

Say What? | Presiding Evangelist | Jane Gardner

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam, Kassie Ripsam, Jane Gardner

Kassie Ripsam 00:26

Hello and welcome to the "Say What" podcast we are asking questions for the youth today, and today, we are interviewing Miss Jane Gardner. She is the presiding evangelist. She was the first woman to hold that position. She's also the first woman to be president of the high priest quorum. And we have a few questions about that, but first we have a few getting to know you questions...

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 00:53

Do you think you would survive a zombie apocalypse?

Jane Gardner 00:58

I love this question. You made me do homework? I first thought, yeah, I'd be fine, because our pantry is stocked and we have a nice, safe home and but then I realized I wouldn't ever be able to leave home. So I'm not sure that's true, because at some point I think I would kind of get cabin fever and I'd have to leave, and then I'd be in trouble. So, doubtful in the long run, I might make it in the short run, but that's a great question.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 01:36

So just make sure that they get rid of the zombies really quick, right?

Jane Gardner 01:40

Right. Right, then I'll be fine.

Kassie Ripsam 01:43

So what part of a driver's test do you think you would most likely fail or perform poorly in at least?

Jane Gardner 01:52

Probably parallel parking. Yeah, I don't have to do it very often, so I don't have much practice, so I think that's, that's why, and I kind of avoid it, actually, if I can park somewhere else I do. So, yeah, it's

Kassie Ripsam 02:08

actually been a very common answer,

Jane Gardner 02:10

yeah. My second would probably be backing up. That's probably what my husband would say, that I don't back up very well. I think I do fine. But, you know, he'll he'd probably chime in with that.

02:26

So sometimes I find myself talking to the programs that I'm writing for computer programming courses. What do you ever find yourself talking to inanimate objects?

Jane Gardner 02:43

I don't think so. I'm more of an internal person, so I do a lot of internal processing and talking outwardly. I make myself practice out loud, like if there's a talk I'm going to give, or if I have a class to teach, or something like that, I like to practice ahead of time a little bit just to get myself in that mode. And my high school speech teacher said to do that in front of a mirror. But I don't. I don't really groove on that too much. So, but I'm mostly an internal processor.

03:26

I'll get that. So what is the weirdest dream you've ever had?

Jane Gardner 03:33

You're not gonna like my answer. I don't remember my dreams honestly,

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 03:41

She's the same way. [KR: I don't either.] The dreams I do remember are, like, insanely weird, but I usually don't remember my dreams.

Jane Gardner 03:49

Yeah, I don't even think I dream. It's that bad. I don't really know what I what I dreamed. And I have a friend, Mary Jacks, who used to be in the Council of 12 Apostles, and she now teaches a class on dream work. And I don't get that. I don't know how you can work on your dreams, and you can't even if you don't even know what they are, but...

Kassie Ripsam 04:16

Your bio was very informative. We want to ask some questions about it, you attend the Lee's Summit Community of Christ congregation is that the congregation you grew up in, if not, where did you grow up?

Jane Gardner 04:30

Okay, this is a long answer. When I was growing up, we moved once a year for my dad's job, and so by the time I graduated from high school, I had attended 13 different schools, and we lived in at least 13, 14, 15 different towns. So I, I don't claim. A hometown because of that, there's a lot of places, most of which were in the Midwest. So Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, I think those are the main ones. But he just got transferred all over the place, and so we ended up moving a lot. So one of the positives of that, for the church, especially, is that we got to be part of a lot of different kind of groups. So some

small, some large, some formal, some informal. So I mean, it was just really fascinating. And as I've gotten to be the age I am now, I have friends from all over from or part of that is the reason why, because we made friends everywhere we went, and that was, yeah, that's a blessing of the church. So I feel like, even though I can't claim a hometown, that I was still blessed by the experience,

Kassie Ripsam 05:58

I can't exactly relate directly to that, but I can say we do travel a lot, and so I have friends from all over the place. It's really fascinating to go to different congregations and see which differences here, what are similar, and get to really get to know people in different places?

Jane Gardner 06:21

Yeah, I think it is fascinating. I've come to think that congregations have personality, yes, and it varies by what their mission is and where they're planted. You know, what their culture is around them, and lots of things dictate or influence what they are, but it's, it's very obvious to me, they're very different.

Kassie Ripsam 06:49

So did you ever attend World Conference as a kid and or participate in the Youth Service Corps?

Jane Gardner 06:58

I did not. I didn't attend World Conference until I was in college, and your question made me think back and wonder why I am the oldest of five children, and I kind of think that my parents took World Conference as their vacation from us. If that makes sense. I because I remember them, you know, being very particular about who are, who our child care people were going to be, and how we were going to live for a week without them, and all of the emergency numbers and all the stuff you do. And my, my parents were very prepared for that. But I, I remember them being very anticipatory and very joyful about going to World Conference and having a week away from us five kids. So I kind of think that's why we never went.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 07:57

And yet, and yet, they go to a whole giant building full of adults arguing, so quite the vacation. Yeah,

Jane Gardner 08:05

I probably would have been bored after the first hour or something.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 08:10

On the Community of Christ website. Did you have a major in music? Um, what is your favorite music genre?

Jane Gardner 08:18

Well, these are hard questions for me. I am very eclectic in my music taste, so if you looked at my playlists or the stuff I have digitally, or even my vinyl collection, it's all over the place. I love classical music, and so my husband and I go to the symphony pretty often here in Kansas City. But I also love

contemporary groups that sing acapella. I love to listen like to King's Singers and other groups like that. So I don't know I have a real hard time narrowing the genre down, but if I had to say something, it'd probably be classical music.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 09:07

Who are a few of your favorite music talents?

Jane Gardner 09:10

Oh, boy. This is hard too. Right now, I just tumbled to a group a woman and a man. They call themselves the hound plus the Fox, and I've just tumbled to their music, and I'm really getting into it. I really enjoy how they perform, and they're very simple, and I don't know, I just really like what they're doing right now. Um, classically, I love to listen to Yo Yo Ma on cello.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 09:46

I think, yeah, yeah.

Jane Gardner 09:49

I mean, he's just so amazing. And cello is one of my favorite instruments to listen to. It just feeds my soul. I think, um. There's a soprano or alto, I'm not sure which. Her name is, Sissel from Australia, and I love her singing. It's, it's not classical. It's, I don't know how you would New Age, maybe I I'm not sure how you would classify it really, for genre, but I love her voice, and she does some really interesting things. And so those are three. There's a zillion more, but...

10:28

honestly, as a family, we love to listen to it's, it's a acapella band called Pentatonix. I don't know if you've heard of them or not. Oh, absolutely love their music.

Jane Gardner 10:40

Yep. I do too. I love what they say. And I have, I have one of their albums. I also like Straight No Chaser, which is a group of men that sing acapella. They don't always some of their songs that are a little whatever, but I mostly, I love their harmonies. That's what I love to listen to. So, yeah, lot of groups like that.

Kassie Ripsam 11:03

Do you have a favorite Christian artist? If so, who?

Jane Gardner 11:07

Well, in in terms of preserving my friendship, I will say Jan Kraybill has been the organist for the World Church for 25 years now, and she is an amazing musician. And so what she does is more than just perform the music. She really gets into what the meaning of it is and what the spirit of it is. And so I really appreciate that with her. I'd also say I love there's a group called Sweet Honey in the Rock. [Oh, yeah.] And they do spirituals, which are usually a cappella. So there I am again, loving acappella music. And they do everything from jazz to religious to popular, but I really appreciate their approach and their style of thing. And then I have, like I said, very eclectic. I have a collection of recordings from better

chance. So I have Benedictines of Saint Mary, who this group of wonderful, talented women nuns perform acapella, and the chants are just, I don't know, they just have this ethereal quality that I really, really get into. So I enjoy that too. See, I could go on and on. So I like to listen to the Mormon Tab choir. I mean, I do that the choir does a great job of performing certain types of music, and I really like listening to a choir too.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 12:49

Yeah. Um, you went to Graceland University for your major, so I'm curious what was your favorite part of your Graceland experience?

Jane Gardner 13:01

I loved being in ensembles, so I was in choir. I was in orchestra, small groups, large groups, all kinds. As I consider that, I think it was mostly because I like that collaborative environment of being together and listening to each other and creating something beautiful. So creativity was important. I'm also a big fan of the way Graceland approaches how students live together on the campus, and I was really involved in that in student life. And so I was a house president for one year, and served on the house councils of where I lived, and being involved and invested, to me, made a big difference. And a lot of universities don't go to that level of participation or investment in their students, and so I appreciate that about Graceland, too.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 13:58

Yeah, I think that has been one of our most common answers was the whole feeling of community and the way the students live together.

Kassie Ripsam 14:08

We've been in a choir as well. And I agree with what you say about the working together to create something beautiful.

Jane Gardner 14:17

I mean, you learn team teamwork. I guess there are those same analogies with sports and other things, you know that really help you function together in that way, our choir, when I was at Graceland, took a winter term, which was most of the month of January, and traveled west. So we ended up in California and Texas and places where it was warm because Iowa wasn't in January, and those bus trips across the country, those just like spec I will never forget. I mean, they just fun things happened, and not so fun things happened, but you remember them all, and it's all a part of the experience. So I think it's important. The other thing for me. And then I'm learning or understanding more and more as I get older, is that I enjoy I am a lifelong learner. And so I can name some professors who really challenged me, who took me into areas that I didn't know too much about, and helped me explore and challenged me to not just be, you know, memorized up for a test and then forget it. It was more like, how can you integrate this into your life experience? So I remember a winter term course I took from Dennis Steele that was on Native Americans, and oh my gosh, I had to read. I think it was 20 books just in the month of January, all of these books. And I thought, What have I gotten myself into? But it was out of all of the courses I took, it was one that I felt challenged by, and I learned so much, and I enjoy that feeling of learning. So that's kind of stuck with me.

Kassie Ripsam 16:03

What advice others would you offer to new or potential students of Graceland University?

Jane Gardner 16:10

I think, from my perspective, this may sound kind of weird, but my first thing I would say is go in with an open mind. Go, don't enter an experience like that with your mind already made up of what you're going to be and do and how things are going to happen in your life, to leave yourself open to new experiences, and especially by becoming involved in things, so that you don't just go to class and that's it, but to actually be involved in the life of the campus, to be involved in the housing life, that to be involved with your professors, to just let yourself be open, especially at the age most people are when they're entering a college experience like that, especially the undergrad experience, I feel pretty strongly that we need to be open. So, I went into the undergrad knowing that I wanted to be a music major, but I also felt very open to other kinds of experience at the college, like the housing and the way it would so to become involved was really, really important. And if leadership is important to someone like they're feeling a call or a sense of giftedness in their life about being a leader in the future, then become involved and take whatever leadership development courses you can take, find roles that you can volunteer for. Volunteering is a huge part of the Graceland experience, and the more you volunteer, the more you learn about dynamics and how things work, and leaders need to know that stuff. So, I think those would be my two main things, is to be open and to to invest yourself, to volunteer yourself to learn.

Kassie Ripsam 18:19

I personally love the arts, and I'm very, very passionate about it. But through my volunteer work, I also found out that I love teaching ministry and any kind of like, for example, we teach dyslexic students, and I found out how much I love that. It's, it's amazing, but it's not really the first thing I would have thought of.

Jane Gardner 18:45

Yeah, and it's the first thing is not bad. It's just to keep yourself open for other Yeah, other things.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 18:54

So you are a 2017 graduate of the Spiritual Formation and Companionship program. Could you please explain to us what this program is about?

Jane Gardner 19:06

Yeah, I was in the very first program, so I was one of the guinea pigs. How's this going to work? And the idea of it is to receive training on how to companion others on their spiritual journey, but it also includes a huge component of your own spiritual journey, of going deeper with God yourself, because we find that in order to companion other spiritual journeys, you've gotta be pretty healthy on your own spiritual journey. So that was, it was, when I took it, it was a three year program, and we did a lot of reading and studying. We did a lot of practicing. And one of the areas of practice that I remember we spent almost half a year on was deep listening. So, learning how to listen to others when you're companionshiping them without your own brain thinking about what your response is going to be, or helping

them solve their problem or a, but we spent a long time learning what it means to just listen, and that has been super, super helpful to me. So, that group of folks graduated in 2017 and then the second cohort formed, and now we're in the midst of the third cohort. So they will graduate a year from now. They still have one year left, and then there'll be a new cohort. So we put out an invitation to anyone who's interested, the parameters can be limiting, because we do require one week a year in the temple in Independence. So, that's usually in October. It's a Monday through Friday in October. So people have to take vacation from work if they're going to do that, or we get quite a few who are early retirees, who are able to come Monday through Friday like that. And we're looking more and more about what this would mean to be more on, even more online, than we were when the second cohort was in process. COVID hit, and so we had to change the whole program from in person stuff to online stuff. And that was it was hard. It was really, really hard. I shifted from being in the program the first time to being on the faculty every time after that, and being on the faculty during that COVID time was really tough trying to figure out, first, how to use Zoom in a good way and but how to go for the same depth of spiritual experience and spiritual understanding when you're doing it on Zoom is not The same thing. It's just a different way of being. So we learned a lot. So this program now, in this third cohort, is a hybrid. We do that one week in Independence, and then the rest of it's online for the whole rest of the two years. So it's mostly online, and we learned a lot. I guess that was one of the positive outcomes of COVID. There weren't very many, but that was one of them, I think.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 22:28

Who can be a part of these classes?

Jane Gardner 22:30

Oh, I started to say, we put out a general invitation to anyone who's interested. It requires you writing a little essay about why you want to do it, and then you have to have two references, so they have to write in and recommend you for the program. So that could be like your pastor, or somebody in the Mission Center, or somebody from SPEC, or, you know, it could be anybody who's witnessed you in different environments. I think probably our youngest one, I'm going to say early 20s. I don't know that we've had anybody younger than that, not that we wouldn't be open to it, just scheduling wise, it would be tough for most people. And then we've got, definitely got people that are up there in their 80s. So, you know, we got a wide range of people. It's really very cool.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 23:27

So what would a person accomplish or gain by participating in this experience?

Jane Gardner 23:35

So there's probably two hopes. One is that the person would find a deeper spiritual life by being in the program. We learn different spiritual practices. We practice the practices and and we kind of learn how to be present with God in new ways that we might not have considered before. So that's the first hope is going deeper with God yourself. And then the second hope is that you would coming out of the program, you would be prepared to help others go deeper in their spiritual journey. So that's the spiritual companion part. And we chose that word pretty intentionally so that it was companionship, in the

sense of walking alongside someone, not pulling them or pushing them, but walking alongside right? So that was pretty intentional on our part, and so that would be our second hope. And what we found, because our participants come from all over the church, mostly Canada and US, but we have found that people that are graduates of the program are then able to live out some of what they've experienced and learned in their mission centers and in their congregation. And so you may, for example, go to a Mission Center conference, and in that conference, they might ask one of our graduates to do a spiritual practice with the group, and they'd be able to lead that practice, because they're they've been through the program, and they know how to do that. So, it's that kind of training, and we try to keep the leaders of the church informed of who these graduates are, so as they have need of people with that expertise, they know who they are, and can be helpful at reunions and camps and conferences and all kinds of experiences like that.

Kassie Ripsam 25:29

So you led the team that made the new hymnal, Community of Christ Sings. How many people were part of that team? And would you name drop a few for us?

Jane Gardner 25:40

There are seven, and I better name them all, or I'll be in trouble. The seven of us were Jan Kraybill as the principal organist. David Bolton. David was our computer/music guru. He had the biggest spreadsheet ever. Peter Judd, who was retired out of the First Presidency and had worked on the old hymnal, so he had that experience. Joey Williams, so Joey has the international experience and the language experience that we needed, and that that was amazing. And Bruce Lindgren, who had just retired as the World Church Secretary, and so he had a wealth of knowledge of the whole church, plus he's a wonderful minister himself. And finally, our project administrator was Lauren Hall, and Lauren came to us with a business background, and she organized us and kept us on task with our due dates and our projects. And so it was a wonderful group of seven. We spent hours together.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 26:51

How many years was the new hymnal in the making?

Jane Gardner 26:54

We started in 2008 and the hymnal was released in 2013 so five years.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 27:03

Honestly, I thought was going to be a bit longer than that. But

Jane Gardner 27:05

Well, and like I said, David Bolton, with his expertise, and like his spreadsheet is unbelievable, he was able to automate several things with, you know, programming and such that, helped cut down on time, on things, and that was really, really helpful. And we had people like Lauren Hall who it was 100% of her job. That's all she did. The rest of us had other things we had to do 100% but at least we had Lauren, who was 100% and that really helped, too, to bring that window down, not such a big number of years.

Kassie Ripsam 27:51

So where did the songs in Community of Christ Sings come from?

Jane Gardner 27:56

Yeah, so that group, being a group of seven, we right coming out of the blocks at the beginning, said, We are the, we are the primary decision makers here. We don't want to be the primary decision makers. We want this to be more collaborative. And so we threw the doors open wide and invited anyone from the church to submit any song they were interested in having in the hymnal, they just had to fill out a little form and send us the song. And so that was what we called we had three streams. So that was one stream, anybody could send anything in. Then the second stream was we took our past hymnals, which was hints of the saints, and then we had like, Sing for Peace and Sing a New Song and By Request, and there were little booklet like things. We took all of those songs and we listed them on the internet and we asked people to rank them according to, do you think this song should move into the future?. Rather than saying to them, please tell us what your favorite songs are, because if you do that, it gets kind of sentimental, and it's not always what you want when you're really thinking about this hymnal has got to serve us for the next 20-25 years. What do we want to be singing into the future? So we did that internet survey, and that was really helpful. So we had those results. The number one you might be interested in that survey was, "Here, I am Lord," or "I the Lord of Sea and Sky." Yeah, so that one, that was the number one, and that really shocked us all. We thought there would be some oldy Goldies that would kind of raise their head to number one, but it was, it was from the old Sing a New Song book, the gold little booklet that we had. We had published "Here I am Lord," and it got the number one vote. So that was kind of cool. And then the third stream is that we are a really active member of the Hymn Society in the US and Canada, and have been for years and years and years our denomination has been a part of that organization, and so we leaned into that their expertise, and said, out of all these other hymnals, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, whatever else is out there, give us your best recommendations. So we took their recommendations and then through hymn society as well. The way the hymn society works is we know a lot of the living authors and composers, because they come to hymn society. And so we sent letters to all those people, saying to them, we're doing a new hymnal. Send us your top 10, the top 10 that you've written, we'd be real interested. And many, many of them did. So that was really cool to receive that. So we ended up with, in the end, all three streams coming in with over 7000 songs that we considered, and we boiled that down to 664 which was not easy, but that's where we ended up. So we felt good that a lot of people had a voice in what was going to be in the book. So

Kassie Ripsam 31:35

You kind of answered this already, but I still want to ask, we love the diversity in the songs, did the international communities have to submit their contributions for consideration, and what process did the submissions go through to be approved?

Jane Gardner 31:51

That's a great question. We were pretty intentional about that, because when world church leadership approved the project, the Council of 12 said to us, please make this hymnal an expression of the

worldwide church. They were very clear about that as a part of our goal for the so as a hymnal team, we took that very seriously. And so during that open submission, where anybody could submit anything. We sent the 12 and others into the field with tape recorders or cassette recorder kind of things. Asked them to record what people were singing in their congregations, in their mission center conferences, all the kinds of songs that they were hearing, and then to bring those back to us, and they are in the book it they're not as many as I wish we would have done. We have 103 at actually, it's a little more than that. Out of the 600 that came from that stream of international collection, some of them are well known to the whole world, like Amazing Grace. Everybody was singing in every country, but there are many that were unique to countries that we've never heard before, and it was lovely to sit and listen to the recording. So what we did as we got further along was we sent Joey Williams, who is a wonderful linguist as well as musician and Bryce Veazey, Bryce is a videographer, and we sent them on a tour of the church, especially the international church, and the songs that we were considering. Then we challenged Joey to organize, let's say in French Polynesia, organize a group and have them record it for us. And so Joey and Bryce did that all over the world. They did it in French Polynesia, in Haiti, in Africa, um, trying to remember, Europe, all over Europe. They went to Australia. So anyway, they traveled the world, which was a real blessing to the project, because now, like if you listen to the recordings that you can get through Herald House, you can hear like the flutist from Australia playing on "Peace, Salaam, Shalom." You can hear the accordion guy from Haiti playing on "Peace, Salaam, Shalom." So, I mean, it's just really infused with international participation. And if we had one wish, the group of us would have wished we could have done more that we tried really hard. We were worried that the major purchaser of the book was going to be US and Canada, and we were worried if they saw a whole bunch of foreign language stuff, that they might just close the book and never use it. So we were kind of worried about that. So we had to balance what that looked like. And so we ended up with over 100 that represent the global church. And it was a start. We need to do more. Last World Conference, we added 18 more songs that have French, Spanish and English, and hopefully this World Conference will be able to order offer some more. So our number keeps getting a little bigger, because it needs to. It needs to help us represent who we are globally.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 35:27

Honestly, the whole going around the world and listening to different songs sounds like a really awesome experience.

Kassie Ripsam 35:35

It really does. And I love the examples of "Amazing Grace" and "Peace, Salaam, Shalom," because I know those are songs that are sung all over the place. I've seen videos of the songs being sung in multiple different languages, and it's beautiful when I see those things that I feel I don't know, honestly, it just feels so spiritual, something that you know that someone around the world can still feel the same beauty of a song that you do here.

Jane Gardner 36:06

And "Amazing Grace" is a wonderful example, because it traveled organically. It wasn't anything that we did or, you know, that we handed out, or it just happened organically. And so that was really interesting for us to see that that was true, but it was also important for us to hear the unique cultures of how they express themselves in music. It varies all over the world, and we were really, really blessed to

be able to do that. So, I agree what you said, Kassie, for me, it's not just that it's spiritual, but that we realize we're connected all over the world with this, and that's huge, kind of like a global language, music becomes really important?

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 37:02

Yes.

Kassie Ripsam 37:05

So, our next statement from your bio is an onion. It has layers to peer back, peel back. So you were the first woman to hold the positions of presiding evangelist and president of the high priest quorum, the latter you carried for nine years. What? What did being the first woman to hold these positions mean to you?

Jane Gardner 37:36

Well, first off, I don't think of it like that. Um, hmm, because in both cases, I had a very strong sense of call to that ministry, and in a way, had lived my life so that it at the point the call came, it made a lot of sense. It logically made sense. It spiritually made sense. It was my own sense of call as well. So there it was, very affirming. I will say I am of the generation that I spent 20 years in business before I came to work for the church. And in those 20 years of business I experienced firsthand much discrimination, much inequality. And so that was interesting to have that in my background. So for example, in business, I was the only woman on the board of directors. I was the only woman in the management group. And things would happen, for example, one particular business board meeting I'm thinking of, we were in a really big argument about something, and lots of back and forth and trying to figure something out. And then we took a break, and after the break, we came back into the room and the decision had been made. And I'm thinking, wait a minute where, how did that happen? And it turns out that the guys were all talking in the bathroom while they were taking their break, and they made the decision. And I wasn't there. It was just that kind of Oh, inequality. I've always been aware, because I was in management, the inequitable nature of pay for women and men, and so that was always a concern for me. So when I came to work for the church, I had that in my background. It wasn't the reason I came to work for the church. I came because I had a passion for worship and music, and that's why I wanted to do whatever I could to help the church. And then that just evolved into these leadership roles. So for me, living through actually the world, the world conference, when Doctrine and Covenants 156 was considered, which was the ordination of women. I was sitting in the Auditorium for that World Conference with my four year old daughter in my lap, and I remember thinking when I heard it read that women, it would be logical to ordain women. And I remember thinking that means my daughter will live a totally different church experience than I will, than I did. It'll just be all different. And in fact, what I noticed now in our congregation and others, the kids have never experienced a world where women weren't a part of the ministry. They've never, I mean, it's just been a part of who they are right from the beginning. So, I love that, but I also know that I represent kind of institutional memory about that inequality and the things that really were not fair. It was a real struggle for the church. We were kind of on the leading edge. There weren't too many denominations that thought about ordaining women. So by the time I came to work for World Church, I'd already been ordained a high priest, and I was already working in that office a lot and helping. And so it just seemed to be a natural progression for me, and

that sense of call into the high priest core of leadership, and then moving from there into presiding evangelist.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 41:27

Where do you turn when you're feeling blocked and when you feel excited about another accomplishment, in what ways do you rejoice?

Jane Gardner 41:34

It's a really good question. One of the things I think women do, and can do, is to help mentor and help other women who are showing potential, who have giftedness, and the idea of becoming leaders and so encouraging them to take whatever training they need, or to be involved volunteering in what ways they could do that. So there is a piece of that that says trying to mentor others into leadership roles for women is important, I think, but it's important for men too. So you know, it's not just that. I turn often to my spiritual director. I have a spiritual director who is, I meet with her once a month, we spend an hour together once a month, and we talk about my spiritual journey, and she kind of is my spiritual companion, and she's not a member of our church. She, I don't remember, I think she's Episcopal. It's just been a fascinating experience to have someone make observations and ask you questions about your journey and help you see yourself in a different way, in a spiritual way. So I use that I have those mentors within the organization. Steve Veazey has been a big mentor for me in my years, and so to be able to visit with him, as well as Stassi Cramm, to have those conversations I think are important, and to be connected to each other, the challenges, the things I felt as a woman that blocked me, and unfortunately, I don't know that this ever goes away, but as a young adult woman with young children, was really hard to travel and to be away from home and to miss concerts and birthdays and things like that. So, and that continues to be a problem, but I am guessing that's a problem for men too. So I don't know that it's unique to women, but I certainly felt it. And because we were new in ministry and new in leadership of ministry, it just felt like we were sacrificing a lot to be away from home quite a bit. And finally, my husband and I just made a decision that I was never going to be gone more than two weeks in a month. I mean, that was going to be it, and the rest of the time I was going to be home. So we tried to live to that. I mean, I had a few international trips that were longer than that, but mostly we lived within that parameter and try to live that way. So I don't know that that was a block, but it was a concern. That was a concern.

Kassie Ripsam 42:07

So, what does the, what does being the presiding evangelist mean? And what are some of your responsibilities?

Jane Gardner 44:39

So organizationally, there are about 650 evangelists in the worldwide church, and so the presiding evangelist presided or leads that group. And in doing that, you provide direction to them, you give them opportunity for learning and research. Sources to help them in their ministry. And so there's a piece of it that's educating, that's motivating, that's helping people learn about themselves, supporting them, and also helping the church by providing spiritual direction, providing spiritual companionship to the church. So there's a lot involved in that. I do a blog about once a month for the evangelists, and so they we can kind of stay connected that way. We meet together at World Conference every day and spend time

together there. There are really, really fascinating group of people that 650. Their range of age is early 40s to 100 so we have quite, quite a range of folks. Evangelists tend to be older just because they tend to have had life's experiences. So you usually won't find an evangelist in their 20s or 30s, because life is still happening and things are still going on. So most of the folks who are in my group are older people, 40 or older, and doesn't have to be but that's just kind of the way it is. So it's a wonderful group of spiritual depth. We have done things like ask them to pray for the church about a particular topic on a particular day at a particular time, and they're very willing to do things like that and to be the spiritual companion for the church. So I there's a lot more to it, but that's that's good enough.

Kassie Ripsam 46:46

I understand that anyone can partake in a sacrament called an Evangelist Blessing. What is that?

Jane Gardner 46:55

That evangelist blessing is a prayer that a special prayer that is offered for whoever the recipient or recipients are, so that sacrament can be between the evangelist and one other person, or it can be the evangelist or group of evangelists, with a couple, with a family, with a household, with some kind of group, or even with the congregation, so evangelists can journey with all of those people. And the culmination of that journey is a prayer, a special prayer that is offered on behalf of that person. Most often the prayer is extending God's enormous, generous love to the people, and we write the prayer down, and they, as the participants or the recipients of the prayer, they have those words to take with them into future life. And we've offered these special prayers only after we've spent time with the people invested in preparing. So we study scripture together, we tell stories together, we ask questions and and process together. So for example, one blessing I did we we spent two years meeting once a month getting ready for that sacrament. Another one was only six months of meeting together. So it just depends on the situation and the people involved. Lot of times with congregation's evangelism blessing, it'll be over a year that the congregation spends time getting ready, preparing for, as well as the evangelist, preparing for and getting ready for. So there are four aspects to the evangelist blessing. One is the time of preparation, whatever that's going to be, and then the prayer itself, which is offered in kind of a worshipful environment, and then it's recorded. So the third aspect is this piece of paper or digital file that you get with the blessing written in there. And then the fourth aspect of it is kind of a continuing check in with the evangelist on how the life's journey is going. So there's just, like that companion piece, so that's the evangelist blessing, and it's available mostly, I'd say age eight or above, in terms of what we would consider, because there is work for the participants to do in getting ready for it.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 49:40

So just basically has to be old enough to be baptized and be able to think about yourself to be able to do it.

Jane Gardner 49:48

Yeah, you don't have to be baptized, but it is more being able to prepare and think about it. And it's kind of that, a little upper level logic that, yeah. Middle School and beyond, maybe or high school, actually, truthfully, most of them are high school and beyond.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 50:07

Yeah, I see that makes sense. So are you limited to just one evangelist blessing or...?

Jane Gardner 50:16

Used to be. I'm trying to think this changed several years ago, maybe over 20 years ago now. So it used to be called a continuing life blessing, which could be happening anytime in your life. So what I find as an evangelist is that people come to me most often when they're in a moment of conflict or decision or not sure which path to choose those kind of situations in life. And those don't just happen when you're 20 or 21. Midlife can happen, and so they're available to you whenever, whenever in life you want one.

Kassie Ripsam 51:10

So why should a youth or a young adult consider getting an evangelist blessing?

Jane Gardner 51:16

Yeah, I, I thought about that, I think it is. I wish it would be a step in their spiritual journey in terms of helping them grow closer to God, helping them to understand more about their relationship with God and how God desires to participate in their life, if we let God and all of that. So it is. It isn't meant to be answers to questions. It isn't meant that way at all. It's more this helping people come into God's presence and to begin to understand and feel what that looks like and sounds like. A lot of teenagers, mostly 18-19 year-olds who I know, who have done this are, you know, making decisions, trying to decide what's next, and where do I go? And I think just the affirmation of knowing no matter what decision you make, God's going to be with you, that there probably are not any terrible decisions you would make here. There's not just one right answer, but that God is with you no matter what, even if you pick the most terrible option, God is with you no matter what. So that, I think is pretty important in that young adult time frame, just because of what life is throwing at you at that point, is to have that affirmation that you aren't alone and that you're loved unconditionally. Think it's pretty important.

Kassie Ripsam 53:05

Yeah,

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 53:06

I've even heard stories where people will go back and years later read their evangelist blessing, and they're like, I don't remember hearing that, but that makes sense now, like it provides answers even later in life.

Jane Gardner 53:21

Yeah, that's a very good observation, Mary Anne. I, I mean, I've heard people say that about scripture that one time they read it, it says this to them, and then years later, they'll come up on that same scripture, and it means something totally different to them, right? I think the words of your blessing can be similar to that, that it, it may mean something different to you at different phases in your life.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 53:46

So what's been the most rewarding experience you've had as an evangelist?

Jane Gardner 53:54

Well, I do. I sit with the Council of 12 when they process calls to the office of evangelist, and that has been very, a very blessed experience to have to hear their testimonies of new evangelists and where things are headed in people's lives. So I really appreciate that. I think probably even more special for me are the relationships that develop when you offer the sacrament of evangelist blessing that feels like a real honor and privilege to be that involved with people in their lives. And I don't take that privilege lightly. That's, that's a biggie.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 54:41

Yeah. So you also assist in the Formation Ministries Team. You are a busy woman. What are formation ministries, and what are your responsibilities on this team?

Jane Gardner 54:53

So formation is a broad category, and I would say the broad definition is that it's anything that helps form you as a disciple of Jesus. So, if you think about what those things might be, it'd be like education, worship, experiences, spiritual practices, individual or community. Spiritual practices could be work, service work, missional work that you do, like a food pantry or stuff like that. It can be a mentoring experience. It can be a scripture study. There's just a lot of ways that we are impacted when we're trying to learn what it means to follow Jesus and try to understand it, what it means for each of us to follow Jesus. And so that's all the formation umbrella. So things that they produce from that team are like class material for for classes, whether it's scripture study or like children's classes or youth classes, they produce materials to help reunion directors who are organizing that kind of formational experience at a reunion or a camp. So camp materials, the Daily Bread comes out that is a once a day kind of story with a prayer scripture, where you can have a spiritual devotion once a day in that kind of way. So lots and lots of resources that come out of that group, and songs, the hymnal, and ways that music can bless us. So that's all formation ministries, and it's a, it's a challenge. We are not a very big team, but we do have a lot on our plate.

Kassie Ripsam 56:50

It sounds like a lot understanding that there are fewer and fewer positions that have only been held by male priesthood members thanks to many trailblazers like yourself. What advice would you give a female who is making a new path?

Jane Gardner 57:11

So, be true to themselves. Don't try to turn themselves into something different. Have a mentor, find someone who can help you walk that journey. I would also say, Take every opportunity for training, retreats, workshops, whatever would be edifying to your knowledge about not just the church, but leadership, how leadership works. Be a World Conference delegate, and start to understand how all of that works and functions together. And most importantly, and I believe this, about any career, any person, find out what you're passionate about and do your darndest to find a way to live into that every day. So whether that's your paid job or whether that's something you volunteer for, you really need to have that passion and find enjoyment or joy in what you're doing. So for me, that's that's a biggie.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 58:31

Yeah, personally, I think the finding a mentor, I think that's really important. And it can be anybody. It can be your best friend or one when your family members or your next door neighbor, if you're if you're good friends with them, does anybody that knows you really

Jane Gardner 58:52

Exactly and it can be if your career is in teaching or in business. I mean, it could be someone in that environment who can mentor you on how to be a leader, but you know how to balance your life or whatever.

Kassie Ripsam 59:08

I personally have had some students in my tutoring who have taught me it's it's really anyone around you.

Jane Gardner 59:19

Yeah, I think that's a great observation. And I, as a minister and someone who has mentored others, you always, as that mentor or that minister, receive back amazing blessings, so much more than you give so much more. It's a wonderful aspect of being kind of sacrificial, but also not self serving very you know, it just helps you have an outward vision, I thin.,

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 59:54

Yeah. Okay, so last question, if you could have coffee or tea, whichever you prefer, with anyone alive or dead. Who would it be? And what would you ask them?

Jane Gardner 1:00:06

This is a hard one for me. I just gave a presentation on David M. Smith, who was Joseph Smith Junior's youngest son. He was born after his dad died, and so I was kind of leaning toward that, because it's fresh in my brain, but it led me to my fifth great grandmother. Her name was Mary Ann McKenzie. And Mary Ann lived in England, in around Birmingham and came in contact to the with the church there as a child, and their family eventually immigrated to the US and ended up in the church community, and that is my heritage, In terms of how I got to be here, and some of the reasons that our family is still involved in the church. So, I would really love to sit down and just visit with her and hear about my grandmother wrote down a lot of her stories of of this great, great, great, great, great grandmother, for those of us kids to read. So I have that, I have that little booklet that my grandmother wrote, but there are so many stories and there, there's some funny ones, but there's also some very spiritual ones about why they decided to leave England and join the church and what was, what was happening in their lives at the time. So I, I'd love to visit with her and and hear about that journey and her life.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 1:01:51

That's beautiful. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So thank you for being here and answering our questions, even though some of them were hard for you.

Jane Gardner 1:02:04

Some of them were not fair, I will say that.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 1:02:09

And, I also want to thank every single one of our listeners for feedback, and I want to encourage them to do comment and do ask these questions and give us some suggestions on who to interview. And, I want to tell you all to remember to walk in truth and remember to always put on your full armor of God. Thank You guys. You