

What's Brewing | Presiding Bishopric Update and Future Plans

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Ron Harmon, Robin Linkhart, Carla Long, Wim van Klinken

Robin Linkhart 00:20

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'm your host, Robin Linkhart, and I'm here today with Community of Christ Presiding Bishopric, Ron Harmon, Wim van Klinken and Carla Long. And in case you are wondering why an interview with our presiding financial ministers is featured in our What's Brewing series, it's because the generosity of faithful disciples and wise fiscal management is all about mission. Ron, Wim and Carla, thank you so much for making time to chat with us today.

Carla Long 01:13

Thank you, Robin.

Wim van Klinken 01:14

Hi there. Good seeing you.

Ron Harmon 01:18

Great to be with everyone today.

Robin Linkhart 01:21

Let's take just a few minutes now for some brief introductions. Please tell us a little bit about you, maybe what your specific role is in the Presiding Bishopric. Ron, would you like to start?

Ron Harmon 01:32

Sure. Well, I still feel like it was just yesterday that I was at World Conference and being ordained to the role of Presiding Bishopric, but that was back in April of 2023 and boy, does time fly. But that is the current role I serve in and have the privilege of working with Wim and Carla as very able counselors. And together, of course, we make up the Presiding Bishopric that focuses on both the financial but also many of the operational needs of the church globally. And I very much like to talk these days about the fact that I am a very happy grandfather of three grandchildren to bring such joy to my life and continue to remind me about what matters most, missionally, as we think about the future of our world, and the kind of world that we envision through the lens of God's unfolding future for us as a prophetic people. And so, in a very, really focused kind of way, my grandchildren bring that for me right into focus and

help me remember what I do. And I'm also just deeply appreciative of the continued support of my wife Barb and her commitment in the life of the church, and her commitment in terms of supporting me in what I try to do in the life of the church. And we, because we have grandchildren, you probably maybe surmise that we also have children. So we have three, three kids, so they're all adults now, Katie and Daniel and Lindsey, and they're all married with wonderful spouses. And we just feel incredibly blessed that we are all together here in the Greater Kansas City area. I kind of pinch myself every week that we, at least at this moment in time, have that opportunity to share in each other's lives. And it is just such a meaningful and enriching part of Barb and I's experience together. So that's just a little bit about me, and look forward to our opportunity to share today.

Robin Linkhart 04:09

Thanks so much Ron. Wim?

Wim van Klinken 04:11

Yeah, it's good to be with you all. So a bit about myself, surprise, surprise, and at the time we're recording this today, I turned 60, so I'm now, for another couple of months, as old as Ron is, but much older than our senior bishop in the bishopric, which is Carla, who will introduce herself in a moment. So I just realized when I woke up early this morning that the older you get, probably not the wiser, but I start more reflecting on things. That's probably me, you become more of a philosopher instead of trying to get things done. So that's probably me getting a more of a philosophic mood the older you get. But okay, that's a bit about me. I'm married with Deborah already for many, many years, and our son, Max lives in Omaha, where he works and has his significant other, his girlfriend, and we're very grateful for all of them. So, what I do in the Presiding Bishopric was your other question, Robin, so I oversee the financial management, particularly the fiscal services and the controller's functions, the business services part of the organization, which is for people who didn't really understand, what are business services, which means Herald House and our event management. IT, which is my passion and my background as well. I oversee real estate. I oversee the investments of the organization, including the Investment Committee, the Children/Youth Worker Registration program, which is pretty new, that I oversee, but I do not do that all alone. I do that with a wonderful and dedicated group of people, which I'm very proud of and love working with.

Robin Linkhart 06:31

Thank you, Wim and Happy birthday to you. Yay.

Wim van Klinken 06:35

Thank you.

Robin Linkhart 06:37

And now the next person who is no stranger to Project Zion Podcast, the one and only Carla K long,

Carla Long 06:46

Oh, thanks, Robin. I was just going to say that if you are a normal listener to Project Zion, you hear my voice a lot, and have heard my voice a lot. You've heard it a little bit less in the last year or so, because it's been quite an interesting ride being a part of the Presiding Bishopric, but I'm Carla Long. I am

married to the wonderful Kuzma, who is from Ukraine. His father is now living with us. His father is a refugee from Ukraine because of the terrible war that is happening there, and he lives with us as well. So, we're a three generational family. I have two amazing kids, Lia, who is six and in first grade, and Ari, who is in his last year of Montessori School. And Lia loves school, and Ari kind of loves school at the end of every day, when I pick him up, I said, Did you have a great day? He's like, I had a great day. And then he said, No, I had a terrible day, because he doesn't want me to think that he's enjoying it, but he really is. As Wim mentioned, I actually am the senior bishop in the Presiding Bishopric. I was ordained a Bishop in 2012 which was is a lot longer than both Wim and Ron. So of course, of course, I use my senior, senior status timely as I try to instruct Wim and Ron in the correct ways to be a Bishop. I hope that they would say the same. I have really enjoyed being in the Presiding Bishopric. It's been quite the learning curve, and I always excited to learn more. So anyway, back to you. Robin.

Robin Linkhart 08:24

Well, thank you, Carla. It's always good to hear from you and get an update on your new role, which hasn't been that long. Golly, so much has happened in a year. It feels like it was yesterday and long time at the same time. So technically, we are still in in summer, although we're recording this in September, but this summer, the Presiding Bishopric provided a June 2024 financial update, and on nine July, posted a companion piece titled Presiding Bishopric Summary Update. So, I was hoping you could walk us through that information, featuring the highlights and with the understanding that the full financial reports are always available online at cofchrist.org.

Ron Harmon 09:17

Well, Robin, I'm going to take that one on behalf of the Presiding Bishopric. So be happy to provide a few highlights, and I'm going to go ahead and put in a shameless plug for a live financial update that will be available on Zoom on October 8 at both 12 o'clock noon and 8pm Central, daylight time, and you'll see information coming out about this, but it will be our first time to do a live financial update with the church, and there'll be opportunity for folks to be able to interact with us and ask questions. So, I want to begin just by expressing our really deep appreciation to the church for its continued generosity worldwide mission tithes. As of August, it's \$170,000 above what we had budgeted for this time of the year, and we hope the church will, of course, continue to respond generously through the end of the year so that we can meet our budgeted expenses, expenses that are manifest in so many transformational ministries occurring across the globe. Probably the most significant news in the financial update is action that was taken by the World Church Finance Board at its May '23 meeting, where it designated \$175 million from the sale of historic assets to the temple endowment in which they placed \$165 million into the temple endowment. And, the worldwide mission endowment, where the board placed \$10 million in the worldwide mission endowment. Just to remind our listeners, the temple endowment funds Temple ministries. It funds mission support ministries and services that come from the temple and the operations of the Temple complex itself, which includes the Temple, the Auditorium and the UN Peace Plaza. The Temple, of course, as an incarnational symbol of Christ's love and peace in the world, inspires our witness and compassionate action globally, but also has an impact right here in the Greater Kansas City area. And we have a deep appreciation for the generosity of generations past that will continue to bless the church for years to come through the witness and ministries of the Independence temple. And this is going to be made possible in large part, through the temple endowment and the gift of those generations that will be fulfilled through that endowment. The

worldwide mission endowment, of course, funds, ministries and formational resources that support the mission of the church globally, and that can be resources, that can be staff, all the ways that mission is expressed through our five Mission Initiatives. The worldwide mission endowment will be the focus of our mission funding efforts going into the future. So, what does it actually really mean that the world church Finance Board designated \$165 million to the temple endowment and \$10 million to the worldwide mission endowment? Well, first, the World Church Finance Board is elected by the World Conference, and it serves on behalf of the World Conference by approving our annual worldwide mission budget and our annual audit. Their designation of these funds placed in the endowment means the funds will be subject to the provisions of each endowment, and they'll be restricted from transfer out of the endowment unless the withdrawal is approved by a majority vote of the World Church Finance Board. In addition, the World Church Finance Board has approved a spending rate policy on our endowment. And this was done clear back in 2016. Currently, the spending rate is 3% on a rolling three year average balance as of June 30 of each year. This conservative spending rate, we believe, will enable our endowments to grow over time as they continue to bless the church by providing income into the worldwide mission budget. Earlier in February of this year, you may recall that we announced that we exceeded the \$120 million goal for the Bridge of Hope retirement responsibility. And here's the big part of that announcement, without the need for any Affiliate Investment Pool loans. This is truly remarkable, and enables the church to fulfill its responsibility to current and future retirees across the globe. In the Presiding Bishopric, we've been working to finalize funding arrangements for our retirement plans, and we'll share a final report with the church when this project is complete next year. And again, we just, we want to say there, there really isn't a way for us to adequately express our thanks to members, and pastors, and mission center presidents, mission center financial officers, field support ministers and apostles for their leadership and dedication in helping us to meet this significant goal. One other area we addressed, of course, in the update, was just kind of looking back to 2023 year-end results and worldwide mission tithes in 2023 totaled just over \$10.8 million compared to a budget of \$11.2 million. So, we came in a little under budget, good budget management and higher than expected. Other income, however, enabled us to finish the year with a net surplus of \$1.15 million and that surplus is helpful to us. We're finishing out the fourth year of a four-year plan for our budget, and that will help us with expenses that we're incurring in the current year. As we look to the future, as we shared in the update, we see lots of opportunities and challenges, and we'll have a chance to talk about a few of those here. As we continue with this podcast, we really are deeply committed to the mission of the Church and its connection, as you said in the beginning of this podcast, to the giving of our whole lives to what this means for us as a people of faith. And to this end, we're going to continue to work with leaders across the church to engage new generations of disciples and seekers in our amazing mission, including whole life response. We're going to explore and implement new sources of income to fund our mission, which we'll be talking a little bit about, explore and implement new partnership models to share missional resources across the church, which we're very excited about. We're looking for ways to increase the impact of the temple complex on the Greater Kansas City area, and we're going to continue to experiment with new ways to convey and live our commitment to economic justice that offers hope for a sustainable future for everyone on this planet. So, these are just a few highlights. I know that probably seemed like a lot of information, but the financial report's actually even longer, so I'm going to pause there and let Robin take over.

Robin Linkhart 17:50

Thanks, Ron, that's super helpful. And wow, it just seems like there is so much positive news to hear on all of these updates and a multi-faceted approach going forward. I, for the benefit of our listeners, I do want to take just a minute to talk about the World Church Finance Board so that folks understand what that board is and who serves on that board. So that is a board that we've had for many, many years in the life of the church to serve in consultation and advisement to the Presiding Bishopric, as needed. Several times a year, they meet and more times depending on what's going on. The people that serve on that board are world church leaders who have ex-officio status on the board, but over 50% of that board are representatives from among the membership of the global church who serve side by side with world church leaders. So, when Ron talks about special provisions for these endowments and shifting funds from one endowment to something else or to another endowment will always require the review and approval of the World Church Finance Board. That is a way that Community of Christ has transparent accountability with the membership and gives the membership an active voice. And I think that's remarkable. And I just want to make sure that our listeners are aware that when we say the term World Church Finance Board, what it means and the critical importance of that board. Alrighty, speaking of critically important, a critically important part of everything the three of you do is focused on the future, and Ron alluded to that in his overview that goes far beyond financial forecast to create budgets, but also includes things like visioning and prophetic imagination as you consider how God is calling us to fund mission in changing times when no one knows for sure what the future holds. So, as you look to the future, what opportunities and challenges do you see, and how might funding the future look differently than anything we have ever done before?

Wim van Klinken 20:22

Oh, thank you for asking that question, Robin. I'll take that and then I think Carla will fill in a little bit later on it. So, I like to start with the challenges and then go to the opportunities as you asked for it. And so I think people know that the church traditionally has primarily relied on the worldwide mission tithes for its income, but we all realize that the church is in decline, declining in the affluent nations and growing in the less affluent nations, so there are still many people who already give generously. Let's make clear that there's a lot of people who give generously, but in order to keep or even grow the level of ministry we currently offer, we need to find additional and alternative income sources, because just depending, or primarily depending, on worldwide mission tithes will not be sustainable going into the future as a church. We've got many resources, not only buildings and money, but our greatest assets are our people... ministers in the fields, ministers in leadership, positions at our world headquarters and support staff without [which] the organization would not function. So, we are looking critically at these resources. We realize that we have not been able to pay our staff a reasonable wage, which is hampering us keeping and hiring staff. We also have buildings that are empty most of the time and deteriorating. So, due to lack of resources in the past, we've not prioritized to spend the needed funds to all the necessary maintenance. So what are the opportunities? So, although it was painful to part from the many historic assets and sell them early this year, the funds position us very well for the next several years in that we should be able to provide the same level of ministry. These funds will also help us address some of the challenges I've just mentioned, as most of these funds, as Ron already alluded to, are now invested and not just spent. We are currently taking a very prudent approach in just taking 3% spending rate. This will help us even grow the endowments and secure that we will have this income in the long run, but 3% of the \$175 million that Ron shared is just over 5 million US dollars

annually for an overall world church budget of approximately 16 million. As worldwide mission tithes is trending down and expenses will increase due to inflations, we need additional income so we will continue to grow the endowments. We envision this to, we envision to accomplish this by legacy gifts, both from members as well from congregations, and in a minute, Carla will speak how we will continue to instill generosity in the next generations. So, tithing remains a practice that is essential to discipleship, but before she does so, I just want to mention last thing, so the serious sale of historic assets gives us breathing room, and there's time to work on alternative income sources, such as making better use of our mostly idle facilities. This will not only expand our mission but could also generate more income. We also are looking at to generate more earned and investment revenue. We love to partner with people in efforts that are considered more entrepreneurial, and we are also looking at into ways to use our staff, including additional staff supporting other organizations that share our mission and vision. No decisions made, but just examples of things we are looking at, all in all for a financial sustainable future of the church, we can't primarily rely on worldwide mission tithes. We also need to rely on stable endowment income and sustainable earned income.

Carla Long 25:39

Thanks Wim, as both Ron and Wim have mentioned, we've been really busy in the Presiding Bishopric since we were ordained, oh so long ago, last April. There's a couple of reasons behind that intensity and moving forward. One of them, and for me, the most important reason of all is that people need to understand just how essential generosity is, and what a life giving and life changing role it can play in our lives. Because I truly believe that when we open ourselves up to leading a generous life, we can fully alter the world around us, anything from the ways our families interact, to the jobs that we go to every day, to elections of candidates worldwide. Generosity, for me, is love in action, and we can show that love in so many ways. And the strategy that I'm talking about right now is a way to remind members and friends of Community of Christ of exactly this. For instance, we have fairly recently hired two new mission development officers, Robin, when you talk about why we're a part of What's Brewing, mission is deeply important to us and deeply embedded in everything that we do. So, these two mission development officers are working to create relationships with younger generations and not so young generations that help foster a different way of thinking about generosity. Now I think, and I hope that we all know, those who are listening to this podcast know how life giving it is to give of ourselves to an organization that we believe in and our two new mission development ministers, Erin Cackler and Noel Gaffka are doing just that. They are helping to connect the passions of our people with ways to make a truly substantial difference in the world. It's exciting, and it is an excellent chance to sit down with folks and learn about why they have so much enthusiasm for any particular ministry of the church. Also, as a mother of young children, I almost said, as a young mother, which I am not a young mother, but as a mother of young children, I have been increasingly aware of how we talk to our children about generosity, and of course, money is really, really important. I'm also finding out that there isn't a lot out there that speaks to children about generosity in ways that I find to be helpful. And in talking with other families with young children, I'm hearing the same thing. I think it's vitally important to be able to speak with children about these topics in a way that is helpful and understanding to them, as well as finding ways that families can develop their own ideas and approach in discussing generosity and what that means in their lives. And I'm going to be totally honest here, I'm a Bishop, and I understand money, and I was a teacher, and I understand kiddos, and it took me more than a year to figure out how I wanted to do chores and allowance and so on in my own home. So, what I'm trying to say is it's not an easy thing

to work out, but it is essential that we explore effective ways to cultivate that spirit of generosity in our children, not just for the sake of the church, but for the sake of the world. So, we will be working to develop resources that help parents explore with their children the deeper meaning of generosity and in a culture of individualism and, sadly, scarcity. There's one other thing that I'm working, I'm going to talk with you about in this strategy that is also really exciting to me, and that is our mission development teams. So. Even though I straddle being Gen X and millennial, there's still a lot to learn about all the different generations. Still, a lot that I want to learn about generations and giving in regards to those generations. So, Erin, Noel, and I are working with two different teams, one in the age range of 25 to 45 and the other in the age range of 46 to 65 and they will be advising us and helping us. We've already started meeting with them regularly, and we will continue working with them, learning from them, and asking them to journey with us as we walk this road of generosity together. It's already been an extremely interesting experience, and I'm thrilled to work more deeply with these teams. So, I've only highlighted some of the major areas that we are emphasizing right now we will continue to share with the church as these and other initiatives and things that we're doing are more fully developed, those things that engage new generations in our mission, in our opportunities to respond.

Robin Linkhart 31:10

So Carla, thanks for that. And Wim, thank you for your comments. But Carla, just to spice things up a bit, I'd like to ask you a follow up question. Tell us about how you have approached chores and allowances with your two kids.

Carla Long 31:27

Oh, you know, I love spicy Robin. So, I mean, it's just not easy, an easy thing. So, my son is four and my daughter is six, so the allowance that they get per week, it is comparable to their ages. So Ari gets \$4 a week, and Lia gets \$6 a week. I found this little bank that I really like that has three different sections, give, share and spend. So, every single week when they get their allowance, they always have to put at least \$1 in each of those places. One for give, one to share, one for spend. One for give one to save, sorry if I misspoke. One give, one save, one spend. And then they get to choose where the rest of their dollars go if they put it in save, we have a very high yield savings account, and I double it. Whatever they put in to save, I double because we want to talk about how important it is to save money, as well as the other two. So, they do have chores that they do every single night. They have to take their plates to the sink after meals, they have to keep their rooms clean and pick up all their toys on the main level of our house. And we do that every single night. That is their responsibility, and they know that that is something that they must do. I tell them that they can give the money wherever they want, but they almost always choose to give it to the church, which I'm not upset about at all, of course, because giving to the offering is something really fun for them right now. And they, and we talk a lot about church, because, of course, that's what I do. My husband is a Seventy in the church, so we talk a lot about it. And finally, I know that, like green light cards and different debit cards are really the thing right now for children like to get put allowances on there, but for me, because my children are still in that very concrete way of learning, those dollar bills that I count out to them every single week is really important so they can see it and they can hold it and they can feel it. And if you ask my daughter, Lia, who's six, what she's saving money for, she will say, in a heartbeat, I'm saving money for college, and I and I just couldn't be more excited about that. And helping her look ahead, when they save \$100 in their savings, we'll go to the bank and we'll put it in the bank so they can also have that kind of a

experience too. So, it's working really well. We've done it for about five weeks now, and they're doing an awesome job with it. I've been really impressed.

Robin Linkhart 33:57

Thanks. Appreciate that. Alrighty, we're going to jump into a different kind of question tonight, which I think a lot of our listeners can relate to, and that is what keeps you up at night and what gives you hope.

Wim van Klinken 34:18

I'll start off here. It's swim. What keeps me up at night? Caffeine, that's really what keeps me awake. And I say that because there's not much else that really keeps me awake unless I've got just too many chores that Carla provides me with, or to my too many things that are on my plate that I've not finished. But all in all, I'm a very optimistic and a very looking forward person. I'm half glass full person, but a realist at the same time, I'm very down to earth. That's my Dutch background as well. So, what gives me hope is really the team here. I really, I really feel, and those who know me, I'm not saying something to just butter up. That's not my background. I really feel that the three of us are so complimentary, complementary and supplementary. So, we really, we fill the wide spectrum of different gifts we bring to the team. And you've probably noticed, even during this podcast, how we're different, how we speak different, our different emphasis. Of course, Carla is the real passionate one that just wants to share. And that's a good because that's not typical. That's not my MO typically, I'm the more, the analyst, and the with the one with the typically with the financial skills and the business acumen, and Ron has the institutional knowledge and knows what happens in the fields. Uh, although Carla and I both served in the fields, in different roles, although Carla and I both served in Europe, (go Europe!) and but it's this team that is really a great team to work with. So that gives me hope.

Ron Harmon 36:42

Yeah, our team gives me a lot of hope. To them. I've really enjoyed us coming together as a community, as we've sought to really address some of the challenges and opportunities I can relate to. What keeps me up at night? And I don't even need caffeine to keep me up at night. So, something just seems to happen. You'll notice this Wim, once you turn 60, you just sometimes are up at night. So, but you know, I think one of the things that keeps me up at night is that there are significant, and have been, over the last several decades, significant shifts occurring in the cultural and spiritual landscape in our world, and they're impacting people's practices and patterns in terms of attending, you know, organized religion, as is expressed in in many different religions across the world, and it's impacting how people relate to one another, and the church is in the middle of all of that change that's going on. It's much bigger than Community of Christ, and so I see a lot of those changes, and I see us as a movement seeking to be prophetic in the midst of those changes and to discern where the Spirit is calling us to go as we seek to meet those challenges in the future. But I also like them. I've kind of got one foot in in reality, and I've got one foot in God's unfolding future, which is where I really find my source of hope. And one of the things that I'm really excited about, that for me is very hopeful, is we have this amazing global awareness and connections with one another, because Community of Christ is a global movement, and I'm really excited about something we're working on that we're calling mission partnerships, to further connect us as a global movement and benefit from the diverse gifts of Ministry and leadership and sacred story and yes, also financial support where that's needed to support

mission. And we're beginning to see this happen between jurisdictions, and we're also beginning to see some limited examples of it to the worldwide mission budget, and I'm currently working with the Council of Twelve to finalize a process for cross jurisdictional mission partnerships. And we've had the opportunity to experience or experiment, actually, with a few partnerships, and we're quickly learning about how to get back at it, but we're also looking at, how do we translate aspects of our worldwide mission budget into exciting missional opportunities that could be funded by an individual, a family, a congregation, or perhaps even a Mission Center. So, for example, like where we currently in the budget, have dollars for staffing, those aren't dollars just for staffing, but those are dollars that are all about people that are engaged in the mission of the church, and they result in very real life changing outcomes in people's lives. So, how do we translate aspects of the worldwide mission budget into initiatives like leadership development or like young adult cultural experiences around the world like we've done through programs like World Service Corp? How do we take aspects of our budget that right now, when you look at the worldwide mission budget, might look pretty mundane, and how do we do a better job of conveying what those dollars are really doing and providing those exciting opportunities for people to connect through targeted mission partnerships, both cross-jurisdictionally and through the worldwide mission budget? And one of the reasons this really gives me hope is because, you know, people light up when they see ways they can contribute to the mission of the church, and it's not just about financial giving. I really want to emphasize that we see in the future nations blessing other nations with gifts of ministry and leadership and sacred story that can ignite the passion of witness and compassionate action in cultures where maybe it's a place where the church is not growing, and maybe the spirit of witness has, you know, decreased and through these gifts of testimony and sharing, a new spirit and passion for witness is ignited those kinds of gifts you don't attach monetary value to, but when you talk about missional value, they're priceless in terms of their value to us as a global faith movement. So, we see these mission partnerships as a mutuality where relationships form and a diversity of missional gifts, they're shared for advancement of our mission all over the world. So right now, you know, I'm excited about some of the initial movement I've seen in that direction, and we're, we're super excited about ways that we can help do some matchmaking out there and really connect people globally to what I think is one of our real distinctives in as Community of Christ is that we have this global consciousness in terms of how we look at the world. We belong to one another in Christ, and that shapes what we do and how we respond as God's prophetic people in the world today.

Robin Linkhart 43:39

Thanks, Ron. I want to go back to one thing that you shared about and I realize we're early on in exploring this, but can you give us, maybe a concrete example even, of something that you've explored, that you've learned from a mission partnerships, and what that specifically could look like, or maybe has looked like in the early endeavors?

Ron Harmon 44:05

Sure. Well, we have an exciting new mission partnership, for example, that is forming between the church in Kashiba, Zambia and Crystal Springs and Woodland Park congregations in the state of Washington, and they are helping with the completion of a building project in Kashiba, and the members of the Kashiba congregation are exploring how they can share gifts of ministry and story with Crystal Springs and Woodland Park. And that's it's just in the formative stages, but that's an example of

how a mission partnership can form, not as just a one-time action, but as a new partnership in mission and ministry, hopefully over multiple years, they'll have that global connection. So, you know, that's we're just kind of at the beginning stages of that partnership, but there's a lot of energy and excitement over what that, what that global partnership could look like going into the future.

Robin Linkhart 45:25

Thanks. That really helps a lot. So, as I'm listening to you and the story you, the example, Ron, that you just shared, I'm hearing and sensing these, these life changing stories that are bubbling up and stories that we may bump into even where we least expect to, along the way of our unfolding future with God and how the Holy Spirit moves in and through and around everything. Story is indeed the heart of mission. So, we would love to hear a story from you about how generosity is fanning the flames of spirit led mission in the life of the church today.

Carla Long 46:15

Oh, I want to go, um, I love, I love telling stories, and I especially love this story. So as a member of the World Church Leadership Council, I am super blessed to get to go to reunions and camps all over the United States, and at some point, I'm sure in the world, and going to reunions and camps is one of my favorite things. And now that I'm a mom, I get to take my kids with me, and it's it makes it even better that they get to have a worldwide church family. So earlier this summer, my whole family, Kuzma, included, went to Spectacular which is a church camp at our at Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa, and it's for high school students, and I was teaching a class, and I my kiddos just loved being around so many high school students, and my niece and my nephew were there, so, like, it was just like a little family reunion for us, and we had a fantastic time. So, on Wednesday night of SPEC, they have a karaoke night, which is super fun. It's people just sitting out on blankets on in the amphitheater, on the grass, and high school students getting up there to sing. And it was such a positive, beautiful feeling. It was just really, really fun. And everybody got cheered for, no matter how well or how not well, people were singing. So my daughter, Lia, who's six, really, really wanted to sing in front of like, a couple 100 people, and I was a little nervous about it. I didn't know how it would be taken from the high school kids, but I went up to the person who was running the karaoke, and I said, Lia really wants to sing. Do you think you can get her in? And he said, Yeah, I think that we can get your six year old in singing in front of all the high school students. So, finally it was Lia's turn, and she got up there to sing, and she started singing a song that was pretty well known from Trolls Band Together, and by the time she reached the chorus, there were no less than 50 high school kids right up on the stage jumping and singing with her, and I still get a little choked up thinking about it. How what an incredibly beautiful moment it was for her and for me to experience that kind of beautiful what I'm going to call communal generosity. The community that had been formed at SPEC that year was an incredibly beautiful community. It was beautiful enough to know that a little six year old girl, what it would mean to Lia to be validated in that way and to be appreciated in that way, and they gave of themselves in a way that she will never ever forget, and that I will never forget. And if we can continue to develop that spirit of communal generosity within our congregations, in our church camps, wherever we are, it could be life altering and life changing like it was for Lia. So, it was just a fantastic experience, and I am already excited for continuing to develop and figuring out ways to continue to develop that beautiful spirit of communal generosity.

Ron Harmon 49:34

That's a great story Carla, and I'm thinking about my kids too. So there's a common theme here thinking about my grandkids, actually. So I was thinking about a story involving my oldest granddaughter, Emma, and giving Tuesday that we went through last Fall and I woke up. on Giving Tuesday morning to a video from Emma saying, Good morning, grandpa. I'm giving \$5, and I'm actually quoting her here. I'm giving \$5 plus \$3 I'm giving \$8 to the church, but also giving my change and my change are and even my wallet money, because Grandpa, I care about the church a lot. So I gotta tell you, that was like, wow. That really made my Giving Tuesday. And, you know, Emma goes to so many church activities because her parents are so engaged in the life of the church and I know that even at, you know, seven years old, there was a a depth of understanding there about what it means to participate in this movement, that it's not just about going to things, but it's also about contributing to the movement in a way that ensures that that blessing of community and life transforming mission continues into the future and, you know, Emma wouldn't express it that way, of course, but she had a sense of that, and she wanted to be a part of contributing to the church, and that just really moved me.

Robin Linkhart 51:48

I really love hearing your stories and it just underscores the fact that generosity is a way of being. It's a tangible way of claiming our connection to one another, in our in our local families and communities, but also in a in a global way. And it's about heart and head, and I'm just really hearing you name that it's something that moves from the inside and grows outward, and it includes sharing who we are in relationship with one another, but also sharing what we have to build community. And you know that just gets to the heart of the heart of mission. Wow. Thank you so much. Those are beautiful stories. So, anything else that you would like to share today?

Wim van Klinken 52:52

Yeah, I've got something, and I'm just picking, backing on something that Ron said earlier here, and when he said one of our emphasis, and we're just in the beginning stages of exploring this. What does it mean, Is the idea of economic justice. We've talked about climate justice, but we feel, as a Presiding Bishopric, we need to also focus on economic justice. And that's not mean that we, as the three of us that you listen to today, are focusing on economic justice, but we think that part of discipleship, part of mission, is not only to bring relief, is to also fully understand what is it? What is at work in our world that prevents us from establishing the peaceful reign, or whatever Zion, whatever we want to call it, and one of those things is just the economic injustice we experience. And that's not just a political item, although people make it political, but it's a justice item, something that is part of should be part of our DNA as disciples. So, for us, the Presiding Bishopric, who are responsible for the temporal affairs of the church, but also part of responsible. We see it as a calling to teach, preach and bring ministry in regards to temporal affairs, and particularly now economic justice. This is something we are going to explore, and you'll hear more from us in the in the future about how this plays out and but I just want to give you a heads up. It's not, I don't think it's nothing new, but it's something we will just continue to focus on and refocus on. So just wanted to share that with our listeners.

Ron Harmon 55:17

Yeah, Wim, I really appreciate you bringing that up, because I think that it, it comes out of this deep well of what Robin has been drawing us back to today, which is that that that mission and spirit are, you

know, and generosity, are all just in separately, connected with each other, and you really can't, you really can't untangle them. They're, they're part of the god experience in our lives and that, you know, when we cultivate this spirit of generosity. It is a way of being, a way of life. It's about how we open ourselves up to the world, how we become more open hearted to everything we see going on around us, and how we feel the spirit is calling us to respond through lives of generosity and a tangible expression of that is economic justice that you know, you've just, you've just named them. So, I'm, I just want to hold up the fact that we oftentimes have to talk about numbers and budgets and, you know, kind of what we call the temporal affairs of the church. But we want all of you to know that behind that is the reason that we're all in this movement, and that's because we have been changed by something that is not fully explainable, that continues to move in our world, that brings about change through love and peace, and has transformed our lives in this movement and that we want to see transform the lives of so many more people. And that is the that's the impetus, that's the thrust behind our passion, and behind what we seek to do in terms of funding the mission of the church for the future.

Carla Long 57:36

Okay, okay, okay, I want to say something too, um, I'm going to go on a little bit of different direction than what Ron and Wim did, but I but I I want to share this. Every single time I have a chance to talk to people, this is what I want to share, and this is what I do share. I was the pastor in Salt Lake, Utah for a while, and what I learned there, I learned a lot of things there, but one of the most important things that I learned there is that people desperately need to hear what Community of Christ stands for and what we say. People need to hear that they are people of worth and that God loves them no matter what, that there is nothing they can do that would make God love them anymore, or any less than God already does. And I think that as members and friends of Community of Christ, we forget that, we forget that we have a message that the world is yearning for that and that we need to be living that message and speaking that message every chance that we get, what we give to the world is something incredibly special, and sadly, is incredibly rare. The world needs to hear what we have to say, and the world needs our voice. So, in every time that you can speak those words to someone, speak them. Every time you can live that message for someone, live it. The world needs Community of Christ in a way that it doesn't even know. So that is my, that will always be my soapbox, that what we do and say is just incredibly necessary for people all over the world and I'm stepping down from my soapbox right now.

Robin Linkhart 59:23

Thank you Well, Ron, Wim and Carla, thank you so much for being with us today. This has been informative, illuminating and inspiring. Thank you.

Carla Long 59:37

Thank you, Robin.

Wim van Klinken 59:38

Thank you Robin. And I would just say to the listeners, if anyone wants to contact us, just send an email to PresidingBishopric@cofchrist.org, and we'd love to be in contact with you.

Ron Harmon 59:51

Yeah, thanks, Robin. It's been really wonderful to be with you and to be with all the listeners today,

Robin Linkhart 59:58

if you would like to hear more from our guests, check out today's show notes for links to other episodes from them on Project Zion Podcast, and also find links that take you directly to where you can see regular updates from Community of Christ Presiding Bishopric as always. Thanks to all of you, our listeners for spending a portion of your day with us. This is your host, Robin Linkhart, and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast, go out and make the world a better place. Take Good care. Bye, bye.