

Repost | A Journey to Ordination | Women in Community of Christ with Becky Savage

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

women, priesthood, Reorganization, ministry, Emma, ordination, giftedness, Joseph Smith, Herald, General Conference, Cult of True Womanhood

SPEAKERS

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Blake Smith 00:26

Welcome Project Zion Podcast listeners! In honor of the 40th anniversary of the ordination of women in Community of Christ, we're reaching back into the archives and revisiting some great episodes on the topic. This is part one of a two-part series featuring host Brittany Mangelson, and former president Becky Savage. It started as a single conversation. But there was so much material to cover that it spans two episodes. Again, this is part one, which originally aired on February 14, 2019. Enjoy.

Brittany Mangelson 01:01

Hello, everyone, and welcome to another episode of Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Brittany Mangelson. And today for our interview we have on a repeated guest who we've had on before, it is the lovely Becky Savage. And I am very, very excited to have this conversation about women and the priesthood in Community of Christ. So we had Becky on before, gosh, it was more when was that Becky? Probably a year ago, maybe longer than

Becky Savage 01:30

Longer than that, I think, yeah,

Brittany Mangelson 01:32

You're right, [Becky: a couple of years], it's been a minute. We talked about her journey in the church, her personal journey in the church related to this topic, particularly because she was the first president or she was the first woman in Community of Christ First Presidency. And so I felt like that was very significant and wanted to get her take on that whole transition, as well as the transition that the church took to get to that place. And so part of this is also because she is a Community of Christ seminary graduate, and her thesis project was to track the journey of the ordination of women in Community of Christ. And so after we had that initial interview, I had read her thesis at a pretty high level. I kind of speed read through it, just to get the main ideas. And then I have since really dove into it. And I just knew that we had to have Becky on again, to kind of walk us through that transition and that development from a church perspective. So Becky, I am so glad to have you on again. And thank you for just sharing with Project Zion again, this is gonna be great.

Becky Savage 02:44

Thanks. It's wonderful to be here.

Brittany Mangelson 02:46

So do you want to give us just a quick little rundown of who you are and where you're where you are, um, I kind of already did a slight intro. But if you want to just give us a little bit more of what's going on in your life right now. And just to let our listeners get to know you a little bit.

Becky Savage 03:02

Yes, I'm now three years retired from the First Presidency, coming up on that at least in April. So it's been a transition into retired life, which is been quite a change gives me time to listen to podcasts like Project Zion Podcast, which I enjoy very much. And find out what it's like to relax, take time to look at life from a new perspective. And I've enjoyed getting back into my thesis, which was completed in 2005. So this was a while ago to go back and look at what it was like to study the journey of women toward ordination in Community of Christ has brought up I was telling Brittany, it's brought up some interesting memories of number one, why did I even engage this particular topic? And why this topic is important to us to consider as we look at where we are in Community of Christ, a denomination that considers the Enduring Principle of "All are Called" as an important part of who we are. I was engaged as a field minister in the mission center in Florida, working with both men and women in ministry, and one of the repeated messages that was coming through particularly from women was, these are women who were a part of the first generation of women ordained as, as ministers in Community of Christ. And they were bringing wonderful gifted ministry, in their congregations and in the Mission Center. And yet, for some, there was a sense of inadequacy. Am I good enough? Am I prepared well enough? I don't have the same background as then bring in ministry of priesthood. And how am I going to measure up in my adequate in bringing the type of ministry that's needed in Community of Christ. And so when I went to seminary classes I chose as my topics for all of my papers, except one, some thing related to women in their ministry, or some topic related to women. And that became, then an evolution at the thesis time to look at women's ministry and, in Community of Christ. And the journey of women toward ordination in Community of Christ historical literature review became my topic. I was looking at how were women, as leaders, engaged in the church long before there was any possibility that women could be involved as priesthood bringing ministry as ordained ministers in the church. And this review of literature became this in-depth study of the requirements for the thesis was 25 to 50 pages long. And anything that got over, excuse me, that requirement had to have special permission, Brittany will know that my thesis is like 250 pages long, I had to at some point, I had to just stop because there became more and more things to add. And I had to, I wanted to graduate. So for anyone out there who wants a thesis topic, there's plenty of more things to add to this particular topic. But it's a fascinating journey that women went through, as they were engaged in a church that calls us with a principle of understanding what it means to really be Zion, which says, as a basic principle, all are called. But in our beginning, only some were ordained. So what does that mean? As a foundational principle for us, as Community of Christ, so that's the game, this journey.

07:26

And Becky, I love in the introduction of your thesis, you talk about how you're gonna be looking at it from a theological lens and a sociological lens, which that speaks to me because I have a bachelor's

degree in sociology. And I really do not think that you can separate theology and sociology, which is a study of culture and societies and human interactions, I don't think you can separate that. And so I really appreciate the direction that you took, because you look at different points in Western culture history in the history of women's ministry, in the Bible, etc. And you really look at what women were actually doing, and how it impacted the community. And then how does that stretch us to answer the question of where do women fit in today, and I did air quotes for today, because I'm thinking of when women were ordained in in with 156. And so, let's just dive right in and start talking about these different points in history of women's roles, etc, in, you know, maybe the early biblical times and in early Christianity as well as Western culture. And, yeah, I'm just ready for this conversation. Wherever you want to start.

Becky Savage 08:44

So, church history, and biblically we know that women were in secondary roles predominantly. There was some recognition in the Christian time, Jesus time, that women were involved in ministry. When you look at the feminist theology, they start to uphold that there are places in the Bible where there's a suppression of the message of how much women were involved. But we do know that Jesus did recognize women in ways that had not been done typically, in other stories. Apostle Paul gets a bad rap for suppressing women, but he also did recognize women as leaders in house churches early on. But as the early church leaders got involved in setting policy and structure for the Christian, early Christian church, the role of women got more and more diminished. And the structures of early Christian churches then took on a very patriarchal role, simultaneous with that and within this theological structure of churches, society had very formal structures that were also patriarchal. And within the, I stayed within my study, stayed within the United States culture that was very much influenced by British culture was a thing called the cult of true womanhood. For us now in our time. It's hard to think about this as something so formal, but put yourself into the times, and how, for centuries women were and men made, both ... men and women are both brought up with these particular ways of understanding sociologically how we fall into particular roles. But the cult of true womanhood is described in this kind of an unflattering way. And I think it's easier just you could bear with me to describe this, this is what women's unrealistic expectations were. As a wife, a mother, a woman can make the fortune and happiness of her children, and even if she did nothing else, surely this would be sufficient destiny. By her thrift, prudence and tact, she can secure to her partner and herself a competence in old age. By her cheerfulness, she can restore her husband's spirits shaken by the anxieties of business. By her tender care, she can often restore him to health if disease has seized upon his overtaxed powers. By her counsel and her love, she can win him from bad company, if temptation in an evil hour had led him astray. By her example, and her precepts and her own sex, insight into character, she can mold her children, however diverse their dispositions into good men and women, and by leading in all things a true and beautiful life, she can refine, elevate, and spiritualize all who come within reach, so that with others a perspective emulating and assisting her, she can do more to regenerate the world than all the statesman's or reformers that ever legislated. She can do so much, alas, perhaps even more do to great man if she chooses to do that. So who can estimate the evil that women have power to do as a wife? She can ruin her husband by extravagance, folly, or want of affection. She can make a devil and an outcast of a man, she might otherwise have become a good member of society. She can bring bickering, strife and perpetual discord into what has been a happy home, she can change the innocent babes whom God has entrusted to her charge into vile men, and even vile women. She can lower even

the moral tone of society itself, and thus pollute legislation at the springhead. She can in time, become an instrument of evil instead of an angel of good. Instead of making flowers of truth, purity, beauty and spirituality spring up in her good footsteps. Let's see, in her good. Instead of making flowers, proof purity, beauty and spirituality spring up in her footsteps, till the whole earth smiles with loveliness that is almost celestial. She can transform it to black and blasted desert, covered with the scorn of all evil passions, on and on and on. But if these respected parameters women were expected to provide for, and uphold the virtues of the family, society and the church, could all within that are the constraints that women were expected to be in the home, to keep their men in order, to raise their children to be perfect, because they are the ones who are teaching and keeping order in the home. And this particular restrictions was called the cult of true womanhood. It defined who what, who women were, what they should do, how they should be, and put them in a particular box that define them and define for them what their woman should be like.

Brittany Mangelson 14:41

Yeah. I'm gonna go out on the limb and guess that a man was behind the creation of that statement.

Becky Savage 14:51

Yes, it was written by a man in the Gleason's Literary Companion in the 1868 saints Herald, "What a Woman Can Do."

Brittany Mangelson 15:01

Oh, wow, look how far we've come.

Becky Savage 15:08

So yet now it's written in the Herald, the Saints Herald, as you know, guide, certainly, and it was read by men and women. So from a sociological perspective, it's giving guidance. The Saints Herald was read, in just a weekly publication that's read by men and women. It's the guidance sanctioned by the First Presidency, as the way in which we're instructed to behave as good and faithful Saints. And I think at the time intended to be helpful, not as a way to intentionally demean, but to be helpful. So, and it matched the societal expectations of men's roles and women's roles, and the place for women to excel in their roles. So while we look at it now, as something that is so oppressive, I do think the intent was to help out. We do know, looking at how we, as women have needed to learn about the effect that those kinds of messages have on our psyche, or hold for holistically our Mind, Body Spirit, how that does affect our whole being, and how messages get through to all dimensions of our spirits. And our, our internal being, that it it does put us into roles that do not allow the wholeness that God blesses us with to fully emerge. So there's the religious, the biblical that the churches, so we have the Bible, we have church, and then we have social sociological parameters out of which women are inculcated, or culturally designed to be in certain roles. And were raised that way.

Brittany Mangelson 17:32

Yeah. And it's, you know, God sanctioned, that's the way God commanded it to be. That's the natural order of society. And like you said, it was really connected to the non-religious culture at the time as well. Which is important to note, because I do think that sometimes, statements like that, or just the reality of what people were living with can have kind of a shock factor for us today, because our society

is so different. But when you actually put yourself in the shoes of the time, like you said, it was not necessarily intended to be malicious and blatantly oppressive and sexist. It was just these are the standards, this is how society is living. And so this is, yeah, also a help. A way to provide support for women and families in the church.

Becky Savage 18:29

And we'll see as we go along that there are some ways that women use their communication tools to help each other emerge out of that, use their giftedness to get beyond what those kinds of societal expectations, societal religious expectations are.

Brittany Mangelson 18:51

Yeah. So let's talk about a little bit more about the early days of the Restoration. And, you know, I would include pre- Reorganization as well as Reorganization. I know that there's a lot of weight given to women's ministry, in the Restoration, particularly Emma, and Emma is a champion character in the Reorganization, which I deeply, deeply appreciate. But I'd love to hear your thoughts on Emma's role and the Nauvoo Relief Society and just the way that women were women's ministry was incorporated in the early church.

Becky Savage 19:31

So in the "Elect Lady Revelation," Section 24, of Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants and 25 for the LDS Doctrine and Covenants, was a good foundation for the role of women in ministry in the early Restoration history. And it's interesting how even this particular revelation that it's addressed to Emma how many of the cultural alignments with it, even as it calls her into a particular ministry. So the revelation was addressed to Emma, the wife of the Prophet, and given through Joseph Smith at Harmony, Pennsylvania in July of 1830. It calls for a selection of hymns that Emma was directed to make. That was completed and published in 1835. And that hymn book was used for the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. So it's known as Emma, Elect Lady Revelation, but it also is the foundational calling for a hymn book that has become theologically a foundation for Community of Christ, even today, that has two really important parts of that particular revelation. The "Elect Lady" component of it calls in with a couple of things, she has an office of calling. And in that office of calling, listen to the cult of true womanhood parts of it. It says, "comfort unto my servant, Joseph Smith, Jr, thy husband, in his afflictions, with consoling words, and a Spirit of meekness." So we're following him, "and thou shalt go with them at the time of this going, and be unto him for a scribe." So she's directing her to be a scribe for him when Oliver Cowdery is called into other ministries. It also calls her to be for her husband support. So don't worry about being fearful for your husband is going to support you in the church. And continue to be in a Spirit of meekness. Beware of pride. Let thy spirit delight in thy husband, and glory which shall come upon him. So here are the parts of this revelation that are saying, Stay within this cult of true womanhood, parameters. And then here are the parts the call her into particular ministry, "and the office of thy calling shall be for the comfort to your husband, but then thou shalt be ordained under his hand, to one, expound scriptures, and two, exhort the church, according it shall be given the by the Spirit, for he shall lay his hands upon thee, and thou shalt Receive the Holy Ghost, in thy time shall be given to writing and learning much." And then it asks, calls her to make the selection of sacred hymns. So the tradition of ministry to priesthood, they are ordaining to priesthood has the practice of laying on of hands for ordination. And this particular revelation is calling that she should be ordained by laying on

a hands for the expounding of Scripture, and exhorting the church and then making a selection of sacred hymns. There's been controversy in the literature about was this actually a calling to have office of priesthood, there's no particular priesthood designated. So you can't really say that it's calling to a particular office of priesthood. And so those who say it's not a calling to priesthood, use that as an argument. And then there's those who argue that it's a calling more similar to as setting apart for a particular ministry. But you can definitely identify this as a time of designating the Prophet's wife as an elect lady with specific calling and giftedness, and ministry to bring to the church as a whole. So foundationally, at the very beginning of the church's founding, we have a setting apart or a special calling of a woman to ministry with particular giftedness that continues to bless the church, even into this modern day. So we have the most recent hymnal, Community of Christ Sings, was published in 2013. And some of the same hymns that's Emma's first selection of sacred hymns are still in our most current hymnal. So, Emma as beginning minister, ministry in the church has continued to bless us from its very beginning. The women's doing involved in the early restoration of the church started organizing. The first record we have is the Nauvoo Relief Society. And that was organized in 1842. The concept of that organization was done, following, again, kind of an interesting path pathway. So we have a concept of women wanting to do good ministry, even though they're not involved in priesthood ministry. So there was a recognized need by a couple of women. Sarah Granger, who was the wife of Hiram Kimball, who was very financially successful person in in the Nauvoo area...a landholder, and a businessman. And a friend of hers, they think was probably Margaret Cook, they wanted to discuss a project where they could help people who were hungry and poor. And they recognize that some, some women had time but little means and others had money, but little time. And there was a way that they could get together and form a society that could benefit the Nauvoo area. So they went to President Joseph Smith. And he embraced the idea and responded with his own thoughts and said, "I'm glad to have the opportunity to organize women, as a part of the priesthood belongs to them." So these are Joseph's words, again, using that term priesthood. And we're wondering, so what I'm, what does that mean? So March of 1842, 18 women assembled in the upstairs room with a Red Brick Store in Nauvoo. And Joseph comes and organizes them, and he sets apart Emma as the President of the New Society, and she chooses two counselors. And Joseph is organizing them in the same way that the First Presidency is organized. Joseph has two counselors, that they called the First Presidency. Emma has, as President, two counselors that she chose chooses to lead the this new society. Joseph says that he would ordain them to preside over the society, and let them preside, just as the presidency presides, over the church. And if any officers are wanted to carry out the design of the institution, then let them be appointed and set apart as deacons and teachers. So he uses priesthood terms now just kind of a little confusing for his own priesthood male members, because he's using parallel language to the actual ordained priesthood of the time. He speaks about this with others in the Nauvoo area. And he continues to persist in using priesthood related language for this Nauvoo Relief Society. It talks about delivering keys of the priesthood to the church with them, and indicates that there's a connection of the women in the Relief Society to their husbands. So now he's again aligning women and men together, and priesthood in the church, which I think is a very important thing for us to remember, as we move forward to when men and women in ministry in the church, in our current circumstances, and after 156 happens in 1984, men and women together in ministry, and in priesthood in the church. So this parallel organization of women, even though they're not officially ordained to priesthood office, there's terminology that's that used, that is parallel to priesthood. The while there's this frustration going on with men in the priesthood, that's going on, to the actual Nauvoo Relief Society does really good ministry. They're

involved in caring for the poor. They're raising money for those who need clothing, places to live. They need food. They're providing housing for the men, they're helping to build the temple. They're feeding those who don't have sufficient food. They're appealing to the governor of the state on behalf of Joseph Smith and his character. They're very active. They, because of their setting apart by Joseph, Emma and her counselors actually do laying on hands for an ill sister and she is healed. Ministry is happening within the organization. It even within the whole the only two years that they're organized at Nauvoo. It causes discord within the brethren of the, in Nauvoo, even as they're doing all these wonderful big things. They raise money by donating one cent per week for the purchase of nails and blasts for the temple, all kinds of wonderful things happen. And then the minutes stop as of March 17 1844, that exactly two years from the time that they're organized, the last minutes saying that they're going to be in the same, they're going to find a place to meet. And we do you know, that a couple of months later, in June, the Prophet and his brother are assassinated. And so there's an assumption that the society stops because of the death of the Prophet. So ladies, find a means with they find a need, and then find a means by which to get an organization as a president, Joseph, President, Prophet Joseph finds a way to organize them, and seems to have an intent to have it parallel to priesthood, even in these early days in Nauvoo in 1842-44.

Brittany Mangelson 31:15

Yeah, interesting. For sure. And I mean, just the fact that he was using words like deacon and teachers and ordain. I mean, these are explicitly priesthood words. So it seems to be that by word they were. I mean, this is my interpretation. But it seems like they were considered an equal like you the word you use parallel organization, and the fact that they could, they were autonomous, they had their own budgets and fundraising and had their own little Society of ministry really shows me that the weight of women's ministry was taken seriously. But there was a there, they had some street credibility, if you will. They were they were taken seriously, the language was paralleled to priesthood. And that's significant. It wasn't necessarily, you know, they were just getting together to knit hot pads for themselves. And it was, it seemed like they were doing actual work, ministry work, which is, from my perspective, very significant.

Becky Savage 32:28

I think, organizationally, from an organizational theory standpoint, one has to keep in mind that they had the support of the Prophet and President of the church.

Brittany Mangelson 32:38

Yes, that is very important to know that they weren't just rogue doing something on their own, that it was set up and supported by leaders of the church, you know, that, like you said, the Presidency, which,

Becky Savage 32:52

So, we as women tend to want to be autonomous, we'd like to take our own initiative, often on on now talking modern day. And to feel like we have the authority and, and initiative to be engaged in the type

of activities we want to be engaged in. Any organizational change does require support of those who are in authority. So we'll also see, as we've talked about another organization that happened informally within women's organizations in the Reorg, the Reorganization, what happens when you don't have authority support, the support of authority. So while I am an advocate and supporter of women as leaders, please know that fundamentally, that's my foundational principle. I am also a realist, and know that there are ways one works within organizations to get things done. That must be my organizational leadership development that that's going on. It's interesting that as you look at the leadership processes that women were engaged in, and you actually analyze those, this was one of those cases where the top leader supported the women's organization, and because of that it was successful.

Brittany Mangelson 34:17

Exactly. So let's move into the Reorganization a little bit. I think one thing that we have talked about on the podcast before I think, particularly with Andrew Bolton, is how Emma impacted the early Reorganization so much, the way that she reared her children and focus on peace, etc. But I'm interested in I, I didn't necessarily pull anything out of your thesis to support this question or this subtopic. But I'm wondering if you think that Emma's leadership was carried throughout the early reorganization, I do know that she had there was a great reverence for her she had a great impact on the early reorganization. And I wonder if because the Relief Society was never reorganized with the Reorganization. I just wonder if you had any thoughts on what her impact and her leadership looked like in the early days of the year of the Reorganization.

Becky Savage 35:21

I think what I picked up from the materials that I was reading, which was not focused on Emma, was her impact was predominantly with her children. So as you've indicated, the raising of your children, the maintaining of principles, and the foundational beliefs, theology, identity of Joseph Smith's foundational understanding of the restoration of the church, and why and wherefore about it. And then supporting Joseph Smith, III as he emerged as, as the imminent leader into the Reorganization. So it's her influence and in support of him, taking his new role as president of the Reorganization that was essential in it ever happening. So in the accompanying him to dine and boy conference where he accepted his call as President and Prophet of the Reorganization was essential. And without her being there and supporting him in that role, I'm not sure whether it would have happened, maybe eventually, but I think she was the essential person. There's, there is one reference to her responding to him, after a particularly difficult confrontation, related to women's vote, where she specifically says she is not one of those who is vocal about the need for women to have the vote, and she's ready to just take a backseat. So don't see her being actively engaged in those who were advocating for women having a greater role in the leadership of the church. It looks like she stepped back after Joseph Smith, III moved into his leadership role. I'd have to do more research into that to actually affirm it. But it doesn't look like she's got as big of role in the Reorganization after Joseph Smith, III takes leadership.

Brittany Mangelson 37:35

Yeah, that's, that's really interesting. And I, the reason why I wanted to ask that one way or another, whatever the answer was, because growing up the book, Emma's biography, that is, from my perspective, and I've heard other historians say that smells become the most comprehensive book we have on Emma is Mormon Enigma. And the whole idea behind that is the LDS church has a very

complicated relationship with Emma. And they don't really know what to do with her. And for me growing up, I always just assumed that she kind of haphazardly fell into the Reorganization that that was just, you know, the closest thing to what she really wanted back in Utah, which is absurd. Yeah, yeah. And so I am glad that you vocalize that, you know, she was very intentional about how she raised her children, and the things that she did draw from when she taught them about their father's ministry and the church. And that, that it was a very intentional move to not only stay behind, but to then support Joseph III. She could have just continued to be engaged in the Methodist Church and could have forgotten about the Restoration completely. But she didn't. She was really, really foundational in helping the Reorganization get off its feet. And so yeah, I just thank you for for that because I I know that some of our listeners who are Latter-day Seekers or who came from the LDS church, you know, that's, that's one thing that, for me, I had to wrestle with is ... okay, what actually was the role of Emma with the Reorganization because the reality did not match up the history that I had been taught? So thank you.

Becky Savage 39:26

And she she died in in 1879. So 19 years after the Reorganization. So she's in her elderly years, even as the Reorganization is in its beginning in 1860. So she's had many years of laying a foundation for what becomes the Rorganization. And I can only imagine, having read in the Mormon Enigma which was foundationally such a significant work, how solid she did have to be to hold on to those foundational principles that have become important for who we are as Community of Christ. They still hold true to our founding principles, so and basic beliefs and Enduring Principles. So, yeah, we we owe a lot to Emma. And, and her principles and, and ability to fight for what she believed in against some pretty significant odds. And strong men. Yes, yes, yes. So in the early days of the real Reorganization, what were the women doing in the church, what was their role as far as ministry or church organization or function? So women are still bound within this Cult of True Womanhood. And yet, they are definitely wanting to be involved in ministry, and the Herald, since Herald is still the primary voice and vehicle through which things happen and are communicated within the church. And there was a request, several requests, that were sent to the President and Prophet, asking if there could be a way for women to share messages via that vehicle. And so they did allow for and I'm trying to find my, my notes here, so I can get to it here allow for a column in the Herald called the "Mother's Home Column," that first appeared in January of 1886. And this was the first time that a woman was given free rein to enter to be the editor of a particular part of the Herald. And this column became a very significant contribution to women sharing with women. Now, women are involved, obviously, in our local branches that they were called the churches at that time were called local branches. And they would share things like baking tips, and housecleaning tips and child rearing tips, that kind of thing as the way to share tips, and this would be one of those you got the Cult of True Womanhood, issues going on and restrictions. But they also have ways to make things more simple. So here's some ways to make it streamlined, sort of like, hey, we have Pinterest now. You can go on the site and find ways to streamline this, this anything you want to do in your day to day life. The "Home Column" was the way that women shared those kinds of tips in their day. We don't have a webcam, but the Herald come in weekly gave you the same kind of quick tips that you could get for you know, things that make your life easier. They also did a spin off of a home column missionary fund, where women would donate a penny for every year on the birthday, for every year of their life just to assist with financial support of one or two missionaries. So it was a of course, they were admonished not to do anything that would diminish the regular tithing. This was on top of regular tithing that they would give a penny for every year of life. So the column

really became a way to bless 1000s of women by comforting, supporting and cheering each other in a wide way of communicating and encouraging with patients above. So this particular column continued for decades. I mean, it was a phenomenal contribution. With Marietta Walker contributing with the column. They wanted to do more. So they're doing something women are doing ministry in their local branches, but they wanted to do more as a group, and there was a request to have a prayer circle or a time when they could pray together as a country-wide effort. So through the column, they asked and designated a particular time when women could pray together. So it would be a particular time of day that they would all across the country pray together. And this particular prayer circle time or prayer union started having effective healing times. So the women would get together locally, and as a group or as a circle would start having prayer time and also started praying for them who were sick. And they started having healings. There was even examples in the Herald of men who came who were sick and healed. Then women who wanted to organize that a little over ambitious, and some of them decided that if they were getting together for prayer time, maybe they could use this to organize for additional activities. And so they started organizing for some other charitable activities, and started raising money for good works. And as those activities started being more and more successful, some of the elders in the local branches started getting anxious that women were getting together, they were engaging in prayer and administration, that were activities of the priesthood without an elder present. And so there started being articles in the Herald that talked about women overstepping their boundaries. And this got to be such a controversial issue that it even came before the General Conference, and caused legislation to come to say that this activity needed to stop. So, something that started as a good work, women wanting to join together to bring prayer for prayer, as a prayer union. And then to do it started having healings, praying together, meeting them for some additional good works, it becomes so successful, that it becomes to a bigger, broader audience. Elders of the church start getting anxious that things are happening outside of their control. And it raises to a broader audience that then causes at a legislative session, for there to be this big controversial discussion about should this type of activity even happen without there being an elder presence present. After this big legislative discussion, they ultimately allow the prayer union to continue. But the the wind is really out of the sails of those who had this original intent, which was very good intent. Marietta had in her column reminded people that the original intent was prayer, and for good, good things to happen at a particular time only for prayer, not for all these other organizing of the women and ask them to pull back to the original intent. And even with those kinds of admonitions, ultimately, the union had to disband. So what we have here is a grassroots effort, where women saw a need as a as a group to want to do something more than what they could do as individuals or in their individual branch. They saw a a mechanism through a communication tool of the Herald where they could share together in and expand upon their spiritual giftedness, through prayer. Success happened in those prayers, success in the sense that people had healings, some took the organizing activity of prayer to a different level, wanting to do additional good works, raising money to to offer social service support for the needy, etc. That meant that they were organizing, raising money. This was happening outside of the organism days, you know, priesthood structure, without the support of men, it became a bigger issue and got out of control ended up going to a broader discussion that ultimately, the priesthood, particularly the elders said, No, you're outside your parameters of authority as women, we as the elders and authority of the Church saying, You can do this no more. So that particular organizational process was stopped. And women were basically shut down from that particular activity. Now, women went ahead and organized additional small group activities. They had small circles of different kinds of things. Some of them were sewing circles, many of

which did wonderful good activities that you get here you have women who would say, you know, we, we can take on our own activities in our home, we can take care of our husbands, etc. We can raise our children, but we also want to do additional good work. So after the prayer circle and prayer union didn't work, they were sanctioned and organized what was called initially the United Daughters of Zion. And then ultimately, that became the Women's Auxiliary for Social Service. Now this organization that started in 1893 was sanctioned and organized by three prominent priesthood members, Francis Sheehy, JA Gunsolley, Frank Crowley, and had the support of branch presidents and ministers. So this particular organization allowed them to focus on women's needs and advisory committees. They got republished, allowed to publish articles, leaflets for children, and they got organizational support. So it allowed them all kinds of authority to now formally organize and do good work. They could publish, they established a children's home, that was also supported by General Conference resolution. And their aim was to do things like truer parented, better children, happier homes and a pure society. So this big, huge global goals, that they had all of this upper leadership support legislation from the General Conference that supported their activities, and formally now organizes women into a social service organization that has impact across the whole church. So they've learned. Women are good learners, quick learners. It takes a little bit, but they've learned that they're going to have an impact, and now are recognized as a social auxiliary, contributing to the church as a whole, and have authority that is allowing them to function autonomously, but with good administrative support.

Brittany Mangelson 51:57

Which, again, I think is so significant to know that they have the administrative support from church leadership to be able to bring ministry and use their giftedness and to develop and mentor in a way that feeds them as well as the Church, which seems I keep using the word significant, but I do think it's significant. Significant. Yeah, especially, you know, like you said, when you parallel the idea of the Cult of Womanhood, and when you think of the timeframe that we're talking about, and in churches and Christianity, especially, there was a lot of women being silenced in church and really, really funneled avenues for women to minister. But when you learn these lessons from past failed experiences, or you look to the history of when you were successful as a woman's organization, in your own church, and to learn from those lessons and to figure out okay, how can we utilize our giftedness while still having the support of the institution, I think is important. So one thing that I wanted to touch on was this idea of women voting as delegates in conferences. Community of Christ has been a democratic church since the beginning of the Reorganization. And I want to know what it looked like to wrestle with the question of women and the democratic process.

Becky Savage 53:28

In 1864, women were involved in the democratic process in the district meetings of the church. And that would mean the local branches and district meetings, women were allowed to vote in the United States. The efforts to get women the vote began in 1848. So about 20 years before that, at the Seneca Falls, New York convention, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony, initiated the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolution. So there's happening United States by the efforts for women's votes having about 20 years before that, and ultimately, in 1919, the passing of resolution that allowed for women's vote in the United States, but 1864 in the church, we have women voting locally. Now, the General Conference, the subject of women voting happened about 1868. There's a general conference where there's a lengthy debate about a disfellowship issue and impact debate, the issue of going and voting

comes out. So here's this totally unrelated topic, but all of a sudden comes this discussion about whether women should be allowed to vote on all questions that might be brought before the General Conference, and they ended up in this long debate. And there's apparently a walk out of someone's a women who are frustrated to if they're not involved in the vote, it ends up in this rather interesting letter being written by Marietta Faulkner a document against the president of the church, she gets so frustrated about President Smith, that she, she writes the First Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, she gets frustrated. I don't know if you saw that in my thesis or not. It's basically a clip against the president of the church saying he acts as a king and doesn't allow some subjects to participate fully. It's just kind of this delightful exercise. Sort of pretty catty anyway, but anyway, so this discussion is taking place in 1868, I thought she wouldn't be allowed to vote. The basic discussion ends up that women should only be allowed to vote on the things that the elders decide they should be allowed to vote on. Subsequently, in 1873, the conference passes a resolution that gives the right for all members to vote. So this is the General Conference of The Church, that it takes 1873 Now, we're all members are allowed to vote. And ultimately, in 1881, the conference formally accepted rules of representation, that formally declare common consent as the foundational principle for all conferences. And that was the conference that accepted the rules for delegate selection. That then opened up delegate selection for every jurisdiction and defined how that process works. It wasn't until 1893, though that they started listing all the delegate names. So even though 1881 was the full acceptance, or 1873 was the full acceptance of all members to vote. And the delegate selection process was defined in 1881, we don't get a list of the number of women who actually attended as delegates until 1893. And I never got to see a list of those delegates to know what the actual representation of number of women versus men is. So in the United States, women get the official first vote in 1920, authorized 1919. But the actual vote, first vote is in 1920. We are voting as women officially pass the resolution in 1873. So we were ahead of the times in terms of that vote. Along with this, we need to recognize in all of this debate, that is women getting the vote, there is also a discussion of non-priesthood getting the vote. So if you're not ordained elder, you're not authorized to vote either in the of these discussions. [Brittany: Yeah, I don't think I realized that.] So instead of this debating, there's this whole other disenfranchised group of non-priesthood that are not always allowed to vote either. So yes, there's this impetus and big struggle of 50% of the population of the church, membership of the church is not allowed to vote. But there's also this group of non-ordained, who are also disenfranchised. So it and that there's this continuing discussion of those who are not ordained as being disenfranchised, that happens in the 70s, as well, late 60s and into the 70s of the quote, disenfranchised, non-ordained discussion that is suppressed in the discussion of issues related to women's rights in the church. So, don't want that to get lost is a parallel discussion. It is certainly a diminished voice. But it is there as a part of the message of all are called. All are equal. Are they in terms of what is the role of disciple and priesthood in Community of Christ?

Brittany Mangelson 59:46

That's really interesting. And like I said, I'm not sure I was fully aware that in order to be a delegate, and in order to have a voice, that you needed to be ordained, because really that throws into question. How do you integrate women but then not have some sort of something for the un-ordained man? [Yeah.]

Becky Savage 1:00:07

So early on, it was just elders, [Yeah. Okay] elders who voted. So at some point, you know, in the midst of all of this discussions, and I didn't go into it in a whole lot of detail, it would be an interesting study, but they're is a dialogue. And I read through the transcripts, there was this discussion about not only elders could vote on certain parts of legislation so ... fascinating.

Brittany Mangelson 1:00:34

Yeah. Fascinating. So one of the other questions that some people have had is wondering if there was talk of women in ordained ministry in the early earlier days of the Reorganization. And I'm wondering if, if it came up at World Conference at all, or if any church leadership brought it up, or what those conversations were like, explicitly surrounding the ordination of women.

Becky Savage 1:01:03

Beginning in the 1860s, there were questions about women in the priesthood that recurred periodically in the Herald. Questions, such as one from ED Hodge may have contributed to men's concerns about women in leadership roles. So Hodge says I do not like to hear them say that women cannot hold priesthood. So he's saying, I do not like to hear that women cannot hold priesthood. Can you imagine that? Did she not get authority to declare the resurrection? Are we not all one in Christ Jesus, and then she pleaded, "please brothers do not put the Sisters of Zion and straitjackets but give God the glory that there is no difference male or female." So the issue of priesthood was further tested when a DS Mills or high priest appointed to the Pacific Slope mission of California, acted on his own volition, and he he anointed and set apart Emma Burton to administer to the sick among the females of the church. When EL Kelly requested CS Mills to comment on the events, he defended what he did by saying, "what I have said and done in that matter was by the power of the Holy Spirit, and I can't go back on that." Harry Fielding has explored this ordination of Emma Burton, calling her a spiritual healer. He talks about her history of multiple healings and of offering rich ministry. Despite this giftedness, it appears that Emma did not interpret her administration as an ordination. And in her letter to President FM Smith, she describes her experience in this way, "as I thought that over there could be no harm in it," meaning a setting apart, "there was no priesthood conferred. And very many enjoy the privileges and blessings of the priesthood, even though they are not sealed upon them, one of which is to accompany that elder on his missions. And another of mine was the gift of healing." Now, Harry Fielding's article talks about multiple healings in multiple places just this fantastic story after story after story of her healings, then there's lots of articles that are in the Herald of using scripture against women being ordained. Certainly, the Inspired Version actually has a change in wording of the First Corinthians passage 14:34-35. The words of called us using the word speak and silence that are used in King James Version and other modern translations. In place of speak in silence, the inspired version uses rule. So it reads, "let your women keep silent in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to rule. But they are commanded to be under obedience as also say a law and for it is a shame for women to rule in the church." So we have a scriptural interpretation with Joseph Smith's translation, the Inspired Version that definitely puts a parameter for priesthood that would be could be interpreted for women and priesthood in the church. Other letters, certainly demeaning women as possible roles in priesthood, but then there are others that call to the giftedness of women and their ability to bring blessing to the church, in their particular giftedness that comes from God. There was a particular process that was brought before the world, what was then the General Conference, women participate called the Zions Religio Literary Society. women participated sometimes along with their appointee husband. So appointees is a term that's used

in Community of, was used in Community of Christ, for men who are hired by the church to serve in mission fields. We changed that terminology now, but you'll see it used for people who sometimes say I was an "appointee." So women would serve with their husbands in the Zions Religio and Literary Society and Sunday School Association, and the railroad companies reduced the fares for ordained ministers. And to help with the funding, Seventy Will Pender wrote the Zions Religio Society requesting that his wife be issued a certificate of appointment similar to that was issued by the church to missionaries. And he requested the society to submit a resolution to the General Conference specified that Religio workers, male and females, be set apart by the laying on of hands to satisfy the demands of the railroad companies so that they all could get half rates. So the company says in order to get a half rate, they have to be ordained. And in order to meet that, because it was imminently proper, a precedent was already being furnished in the case of Emma Smith and her revelation, Doctrine and Covenants 24, or 25. So while the setting apart would not convey priesthood authority, it would designate them as workers for their task in the original the Religio Society or the Sunday School Association. So this was brought before a general conference for a decision. They had an extended debate with multiple amendments and substitutions. And the matter was referred to a Joint Council, the First Presidency and the Council of Twelve. All of this was happening in 1905. And it has had extended ramifications. The outcome of the council's deliberation, denied the request with the following opinion that was approved by the conference. It said that women of the church are by qualification and desire eligible to office as workers in the ancillary societies of church. There are no prescribed rules of the church or provisions by revelation. Pretty important here, no provisions by revelation directing ordination of women, and no divine recognition of women, as pertaining to priesthood of either order, meaning the Aaronic or the Melchizedek order. And whereas there's apparent necessity for ordination or setting apart of women as officers, the Resolve is that we, members of the Joint Committee, Presidency and Twelve. And this is the very important wording, do not now see our way clearly, to report favorably upon ordination of women, as suggested in the papers submitted to us. So in 1905, based on a resolution that was brought before the then General Conference of The Church, the presiding quorums of the church council of the church, the First Presidency and the Council of Twelve resolved back to the conference that they did not see a way for them to favorably approve ordination of women. This resolution stood for the church from 1905 to 1976, and was used as the rationale for denying women's calls to priesthood for those years. It was rescinded in 1976. opening the way for consideration then of women's calls to priesthood. So, way back in 1905, there was a resolution that gave a rationale for the denial of women's call to priesthood. That was then rescinded in 1976, opening the way for women's call to ordination, by whatever means, then that might come. So many, many years, you know, 71 years of rationale for denying ordination to women. But 76 opening the way for ordination.

Brittany Mangelson 1:10:27

I think that it's interesting that they listed the reasons why they have that rationale because it kind of gives, when you open the door, you just have to address those rationales. And we know, you know, spoiler alert, we know now how it happened through revelation. And since that was specifically mentioned that there was no revelation. It's,,,

Becky Savage 1:10:53

revelation and divine recognition of women. Yes, pertaining to priesthood of either order. Yeah, very, very significant.

Brittany Mangelson 1:11:04

Yeah. So then to address that is, is how we're where we're at today.

Becky Savage 1:11:10

It is fascinating.

Brittany Mangelson 1:11:13

It really is fascinating. And I think it's, it speaks to how the church does institutional change. So we don't necessarily have things pop out of the sky that have no precedents that have no, you know, common consent, we have no discussion with the body, etc, that we really do try to look at where we have been, and then use God's Spirit and use community input to discern where we're going to go in the future through divine revelation, which I think is a really, really beautiful, and I don't know, I think we have this scriptural phrase, let the Spirit breathe. And to me, that's, this is a testament of that this is an example of when that has happened. And looking at where we've been and where we can go, but to have a an actual process to go, step through those doors is something that I really appreciate,

Becky Savage 1:12:17

I think it's also a recognition of where the church was coming. If you think about the sociological, theological and sociological lens out of which the church was emerging, so founded in 1830, grounded in scriptural and theological principles, living through the social norms, and scriptural foundation, theological understandings, and, and emerging through all of that is this very strong need, at the time of that will ultimately get you want section 156 comes is this provision that is, it's going to take a revelation and an understanding of divine intervention for the church to grasp what God is calling for in terms of change in the understanding of calling, and giftedness for priesthood. Right? And when we get there, there's also even a call to what it means for discipleship. So section 156 is not just a call to priesthood and women, it is much richer in terms of its depth of calling for the church to mission today. It gets, it gets called I mean, it gets labeled for the call of women to priesthood so a much richer revelation. Yeah, in its fullness.

Brittany Mangelson 1:14:03

For sure, for sure. So let's just continue on and talk a little bit more about the 1970s. We have had Marge and Richard Troeh on the podcast before that kind of walked us through this time period and their contributions to the conversation and the development of yeah, they are some dear friends of mine and treasures to the church. So let's just talk about that time period a little bit and what their roles were, if you will, and this journey to ordination.

Becky Savage 1:14:37

Such an interesting time. I think if you back up just a bit in terms of organizations, President F M. Smith, who was supreme directional control, had taken what had been a pretty autonomous women's organization that social organization that was doing things autonomously. And he took back some of

that control, allowing for a General Council of Women ultimately, because the women revolted. He took back and said, I'm going to take control and do some things, and the women revolted. And he actually acquiesced and allowed the organization that became the General Council of Women to emerge, which was really pretty amazing that the women of the time could actually stand up is the saying that even in the 30s, depression time, women's started getting a voice to say, wait a minute, we have something to contribute, and the church needs us right now. So listen up. FM Smith, he kind of marshaled, when who marshaled all of the troops together, he allowed the organization of a General Council of Women with three purposes, which was to help reduce the indebtedness, hence the Great Depression of the church, to evangelize the world and to establish Zion, three, just small goals. But he did allow them to move from what had been a decentralized, non-reporting to the president of the Church, which had happened initially, and move them back to reporting to the president of the church again. So they're now back under the authority of the church leader. So they have authority and recognition again, to report to an important leader of the church. He then under his death, there's a decentralization again, of the women's leader, but ultimately, the Women's Council was reconstituted. And women start serving women, again under Catherine Westward, who was just before March TROs leadership, Catherine had organized the General Council of Women in quite a structure. She was able to do all kinds of autonomous work because she was a volunteer for the church up until the last few years of her leadership. She established strong channels of communication among the local church women's leaders, she was able to do major fundraising. She did a lot of local retreats, women's retreats, which continued to be an important part of women, joining together classes, published multiple resources, etc. And then, because of all of that work, some of our writers have claimed, including historian Richard Howard has claimed that the church men leaders got threatened by Catherine Westward's success, and decided that she needed to be a paid employee of the church because they could control her and start taking back control of her resources. And just before Marge was hired, they started taking over her budget and reducing her resources and limiting some of the things that she did. So Marge was then and actually Catherine was asked to resign, to make way for Marge Troeh's position. This happened in a major reorganization that was happening organization wide, where would there had been organizations or departments locally that served jurisdictions. Decentralization became the model so that those who were leaders in the local or leaders headquarters became consultants to the field. And in Marge's case, even though she was named as the Women's Ministry Consultant, they took away all of the things that Westwood had access to. So, Marge lost a budget. She no longer had a budget and went into the general fund of the church. And she lost the DIS distaff which was the primary journal for women. She no longer had had that as a way of communication to the rest of for women. She had no directives, communication channels, to the web and locally, so she lost direction, direction of the control of any kind to the districts or the branches, and her priorities will change her priority was not to serve women. Her priority was to serve local administrators. So she was put into this position of major loss of what had been this big robust women's organization that had been put in place and was functioning extremely well. And was put into an extremely difficult situation with what was almost set up as a no-win scenario. So, no budget, no communication tool other than the Herald. She's lost that. And her responsibilities included...listen to this list, cultivating the giftedness of women resource production, research regarding needs of women, member understanding about women, education for members about women. And in addition she was to consult with administrators, in all jurisdictions, including the First Presidency, Council of Twelve, regional administrators, district presidents and pastors. And, her consultant responsibilities included exploring programs and implications of various decisions, including

the impact on women and women's ministry. Now, the issue is she was never given access to those administrators, locally, or at the highest level, First Presidency, Council with Twelve, Regional Administrators, district presidents when they were making decisions, she was given the decision and then very little time to it was basically and then told to react, here's the decision, now you go and do. So, she did amazing things, considering the circumstances in which she was put. And I'm pretty sure in the podcast, she talked about the financial circumstance, she was hired and then told her salary would be less because her husband was a physician. There was a lot of controversy, even in the minutes that I looked at in the archives, where there was controversy about whether to hire her because she was the first woman executive hired who had children, and the debate about whether they should even hire her because really, her place was in the home, raising her children. You know, things about breaking all kinds of new barriers. She walked into an executive role with all kinds of expectations, and then barriers to be successful. So she did move from a consultant role to a Women's Ministry Commissioner role. And she was an outspoken proponent for advocacy for women and for injustice in the system. And that included HR policies for pay, and for benefits for staff within the organization, and just ruffled all kinds of feathers. She, she did not fit the Cult of True Womanhood model of women. She spoke up. And it was hard for church leaders to have someone who was so outspoken, a little difficult for some of them to adjust to that type of a bold spoken person in her role,

Brittany Mangelson 1:23:47

For sure, for sure. It would have been extremely difficult to do those jobs with the parameters that they gave her. But I know that she is credited, And you know, she takes credit for this, which rightfully she should, in helping guide Wallace B Smith in some of these feminist issues, so to just kind of help him. And I think, if I remember correctly, he asked for it. I mean, he wanted her consultation and how to respond to women. And he admitted that he was not aware of all the challenges of being a woman in the RLDS church and that she did not mince words, and she was not shy about equality for women. And that is something that her husband fully supported. And I know that they were they are dear personal friends with Wallace B. Smith. They were next door neighbors for a long time. And so I think that that really helped as far as opening his mind to this deeper understanding that we did have work to do in regards to women, so...

Becky Savage 1:24:58

Simultaneous to This time is an emerging awakening of women in an understanding of feminism. Church leaders in this in the late 60s and into the 70s. Were in their own theological studies with the St. Paul School of Theology. They were also introduced, I think, by Draper, maybe Neff, I can't remember one of the church leaders to the feminism theology at St. Paul School of Theology. So this group of women were also studying feminist theology, and in their own on their own journey of discovering what it was to understand feminism, and what was that part of part of journeying and awakening to what is there beyond this old Cult of True Womanhood, this scriptural understanding of, of what was the role of women in the church? What was the traditional role of women in society? What was the former theological understanding of women and women's potential role in the church, all these new discoveries were happening simultaneous to this big huge awakening of Christian thoughts, of scriptural interpretation, of societal understandings of what it means to be a woman. And in this new social awakening, all of these things are happening simultaneous, and the church is immersed in it, even as they're opening new mission fields, and the international world. They're also discovering these

places where people don't even know about restoration history. So they're opening the church in India, and then the Orient, and Africa, places where people are, they don't know about Joseph Smith, they just want to know about Jesus Christ. Well, who is Jesus Christ. So we're questioning as a church, this whole new idea of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ, not followers of Joseph Smith. All these things are happening simultaneous, just the discoveries abound, all as we're also journeying along about what does it mean, to be engaged in priest discovering priesthood? Understanding where God is calling us to be as in mission, all happening simultaneously, imagine what it would put it's while I was there, it was, it was interesting. There was very interesting times, I was learning to be a new nurse. So I was also discovering this whole body of knowledge about wholeness, Mind, Body Spirit, and that we're all kind of inter-connected, and that you can't separate each part. There's no way to separate it, because we're all a part of the whole and God blesses us as a whole. And that, because I was involved in pediatrics, the whole is the family. You can't separate children from parents. It's the whole, its mother, father and children, God blessing all men and women together with children, you don't separate them. So well, how does that then have implications for wholeness in church life. So that then takes us on to the next step of our journey.

Blake Smith 1:28:51

I'm Blake Smith, and you've been listening to Project Zion Podcast. For more episodes. You can find us at projectzionpodcast.org or on any of your favorite podcast platforms. Thanks for joining us. Have a great rest of your day.