

# Extra Shot | Mormon and Evangelical Boundaries | Pt 2

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Mormon boundaries, evangelical boundaries, Community of Christ, distinctives, Jesus Christ, continuing revelation, inclusivity, enduring principles, spiritual formation, social media, Golden Age, identity boundaries, ecumenical dialog, theological exegesis, spiritual practices

## SPEAKERS

Tony Chvala-Smith, Blake Smith, Charmaine Chvala-Smith

### Blake Smith 00:27

Hey, Project Zion Podcast listeners. This is Blake Smith, host of this Extra Shot episode, which is part two of a conversation with Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith about what they refer to as the Mormon and evangelical boundaries. If you've not yet listened to part one of the conversation, you may want to do that first, because in this episode, we pick up the conversation talking about the porous boundary between Community of Christ and Protestant traditions. It raises a question for me. I mean, so Tony picked up on the porous. I had written that word there because I think for some in our tradition, that porous is one of their critiques, that we become too porous, [CCS: feel threatening. Mm, hmm] we've become too porous. And we talk, I, I know growing up, we talked a lot about our distinctives and what is distinct. And I kind of, I kind of align that with, Okay, what's that center point for us? And probably, I think it early, early in my life, which is not early in the church life, but early in my life, we were still looking at the porous side being more on the connections with the LDS church and an attachment to Joseph Smith Junior. So, I guess my question would be, what do we say about that? Because I still hear in the conversation about needing to have some boundaries, that there are some distinctions. But where does that? Where do those boundaries go when we become too porous? Or, do we come become too porous?

### Tony Chvala-Smith 02:10

Yeah, so here's, here's a thought on on that. I I remember a number of years ago when Dwayne Cooley, who, at the time was Presiding Evangelist of the church. He'd been in the Council of Twelve, and in the presence, he was a really amazing theological thinker. I remember hearing him say something that stayed with me for now decades. He was asked in an open forum, what's happening to our distinctives? And he said this, "the only distinctive we are called to share ought to appear in the distinctiveness of our witness to Jesus Christ." In other words, that is the distinctive way that we witness to Jesus Christ is the distinctive, right? It's, it's not. You don't, you don't look to, well, we have deacons, teachers and priests and high priests, those kinds of distinctives that we once lauded, that's not the place you look. What really counts. What really matters is how uniquely, distinctively, persuasively, compellingly, does this community bear witness to the center point, Jesus Christ. Otherwise, you end up worshipping your distinctives. This was always a danger for us.

**Blake Smith** 03:30

I think we did for a long time.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:32

Oh, we did. Some of the theological thinking going on back in the 1970s in the church, some of the, some of the thinkers, tried to make a distinction between universal or ultimate principles and middle principles. Middle principles being those, those things currently unique about the movement. And the problem they kept coming back to was that in RLDS church life, and it was Reorganization church life. At the time, people wanted to elevate those distinctives almost to the level of ultimate principles. And whenever you, whenever you elevate that which is less than to the status of ultimate you, you are practicing what the Hebrew Bible calls idolatry. And so, so Dwayne was, I think, spot on with that. Now we, we can't not be distinctive. I'm sorry. I mean, we, you know, we Charmaine and I have taken friends from other traditions on little private tours of the Temple in Independence. And they, they have, they have remarked, by looking at the pictures on the wall of of leaders of the church, oh, my goodness, you have so many women in the top leadership of your church. How do you do that? You know they, they see things about us that are not common. Even in progressive mainline churches. And so those, I mean, this, distinctives are still there, but we're not going around talking about our distinctives are that Lutherans are wrong and we're right. That's that has no place in the church today. We, we moved away from that a long time ago, as we should have so. So, live out the witness to Jesus, the peace, the peaceful one in a distinctive, just way, and you'll have all the distinctives you can manage for one lifetime, right there.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 05:32

I would add that, yes, our unique journey is perhaps the most distinctive thing about us, and our willingness to be on a unique journey and not to just try and have the same journey as another group or another sector, another denomination. And you know, I think in some ways, we, we should probably embrace our, our, the many changes that keep happening in this church, because that is part of our identity, and it's tied to some of these very basic what we what I think would be called distinctives, from the beginning, middle and, and to this point in our story, things like continuing revelation that we are continually listening for God calling us into today and into the future, acting today and into the future, caring about the social structures of today and the future. So, so continuing revelation that was something we've we held as a distinctive but now we are making it not about continuing revelation, because now we have the one true prophet and only we can hear God. No, we're recognizing that, yes, God keeps speaking to us, but God is speaking everywhere, and that we can work with others. And so, it's like expanding that, that distinctive. Another, the Kingdom of God. What Christ preached about, pointed to, demonstrated the reign of God in on this Earth. Our idea of Zion, those are, those we have. We have equated those two more and more over the last three decades. And that's a distinctive. That's something that inspired people's imagination about what we can create here, what we can invite the Spirit to create in our midst, our reunions, our camps, so many, conference, World Conference. These are all forms of God's mark in our midst that they're consistent. And so those things that we've wanted to call distinctives, they're still there. They may be taking some different shape, but they all keep, they must keep pointing back to God and Christ and the Spirit, because that's what we worship. And the other thing I would say is, if people want to have an idea of what we believe and who we are, we're

probably in a better place today than we've been in five decades, and what you need before you is the basic beliefs on the one hand and the enduring principles on the other. And to keep those two in balance, the Enduring Principles are about how do we live out our understanding of God's call to us as a denomination. So, All are Called, the Worth of all People, diversity and unity, together, tied together, Grace and Generosity, all of these things. These are parts. These are describing who we are, but they're also inviting us to keep living it more and more deeply. And the Basic Beliefs you know. Who is it that we say God is? Who is it that we say Christ is? Who is it we say the Spirit is? What do we say the church is about? What do we say scripture is about? We, we have so much richness right now that is, it's very Community of Christ. It's very, its own identity. Yes, it's borrowed from both, beyond both of those boundaries, and, but it's, we're a new thing. We're our own thing, and we don't need to apologize about our associations on either side. And I think that that's a new place for us to be in, and a freeing place to be open to the Spirit again, and to hear God's call again, and to not say we have to solidify our identity for one time and forever, which is very different from where we were for our first 100 years, where we thought we had the whole right theology, and we just had to stay faithful to it, and till the end, staying faithful to the end, that was a phrase you found in evangelist blessings and in lots of preaching. And so we thought we just had the whole package. And you know what? We've become more humble and said, Wait, God, is the whole package, and we can't even begin to contain what that means. And so, let's be stretched by it. Let's be called into God's future instead of some image of ourselves.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 10:35**

Let me add on. So, Alan Tyree, who was a member of the First Presidency, was also a saxophonist, and I remember him once giving this analogy for the kind of the development of the church's theology. The analogy was from jazz improv, right? So, a really good jazz trombonist or jazz saxophonist, whatever, you've got, you've got the keys and the basic sense of the tune, but a really good saxophonist can spin out in whole different directions while still staying on key. That's improv, right? Improvisation. And so what Charmaine has been describing our Enduring Principles or Basic Beliefs in some in some respects, the keys of the song that we're in have remained pretty much constant. But the church has been doing improv for a while, and as it, as it has needed to. And so, if you read sections 161 to 165 of the Doctrine and Covenants, you find some old, familiar themes. There's the key, but a whole new ways of reconfiguring what it means to be Community of Christ. That's distinctive, that's really just ... every improvisation the saxophonist in a jazz band, every everyone they do is is distinctive and unique, even though it's in the same key. Uh, years ago, Charmaine and I did a weekend class out in California on kind of the development of Community of Christ theology. And at the time, our friend who is now in the Presiding Bishopric, Carla Long, was a local appointing minister, and she had invited us out to do that. And, she told us afterwards that she had been connected with a Quaker minister, whose name I can't remember. I'm ashamed. I can't remember, but he was Mulholland, I think so that sounds right. Um, she had a chance to walk him through the development of Community of Christ theology. And when she finished, what he said was, I want to write a book on you people. Nobody has ever done that. He came to understand that we had completely rethought ourselves in the 1960s and on, and in my words, but stay, but stayed on key even as we completely rethought ourselves. And he said, nobody has ever done that that way before. It's totally unique. It's like, Yeah, well, so we, like I say, we can't help but be distinctive, even as we go through all kinds of changes and transformations and I think that's a pretty, a pretty cool thing about us. So, it's a really, a really good reason to want to

be Community of Christ in this time, not Community of Christ of the 1950s or 1930s or 1880s, but who we are today. It's a really good reason to want to be part of us.

**Blake Smith 13:37**

Yeah. And so first I want to say, when I think about the enduring principles, and for most of most of my ministry career, my answer about distinctives has been in relation to ongoing revelation, that from our beginning, we believed that God was still talking to us, God is still giving us guidance, and that has led us to deeper and deeper understandings of these things, which changes our course within the key, as you mentioned, Tony, I think that's a great analogy. But I've also learned something new in the last several years. So, I admit, and my apologies to all the history buffs out there who love history and think everybody ought to love history. I did not. I've always been kind of in the moment. And I remember reading, stepping into a Christian bookstore in Independence, when I was there doing youth ministry, and seeing this paperback bound that was being sold there. But it was "The RLDS Cult." And I flipped open to a page, and it made a comment about, well, if it was the one true church, why did it take Joseph's mother seven years to join the church? Like I don't know, and I don't care. I mean, I have no idea. I can't, I'm, if I could ask her, I would ask her. But other than that, what I care about is where we are now. But one of the things in the last 10-12, years, and I credit Lach Mackay and Barb Walden for this, and my relationship with them, and being able to sit and hear the Reconstructionist side of history, because, and I think Lach even mentions in the episode that we're talking about today, or that we've referred back to, that we were really good at deconstructing, but not reconstructing. And now, I'm located in Chicago, and the Plano congregation, the Stone Church, is part of the area that I serve, so I've been learning more and more about that. And I'm just amazed, and embarrassed that I didn't know this before, but amazed that some of the key things that I'm hearing were important then, were inclusivity, that we had been a church in our early days, of really sticking to that One True Church, and even though the RLDS church was still believing in the one true church, Joseph was very, Joseph III was very intentional about letting the Plano community know that this church is for everyone, this place is for everyone, and inviting in some of that ecumenism that we talk about now. And the inclusivity that has become so essential to who we are now, really was there in the first days. Same thing with inclusion of women, with Marianna Walker walking out of a conference because women weren't allowed to vote. Church members weren't allowed to vote. We were modeling culture and so we were taking steps way back then and then finally, ironically, with Section 116, that we just spent time talking about at the last conference, about removing because we're embarrassed about the language. But when you look at the context of that during the Plano era, it was groundbreaking that we were a tradition who saw the value and need to ordain people of color. And it wasn't, we didn't use good language, and it was also still very limited, but it was really cutting edge in the 1860's right? And so, when we talk about our distinctives, those were really distinctives of who we were at that time, the ways of living it out like you've talked about, and those are things that we're recapturing. So, I like to now I have even more information when I'm talking to these folks who say we've lost our distinctives. And in my perspective, I think we're beginning to reconnect with some of the distinctives in terms of how we live things out, not the, not the things that we can hold on to, but the way we live our lives.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:45**

And I think the way we talk about things, changes everything. So we're recognizing, we're naming some of those things that we just assumed were part of the church, maybe in one place or another place. But actually were, were foundational for our identity as a whole. And once we start putting names to some of those things, like inclusiveness or like unity and diversity, like perhaps even the idea that we are by nature, some of us dissenters, and that keeps the conversation going, broadening it and deepening it, and that that's part of our identity, too. Always asking questions, always seeking to to hear what? Why? Why is this message relevant today in in our situation, and are there things we need to let go of, are there things that we need to claim, or reclaim or revalue that are already part of of who we are? So, that's another element that I think we sometimes have undervalued, because, you know, those dissenter genes in us, they're uncomfortable, you know they make us have to sometimes look at some embarrassing parts of our individual or corporate story, and yet, like with 116 that you were just referring to, if we don't have that, to remind us of many things, a that, that there needs, that we need to be talking about things, even if we get it wrong sometimes, as long as it leads us to something better and to be okay about being embarrassed about some things we didn't do as well in the past as we think we might want to. That we can see differently now. That allows us to keep being honest and humbled. Um. And it not being about us, that leaves a lot of room for it being about Christ, about God, about the reign of God, the peaceable kingdom.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 20:16**

So back to our starting point. We are. We are Community of Christ and not the Mormons. Right? In other words, every decision for something, is a decision also against something. Right? The theologian, Paul Tillich, Charmaine mentioned him earlier how influential his writings were to church leaders in the 60s and 70s. Paul Tillich says somewhere in his writings, he says the term decision comes from Latin *decisio*, like think incision, only cut right. "*Decisio*" means to cut around. So every decision to be something is a decision against or to not be other things. That is how, that is how human development takes place. That is how relationships take place. That is how cultures exist. To choose, to choose x means we have not chosen A or B, and so there's, there may be nothing wrong with A or B, but we chose not to be that when we chose to be X or Y, and so Community of Christ has chosen to be a kind of radically Jesus-centered, Peace and Justice oriented church that's trying to be as inclusive as possible, that is open to ecumenical and inter-religious dialog and work, and that wants to make the world a place that is safe for children, safe for refugees, safe for immigrants, safe for LGBTQIA people, and safe for those who live on the margins and the edges. That's a that's a pretty distinctive thing to want to be actually in the world as we currently know it. And so we we are not X, or sorry, we are not A and B. We've chosen to be X. And so what if the journey is hard, that's what we've chosen to be. And we've chosen to be it because we feel divinely called to want to be that. And so it's not just a random choice on our part, it's part it's, oh wait, it's a distinctive we feel divinely called to be, to become what we are becoming.

**Blake Smith 22:16**

So I'm glad you brought us back to the beginning point, Tony. And with regards to us choosing to be X, let's talk about C and D. We're not A and B, but we're not C and D. Also, because you mentioned in both the Mormon boundary and the evangelical boundary, and we Charmaine, of course, in her sharing of her chart has shown how the Protestant boundary has become kind of more porous as we move more toward mainline Christianity. But can you say more about the evangelical boundary?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 22:45**

Well, sure. So going all the way back to Joseph Smith, III, who said in the, I believe he said this in the Kirtland case, we do not believe in the infallibility of the Bible. We don't believe that anything that's passed through human hands is infallible. And gosh, I wish church members had listened to that. Because often what happens in church life is we, we pay more attention, sadly, to local religious custom than we do to our own tradition. And so what's happened, especially in the last you know, generation or so is that as types of evangelicalism and fundamentalism have sort of pushed their way into being the default setting for what Christianity is, church members often unwittingly borrow stuff. They go online to find stuff for sermons and they don't, they, and they're not really well grounded in current Community of Christ theology. And so, before long, they're teaching the rapture, which we don't believe in, which is a really bad piece of theology that's widely popular. They start talking about hell. That's not a central part of our theology. Never has been. They. They adopt various kinds of right-wing ideologies that are now connected to evangelicalism and fundamentalism. And so that's, that's the boundary. That boundary, if you read our public theology, that boundary is actually a wall, but it should be a wall. So, we're not, we're not C and D. We're not evangelicals, we're not fundamentalists, and that's traditional. We have never been that, at least in terms of how those things are construed in contemporary religious life. We don't have the autocratic, dictatorial tendencies of fundamentalism in our theology. It doesn't mean we don't believe anything, or that you can believe in anything you want to. It just means that our theology does not function, from a standpoint of like tyranny, right?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 25:02**

But, but I will add one thing there, and that is that our desire for a one true something will sometimes be very appealing to going towards evangelical fundamentalism, because they tend to have absolutes. Absolute assurance that if you believe these things, you're going to be right with God, or if you do these things, you'll be right with God. And you know, whether it's your eternal salvation that will be assured or that you'll be blessed in this life, what, whatever it might be. That is appealing to many RLDS, Community of Christ folks, to have that one absolute thing, you know, that we had as when we saw ourselves as the one true and so that, it's an, it's an absolutism, and it can be quite appealing for people who are saying, Well, how do I know? How do I know for sure what God wants from me, or what it means to be in a right relationship with God? So, I think, you know, I'm just saying that I know a lot of church members who, or, and people who identified as more like a Restorationist within the church, who were far more drawn to evangelical fundamentalism, if they, if they left the movement altogether, than they were to come to Community of Christ, where there were questions and discernment and uncertainties along the way. So, it, you know, it's understandable why that, why members of the church are so want, may want to have those absolutes that evangelical fundamentalism offers.

**Blake Smith 27:04**

Yeah, I think that, I think that's pretty universal, inside and outside the church, because we live in a world that's absolutely chaotic and everything's kind of a gray area. We can't have black and white anymore. And so, there's an attraction to somebody who will just give me a checklist of things that I can accomplish and go to heaven and be done.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 27:28**

I sometimes put it like this, fundamentalism is to religion what Fascism is to politics. Fascism and politics is the absolute control of meaning and the reduction of meaning to one meaning. There can be no plurality of meaning, because that's dangerous. And so in in fascist politics, there there's one leader, there's one meaning, there's one party, there's, you know, one view of reality, and all others are wrong. This is the same in fundamentalism. Fundamentalist Protestantism is the same thing, only it's religious and not and not political. And by the way, this analogy works across religions. Hindu fundamentalism, Jewish fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalism. I mean, they all function the same way, kind of absolute reduction of and constriction of meaning to to to one thing, which is really odd to me, because God is infinite, and yet religions have this habitual need to want to reduce the meaning of the infinite to one thing, which once again...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 28:40

We can then control

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 28:41

Absolutely, that's it. It comes down to control. So...

**Blake Smith** 28:47

So, I want to talk a little bit about obstacles. You mentioned a couple of obstacles Tony in that episode 649, to getting at this. One of the things, before I get to that, though, one of the things that I have struggled with time and again as a leader in Community of Christ, a church that honors and values Unity in Diversity and has a relatively fluid theology. Everybody has their own relationship with God. How do you maintain the center point and honor again, different perspectives without becoming all things to all people with no boundaries at all?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 29:36

Yeah, that's there's not one single once for all answer to how to do that.

**Blake Smith** 29:42

Oh, darn.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 29:43

Sorry. Charmaine, I did a podcast a number of years ago on, I forget what we called it, the big tent analogy, or something like that. And basically, it works like this, going back to Joseph III. The Reorganization, because it was attracting all these dissenters, was de facto attracting diversity. And yet, Joseph III wanted to make sure we held up a center point. And so in General Conference Resolution 222, from, I think it's 1879 he articulated that central point as those things which are essential to salvation. Obviously, those things essential to a life-altering, healing, redeeming relationship with the God of Jesus Christ, that's the center point. That's, that's the pole that holds the umbrella up. That's the big, that's the big pole that holds the tent up in the middle. And he wasn't saying there that everybody has to grab onto that pole. You're saying, look, there is a center point, and we're going to keep pointing to it, get as close to it as you can, right? And we're not going to be ashamed that we have a central, a central theological conviction connected to Jesus as the revelation of God by the Holy Spirit. We're not going to be ashamed of that. That's, you gotta have a center. Remember the

Temple spiral. There's a center point. Otherwise, you can't build it. And so, we keep, we keep pointing back to that central point. We do it through our hymnody. We do it in worship. The lectionary helps us do it because of its connection to the Christian year. We try to make sure we do it in preaching and in teaching and publications and so on. So, without, without coercion or force, we keep holding up the center point and saying, this, this is, you know, this is the, this is the center of our tradition. Um, and if ... If I can be tongue in cheek about this, anybody can live in our house, anybody can live in our basement. But if you, if, if you get to the point where you say, I hate this house, I hate this basement, I hate all of you, then you probably need to move out. In other words, in other words, we have, we have a set we have a center point. We have a Enduring Principles, a set of convictions. We're committed to certain things and not others. And get as close to that as you can. But if you find you can't, if you find you dislike it, you hate it. There's, we're not going to say that you're only saved if you stay here. For goodness sakes, there's other places to go and be so. So be free.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:59**

you don't have, you don't have to be right close to it in order to be part of the tradition. Right? You know, you can be on the you can just be under the eaves of the tent. You're still in the tent. You don't, there's no creedal statement that you have to sign on to. But there is a recognition that there is a theology that guides us, that is our core and that we keep expanding on, as far as trying to go deeper, trying to give better language, trying to, to like in the Enduring Principles and Basic Beliefs. And you know, those kinds of statements and those last few sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. They're all ways in which we keep naming, proclaiming, explaining, what is our center. And those are good places to look.

**Blake Smith 33:34**

That ties really well into the question that I was going to ask is, Charmaine, you mentioned it can be out under the eaves. Is there anywhere where the tent actually ends? And we say, okay, that is not ... so Tony used the term that ought to be a wall. Do we have any? It's sometimes it feels like we don't have any walls. And the closest thing we'd had be would be a screen door called the faithful disagreement statement, that says, if, if you cannot, in certain circumstances, like you can't be in the pulpit and preach something that is against this core value, or that leads to that center point in that theology, but you are welcome in the doors. So those conversations then happen in Sunday school classes and other places. I don't know I, and I, people close to me know I'm not an athlete, so they might be surprised that I would use the analogy. But I've always said, you know, every foot, every field of play, has a boundary, and that boundary can be way, way, way out there, but at some point there's still an out of bounds. So how do we deal? How do we answer that question? Or do we answer that question? And I'll just say in relation to your comment about someone living in your basement, do we, in order to be faithful to our theology and our Unity in Diversity and the Blessings of Community. Do we wait until that person makes the choice to get out of the basement? They need to find some place. Or, do we, do we encourage them for their own, maybe for their own spiritual health, to find another ... Anyway, so you, I think you get the idea what I'm getting at.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 35:22**

Yeah, you're asking a question of pastoral care and what for which there's never a one size fits all answer, go ahead, Charmaine, I think you were about to jump in.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:29**

That's where I was going to go too. I mean, so much of it is the particular circumstances and needs of the person. I mean, if they're if they are unhappy, if they feel that this is creating distance between them and God, or them and them and themselves. If, if there's more anger and destruction than there is building up and going deeper, then you know, sometimes people do need to know that it's ,okay to continue your journey with God in a different spot. This is hard though for I, you know, I'm thinking about people our age and older in our denomination and in other denominations. It, it might be people who are even younger, depending on how their, how their denomination defines faithfulness. But sometimes people need to move on to another, another field, another, another sport, another place where they can encounter God in some new ways. And, but their sense of being loyal to their parents or their grandparents who raised them in this church, or to an experience that they had, or to a particular expression of the Spirit, it can be so difficult to have, and so sometimes they do need exterior permission from someone who says, you know what, this God that you know and love is at work in a lot of different places, this might be a good fit for you, so that parts of who you are can be freed up. Because right now, you know, there's, there's too much hurt or resentment or fear or whatever it might be. So I think it's a circumstance kind of thing. I think, for people who are being destructive within the body, that's a different kind of situation, because sometimes there are people who, who love the drama and the power that come with creating problems. And so, you know, there have been times where people have been asked to leave for, for the good of the body. And you know, you find that all the way back. New Testament writings in Paul and you know, so that will always be an element and a possibility within the church, that it's just like, No, you're causing too much harm to others and perhaps to your own soul, to your own being. And this isn't, you know. So I think lots of things like that have to be taken into consideration, and there's not an easy answer, but I think the more that we keep trying to identify what game we're playing on this field, I like your analogy, your sports analogy, or this court, or whatever it is, the more we ,are able to define that and invite people into the play, the more they will be able to tell whether or not this is a good game for them. But they if they can be reminded that that on the other hat, on the other side of, that wall, there's another sport going on that they're also welcome to join, and that they have some skills from this game to take to that game. I don't know that I'm I love analogy, so I might stretching it a bit far, but I do think that that's, you know, we have a friend who, who by the time he joined Community of Christ, had been in two or three other denominations, and after he left Community of Christ, he was in a couple more before he finally found a spiritual home, and he's been happy there, but he had to do some trial and error kinds of things, as well as inner work to figure out what was going to work for ,his relationship with God and himself. So sometimes our church is a way station for people. You know, it's a place people come for, a place of exploration or of safety or of recovery, of healing. So that they can know what other options are before them. And I think we need to embrace that role that we sometimes have as a denomination is as a way station, a place where people arrive, are greeted, have time to recover or to learn or to commit or to move on, and there's no that's a beautiful thing to offer, and there's no shame in the fact that people may want to move on,

**Tony Chvala-Smith 40:30**

And as we are a way station. Often, I'm reminded of something a friend of ours who was a full-time minister for a while in a rough, urban environment, he used to say, You got to protect the call, right? His

own personal vocation as a minister, he had, he had to say no to things, because he had to protect his sense of vocation for what he was called to do. And I think sometimes that's the denomination or the local congregation, sometimes we have to protect the call to be the church we're coming to be. And that may involve saying no to somebody, or saying, you know, this has been a way station for you, and we're so glad you found temporary home in here, but where you are right now, you're not happy here, and we're not going to make you happy, and there may be better places for you to live out, where you're, where your calling is. There's nothing wrong and everything right with doing that. It's simply a form of discernment, really. So we have to protect our calling as a church.

**Blake Smith** 41:39

Yeah, I think that's a beautiful way to receive and accept this idea that people may come and go, the way station, because we tend to get caught, we get so excited when somebody new comes in, and then we think, Oh, what did we do wrong when they leave? And it may not be about that at all, right? So, it's we have provided what they needed in the period that they were with us. Same thing with churches that are closing to help congregations understand that this doesn't mean that all you did was of no value. Over all of the years that you're open and the people who came through your doors, you provided incredible ministry for that time, and that is what we need to celebrate. So, yeah, that's really helpful. I want to ask just one last question, and you guys might have some other things you want to add in addition, but I want to ask one more question with regards to the boundaries, and setting those boundaries and having a center point. And that question is, what are the obstacles to doing that? We've kind of touched a bit here and there, but I wanted to be real, real intentional about asking, what do we see as the obstacles? And Tony, you mentioned a couple of things in the episode. One of the things is being the lack of full-time paid ministers. I think some of those eras Charmaine that you were talking about when, you know, we had some really strong beliefs and a kind of a unified vision. Part of that, we had people going around with preaching charts and telling folks exactly, you know what, this is the thing, and cottage meetings and full-time people that had time to do that, and we just don't have that across the church anymore. So, we get whatever the person who is assigned to the pulpit or to Sunday school teaching pulls off of the bookshelves, and the other one was just this, and we've already, we have talked about this, and that is honoring the unity and diversity while having a center point and finding the balance there. But can you say some more Tony about what you think might be the obstacles to us as we move into the future, seeking a center, seeking to hold on to that center point?

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 44:00

Well, this will, this will sound furiously old fashioned, and I'm, I'm okay with that, because I am old, but

**Blake Smith** 44:09

And fashionable.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 44:12

But I think sometimes social media and the internet are not our friends. Other words, you know when, when a local elder or priest is trying to get a Saturday Night Special ready to speak the next morning, they're in a hurry. They're bi vocational. They've been working hard all week. They've got family. I mean, there's they're struggling to get ready to preach tomorrow. And the instinct nowadays is to see what I can find on the internet that can, you know, be the heart of my message or an illustration, or so

on. And because, in the push and fray and busyness of postmodern life in the United States, people, people are always strapped for time, it seems. Yes, we don't have good theological exegetical skills and commitments to them. They seem like they take too much time, which we don't have. And so we'll just go find something quick off the internet. And I tell you what, if you type, if you type in Bible, and you know, in Google, the stuff that's going to come up probably 95% of it is not aligned with community of Christ's view of the Scripture, at least the stuff that comes up first. And so an obstacle is haste, and an understandable unwillingness to spend the time it takes to prepare sermons or worship or things that we're doing at church in ways that really align with Community of Christ's identity. Um, I don't know an easy way around that, because I understand being strapped for time. Um, I understand where this is the reality for people, but it's, it's a matter of what matters most. And so I think, you know, one, I'm just trying to lay out what I see as an obstacle, and I'm not going to say that time is the obstacle. It may seem like it is, but it's more. It's more like what we commit to do with our time, and often church is, one more thing I gotta do. And so, then we don't, we don't give it the theological, we don't give it the theological attention it really deserves. So that's something. Anyway.

**Blake Smith 46:39**

Great. Thanks Tony. Charmaine. Do you want to add anything to that?

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 46:43**

I think just building off of what Tony was saying, right took me in a slightly different direction. But one of the boundaries is, or one of the one of the obstacles to to us really claiming and embracing parts of who we are, is our confusion with that Sunday morning is about a either performance or entertainment, that it has to be full of noise and A great presentation when and we have touched on this yet. I'm kind of surprised we haven't. But one of the things that has been a very important element in the last two decades is spiritual formation. And so, one of the obstacles is our fear of quiet, of simply, I mean taking time to to let things soak in, to listen to listen to to God, to listen to what's happening in ourselves, to be open To the Spirit moving amongst us and within us, and letting some of our times of gathering together be that simple, that quiet, that still, that receptive, Because when, when we open ourselves to spiritual practices, prayer, even, and maybe not even, but especially, being open to the needs of others in our communities. Things happen. things change in us. We, we grow deeper, we grow wider in our understanding of the world that God has called us to. So, I think, I think that's an obstacle, is our expectations of how things should look or whether they should be entertaining or polished, and forgetting this the deep beauty of stillness shared together and the trust that comes in a living God who can touch our lives, who can call us, who can empower us to Be beacons of light and hope and keep pointing back to the goodness of God. So that's an obstacle I can I can relate to myself.

**Blake Smith 49:31**

Oh, I think that's pretty common, yeah, Tony

**Tony Chvala-Smith 49:35**

One other obstacle that comes to mind for me is this. Is, this is a thing that's happening, that happens in our heads. And it's, we'll call it, an ideology, and it's the ideology of the Golden Age. It's mythology actually, that that there was a time in the past when it was all so much better, and so nothing we have

now. Matches up to the image we have, highly selective image we have of the golden era in the past that really hampers things a lot, because it doesn't allow us to live in the present and into the future. Once in a while, I'll catch myself thinking back to my high school days when we lived on a farm and I had the run of the woods and fields in Central Michigan. It was I have these idyllic memories of stocking through the woods and the beauties of gardening and on and on. But then I'll catch myself, and I'll remember, Oh, we raised pigs, and I, the teenage boy in the house, had to shovel pig pens, and I I shoveled. I shoveled a lot of pig pens, enough probably to, I don't know, build, build a road from Central Michigan, Chicago. I'm guessing it's like that was part of the past too. The past. The past had beautiful woods and streams and fields. It also had pig pens and pig manure, and up at 545 every morning to feed pigs, and back from school in the evening and shoveling pig pens. And so, we have to be careful not to idolize a false image we have of the past, because that makes the present feel bad and the future seem impossible. And that is a that is a real obstacle in the church right now, because the nature of church is changing, right and we have to figure out how to embrace our way into a different kind of future, and thinking back to what church was like 6070, years ago, is not going to be our friend. It's going to be mythology. We will have screened out all the stuff that was hard about it, and will not be able to find joy in the present.

**Blake Smith 51:58**

Great, great advice. Yes, I have heard many times over the years, Well, we used to have 400 people, and we used to be packed out all the time, and this kind of thing. And it's like, well, that's probably not going to happen again. Well, it's happening down the street at this mega church. Well...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 52:20**

Well, you know, Blake, we used to have 100 pigs and...

**Blake Smith 52:24**

Yes, yeah, I want to say that a lot of images and words came to mind, probably none of them appropriate for me to say here, but it does shine a new light on you, Tony, thank you. Oh, my goodness. So do you? Either of you guys, have anything you want to add, something that I didn't ask, or any closing thoughts,

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 52:52**

just to say that having boundaries is it's common. It's what happens to all of us growing up. If we have siblings, we have identity boundaries. We have to to distinguish ourselves, to understand who we are and how we're different. And so, to you know, everybody has some kinds of boundaries. We just may not have identified them and this has been helpful for us over the years, to be able to start to describe our identity in reaction to or in relation to the other movements that have influenced us. And so, I think it's just to think of it as a very natural part of of life and of identity is a is a good starting point. I'm also a twin. So, you know, there's lots of that. You know, you have to figure out who, who you aren't, and remind people I'm also Canadian, and so Canadians have a hard time not telling people who they are, and it almost always relates to that we're not Americans, and how different we are, and probably better than the people to the to the boundary, to the border south of us. So, I think it's just that's part of human nature, and I and the very nature of identity. And it can be helpful. It can be a helpful way, mechanism

to understand development and distinctiveness, sense of call, all of those things so it's a nice working model.

**Blake Smith** 54:47

Great. Thanks and Tony, nothing.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 54:51

Boundaries are what makes relationships possible, and so don't be surprised if the church would have some boundaries. Church. Is itself a relationship. The God we worship is an eternal relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. The son is not the Father, the Spirit is not the father, and so on, you know, and so and the church is probably not everything you wish it were. And we have, we have certain kinds of boundaries, and that's what makes relational living actually possible.

**Blake Smith** 55:25

Great. Thanks. I think that the idea and the issue of identity is so important. If people are looking for a spiritual home to be able to articulate, this is the space that we occupy. Where there are some crossovers here and there, there are also some boundaries. So, hopefully this has been helpful to our listener who asked the question in the first place, and want to remind our listeners that we will make the information that Charmaine was sharing available through at least a link in the show notes. So, invite you to look at [projectzionpodcast.org](http://projectzionpodcast.org) for the show notes to this episode. And, I want to thank Tony and Charmaine. Thank you guys for being willing to come on and do this. I know you're incredibly busy. Thanks for, thanks for being here.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 56:15

It was fun. Thank you.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 56:16

Thank you Blake.

**Blake Smith** 56:18

And thanks to all of our listeners here at Project Zion Podcast, we invite you to join us for other episodes. We have lots of different series. If you have not been to [projectzionpodcast.org](http://projectzionpodcast.org), we invite you to do that. You can go to the series drop down menu or the quick list, the episode quick list, which I kind of is, is not quick anymore, because there are, we are nearing 800 episodes. We are we are talking about what we need to do about that. But anyway, join us at [projectzionpodcast.org](http://projectzionpodcast.org), or on any of your favorite platforms. This is Blake Smith. I've been your host today, and it's just a joy again to be with Tony and Charmaine. Thanks so much, and Have a blessed day.