

394 | Historic Sites Foundation Spring Lecture Series | Carl Mesle: Pastor in a Time of Turmoil

Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome. This is Cuppa Joe, where we explore Restoration history. And I'm your host for this series, Karin Peter. Our guest today is Sherry Mesle-Morain and we are so glad that she is here with us. Now, Sherry's retired now, but before that she worked in higher education, including the Director of Financial Aid Services at Graceland University, which is the Community of Christ University in Lamoni, Iowa. She has served in city government and volunteers in community projects. She's also served as President and as Executive Director of John Whitmer Historical Association. So, some of our listeners may already be familiar with Sherry. She's also a quilter and participates, when COVID is not happening, in the Lamoni Mite Society which is the longest continuously running quilting society in the state of Iowa, and there are a lot of quilting societies in Iowa so, that is quite a feat. Sherry is one of the featured presenters in the Historic Sites Foundation's Spring Lecture Series. And her lecture is titled, "Carl Mesle: A Pastor in a Time of Turmoil." And that is an intriguing title. So, hi, Sherry.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 01:53

Hi there, Karin. How are you?

Karin Peter 01:56

I'm good. And I'm so glad that you've agreed to be our guest today here at Cuppa Joe on Project Zion. I think maybe a good way to, kind of, start our conversation about your lecture might be for us to hear just a little bit about Carl Mesle, who was your father. Can you just give us a little biography of him to get us started?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 02:21

A short biography? Certainly. Yes, Dad was born in upstate New York in Oneida, New York, where the Oneida community was. He, that's where he was born. He grew up in Sherrill, New York, the little town right next door where Oneida Silver was. His father worked for Oneida Silver from the time he was 14 years old until he retired in 1950. And that, that's important a little bit later. Dad was a Boy Scout from the beginning. In fact, he was an Eagle Scout at age 14, so that he could go on the ship with the group to the International Boy Scout Jamboree in England. That year he was four-, they were gone for seven weeks. He was just 14 years old.

Karin Peter 03:07

What year was that, Sherry?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 03:09

That would have been '28, '27.

Karin Peter 03:13

Yeah, on a ship. Wow. Okay.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 03:16

Yeah, he kept a daily journal. His desire was to be a professional Boy Scout. And he was. First, he went to Graceland College. And then he graduated from the University of Iowa in 1937 with a BA in History.

Karin Peter 03:35

Good for him.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 03:38

And then, he went to fulfill his dream of being a Boy Scout executive. He went to the Schiff Scout Reservation, which was the professional scouting training camp, and did the training there and then became a field executive in Camden, New Jersey, which was the, one of the roughest inner cities in the area. And he taught the boys camping. They went camping when they were 14 and 15 years old. And that was the first time they had been out of the city. Of course, Dad learned what it was like to live in the city. And then he was called by Uncle Sam in 1940 to join the army, which he did. He was, he went to Officer Candidate School, and then worked with the Office Chief of Engineers as the Chief of Technical Information, which allowed him to work with all kinds of personnel from privates to actually with the Secretary of War, Stimson. And then, after the war, he came to Kansas City to be a Boy Scout field executive. And in '46, he was invited by F.M. Smith to go under appointment. And Dad decided, no, he really needed to stick with scouting at the time. Then 1947, it was Israel A. Smith who invited him to go under appointment. So, he and Mom said that would be a good, that would be a good thing for him. So, he became, he went under appointment in 1947, beginning as the Center Stake Youth Director until 1951. And then he was the World Church Youth Director for a few more years. Camping was a very big part of that which was a love of Dad's. Then he was changed to Ministry to College and University and to Military Personnel, which he did for 10 years. And then, in 1967 he was assigned Family Coordinator of Family, Coordinator of Family Life, sorry, until in 1970 he was asked to be the pastor of the Stone Church.

Karin Peter 05:57

So, we're going to pick up from there. But before we do that, for our listeners, I just want to clarify when Sherry talks about her father going under appointment, that was when people agreed to work full time for the church, which at that time would have been the RLDS church. And when a family went under appointment, it wasn't just the male who was being paid. It was a family endeavor because it would significantly reduce one's income. It was an act of sacrifice and service, and the church pretty much told you what your job was going to be. You are assigned to specific ministries. So, to go under appointment means a lot more than just taking full time employment with the church.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 06:49

Well done.

Karin Peter 06:50

Okay, so let's, kind of, start from there. Your lecture that is on the Historic Sites Foundation website focuses on Carl's time at what we call Stone Church and many of our listeners might be unfamiliar with what that is. So, before we begin, we need a short primer. What is Stone Church? And where is Stone Church?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 07:15

Certainly. The Stone Church is located in Independence, Missouri, about a half mile west of the Independence Square, which is a proper square, I should add. The cornerstone was laid in a 1888 [correct date-1888]. It was completed in time for the first worship service in 1892. So, that took a few years of building. It seated 1500 people, and it was used for the church's General Conference until the Auditorium was built in 1928. General Conference was an every-other-year, total church conference. Delegates came and so on. It was referred to as the "Mother Church" and was the, served as the official pulpit of the RLDS church from which the First Presidency delivered information they wanted to share with the entire membership. The Auditorium was built in 1928, and it's a huge building which housed the church headquarters and a number of offices and so on. The Stone Church sits directly across the street from what's called the Temple Lot. The Temple Lot was designated by Joseph Smith and his group as the center of the center of Zion. And so, it was a desirable piece of property. I, kind of, referred to it as the "Reorganization's original sin", that they coveted that piece of property. The Stone Church looked across that piece of property to the south, and when this Auditorium was built, then they could see the Auditorium because the Hedrickites, who own the Temple Lot, had just a small church building on it, a modest one. So, they had the view of the Auditorium when it was built. In the 1950s it had a membership of 2000 and a regular attendance of about 800. It had active programs for all ages. For boys, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts. For girls, Skylarks, Orioles. Zion's league for teenagers and so on. They had three worship services every Sunday, an 8:15, an 11 o'clock and then an evening worship service. And they had Sunday school classes for every age. So, it was a very busy, prosperous church. They did build an extension. No, extension isn't quite right word, an attachment, called Partridge Hall, which served as an educational building where they had dinners and so on. More about that later. Yeah, I think that probably does it right now.

Karin Peter 09:59

Is this also, was the Stone Church where the radio broadcast emanated from?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 10:04

Yes, it was. Yes, it was, yes. And Dad did some. Yeah.

Karin Peter 10:09

All right. So, when the RLDS church had a little radio broadcast system going on, the pulpit from Stone Church would be the center of that as well. It really, for people who grew up in the RLDS tradition of that time, Stone Church, you know, to go back to Independence for a Conference and then go to worship at Stone Church was a really big deal. It's a beautiful building as well.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 10:35

It is.

Karin Peter 10:36

So, you made a comment, and I found it in the short synopsis of your lecture, that your father kept every piece of paper he ever penned, or that he ever received. And so, I'm assuming that wading through this mountain of paper must have been quite a project as you, kind of, decided on the topic that you were going to focus on for your paper about Carl Mesle. So, how did you select this, "A Time of Turmoil" that we've got going on here, that we're going to talk about?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 11:11

It was a treasure hunt through all of his papers, and they were covered all over the living room. It was Don Landon who suggested that particular time of church history for Dad because he felt he was so instrumental at maintaining the Stone Church. He had to take care of both the conservatives, and we'll talk about that in "The Time of Turmoil", but the conservatives and the progressives, without alienating them. And Pat Spillman said, "You know, nobody was a better tight-walker than your dad, in terms of ministering to both groups at the Stone Church. Yeah.

Karin Peter 11:54

So, it surprises sometimes our friends who come to us from the Latter-Day Saint tradition that we have a long history of division and disagreements and trying to navigate everybody's perspective, diverse opinions and perspectives in Community of Christ. And we're very comfortable disagreeing with one another. So, I look forward to hearing how that worked out. So, as we go on, you had said that it was after Carl had served in many different positions at headquarters that he was assigned as pastor at Stone Church. Now most Community of Christ congregations don't have full time pastors. So, why did Stone Church receive a full time, church paid, church assigned pastor? What was, what made it so important?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 12:50

Interesting question. I don't know when they started paying Stone Church pastors, you know, full time, but it was the "Mother Church". It continued to be the "Mother Church". Dad called it our cathedral. It was in the center place. It was distinctive. It was a community icon, if you will. At the time, I think they'd already been paying pastors. In fact, Dad even got an assistant pastor, whom they paid a bit, was not exactly volunteer, not full time but, yeah. It was an important by where it was, what it was, its representation in the community of Independence, Missouri,

Karin Peter 13:38

So, it was a very symbolic edifice about who the church was and why we were there.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 13:45

Yes.

Karin Peter 13:46

Okay. Excellent. All right. So, "The Time of Turmoil", let's talk about that. You talk about several areas of turmoil in the life of the church and one was internal turmoil, one was neighborhood turmoil, and then you had some turmoil with the building. So, let's talk about those. You can take them in any order you want.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 14:11

Okay. Internally, what was going on in the larger church, and I don't know how much your listeners know about this turmoil, but the membership had considered themselves, all along, as the one true church of Christ on Earth. And clearly the conservatives continued that. But something was happening in the church leadership. There were, as a group of young appointees, whom Dad mentored, who were taking courses at St. Paul's Seminary, just a few miles down the road in Kansas City. They were studying theology, scripture, the history of Christianity, and so they were broadening their horizons and had a larger understanding of Christianity. They persuaded the President to hold what was called the Joint Council Seminars for church leadership. They invited three of the St. Paul professors to come over. And they went, they talked through some of these issues, church, the one true church or a church of mission with a message for the world. And toward the close of this, the, one of the professor's said, I think he asked it directly of W. Wallace, "If you had to choose, would you choose the words of Joseph Smith or would you choose the words of Jesus Christ?" And without hesitating, Wallace Smith said, "Jesus Christ". So, that was where, really, and Peter Judd really explains this so well. That was really how it happened that the church leadership assumed the position and the facilitation of becoming a church of mission to the community and to the world. But that created such heartache and bitterness in the membership, particularly the conservatives. And I was aware of some of that as I became a young adult. You cannot underestimate what this did to the church. It threatened to tear the RLDS church apart. And, in a sense, it did because there were splinters and splinters of splinters. So, that was, and that, the Stone Church was, of course, an aging congregation, and there were conservatives, and there were progressives there. And so, that was a large focus of the small piece of the greater turmoil, if you will. And Dad, Dad walked into the middle of that, and had to minister to both sides, to all people.

Karin Peter 17:05

So, what years, approximately, are we talking about here?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 17:10

This, well, Dad was pastor from '70 to '79, but it was in the '60s. And what was going on nationally, as your audience recalls, was the turmoil nationally of the '60s. And that was part of this. And the church was afraid that as young people grew up, they would not accept some of just basic teachings of being the one true church and not Mormon. And so, they might lose them altogether and not have a church.

Karin Peter 17:37

Right.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 17:37

So, it was, yeah.

Karin Peter 17:39

So, W. Wallace Smith, for our listeners who have kind of followed the podcast series, we've had some conversation about Joseph Smith III, who was the first President of the RLDS church. W. Wallace Smith was his son by his third wife. His first wives had passed away, I'm pretty sure by his third wife.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 18:02

Ada.

Karin Peter 18:03

So, he would have been the fourth president of the Reorganization.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 18:07

Yes.

Karin Peter 18:08

And he was the '60s, and '70s. He was the first President of the church that I met, and that I got to meet personally. Okay, so that kind of sets that if we could look in the greater context, what was going on in the '60s, was affecting the church, just like it affects every aspect of culture and the church responds, like the church has for centuries, has responded to what's going on in the culture. So, progressive, conservative conflict. So, what's happening in the neighborhood then, around the church.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 18:45

In the neighborhood, in the area around the Stone Church, the Center Stake office, because the church was divided into stakes in different areas of the country, the auditorium, which was the church headquarters, and the Independence Square, just a half a mile up the road, was becoming a too typical inner city with changes that were pulling in crime and drugs. And because of social and economic issues, it was just too typical of what was happening in inner cities. A letter from the Center Stake officials, and the pastor of the Stone Church at the time, this was in '79, '69, sorry, to the church leadership, the presidency, and the bishopric and the apostle in charge of the Stone Church at the time, in which they said, "We share with knowledgeable men of Independence that the trend is yet to run its course and will not be halted until large sums of money are invested by the right people for the right reasons". And I would like to digress with a little story here. Okay, so this was in '69. In the 1890s, 1990s, a man named Ken MacLaine and his wife, Cindy, were the right people with the right money. And they started investing in the town, the city of Independence. First, along the main corridor, Truman Road, rebuilding some of the houses, renovating the houses, and then on the Independence Square, rejuvenating the businesses there, and so on. And they, theirs is a story to tell. And I would love to have one of these groups, contact them to tell their story. Ken has, is a part of a major law firm in Independence so, he earns the money and Cindy is the one who does all of the facilitating, getting these businesses going. She's the business mind and so on. So, it really was, it's pretty cool. What they have done with Independence. Yeah. Okay. Anything else about the neighborhood right now?

Karin Peter 21:12

No, I think a lot of folks who are familiar with what happened in the late '60s, early '70s, to communities that were located right around huge urban centers are aware that this is a common factor where people move away from the inner cities. There's a lot of "white flight" away from inner cities during that period of time. And, yeah, so that gives us kind of an idea. And here is Community of Christ, the RLDS center of the church, right in the midst of all of that. So, what about the building? What was happening with it that was a problem?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 21:48

Okay, the stained-glass windows were eighty-six years old. They leaked. It was drafty. In fact, it was so cold in the wintertime, the furnace couldn't keep up with the, in the sanctuary. And so, they had to meet downstairs. So, that was not, that was one. They also had to replace the pipe organ and that was the third pipe organ in the church. So, Dad loved good music. So, that was dear to his heart as well. And then the other was that some of the stones in the foundation were deteriorating, creating hazardous condition. So, they had to be repaired. Yeah, the congregation in 1968, had identified these and had begun setting money aside for them. But it was the new pastor in 1970, who had to make these things happen. And so, this is what Dad was meeting physically as he came into this congregation in turmoil.

Karin Peter 22:47

So, it was an older congregation that was having some inner dialogue that caused some conflict. And in the middle of it, you have some major expenses with the building. And it's a question of what are we going to do about the building and the surrounding neighborhood? So, there's a lot going on all at the same time. And here comes Carl Mesle, into the middle of it, new pastor. Yippee! This will be fun. So how did he navigate all of this? I mean, that's a lot. Now, you said he was a good tightrope walker. There's a lot of skills besides that needed here. What happened and what went according to plan and what didn't?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 23:28

The first story I want to tell you has to do with the windows. They hired a Catholic designer to, the committee hired a Catholic designer, to help them decide what windows and how to do the windows, and then his team would do the windows. And so, he said, "Well, there were three major windows in addition to the others, but in one location, there were three major windows. And so, the big question was, what are we going to do with these three windows? Are we going to put Moses or Jesus or Joseph or what are we going to do? And Dad said, "Well, we have three books. Why don't we take something from each of the three books?" And Ron Dixon, the designer, said, "What three books?" And Dad gave him the CliffsNotes version of church history, and explained the three books. And so, each one of those windows represents one, the *Bible*, one, the *Book of Mormon*, and one, the *Doctrine and Covenants*. And people were happy with that. It also showed Dad's conservative side, his attachment to the church in church history. Yeah, that's one of my favorite stories. You know, I'm going to continue right now, because when they took the old windows out, the stained-glass was beautiful. And my mother, Kay Sprague-Mesle, Dad's good wife, learned how to do leaded glass work. And whenever she traveled, when she and Dad traveled, she would look for stained glass pieces. She would buy them. She would bring them home and then copy them as best she could. And they sold them at the annual Williamsburg festival, it was called at the Stone Church, which was a fundraiser and a social event and so on. And sold them to help pay for the windows that were being installed. And in the lecture tonight, I have a couple of pictures of those pieces that I have. They're... Yeah. Yeah. So,

Karin Peter 25:27

Oh, marvelous. Alright. We want to hear a little bit about how he navigated. I think that the windows are a good illustration of, kind of, appealing to both the conservative and the progressive with the new windows and the repair. But what other skills did he need? And what was a, what was a positive situation? And maybe what was more difficult?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 25:56

Okay, I heard Dad say a lot, "I am not a theologian. I am a minister of people." When I was doing my research for my original paper. I asked them to tell me about Dad and how he approached people. And they said that he didn't tell them what he thought. He said to them, "Tell me what these changes mean for you. How are they affecting you?" And then, he listened. And everyone I talked to said he listened. Bud Sheehy described him as not the sage on the stage rather, the guide by your side, although Dad was a good speaker. He and Mom started a luncheon, a luncheon on Sunday noon, yeah, Sunday noon meal for mostly people out of town. But it gave them an opportunity to have conversation with the speaker at the service that morning. He did this so that, instead of saying, "Oh, I've heard of him. Oh, he's awful." They could meet him and talk to him and exchange ideas, and learn that he was a good man, even though they disagreed. So, this is one of those themes with Dad. And he had several ways of doing that. He pulled together a team of leaders every month, following the evening service at Mom and Dad's house for refreshments and conversation. And this team and these, this team of leaders and Dad talked about, what are the problems? What's going well? How can we solve our problems? What do we need to do? And so on. They were very effective at doing that. And that meant that all those leaders had a sense of Dad. Remember, he was a professional volunteer trainer. He had learned that at the Schiff Scout Reservation, training to be as field executive. So, volunteer training was one of Dad's real strengths. And he used that with his team leaders in the congregation. These were volunteer leaders in the congregation. And he wanted a mix of conservatives and progressives in that, in that group, in that discussion. He instituted a regular newsletter for the church membership every month to, kind of, let them know what was going on because not everybody knew everything that was going on. So, those things worked. Another thing that he did was to invite some of the progressives to come speak in the pulpit. That had not been done. Before Dad came, it was mostly church leaders, the bishop, the President, and the, you know, the Stake President and the, some of the prominent people in the congregation, and so on. So, it was mostly the conservatives who would speak. I looked at the records of who spoke a couple of years before Dad became pastor, and a couple of years after he came pastor, and he started inviting more progressives. He wanted them to hear them. And again, say, "I may disagree with him, but he's a good man." Now, one of the interesting fun stories was when he invited Richard P. Howard.

Karin Peter 29:32

Hahaha. Let's tell our listeners who that would be.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 29:36

He would, okay, he was one of the most effective church historians. If you want to embellish that, please feel free and then I will continue my story.

Karin Peter 29:47

Well, a delightful church historian who, kind of, spearheaded, if you will, the church's ability to accept some new understandings about church history that had previously really been rejected by the church. And it wasn't easy for him. He suffered for that.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 30:07

It was, his wife, Barbara, refers to it as true history. So, Dad, one year, invited Dick to come speak, and between services, the early service, he spoke, and then there's Sunday school and then there's the late church service. Between services he went, he attended Thelona Steven's Sunday school class. Thelona was one of, who prided herself on knowing the *Book of Mormon*. She was the one who introduced Braille documents for church readers who were blind. So, she was a good woman. But she was very conservative. And she was talking about the *Book of Mormon*, and Dick commented in her class, that actually, the Inspired Version was in the *Book of Mormon*. And then he gave people the Inspired Version. And she changed the subject from the Inspired Version to something else. And after the service, after she heard him preach, she went through the line and said to him, "Thank you. I enjoyed your service. Your, I enjoyed your comments. Thank you very much." But then, the next morning, she went into Dad's office, and she said, "If you ever invite him to speak again, at the Stone Church, I will never come back here." We don't know what Dad's response was. But Dick says, "Yes, I did not speak again at the Stone Church. So..."

Karin Peter 31:39

So, a couple of things I want our listeners to pull out of that. One is that this was the 1970s, when she was teaching the adult Sunday school class. This was before women were ordained.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 31:52

Yes.

Karin Peter 31:53

So, she was a very powerful women in the congregation, teaching a class that included men and women, priesthood members and non-priesthood members. So, I just want to call people's attention to that. And it's interesting how, when a powerful person who doesn't have authorized power, but has unauthorized power, can change how things happen in the life of congregations. Absolutely. Yes, I've had people say that to me, after I've preached, "That was very nice." And then later, "I don't ever want her to come back." So, yes, that still happens. Okay, so, your father was able to navigate this by what we would call, kind of, in our lingo of our business or education lingo at this time, excellent communication skills, excellent team building skills, excellent listening skills. And that whole idea of collecting leaders from all perspectives to get up these diverse opinions, not just relying on one specific perspective to lead the congregation. So, everybody had ownership in what was happening in that. So, as you look at that, and how he navigated some of these more difficult situations. What were some of the lessons, important lessons that we learned in that? What did Stone Church, as a whole, what can we look back and go, okay, from Mesle's tenure as pastor, here's what we learned that we can carry forward.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 33:33

Let's touch on the neighborhood turmoil first.

Karin Peter 33:35

Okay. Excellent.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 33:36

Okay, yeah, because the neighborhood was in turmoil, and it was discouraging. Okay, so the first thing that Dad did as pastor was to establish a preschool at the church, so that parents in the neighborhood, open to any parents, not just church members, parents in the neighborhood could use the preschool to have their children there while they went to work so that financially they could meet their family's needs. The other thing that he did, he was a community developer.

Karin Peter 34:07

Along with everything else.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 34:09

Everything else, and he assembled a group, with the permission and acquiescence and teamwork of O.C. Henson, who was the stake president, treasurer, and Jerry Winship, who was the Stone Church Bishop's agent. He held a group of 20 volunteers. They contributed \$25 each month, each month for three or four years. At, to address the issue of affordable housing in the McCoy neighborhood. The Stone Church was located in the McCoy neighborhood. Independence had 42 different neighborhoods and each one had a name. So, they enlisted the assistance of a successful builder in town, the head of whom was a member of the church, and he had an idea for this affordable housing building. These 20 people assumed a 40 year mortgage in order to build that building, to provide affordable housing for those who were low income, for seniors, for the disabled, and so on. It's three stories, I think. And it's still there. Okay. So, that was, and then, oh, just recently, yeah, about four years ago, it was sold for, to a private corporation for \$4.4 million.

Karin Peter 35:40

That's quite an investment those 20 families made.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 35:44

Okay. And then he also initiated, now, you understand he didn't do this all by himself. He pulled people into his web. He initiated the Independence Neighborhood Councils. There were 42 neighborhoods and each one had its own Neighborhood Council under an umbrella Neighborhood Council group. They provided an instrument for everyone who lived in the neighborhood, whether they were owners or renters, to have an active voice in how the neighborhood would be run, activities, social activities, neighborhood watch, and so on. So, that was another thing that he did. He and Mom instituted a weekly Wednesday luncheon, free, for the homeless, the lonely, the elderly, to come and have a free meal, and those who needed better diets. They also, for those who could not get to the church, took meals to their homes. Then they collaborated with other church and this became the Meals on Wheels program in Independence. So, they also, this was probably a hard one for the conservatives to handle, but Dad did it. One year, the Waldo Baptist Church, which was just around the corner from the Stone Church, had a fire that destroyed the church. Housed in that church was their Christian School for students, K through 10, I think for some reason. They had 250 students and no place for them to go to school. So, the Stone Church reached out to them. And they held classes in the Partridge Hall, the educational building I talked about. Their student classes were on floors A and C and the preschool continued on floor B. So, that was another way of serving non-RLDS members in the community. And then Dad also joined the Independence Ministerial Alliance, which was one more indication of being a part of the greater Christian community, rather than the one true church, separate from the world. Yeah.

Karin Peter 38:14

So, he really led the way, especially there at Stone Church, in the 1970s, as we began to look around us and say, "This isn't about us. This is about what's going on actively in the world as it changes and how do we respond to that?" So, we would call it now social justice kinds of activities, where we talk about pursuing peace on and for the earth, some of our mission initiatives. This was kind of the leading edge of that happening in Independence and also leading the way for congregations around the world to do the same. This was new stuff for the church.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 38:54

Yeah, yes, yes.

Karin Peter 38:56

Very much so, and continues to this day. Stone Church is still actively involved in feeding the neighborhood and caring for the neighborhood. So, yes. Okay. So, let's go back then to, what did we learn through this, through the way your father navigated all this turmoil?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 39:14

Okay. One of the things Dad did, he was very effective at bringing people together, people who's had needs, real needs, and those who could help address those needs and offer solutions and programs to assist. He was very good at that. He was able to meet their emotional and program needs as well as their intellectual needs. He was a professional volunteer trainer at heart, and so, he guided, as I'd mentioned before, his volunteer leaders in the congregation in the team effort, rather than being top-down, "Here's what you need. Let's do it." So, it was from the roots up. He essentially was good at identifying and meeting people who had needs. If you don't know them, you can't know their needs. So, he was really good at identifying and meeting the people's needs, by meeting with people, and by collaboration with those who could help provide the services that were necessary. Yeah.

Karin Peter 40:24

So, all things that we still seek to do today. We seek to be visionary in what's happening in the world, and how can we participate. We seek to network with one another, and address people who have needs with those who can help. We need the pastoral skills that your father modeled in, what is the Lincoln book, the "team of rivals" was that the phrase? It sounds almost like that when you talk about his team building ability, with different perspectives, and some [inaudible] good to talk about a lot today, and that is shared leadership, leading together, rather than top-down. [inaudible] is something that's been modeled more and more in the life of the church. So, what do you think, not just as daughter, but also as someone who's now researched and gone through this mountain of paperwork and talked to all these different people? What do you think is the lasting legacy of his tenure as pastor at Stone Church?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 41:26

Well, the real ones are the priesthood, the preschool still continues today. Heritage House, that affordable housing is still there and serving people. I walked by it a couple of weeks ago and asked my son, who lives in the neighborhood, you know, is this functioning? "Yes, Mom." The Wednesday noon free meal still continues. The Independence Neighborhood Councils are going strong. Dad, that was

one of Dad's favorite activities in retirement. And he wrote and edited their monthly newsletter in the McCoy neighborhood, which he called *The Real McCoy*. That's the name of the newsletter.

Karin Peter 42:07

I love it.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 42:08

Yeah. Meal on Wheels, of course, is still going and the Independence Minister membership continues. So, those are the lasting legacy that you can point to that are the many vehicles that still serve individuals and community.

Karin Peter 42:25

Ecumenical relationships, community service and ministries of justice and peacemaking. Yeah. All still going strong at Stone Church. So, now, let's go back to you as daughter. What is most meaningful to you from your father's ministry?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 42:47

Thank you for asking me to think about this. You know, I've been so involved in the research that sometimes you don't stop and think. So, your questions have been very helpful. Um, one of the things that I value most is that he cared about people on the fringes. He reached out to them, protected them and he helped them grow. And do we have time for a story?

Karin Peter 43:12

Absolutely.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 43:15

One of the stories came from a woman who was a big fan of Dad's. As a young woman, she worked in the foyer of the Auditorium as the, as the operator and as guide services. And one day a bus of schoolchildren was supposed to be coming for a program. And one of the, kind of, wandering man, men, a wandering man who was kind of strange, but harmless, broke out into kind of a kick-dance in the foyer. And she was really nervous that if the children came when he was there that she would, he would frighten the children. And she didn't know ask, she didn't know how to ask him to leave. But Carl Mesle was walking by. He took in the situation and he said, "Are you hungry, brother?" And the man said, "Well, yes." And Dad said, "They're, they're providing a free lunch over at the Stone Church. Why don't you go have some lunch?" Before the man could respond, he said, "I'm going over there now. I'll, walk you over." So, he saved the man, the gentleman and the schoolchildren in a very gentle way.

Karin Peter 44:28

Absolutely.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 44:29

Yeah.

Karin Peter 44:30

Walking with. You said that Bud Sheehy said that earlier, that he walked with people.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 44:35

And I'm by your side? Yes. I admire that he worked with groups to identify problems and find solutions together. It's what community development should be all about as well as pastoral care. And I see that, you know. My husband is really good at that so, I see it a lot. And also, though his personal beliefs were basically conservative, his actions were progressive. My cousin worked with him a lot on boards, and so on, as an adult, when I did not live in Independence, and she said that her observation was that he was one of the most progressive church leaders there was, and that he did care about people on the fringes, whereas some of the church leaders were just all about appearances. So, I value that, that Dad was able to mix those together, his personal beliefs and still take care of others. I see him as gracefully, graciously and skillfully facilitating the RLDS church, in its move to become a church of mission.

Karin Peter 46:02

Nicely said, Sherry.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 46:04

Thank you.

Karin Peter 46:04

So, my last question is this, what do you think he would want us to remember about his ministry at Stone Church?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 46:15

That was another good one for me to think about, which I hadn't thought about. Dad wouldn't have expected anybody to remember, I don't think that it takes willing workers to build Zion. Zion is not something that God plunks down for us. We have to do the work ourselves. Dad grew up next door to the Oneida Community. And they owned Oneida Silver, where his dad worked. They were, their theology was perfectionism, to be perfect in this world, not just in heaven. They were also communal and practiced caring about each other, holding property and possessions in commonality. And the same thing happened with silver, Oneidas Silver. And during the Depression, the president cut his salary by half, he, the middle management, the management cut their salaries by 33%. And the workers' salaries were cut proportionally. So, it was shared, whether times were good or times were bad. And that was Dad's idea of Zion, was sharing and building it, and it's your job to do here on Earth. God's not gonna plunk it down. I had that conversation with Dad just a few days before he died, that he was trying to explain to somebody, that Zion doesn't just come down on its own. We have to build it ourselves.

Karin Peter 47:54

And that's still how we talk about Christ's mission. We talk about God's reign here on Earth, that we participate in that with God, that it's not something that just happens. Absolutely. Wonderful thing to remember from his ministry, along with his real skill at gathering community to focus on community. So, as we come to, kind of, our close, Sherry, do you have any last thoughts for us before we wrap up our conversation?

Sherry Mesle-Morain 48:25

Of course I do. And one thing I forgot to mention was that Ken McLean, who helped build up the Truman Road and the Independence Square and so on, is now the pastor of the Stone Church.

Karin Peter 48:39

Ah, excellent.

Sherry Mesle-Morain 48:42

What goes around comes around. [inaudible] the same problems. Yeah. But back to Dad. Dad's speech and behavior, publicly, were always support, supportive of the church leadership. He never undermined their authority, if you will. Privately, on the other hand, he would disagree with them strongly, and he would let them know it. And I found that in his papers. I would suggest that it served his ministry very well. But it did not serve his career so well, because they retired him at age 65 when he was in no way ready to retire from church service. Kind of a sad note to end on.

Karin Peter 49:34

Yeah. Well, we have learned a lot not just about your father's ministry, but about Independence, kind of, during that time of transition, which led very much to the transition into when, the ordination of women and into us becoming Community of Christ, which is a real expression of the ministry your father instituted at Stone Church. So, I want to thank you for helping us learn about that period of our history, and more about Stone Church, and why it was important, and why it continues to be important in the life of the church. So, for our listeners, we encourage you to view Sherry's lecture. You'll find it at historicsitesfoundation.org. You can see those beautiful stone, or stained- glass windows at Stone Church, and maybe some other things as well. And you'll see Sherry, and get to hear more from her about that period of time and about her father, Carl Mesle. This has been Cuppa Joe, part of the Project Zion Podcast. I've been visiting with Sherry Mesle-Morain and we thank her very much. My name is Karin Peter. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 50:59

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