

Nice to Matcha | New Harmony Board

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Harmony Board, LGBTQIA+ advocacy, welcoming congregations, Sacred Pause, inclusive spaces, faith and spirituality, political advocacy.

SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Sean Langdon, Andy Markle, Shelby Williams

Robin Linkhart 00:29

Welcome to Nice to Matcha, a Project Zion Podcast series where we meet new people, leaders, movers and shakers. I'm your host, Robin Linkhart, and today, I'm here with Sean Langdon, Andy Markle, and Shelby Williams, all newly elected members of the Harmony board. Harmony is a non-profit organization founded by Community of Christ members nearly 40 years ago and that was founded to provide advocacy education and resources for LGBTQIA+ voices in Community of Christ with a shared vision of full participation. The purpose of Harmony is to affirm the dignity and worth of all persons without regard to gender, race, sexual orientation or religious affiliation. Hello. It is so great to have you with us on the podcast today.

Sean Langdon 01:31

Hello.

Robin Linkhart 01:34

Alrighty. Well, first things first. We're going to have you each tell us a little bit about you. So, Shelby, why don't you take it?

Shelby Williams 01:42

Okay. Hey, everyone. My name is Shelby Williams and my pronouns are she, her. I'm a lifelong member of Community of Christ, although I didn't really grow up going to a congregation in southwest Kansas as we did not have one. So, I've attended a variety of Christian churches from non denominational to Assembly of God, to the Church of the Nazarene, while attending youth camp in New Mexico starting in seventh grade. So, I've had a lot of different experiences within the churches. Um, eventually, I went to Graceland and ended up out here in Arizona work to, for work after graduating with an accounting degree in 2007. I've been active with the youth here in Arizona while staying active in my young adult years in New Mexico while I grew up going to camps. I've also been working at Spectacular with the older youth over the years. I enjoy board games, hiking, playing volleyball, and I'm currently busy raising a three and a half year old, Avery, with my husband, Sherway, and continuing to love on our first kid, our 16 year old Puggle Jasper and I'm a CPA currently working as controller for Harkin Theaters. It's the largest privately owned theater chain in the US. With the Arizona Community of Christ Mission Center, I'm currently one of three volunteer youth leaders helping to plan out all of the activities for the youth here in Arizona. And I'm also active in a few other organizations including being on the

board for Accounting and Financial Women's Alliance where we work to enable women in all accounting and finance to achieve their full potential and contribute to the development of our profession. And one of the reasons we're talking today is being the board treasurer as Harmony treasurer. So,

Robin Linkhart 03:19

Wow, Shelby. I feel super lucky, even luckier than I did before today, that we were able to get you on, get us on your calendar. Thank you. Andy.

Andy Markle 03:31

Yeah. I'm Andy Markle. Um, I live in Salt Lake City, Utah, with my husband, Matthew. We have no kids. Um, we do have a, we are the guardians of one child, though that lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, so, he's a, he's a great little kid. Um, we are, so sorry. My hobbies, um, I really, really enjoy traveling. Uh, right now I'm doing this, uh, from London, England. Um, earlier this week, I was in France, so, always all over the place for my job. I am the current chief revenue officer, uh, and, what they like to call at work, evangelist for our software. Uh, it is, uh, governance, risk and compliance software, uh, for a company called Empowered. Um, and, yeah, uh, I don't know. I think that's it for me.

Robin Linkhart 04:16

That is great. Andy. And Sean.

Sean Langdon 04:20

Well, hello. Uh, it is good to be back on Project Zion. I, my pronouns are he, him. I, um, am from the northwest USA, so, from the Washington, uh, Seattle, Washington area, just north of there, and have spent most of the past 10 plus years in Oregon, where I currently reside. I, um, I work for a nonprofit organization called Neighbor Impact doing, um, I started working there October as a housing advocate, so, working with folks who are experiencing homelessness and trying to get them housing and navigating with them to do that, applying for rental units and stuff like that. And then while they are in program using our long term rental assistance subsidy, doing case management with them for that year, um, to work on goals, uh, to stay housed and, um, continue to be housed even beyond our program. Um, but then, starting tomorrow, I was just, uh, accepted a position within the company to be the supervisor for that group of advocates. So, I'll be starting a supervisor management role tomorrow with Neighbor Impact, um, and continuing to journey with a great, great group of folks doing some awesome work here in Central Oregon. Um, I live in Bend, Oregon currently. Um, I just enjoy spending a lot of time with friends and doing things with friends. Uh, I, going to concerts, camping, spending as much time at the beach as possible. It's not as close to me as it once was, and, so, it's a little bit more of a trek to get there. But, uh, I absolutely love spending time near, near water. And if I can do that with friends, that's a, that's a wonderful thing as well. Uh, so yeah, that's, that's me.

Robin Linkhart 06:04

That is great. It's always great to hear about our guests. And I happen to know each of you personally. Um, I've probably known Shelby the longest, Sean the second longest, and Andy's come into my life in the last few years. So, it's, it's always great to hear about people. Okay, so, tell us about your past connection with Harmony and LGBTQ+ advocacy in general. Sean, you want to start us out there?

Sean Langdon 06:36

Yeah, so I, I remember hearing about Harmony, or at the time, it was, uh, known as Gala, uh, back in, uh, when I was growing up, in the late 90s, early 2000s and I remember that my church campground was Samish Island Campground, uh, when I was, um, growing up. And there was, they were the host for a Gala retreat in 2000 and I remember being asked to help cook for that retreat as a 15 year old. Um, and my dad, I think, was not necessarily the most comfortable with that and, so, that did not work out, um, unfortunately. And then later on, I remember I just, supporting gala in, in, uh, by word, you know, and but not necessarily, like when I go to World Conference, it's not necessarily going to the Gala events, um, because myself, I was on my own journey, and I was closeted at the time, and I thought, Well, what if I go to those events that people will know this thing about me that I don't fully understand about myself either? And, so, I remember that I would be supporting it and not really, actually physically supporting it by going to events and aligning myself fully. But when I did come out, um, and seeing the work they, that, at the time, Gala, did with Community of Christ as we went to the USA national conference and, uh, my own journey of coming out not long after that, a few years after that, as bisexual. Um, since then, my time with, with, um, Harmony has just really, um, increased. I was able to attend the last couple of retreats that we had, um, in, they were in Utah, and, uh, those were wonderful events to gather together, um, the folks and just getting to know more and more people that are either identified within the queer community or as allies within Community of Christ, um, was really important to me. Um, I previously worked, uh, for the church and spent a lot of my time after, um, especially as a youth minister, uh, lifting up LGBTQIA+ advocacy and inclusion within the church. For me, it was really important that they know that, um, there was somebody who, if there was, if there was a kid who was, uh, closeted or trying to figure out their own story and their own stuff, um, or who was experiencing pain because of people around them for who they were, I wanted them to know that there was somebody in the church who was a youth minister who knew what they were going through. And, so, for me, a lot of my advocacy, uh, came out in that way. And at one point I also started in the Northwest a new expression of community that was focused called Beyond Horizons, that was also focused on building that sense of advocacy and inclusion in the Northwest USA, um, as well. So, I've since then, uh, been able to participate, of course, through harm, with Harmony, through various things like Sacred Pause and other online events and then at the last couple of world conferences as well.

Robin Linkhart 09:38

Thank you, Sean. Shelby, how about you?

Shelby Williams 09:42

So, for me, it was many years ago. I don't have the exact year, but early 2010s probably, maybe around that time, Gala had a retreat out here in Arizona at the Whispering Pines, uh, retreat, and I was able to go up there. I had some friends attending. They were, like, Hey, you should come up to this retreat. I hadn't, I'd heard of Gala at that point, but I hadn't really been involved at all, and, but I always take the opportunity here in Arizona to go up north into the mountains and I was very excited to do so, um, with some friends. And what I found when I attended the Gala retreat was, um, just this inclusive community that I fell even more in love with. So, that was kind of my first exposure to Gala, which is now Harmony. And since then, I kind of haven't been super active with them particularly until I became a member. I think it was around when they were really pushing, um, some memberships at World

Conference and it was a discounted membership and I was like, Okay, why am I not a member? I should have been a member all, all along. So, I became a member and then that's how I've silently supported the community over, over the years. Um, for me, a lot of my advocacy with the LGBTQIA+ community has been more of, um, from the youth standpoint, just being that safe space for the youth, and here in Arizona, any youth that I've come in contact with at Spectacular, any within the church and just in general, if I've had other organizations where I've been fortunate enough to work with younger folks, letting them know that, Hey, I'm a safe person. Any situation you find yourself in, feel free to talk to me. Feel free to call me. I won't ask any questions. I'll just be there to support and love you. And, so, that's kind of been my way of being an advocate for those in my life and those around me and, luckily, a lot of those youth have grown up and have become really great young adult friends for me. So, um, that's kind of been my journey with this advocacy and inclusion community.

Robin Linkhart 11:47

Thanks, Shelby. Andy, tell us your story.

Andy Markle 11:51

Yeah. Uh, so, I only recently came across Harmony, uh, as part of the Welcoming and Affirming Committee, um, with Salt Lake Community of Christ. So, I was working with, um, our congregation to become welcoming and affirming going through all of the steps. Um, it had some minor bumps in the road, but it was, uh, it was a pretty interesting, interesting, uh, experience in the sense of the education component was, uh, very similar to something that I had worked on in the past. Um, so, in, in my past, I worked, uh, primarily with Reconciling Ministries Network in the United Methodist Church that was committed to the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people, uh, within the UMC. Um, one of the things that I didn't say in my beginning is that I kind of bumbled around after I was excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and as a result of that, the United Methodist Church was my home landing pad for a minute there and then as a result of that, um, I helped create safe and affirming spaces with, inside of the UMC, particularly in the Indiana Conference of The United Methodist Church, working with congregations to facilitate, um, their movement into a reconciling church, uh, and to, to, kind of, um, as, as one of our, um, enduring principles is the worth of all people, uh, basically, was the, was the main theme there. Um, I actually ended up, uh, working very closely with a congregation that had, um, that started in 1861 in, uh, in, uh, Lafayette, Indiana, uh, which a lot of people would know as the home of Purdue University, um, and as a result of that, um, they actually became one of the first, um, reconciling congregations in Indiana, which was pretty interesting, considering most of their, uh, congregation was about 80 years old, so, it was a very different, uh, conversation, and this was more than 10 years ago, so, that, that could give you an idea it wasn't exactly, uh, a popular thing at the time. Um, but then before that, I organized inclusive events, particularly for LGBTQ+ Latter Day Saints. Um, actually, one of the catalysts for me getting excommunicated from the church was that I had created a website that allowed us to communicate with each other, kind of in secret, uh, which would allow us to not be marginalized, but to also have equal conversations. Um, it drew very close attention of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and, ultimately, its disapproval. Um, and then, despite the opposition, we still kept going with the website and continued. It's called Origins, or it was called Origins. I think it's been disbanded by now, but it was a it was a pretty interesting experiment for us at the time, considering there was no space for us to speak openly to each other. Um, and then my advocacy also has extended into the political arena. In Indiana,

I ran for state representative in direct response to House Joint Resolution Six which sought to amend the state, uh, constitution to ban same sex marriage. Um, I fought, uh, really hard to raise awareness and shift public perception in that moment. Um, we had real impact. The lawmakers tabled the resolution and prevented the permanent ban from being enshrined in the state's constitution, which was really awesome, and it was probably one of my proudest moments. I was also a member of Freedom Indiana, which was similar in the same, same vein, which was to kill additional amendments and, and other, um, bills that were directly targeting the LGBTQ+, uh, community. So, that's my, uh, little, little bit in a nutshell.

Robin Linkhart 15:04

That's awesome. I love hearing your story. And, you know, it's no, uh, coincidence that reconciling works, that, what you, uh, were studying in Salt Lake City felt familiar because Community of Christ was part of an ecumenical board that helped found that and, uh, what we use today, it stems directly from reconciling works educational materials. It's so exciting to hear how what began as humble endeavors have grown and blossomed in so many ways. Alrighty. So, this January, in 2025 you were each elected to serve on the Harmony board of directors. Before we get into the nitty gritty of your specific roles, I would really be interested in hearing what brought you to the decision to accept nomination for your new role on the Harmony board. Andy?

Andy Markle 16:00

Yeah, I would say that I accepted the nomination of the board, uh, particularly to serve as the congregational support minister, because I believe that affirming inclusive faith communities can be a lifeline, especially for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals have been harmed or excluded by religion. Throughout my own journey, I've seen the transform, transformative power of congregations that choose to fully embrace queer people, not just as attendees, but as leaders, storytellers and spiritual companions. Um, and so I think it is a really good opportunity for me, specifically, um, to be walking alongside congregations as they explore what it means to be truly welcoming and affirming, whether that involves deep listening, providing resources or simply holding space for hard conversations. Um, I see this as a ministry that's, it's more of a sacred opportunity, in my opinion, to nurture courage, compassion and justice, not only within Community of Christ, but beyond Community of Christ as well. So, that was the main reason I accepted the nomination, because I, I strongly believe in this.

Robin Linkhart 16:55

Thanks. Sean, how about you?

Sean Langdon 16:58

Yeah, I had, I mean, I knew that, uh, for a while now, that I would probably want to serve in a capacity with Harmony at some point in my journey, um, but was too busy with too much stuff, uh, within the church to be able to do that previously. And, uh, the past year has been a year of transition and a year of journey through my relationship with Community of Christ and trying to figure that out, and where do I kind of fit in, and what role do I play in today, and, um, when it was shared that the, you know, what the roles were that the people who the, the board was looking for to fulfill for the new cycle, um, and

knowing that there had been a struggle in the past to necessarily get some people to serve in leadership on the board as is always the case in leadership roles within, uh, church context it seems. I, um, recognize that this might be a good time for me to, uh, channel some of that energy and focus and, um, be in relationship with the wider community in this way, uh, knowing that I could bring my background and experience, um, with leadership to, to this role. So, um, it was kind of one of those things where I reached out to our Harmony, uh, president and said, Hey, I'm thinking about maybe throwing my hat in the ring. What do you think? And she said, Yes, please do. So, um, here I am.

Robin Linkhart 18:24

Thanks. And we're so glad you did. Shelby.

Shelby Williams 18:27

I love that I went third on this one because, listening to the two of them, that's one of the number one reasons that I joined as well. Um, I, I'm getting to work with some really great, influential leaders in the church and for such an important cause. Um, first of all, I hadn't been thinking about getting involved in another organization, because just I'm a little busy in life right now raising a toddler and I had just stepped into the volunteer role here in Arizona for the youth leader position and my husband was like, Are you serious? when I was talking to him about it. But, um, Molly, for one had, she's the current Harmony president, she had reached out to me. We were great friends at Graceland. We were both on Aponivi together, and, um, she had reached out and I said, Okay, maybe I'll think about it. Um, then Michelle, who is our past Harmony treasurer, reached out to me. We had been on Community of Christ, World Church Finance Board together while she was CFO of Community of Christ. And she was like, Hey, is this something you're thinking about? It's something you could probably take on. I said, Hmm, okay, two people. And then, of course, then I'm chatting with Sean Langdon over here and we're, we had just gone to a concert together in Vegas. Like he said, he loves going to concerts. I jumped on the opportunity to go with him to one. And I was like, If you do this, I think I'm going to have to because I really want to work with people like Sean. I want to work with people like, I, I hadn't even met Andy yet and I had heard his name, and, so, um, that all kind of came together. And then we had the end of 2025 happening. I began to fear that I wasn't doing enough for the folks I claim to support. And, so, it felt just like um, a natural step to go into an organization that was helping to provide, provide this advocacy and education and resources to give voices to those who maybe were being silenced at the time. So, that's really what came into my tipping decision to put my name on the ballot and accept the nomination, so, and I'm so glad I did.

Robin Linkhart 20:24

Well, thank you. On behalf of Community of Christ, I want to say to each of you, thank you for saying yes to this role. And, uh, I've journeyed with Harmony for several years now as a liaison Apostle and, um, golly, what, what really important work Harmony does, and, uh, Harmony is lucky to have each one of you serving in your role. So, speaking of roles, we want to hear all about your position on the board and the specific responsibilities associated with that role. So, Sean, let's start with you.

Sean Langdon 21:04

So, I did look up, uh, the bylaws to see what the bylaws had to say, um, about the role, and, um, basically, it's a lot of just gray for the vice president role. Uh, specifically, uh, I'll share that it says that we are to work in cooperation with the president, that we are being invited to share in other duties as may be prescribed by the board of directors or the president, and that we support membership activities of the corporation. Uh, so, really, it really means that I work really closely with our president, Molly Wilkins, and, uh, the vision, and helping kind of cast that vision, and what different and some different programs that I specifically will be working on. I'll share more about that here a little bit. But, um, yeah, that's, I mean, really, it's kind of a anything and everything, um, and what the needs of the board are at the time.

Robin Linkhart 21:58

That's exciting. And I can't wait to hear about the gray areas because VP, it seems like the vice president role often has this wide open space of potential assignments. Shelby.

Shelby Williams 22:12

My role as Harmony treasurer is pretty direct. Uh, main role is I supervise all the monies and funds and credits of the organization, but I also help to chair the Finance Committee which is made up of a couple additional members that work closely with me and provide information to the board on behalf of membership. So, that's a, a cool little committee. If anybody wants to join Harmony and join the Finance Committee, let me know. That's my plug. Um, the, I, I draft the monthly financial statements that the board reviews, uh, making sure that they can ask any questions, making sure that we're in line with the budget that is approved by the membership, and the finance committee reviews that budget as well. Um, currently, I'm working to get that budget approved for 2024. We had a, or 2025, we had a little late start, but we'll get that out to membership soon. And then my goal is to get the 2026 one starting and going so we can start planning ahead this next year. But along with the others, I attend those monthly board meetings, um, and my role is just do what the other board members need me to do to help support them, offer any direction or feedback or give any input. So, uh, my, I love being treasurer. It's what I do for my living. But also I get to be, um, part of the board and have fun and help make directions, the, help with the direction of Harmony into the future. So, that's what the treasurer does.

Robin Linkhart 23:38

That's exciting stuff. Andy.

Andy Markle 23:42

Yeah, uh, I serve as the congregational support minister, uh, where I focus on guiding and supporting congregations within Community of Christ as they navigate the process of becoming welcoming and affirming. Um, I think this is a really important role and I think it's, uh, very, uh, interesting to say the least because not only do I have to facilitate more of our internal facilitator role, but I also have to facilitate the external role and make sure that we're, we're still listening to congregations. So, a lot of my responsibilities include providing educational resources, which is what we've talked about kind of ad nauseum at the beginning of this, uh, facilitating workshops and conversations around inclusion, and then offering one on one support to pastors and leadership teams, uh, just in case they have questions

or anything like that about how things work. Um, I also help, uh, congregations discern their readiness. I address, um, some of the cultural concerns, sometimes theological concerns, depending on who's asking the question. Um, I've already had to do some of that this year already, which is interesting, to say the least. Um, and then I also celebrate milestones along the journey, uh, by popping in to some of the calls with facilitators as they're working, uh, to create new, welcoming and affirming congregations. Um, at the board level, I'd say I collaborate on strategic planning and help shape initiatives that advance, um, Harmony's mission for full inclusion in church life and leadership. And then, of course, uh, my work centers on building relationships and fostering understanding. And then it's, uh, I want to empower our congregations to be bold and take faithful steps towards justice and belonging within the church.

Robin Linkhart 25:06

Thanks. One of the joys that I've had, um, I attend as many board member, board meetings as I can and just being part of Harmony and supporting Harmony and watching, um, how things have evolved. I mean, Sean talked about, you know, originally the organization was called Gala, Gay and Lesbian Acceptance, and, uh, in 2019, there was a merger and a relaunch to become Harmony. And just watch as the nature of what Harmony can actually do and how they advocate has changed with the changing times all around us, but the specificity of focus that has emerged on the board and your role especially, Andy, as a congregation support minister, um, the definition and the focus and the, the program, uh, all of that has just taken such important steps forward and really into what I'm seeing now, because you'll be like the third person I think that has had this specific role in recent years and where we are now, and hearing you talk about it, and just list off all these things that are part of it, I just want to stand up and cheer. And, oh, my gosh, the number of welcoming congregations across the globe has, it, it's more than doubled. In fact, I'd have to look at it because we had almost less than a handful, I think, that were, were officially registered when this push started. And, gosh, it's just been tremendous, tremendous. Okay, as you look ahead to the rest of this year and on to 2026, what are some of the hopes and goals that you have for your role specifically, and also for Harmony as a whole? Sean?

Sean Langdon 26:58

So, one of the things that I when I first, um, got into this role and I had kind of an initial meeting with, with our president, I just talked a lot about where, where I sense is a need for connection and how important connection was going to, um, be, I think especially this year and going into next year, I think that there's, um, a lot of yearning for that, since there's a lot of discourse in the world that's not very healthy for folks, especially within our community. And, so, um, within my role, I'll be looking at ways that we can help provide opportunities for connection, and part of that comes with awareness. So, you're going to start seeing, like on our, uh, social media presence, there's more awareness about, there's a lot of those, you know, different days and focuses that throughout the year that are about, um, on the LGBTQIA+ community, that, uh, we'll start highlighting more and more, um, as we're able to just kind of bring more and more awareness and education to the broader community, um, to help provide, again, connection through that way, through awareness and advocacy. Also, our Sacred Pause and continuing to look at maybe new ways of bringing that ministry to folks, uh, keeping a, a similar, uh, way that we've done it, um, but also maybe changing it up every once in awhile, as well, to explore new ways of bringing that kind of the online worship ministry, uh, to people. Um, and, so, I have hopes of continuing to grow and expand that and seeing if we can get more and more folks involved within that

ministry. Um, it's great and it has a wonderful purpose, but there's a lot of the same folks continue to come without necessarily getting more, um, other new faces involved. And, so, I'd like to see, to see that happen, um, as well. And, then again, along the lines of those advocacy and awareness, one of the things that I had started a few years ago was something called the Coming Out Monologues, uh, for Community of Christ. And I started that when I was doing the, my work with Beyond Horizons, and then we eventually partnered with Harmony at that time. Uh, that's been on a hiatus, but that's something that we're wanting to bring back to Harmony, um, so that we can continue to highlight the stories within Community of Christ of, um, our LGBTQA+ members and friends and also allies that journey with them as well. We've had some very powerful sharing in the past of, like, parents that have shared their journey with their kid, alongside their kid, um, as well, and that's been, um, wonderful and I look forward to that. So, just looking, my hope is that we can continue to find ways to be connected, and that in my role within vice president, I want to help provide that and to help expand the circle of awareness, you know, and to draw the circle wide in terms of who is involved within our group. Um, I also, for Harmony as a whole, that I also want to continue to, um, make sure that the younger, uh, folks are aware of the work that Harmony is doing in trying to draw more and more younger voices to the mix and to encourage them to look at being a member and to having their voice heard within this as we continue to do the work that is so important within Community of Christ for inclusion.

Robin Linkhart 30:16

Thanks, Sean. So, our new treasurer, Shelby, take it away.

Shelby Williams 30:20

Yeah, for my role, specifically, um, I want to continue to just be a resource for the board if financial questions come up. Uh, I was talking with Molly last week about the budget and we were talking about some of the specifics on when you're fundraising, what, what you have to say if you want it to be a general fundraiser, very specific and working through those fundraising plans for the upcoming year. And I'd like to be that in general for the board. Uh, I also want to put some procedures into place. Our, our roles are two-year terms and putting those procedures in place will help me at the end of my two-year term to kind of do a really great hand off to the next treasurer and Michelle did great job of training me, so, I want to continue developing some of the processes to kind of automate some of the role of the treasurer so it can just happen every month to create those financial statements and some of that boring treasurer stuff. But for the organization in general, um, I mirror a lot of what Sean's hopes are. Um, in addition, I'm hoping that we are a support for those in, who need it, not just at a congre, as a congregational resource, but also on that individual member level and the non-member level, anybody who needs to be heard and supported in this environment, uh, where we are seeing a lot of silencing, I think that we can be that, um, kind of resource for them as well. So, that, I feel like that's going to be a really important role for us as a board of Harmony over the next couple years.

Robin Linkhart 31:51

Okay. Andy, take it.

Andy Markle 31:53

Uh, my hope for my role, uh, is to walk alongside even more congregations that take intentional steps toward becoming welcoming and affirming. So, not just in policy, but also in their culture, their practice

and spirit. Uh, I want to help them create more spaces where LGBTQA+ individuals feel seen, um, safe and celebrated as full participants in the life of the church. Um, I, I know that a lot of people know this or don't know this, but we have an emerging congregation in Utah right now that is almost entirely comprised of LGBTQIA+ individuals, uh, which is an amazing thing that it exists with inside of Community of Christ at the moment as well. Um, I'm also really passionate about developing new tools and resources that make the discernment process more accessible. So, especially for smaller or rural congregations who may feel isolated in this work, I am seeing that a lot with people that are coming in and asking questions or, and things like that. They're not really sure how to, how to manage this considering the political climate and things like that that we find ourselves in now. And, then, this also includes building up a network of affirming leaders, so, not just having facilitators, but also creating a leadership pool that's a, that allows people to share the stories of transformation in their own congregations, as well as their their own personal journey. And then expanding those educational opportunities that kind of meet people where they are. Um, I think accessibility is entirely huge for that. Um, so that's just for my role. For the organization as a whole, um, I think the, the vision for me particularly is continued growth, not only in membership, but in visibility and impact across Community of Christ and the broader faith landscape that exists outside of it. Um, I hope we'll deepen our partnership with the church over the next two years and amplify queer voices in leadership and boldly proclaim that love, justice and inclusion are sacred expressions of the gospel. Um, and I believe that we can help shape the church and a world where everyone belongs more effectively through what we are attempting to accomplish in the next two years. Um, so, albeit that might be through process, that might be through an expansion of sacred, um, Sacred Pause. It may be through any of the things that we've mentioned here, but I think that we have a really good opportunity to really shape, uh, the future of how we respond to things, especially in today's political climate.

Robin Linkhart 33:58

It's so exciting to hear all of you talk about this and offer your reflections and your hopes and dreams, and, um, as we look back, we can say, Look how far we've come, but as we look forward, we truly have so much further to go. So, your voices and your dreams just are so inspiring to hear today. Alrighty, so, let's talk about what's coming up for Harmony this year. I mean, what's on the calendar? What are the things that we need to make sure we don't miss? Sean?

Sean Langdon 34:33

Yeah, so, I know that, um, you know, of course, we have, uh, World Conference coming up, and leading up to that, we're going to do a, kind of a video seri, series on the enduring principles throughout the month, most, mostly May, a little bit into April, uh, two videos a week of different folks within the, uh, community and allies here within Community of Christ that will be sharing reflections on the enduring principles as a way to kind of ground us going into the World Conference experience and ground us in what we are to be about. And, so, I actually think that I can share that, that fresh off the press, because I just confirmed it with Molly, um, our president, that our guiding question for those who are going to share is going to look something like, How does embodying blank so insert the enduring principle bring hope to the world today. And, so, we'll be having different folks share perspectives on that and post them on our social media accounts leading up to World Conference. Of course, at World Conference,

uh, we, there will be, um, an event or two (. . .) so, well, I know that I'm not going this year, so I don't, I'm not as closely tied to that, but somebody else on here may be able to share more about that, if they, if they, um, have anything. Um, of course, Pride Month is, uh, in June, and we recognize that. And, so, we'll have, as we have in past years, have a special Pride Sacred Pulse, um, experience as well for that. Sacred Pause is the last, uh, Monday evening of every month. And, so, just being mindful of that, you can go to the Harmony website to find the programs and then find the Sacred Pause portion so you can sign up to receive the reminders about that and the invitation with the link to join that. And, so, I would encourage and invite folks to participate in those monthly gatherings that we do have throughout the year. In the fall, uh, we will have our first, um, since bringing it back after the hiatus of the, of the Coming Out Monologues and that'll be around the same time as National Coming Out Day which is in, um, October. And, so, just be mindful of, of that on the horizon. Um, also, if folks within, uh, our community have a story that they want to share, that they would like to share their story as part of that at some point, then I would also certainly invite you to, uh, reach out to, to me, um, so that we can talk about that as a poss, as a potential. We'll do that twice a year and we're going to, so, it'll be kind of in the fall and in the spring. So, those are some things that we have, um, I know, coming up on the horizon for this year, um, and we'll be looking at, I know, other opportunities for us to gather and create connection, and that's, of course, in the broader sense of Harmony. And I would also encourage that if you are somebody that has localized expressions that are supporting events for those in the LGBTQIA+ community, that you please share those and share them within our Harmony, uh, social, on Facebook, uh, page, uh, Facebook group, so that we can, others can be invited and be aware of those events that might be more local to them as well.

Robin Linkhart 37:45

Thanks, Sean. Uh, Sean mentioned that others on the call today, Andy and Shelby, might have additional information about what Harmony has planned for World Conference. Do either of you have any information on that?

Shelby Williams 37:58

We don't have, uh, specific information yet, but I do know that information will be coming out soon about the worship in Independence during World Conference. I believe it's going to be Wednesday, but I don't want to, like, speak incorrectly, so, but be on the lookout for that information. And if Andy had something a little different than that.

Andy Markle 38:15

I will be there and we will have a booth. So, I'm looking forward to communicating with anyone who is there.

Robin Linkhart 38:20

Yay! A booth at World Conference. Great. Alrighty. Okay, so, for those listening, how can we learn more about Harmony or get connected with Harmony? Andy?

Andy Markle 38:35

Yeah, so, if you're curious about Harmony and want to learn more about the work we're doing to create fully inclusive spaces in Community of Christ, um, I'd like to invite you to check us out on our website,

Harmony.LGBT. Um, that's our main website where you can find resources, updates and ways to get involved. Whether you're a pastor, a congregational leader, or just someone looking for a place to belong, you can contact us at any time through there. I'd also encourage everybody, as Sean said before, to follow us on Facebook. There's a lot of information that goes on there, especially, um, posting about upcoming events, um, community stories that he talked about, and then all the good things happening across the church as well. We, um, we posted the recent apostle letter as well that, that went out, uh, through there. Um, it's a great way to stay connected and be a part of the conversation. Um, and then if you have any questions, just want to talk to someone about how your congregation can start the journey, you can feel free to email me at Andy@Harmony.LGBT and I'm always happy to connect and support you wherever you are. You can also become a member of Harmony on our website, which is a wonderful way to stand with us in this work and help build a more loving and affirming church. And, so, that's all at our website.,Harmony.LGBT.

Robin Linkhart 39:35

Thank you, Andy. So, you each have shared a little bit of your personal story, um, what brought you to, to saying yes, um, to accepting a nomination for the roles that you were elected to serve in, and also kind of your background connection with Harmony? I want to dig a little deeper on this question and ask you, How has the work and efforts of Harmony made a difference in your life, personally. Andy?

Andy Markle 40:05

Uh, I, I would say that it's made a profound difference in my life. I, I know that I'm relatively new to Harmony, uh, but I'm not new to the reconciling work that is, that Harmony is assigned to. Um, over time, um, I would say that I had to choose between my identity and my spirituality. Quite often, uh, my sexuality and my, uh, my religious expression were not one in the same, and they could never be one in the same. But through this community and reconciling communities like Reconciling Ministries Network, I've discovered that not only do those parts of me belong together, but they actually strengthen each other, uh, which was a really awesome way to kind of, um, come to terms with the way that this works. Um, I also believe that, particularly when I interact with board members of Harmony or even, uh, congregational facilitators, it's given me the space to fully be myself, uh, while being fully engaged in church life. Um, that is something that has been extremely difficult for me in my past, um, but it has shown me that there is a place in the body of Christ for queer voices, queer leadership and queer theology, which is, is really different in comparison, uh, to my previous experience. I think most people know what that is and I also have a PZP episode that's just on my, my traumas, though, if you want to go through that, you can. Um, but it's been incredibly healing, I think, especially coming from faith traditions where that message wasn't present at all. Um, and, so, I think that, uh, being part of Harmony is also connecting me with a wider network of people who are more passionate about justice, inclusion and sacred community. It's also reminded me that we don't do this work alone. Every welcoming, affirming congregation, every testimony shared, every conversation that moves from fear to understanding is all that matters, um, and it's deeply changed how I show up in the world, both inside and outside of the church.

Robin Linkhart 41:49

Thank you, Andy, and I think at this point I do want to make our listeners aware of the wonderful interview you shared with Project Zion Podcast on Fair Trade Series, and we'll have a link to that in our show notes. Shelby, how about you?

Shelby Williams 42:05

For me, Harmony's allowed me to practice a more out loud support as an ally to this beautiful and diverse community. I've typically been one that kind of does more of the quiet, like, one on one work with folks and not been super loud on social media or super loud in person, um, as much as I've wanted to. And I think in this space, it's allowed me to step out of my comfort zone a little bit, be more of the true ally that I've wanted to be in the past. And it's helped me fi, find that space where the skills that I have in, in accounting and being a treasurer for this organization has allowed me to share skills in a way that also allows me to speak for justice for a community that needs it. And, so, I've been very fortunate to be, uh, become a member, not only just a member, but be allowed to be on a board that makes such a difference. So, for me, personally, it's just been something that's helped me to be a better human and a better ally for a community.

Robin Linkhart 43:12

Thank you. Sean.

Sean Langdon 43:16

Yeah, for me, there is, um, there's, you know, there's no separation of who I am as a spiritual being, who I am as in all the ways that I am human, who I am as a queer person. And, so, because of that, I chose, um, the anniversary of my confirmation as the day for my Coming Out Day, uh, which was December 5. And Harmony, I think, has gone a long ways, um, in my own life and as well, but, but also because of what it's in the life of the church to help bridge those connections between who we are as spiritual people, who we are as a religion, who we are, um, as Community of Christ, and recognizing the worth and value in folks. And though I would say we definitely have a long ways to go and, um, I think what is going on, um, just in our culture right now, again, that is, it's a reminder that we have to stay focused on the work we're doing here within Community of Christ, um, because there are always voices that will pull us back, um, or pull people back within the community that might set us back as well. And, so, the work that we do is so important within, um, this, this nonprofit organization, uh, that we serve in leadership for and get to partner with so many amazing people with. I, I mentioned national conference earlier, um, and I, I, you know, again, I don't think that we would be at the place that we were at at that time if it weren't for the past work of Harmony that le, helped lead us to that point within the history of Community of Christ. So, even from a broader sense, there's just no, um, way of, of not recognizing the connection or impact that it has had on, on my experience, on my, the difference it has made in my life and the life of so many people that I've, I've been able to encounter, um, and journey alongside.

Robin Linkhart 45:14

Thank you so much, Sean. Really appreciate that. Okay, let's say that I am someone listening to this podcast today and I really, really want to support what Harmony is doing, but the reality is, my life is just so busy that I don't see myself having any time to sign up for extra stuff right now. So, if I'm listening and I'm in that position, how can I best support Harmony? Shelby.

Shelby Williams 45:45

So, the easiest way to support is financially, obviously. So by becoming a member. Um, we have a really great website, thanks to past board members and past work on, on the website. And, so, you can sign up as a member and it can auto renew annually if you want it to. Uh, we have several different options. You can sign up as an individual for \$30 a month. You can sign up as a couple for \$50, so, it's a little bit of a discount in that sense. Um, or if you have a household that wants to support and become members, it's \$70. We also have options for students at \$10 and limited income, which allows folks to join our membership for whatever they want to donate, uh, if it could, if it's just \$1 that you can do, but you want to become that member and show your support as part of a Harmony membership, uh, you can join it for as little as whatever you can donate. Um, there's also scholarships available, so we're, we're saying, No questions asked. You can become a member for free. We want, um, to support all folks that want to be members of Harmony. Uh, these are all the annual options. Recently, we've had a good push for monthly donors. So, on top of your membership, if you feel that this is an organization that you really want to stand behind, you can sign up on our website. Again, that's harmony.LGBT. Uh, you, there's a, a button that says, Become a monthly donor. And, so, you can sign up as a monthly donor. You can end that whenever you want. Uh, recently, we've launched some really cool merch sells. So, if you want to support us by marketing with T-shirts or bags, uh, there's other options on the website. They're really cool this year. We have some that are supporting kind of World Conference and some that are Pride specific, uh, but those are out there now on our social media. You can find a link on the website as well, and those are live right now. So, go and check out our merch sales. Those are very exciting. And if you cannot participate financially at all, or you don't want to become a member just yet, I'd say, um, please visit our socials, share our posts, interact on the posts, go to the Sacred Pause, uh, be active in whatever ways you can, whenever you can. You don't have to do it every month. It's not something that we're holding your feet to the fire to do, but just make sure that you attend when you feel like you can, and we will be there for you. So.

Robin Linkhart 48:10

Thanks, Shelby. Sean or Andy, do you have any other ideas on how folks could best support Harmony if they can't sign up for a job or, uh, something concrete?

Sean Langdon 48:21

I just wanted to highlight another, um, opportunity for giving, um, and that's also, like, on Facebook, when you can do your, a birthday, uh, fundraiser for your birthday, you can direct that towards harmony as well. And, so, that's a great way to, um, bring in resources from folks who may not even know yet about Harmony that are in your circle. Uh, I know that I've, when I've done that in the past, I've been able to see friends who aren't even affiliated with Community of Christ that will, that will give as part of the birthday fundraiser. And, so, I just want to, uh, lift up that as well as we look at various ways of, um, getting resources to do the work that we do from, from folks that may not be already in our immediate circle.

Robin Linkhart 49:05

Great ideas. Alrighty. I want to just take a quick opportunity to ask you if there's anything else that you would like to share with our listeners today that I have not already asked you about. Shelby.

Shelby Williams 49:20

I don't have anything else. Just wanted to make sure that those listeners know that you all are loved and that we've lov, we'd love to have you come and participate in any way you can with Harmony.

Robin Linkhart 49:32

Andy?

Andy Markle 49:33

Yeah, I would say that if you're listening and wondering where to even begin, uh, whether someone seeking belonging or a congregation asking the question, Are we ready? Uh, you don't have to have it all figured out. Just start with openness. Ask questions. Reach out. You're not alone in this work. Um, and through Harmony and the people who made space for me, I've learned that you can be queer and you can be faithful. They're not in conflict with each other. They're beautifully intertwined. And that's the gift that I've received, and that's how I feel, uh, called to offer that same experience for others. And to the allies out there, you don't have to be perfect. You just need to show up with love and a willingness to listen and grow. Your presence matters more than you know. Um, and then also, I just want to say that I'm super grateful for the church and for this movement to serve in the role that I'm in and to witness the incredible courage and compassion of people that are building a more inclusive and more Christlike church. This is sacred work and it's worth every step.

Robin Linkhart 50:24

Thanks, Andy. Sean.

Sean Langdon 50:27

Yeah, I just want to uphold the importance and value of what folks are doing there at the grassroots level in your own areas. Um, the work that we do is not fully, cannot fully become who we are called to be as Harmony, as Community of Christ, if we don't have folks in local congregations, in local ministries, new expressions of community, at camps, um, that are upholding this message of inclusion and helping, um, draw the circle wide and to create more awareness of what's, um, happening. Let the voices within the LGBTQIA+ community, uh, lead the way. Uh, let them hear their stories and learn from that and then help share that as with others what you, what you lead as, what you learn as the components of those stories which you learn as the principles of those stories to help widen the circle of inclusion within who we are as a people of faith. I also cannot, um, say enough about the importance of allyship within our community. Um, we, we will not be able to go where we are called to go if allies do not also step up and to help partner in the movement. Um, and, so, I just want to lift that up. And I want to lift that up that that doesn't just happen in the context of Community of Christ as a denomination. It needs to happen in the context of who you are as a citizen of the world as well, and who we all are as citizens of the world.

Robin Linkhart 51:56

Well, Andy, Sean and Shelby, I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for making time in your day to be with us, to share your personal stories, to help all of us understand more about Harmony and the good, sacred work that, uh, you and we are doing together, and to recognize the prophetic

voice that has resonated in what you've shared with us today. Thank you so, so much. If you would like to hear more from Harmony, check out these episodes. Number 537381 and 207 on Project Zion Podcast. And also the most recent one is 709. You can also find links in the show notes for today's episode for key topics and everything that we have mentioned in our conversation today that you can find out more about with the link. As always, a very special thanks to all of you, our listeners, for spending a portion of your day with us. This is your host, Robin Linkhart, and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take good care. Bye, bye.