode 438 with our Cuppa Joe series, Richard talks about Community of Christ history in Wales, and episode 646 What's Brewing about the world hunger team, you can also visit Community of Christ YouTube channel and put Richard James in the search box which will pull up everything that Richard has contributed there. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care, bye bye