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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

**Robin Linkhart** 00:34

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is your host Robin Linkhart and today we are with Shandra Newcomb, who is an apostle designate in Community of Christ. We want to take some time to get to know her and hear about her journey. Welcome, Shandra.

**Shandra Newcom** 00:51

Thanks, Robin. Good to be here.

**Robin Linkhart** 00:53

Well, we're delighted to have you. I really just want you to take a minute and introduce yourself to our listeners, just the basics about you that will help us understand who you are and a little bit about your life.

**Shandra Newcom** 01:09

Okay, so Shandra Newcom, and Shandra is always the question. But the word and isn't it so that might help. So my name Shandra and I live in Rockland, California, I've been there about three years and before that lived in Boulder, Colorado, I have one son, one child, his name is Andrew. He's a senior at Graceland and my delight. And I worked for the church from 1999 to 2001, as a campus minister at Graceland, and then started again in 2007. And I have been here ever since.

**Robin Linkhart** 01:48

That's great. That kind of helps us place you in your life where you are now. So let's start at the beginning. We want to hear kind of like your life story, from birth to maybe high school time and where you grew up what it was like for you and your family and your community. Throw in some of your interests and hobbies, too. We want to know all about that. And of course, because you are a minister and you're becoming a world church leader, we want to hear about God and your journey of faith.

**Shandra Newcom** 02:18

Perfect. So I was born in Chicago, lived there for three years. And so say it was my birthplace, but don't really have a sense of it beyond that. And my folks, my mom and my dad and my brother, who's three years younger than I, we moved to Southern California when I was four. And so I walked... here's the beginning of my relationship and connection to God, three and a half years old, I walk into the Canoga Park congregation, and they put me in the nursery, of course, and I walk in, and there's two other girls. Their names are Jana, and Mandy, and we become fast friends, going to church together riding in the back of the Volvo together in a way that people wouldn't allow their kids to ride now, but it was the 70s, gluing our hands together because we loved each other so much after church, we didn't want our parents to separate us. And what I discovered there was God through relationship. And so much so that Jana and Mandy and I are close still. Now here we are 50 years later, and still good friends and I still find God in those relationships. Canoga Park was also where I started singing. So the first time I sang in church, I was five years old, and I sang Que Sera, Sera, whatever will be will be,"" and sang it with some friends. I remember standing and again, feeling that supportive, God centered community that was inviting me to be a part of something bigger than myself. And then I also have to do a shout out to the Skylarks, which was a Community of Christ, girls organization where I learned all the important things, including... Well, I flunked it the first time but including how to set a table. Because in that time as girls, that was a requirement for life. I flunked it the first time I had to go back and do it the second time, and I'm not sure I've used those skills ever since, but again, set me in community. So my folks decided to move us to Kansas to the Midwest when I was nine. So we packed up we moved there and I was there through high school. So I say I was a Midwesternere or I'm a Midwesterner. A Kansas girl at heart. All my memories and I have some from school, I was in theater, I was in music. I did great shows like Camelot, 1940s Radio Hour. I'm a singer. So I was really able to use those talents. But really all my memories from that time come from the Olathe Kansas congregation. There was a large group of us in high school and some of us went to the same actual high school together, but not all of us. But we were tight. We had a youth minister, which was not common at the time in the early 80s. And he reflected back to me a sense of ministry. He saw something in me. And I began to think about who I was in relationship to the Spirit that breathes through all and what I was being called to do in my life. And so I began sort of, I don't know, I call myself like a Jesus freak, which was a term back then, but really, like, just in it, just falling to my knees, Maundy Thursday services, singing Sandi Patty songs, you know, at the top of my lungs at church. Being a part of all of the things that made that community, Christ centered, and life giving. And I carry all of that in my heart today. Still,

**Shandra Newcom** 06:25

I'm trying to think if there's any other little piece to throw in there, other than Oh, I'm sorry, I missed this. But I have to shout out to my home campground camp Jehovah, which is where I really began to live into the calling of ministry that I saw reflected back to me by my youth minister. And if you grew up going to any camp, you know, not just Community of Christ camps, there's all sorts of camping experiences. But for me, it was Community of Christ, growing up going every year to Community of Christ camps at Camp Jehovah, and another places since then, it laid a foundation upon which I have grown. I'm really into the idea of planting seeds and what that looks like in life. And as we grow, and I would say, Jehovah, and the camping program with Community of Christ was a seed that was planted deep. And that took root. And that is a strong part of why I'm here talking to you today.

**Robin Linkhart** 07:32

So that's a fascinating history. And I love the way you paint the story of your life and words that paint pictures and this deep sense of relationship that resonates through. So you're finishing high school, and now you're ready, you're ready for the next few chapters of your life. What comes next?

**Shandra Newcom** 07:55

Well, Graceland University comes next. And it was funny. As I look back now, none of my friends from my Olathe or Jehovah experiences went to Graceland. There were a couple there on and off. But I really went there alone, separate from that broader community. And it was hard. It was hard going and feeling alone for the first time and I, I broke out of that quickly. But remember that pain pretty vividly. And I'll tell you a little bit in a moment about another thing that started happening to me at college, but that alone-ness was something I hadn't experienced. And you know, I have on and off since then, Graceland was the place for me for a couple of years. And I made great friends, friends that I'm still very close with today. I participated in campus ministries. That was a strong support for me, we had we had hymn sings, of course, probably Wednesday evenings, which I loved sitting in the Cheville Chapel in a circle in our chairs, just singing this small, odd band of Jesus followers. But we also had something called Morning Element. And if you were at Graceland, at that time you just like snorted milk from laughter out your nose when I said Morning Element because we also called it Morning Elephant. Because we got up early and went to Devotions before classes, which is ridiculous when you have early classes and you're... but we did it because we were dedicated to the idea that there was something powerful in scripture and song and community that propelled, propelled us into each day, but was propelling us into our lives as well. And so I often think of Morning Elephant fondly. I think we had T shirts that said Morning Elephant, which of course at Graceland T shirts are a thing. So I was going to Graceland to major in music theory. And the first class that you had to take in music theory was at 8am, which quickly shifted my attention to philosophy and religion. So I let go of the 8am class and became a Philosophy and Religion major. And I also was interested in sociology, and psychology a bit, but was reall...y I found my home in philosophy and religion. And I began working with Howard Booth and Bob Mesale, who were two mentors of mine. And it's funny because a lot of people talk about deconstruction, and specifically around Graceland at that time, but I went through a process of looking at my life and my relationship with Jesus, and the way I connected to the Holy Spirit. And I didn't so much as deconstruct all that. But with process theology, and feminist theology, and all the things I was learning, I began to sift through what I had brought with me to Graceland. And I participated in this lovely uncovering of the assumptions I had made. When I got there, who I was becoming as a person, how I believed God was working in the world. And all of that set this new foundation for me. I went home after my sophomore year at Graceland, and realized that I was experiencing severe chronic depression. So I dropped out of Graceland for a semester to begin to tend to myself. That was rough. And I experienced depression for about 15-20 years. After that, during the midst of that, I, I call it the abyss. And I really lost a sense of God in my life. And God at work in a world. I couldn't find that center that had been laid in me that foundation that I brought with me from my high school experiences from my first two years at Graceland, it just was empty.

**Shandra Newcom** 11:25

And, um, I relied on friends and family to carry me through the end of my college experience. I relied on my sort of renewed sense of passion about feminist theology and feminist theory, which was a stronghold for me, I relied on my professors. And I relied on this hope, that even though I couldn't feel or experience any divine, that I would have called it before, a hope that, that there was still a divine presence that I just couldn't see. And, you know, I'll just end that little piece about my depression.Tthrough a lot of therapy, a lot of family support, and some great medication, I have not been having to deal with that depression for about 20 years. So I found what worked for me. And that was a real gift, as I have gone on in my life. So a couple other things. Because of that depression. When I graduated from Graceland, I really wasn't able to step into a job beyond retail. So I worked at Pier One, and I worked at a beach store, as all 1980s Hippies would. And, you know, I loved every minute of working in retail, because there were people and connection, and I'm visual, so I got to, you know, put the plates where the plates go. And the towels color coordinate. I don't know all the good things at Pier One. And I'm going to pause there and see if there's any questions about that, and then I'll move to seminary.

**Robin Linkhart** 12:49

That's great. I really appreciate your willingness to be so vulnerable and transparent with us. Shandra. I do want to back up just a minute when you mentioned Bob Mesle and Howard Booth. I, I know Bob Mesle was faculty for a period of time, just want to check in if you can kind of place them in the story for those who aren't familiar with their names,

**Shandra Newcom** 15:01

I can, and I cannot give you you know years when they started at Grayson and yours when they finished I'm not clear but Bob, and I'm going to put BarB his spouse, Bob and Barb Mesle. And then Howard had Bonita Booth lived in Lamoni, and Howard and Bob were the Philosophy and Religion Department basically, of course, others. And some of that now if you know Tony and Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, then they've sort of stepped into that space. They're doing that now with students, but at the time, it was Bob and Howard and Bob was the philosophy instructor. He is a process thinker and very well known in the community. And so if you don't know what process theology is, for example, Bob has written a couple books and is a great resource. Barb, taught literature and introduced me to poetry, which became a love of mine. She was a strong support for me, she and Bob are beloved partners, and are a great example of what partnership looks like and love looks like together. Howard Booth was the religion professor. And he and I, I mean, we spent a lot of time talking about Community of Christ, we spent a lot of time looking critically at the assumptions that existed in the institution. We spent a lot of time reading through scripture and talking about what it meant and identifying where God was at work. And in Briggs, which is the building at Graceland University, they were down in the basement, and I spent time down there, like I said, sifting through my theological and spiritual assumptions. And they were partners on that journey as professors at Graceland at the time.

**Robin Linkhart** 15:33

Thanks that really helps a lot. And I think for Project Zion listeners, Tony and Charmaine do Percolating on Faith series and other related topics and, and hearing your story, I think connects with all of us because that journey of faith seeking understanding and sifting and sorting and discover our authentic selves and dealing with enormous challenges in life, like you did with your depression, and life in general, it's, it's really helps us understand how the journey of life has timeless truths and experience that span over generations. And yet each is unique. And, and one of a kind. Okay, so we are ready to start seminary. Tell us about this.

**Shandra Newcom** 17:45

So I went to seminary knowing I didn't want to go to seminary. I knew I was pretty sure that I didn't want to be engaged in any sort of religious anything at the time. So I chose to go to seminary, logically. And I had a friend from Graceland who was there. And so I chose Illiff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, it's connected to the University of Denver. And Illiff is a United Methodist seminary, and it's known for its focus on peace and justice. So that was attractive to me, as a feminist theologian, as someone interested in peace and justice in the world. And so I went there, started mid year, and I'll throw in that my first day there, I met the man who was going to become my husband. And you know, so then, of course, I had to stay no matter what happened at Illiff. But I loved Illiff. And what I loved about it was I for the first time, spent a good, dedicated, quality time with people who did not look like me who had not grown up like me who didn't have my privilege. I spent a lot of time listening to stories that were not mine, and that were painful, and stories of racism, stories of homophobia, I spent time learning about people in ways that have affected me ever since and created a burning in my heart to turn towards peace and justice at every turn, if that's possible at every turn. And so, I worked with Dr. Vincent Harding, who had been a speechwriter for Martin Luther King Jr. So I learned about the Freedom Movement. And that was really powerful. I just learned about other's. Human, beloved beautiful other folk. And who they were and how we were different and what made us the same. So like I said, I met Roger, and we got married three years into the four years that we were there, I also really felt like I was missing something getting my Master of Arts in Religion at Illiff. There was some sort of component of human connection that I thought was missing. So they had a dual degree, Master of Arts in Religion and Masters of Social Work. And so I did both. And in my social work life, I felt there was a spiritual component missing. In my theological life, I felt like there was this sociological support that was missing. So the two blended really well for me, and I've done jobs. In both of those spaces. I've worked with, under housed women in transition, I was a hospice social worker for a while, but I have landed in church work is what I will be doing for the rest of my career. Although I bring a social workers heart with it. And then I guess the last part of that bit of our life was we moved back to Minnesota where Roger was from and spent time with his family and three years there. And then comes the next part where I decide to apply for a job with the church.

**Robin Linkhart** 21:36

So that's fascinating, and I just learned something I never knew I did not know that you spent a time living in Minnesota. And then where is the birth of your son in here? Have we gotten to that yet or not?

**Shandra Newcom** 21:48

We're close.

**Robin Linkhart** 21:49

Okay, so I'll, hold on.

**Shandra Newcom** 21:52

We're just a couple of years away. Okay.

**Robin Linkhart** 21:55

Okay, so that brings you right up to, to the point where you begin to consider or, or I don't even know how it unfolded, being employed in full time ministry. So take us on that journey.

**Shandra Newcom** 22:09

I applied and for anyone who was around in 1998-99, 2000, or 2000, in Community of Christ, T2000. was emerging. It was the thing. And so even though I applied to be an appointee, we were moving at that time away from hiring people for appointment, which was full time work for the church. That was that language that was used to becoming Transformation 2000 ministers, and there was just this renewed sense of Spirit and hope for putting people into jobs that would kind of bring new life and Christ-like vision to the church. And so I was looking at the Transformation 2000 jobs that were being posted, and one came up for campus minister at Graceland University. I applied for that and got that position. And so Roger wanted to stay in Minnesota and finish up, they were building a new church. And so I went out to Lamoni. I and I was there for a year. Without Roger. He came out a year later, we moved to Leon, where he had what's called a five point charge, which was he had five little congregations that he was pastor for. And we had Andrew and so we were in Leon, when Andrew was born. I remember teaching religion, holding Andrew bottle feeding him. Andrew was a regular, in the campus ministries office, I had students who would be with him. So Andrew could be on campus, and I could see him it was just a lovely place to have a child just just lovely. And I worked with Blake Smith, and we were and I'm going to use these words. I don't know what other people would say. But we were a dream team. I loved working with Blake, we did great work together, I will say. And we were really good for the campus at that time, because we were so different in some ways. And so students kind of had a choice of who they might connect with, depending on their theology, or where they were on their journey. And I think that was really helpful as well. And so a couple of things about being campus minister. One was that we were there on September 11 2001. And I remember walking into what's called the Swarm, which was a kind of snack area at Graceland, and, you know, instantly knowing that something was wrong. And so we quickly worked to create a safe and sacred space on campus. And it wasn't always easy on that day. But we went into the student center and we just had the news on the TV, but also spaces of prayer spaces of support. We chose to really look at our community at Graceland as a world community. If you know about Graceland, there's a number of international students there. And it would have been very easy for those students to be ostracized, to be shamed, because of what was happening in the country. And instead, we became very committed to making sure everybody felt welcome. Everybody knew that God was in the midst of us. And there were, of course, students who lost family members, and friends. And so we provided that support. But it also was a difficult time for me, I wouldn't say that my clinical depression was heightened again. But I was very broken from, I think, supporting others and not tending to myself. And so I left Graceland in 20, or 2002, in large part because of my brokenness, about that experience. And it was just time for me. Time for me to move on.

**Robin Linkhart** 26:29

So we know that it was about that time that you had a break from employed ministry with Community of Christ. So tell us what happened between 2002 and 2007.

**Shandra Newcom** 26:40

A lot of things, and I'll start with...well, I'll not jumped to 2005. But I'll get there. In in 2022, we ended up moving back to Denver, because that was the place, both Roger and I loved and we had met there. And so we moved back to Denver, I had a hard time finding a job. And that's when I started working as a hospice social worker, but I was the on call hospice social worker. And so I was the 3am phone call. You know, I was the midnight phone call. And I had a two year old child. And so that was tough. And also during that time, Roger and I were moving towards getting a divorce. And so in 2005, we got a divorce. And I'll be honest, and divorce, if you've been divorced, you know, it is different for everybody. But even if you wanted the divorce or knew it was the right thing, it is still painful. And I experienced deep pain and darkness. I haven't experienced actually, from that time, the day of the divorce. And just even though I knew I got home and it was maybe the Abyss visited me again, like I don't know exactly how that works. But my parents sat me in a chair and wrapped me in a quilt and put their hands on my head, both of them priesthood members in Community of Christ and prayed for me. And then knelt down beside me and just held my hands and lay their heads on my lap. And let me know I wasn't alone. And it was what I needed. And it was the beginning of actually my healing process. And while a divorce is an ending, for me, it was a beginning. And it was the beginning of me authentically moving into my ministry. I forgot to tell you I can't believe I forgot to tell you. i—oh my goodness, Robin. I had been ordained to the office of priest when I was a Graceland a student 1980...? Oh my goodness so much. Wow. 1987 was when I was ordained one of the first women at the lathe a congregation. Can I go back is that allowed?

**Robin Linkhart** 29:33

It is totally allowed. And welcome.

**Shandra Newcom** 29:36

Okay. So I want to go back actually to the vote to sustain the recognition of priesthood for women in Community of Christ. And I was not a delegate, but sat in the balcony.

**Robin Linkhart** 29:58

So this would be World Conference 1984 Section 156 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

**Shandra Newcom** 30:05

Exactly. And so we were voting, our approval for that section. So sitting next to a young man that I had a crush on. And if you can believe it, our first quote unquote date was sitting next to each other for the vote at World Conference in the balcony, and we were all allowed to vote, as I recall, like they opened to the vote up to the balcony and asked, you know, not just delegates, but folks to vote. And so, I mean, I was all in, I was in it. So I raised my hand just with joy. And the guy I had the crush on, stood up and walked out. Just like so many did. And I learned that pain, and joy can be held at the same time, in that moment. And so I was called quickly to the Office of priest. My mother was called, I'm not sure maybe to the Office of priest I was during the, I'd have to ask her, but during the vote for my call, in particular, in my beloved Olathe, there were people who were ready to leave over that vote. And they, they got up and walked out when my name was put forward. It was hard. It was a difficult time, my father's family were all restorationists. And so they left Community of Christ, they left the RLDS church at that time, and they went and they became members of the Restoration branches. And we worked really hard to stay a family and dedicated ourselves to that work and still are today. In fact, I told my aunt, my beloved 95 year old aunt, who still is a member of the Restoration church, that I was called to be an apostle. And she was overjoyed, overjoyed, I was ordained to the Office of Elder right after Andrew was born. So I'm going to jump back into my work at Graceland. Blake Smith called me to the Office of Elder and I was ordained at that time. Then I was ordained to the Office of high priest 2015, maybe? Gosh, I don't have the exact date. But that's been my journey of priesthood. I guess I'll say that before I became Mission Center President in Colorado, I was ordained to the Office of high priest.

**Robin Linkhart** 32:48

That's, that's super helpful, because I don't think we're to 2007 yet right? No, no, that's fine. I just want to help us be on the right train with you on the right part of the crack.

**Shandra Newcom** 33:00

Just a little detour. But yes, in 2007, Apostle Dave Nii hired me to work for Rocky Mountain Mission Center. And I was a congregation support minister, which became mission center support minister, which became Mission Center President 2016. And during that time, I also had some real passions that I was living. In my own journey with Christ, I became a facilitator internationally, I've been to Africa a number of times, I have been to French Polynesia. And I often teach classes on spirituality and spiritual practice that has been sort of my passion, and then weaving peace and justice through that. I was on the Theology Task Force when it started a number of years ago. And one of the best things I've ever done with my life, it will be just a gift to me in my life. As I look back, I have attended Spectacular, which is a camp for senior high youth at Graceland University, almost every summer, but four since 1987. And I have been in many roles throughout that time. I have supported many of our youth in that time, and I currently am the performing arts coordinator. And I've been doing that for almost 10 years, I would say. Spectacularike I said, I'll look back and see the gift that's been to me and I'm so grateful for that experience.

**Robin Linkhart** 34:41

That's great. I love all these little tidbits that are coming in. So Dave Nii was not the apostle when you were hired in Rocky Mountain Mission Center. He was the Mission Center president and financial officer. He was ordained apostle and 2019 For those of you who aren't familiar with his journey And it's interesting because Shandra's path and my path are overlapping, because I was working full time with Rocky Mountain Mission Center. And in 2007, was called, I was a high priest, I was called to serve as a seventy. And to step into a new role, yoked in mission with an apostle, so we had Seven Presidents of eventy. And then seven other people were called to serve alongside with apostles, as the presidents of 70, were called to do as well as field missionary coordinator. So we all had this role. So there was an overlap time in the Rocky Mountain Mission Center office. And eventually, I don't remember how, when and how it, it came to be that I was no longer housing in the Rocky Mountain Mission Center office, but Shandra eventually got my old office, which I thought was really cool.

**Shandra Newcom** 35:55

I did. And you know, I had to fight a little bit for it, but I was victorious and loved everyOminute of it.

**Josh Mangelson** 36:03

So okay, so you were working there, and Dave was there. And so what comes next?

**Shandra Newcom** 36:10

So what comes next is sort of that little bit of a journey to Mission Center president and just deep love for the people with whom I was working and worshiping and being with, I deeply love the people of Rocky Mountain Mission Center, I have experienced so many moments of God at work in our midst and in community, I worked with some people who are very, very focused on peace and justice work in the world. And so was able to do that. The peace colloquy became, you know, just really important to me. And I worked with Desere Astle to bring youth to the Peace Colloquy, and that was really powerful. So all of those things were happening in that time.

**Robin Linkhart** 37:03

And you were the Mission Center President. I've lost track of the years. You were on staff for a few years. And then you moved into the presidency. What were the years there?

**Shandra Newcom** 37:14

2016 to 2019. Yeah.

**Robin Linkhart** 37:19

Oh, right. And then you take a big adventure, right before the whole world is plunged into an adventure tell us about that..

**Shandra Newcom** 37:27

I will tell you that. I don't know how God works. But I do know that God works in the world. And I had this experience where I happened to be in California going to a retreat, and Zach oarmen McLaughlin, and Larry McGuire, and Ron Harmon and I were eating at a burger place. And Zach was making his decision to, he had been Mission Center President at Sierra Pacific. And he was making his decision to go become Dean of the Seminary. Right then at the burger place. And he said, and I was no longer working for the church, I just want to kind of throw that in there. I mean, just for a couple months, I had just, I had moved on. I didn't know what I was going to do. But I was on a journey. And Zach said, you know, this is the right choice for me, except I'm not sure who's going to take over at Sierra Pacific. And I really love those people. And I want to make sure you know that they're okay. And Larry Maguire looked at me. And I looked at him. And that night, I decided to move from Colorado to California and take the job that night. And I FaceTimed my parents, I'm very close with my family. I FaceTimed my parents and said, I'm moving to California. And my dad said, "Oh my gosh, what a great opportunity!" And my mom smacked him across the chest. And she was like, "What is she talking about?" In the end they were very supportive. And so Andrew went to Graceland. August of 2019. I packed my car and the truck up that week, drove out to California was here for six months, and then COVID hit. And that's really and this is not that story. But that's the beginning of the journey I've been on that has been missional and creative and full of surprises and all sorts of things that actually bring me here to you today as well.

**Robin Linkhart** 39:41

Yeah, so you you were one of many in Community of Christ that that were just propelled into this new way of being where we were all in isolation, desperately longing for community and connection and thanking God that Community of Christ through divine synchronicity had already made provision to share the sacrament of communion online, which was such a saving grace. And there you are brand new Mission Center. So tell us just a little bit about some of the things that you explored before we talk about your call to Apostle.

**Shandra Newcom** 40:14

Yeah, so And these things are mostly happening still. So the first thing that happened was March 13, which is the day of the world shutdown, or at least our congregations, I reached out to the 15 pastors that we had, and some of them, there's pastor teams, and I said, Let's meet. So we can talk about how these decisions are going to be made. And you know, it was a painful time. And we all met, we have been meeting almost every week, since March 13 2020. And that has become rule breaking ground breaking, all the things that are supportive, and we consider ourselves to be a team, and they are the council for the Mission Center. But more importantly, they are the ones who provide support through prayer, and dedication and discernment, and conversation. We talk about decisions that need to be made, and we make them together. And I bet we've had 12 out of 15, there almost every week. That moved us into creating a covenant for our community, where we decided to say who we were because all of a sudden, we're online, there's 100 people. And the Mission Center has held worship online almost every week. We invited all the folks from the congregations to come and we were spending at the height of COVID, from eight to 12:3o/1:00, every Sunday together. And people just wanted to keep adding more fellowship and post worship fellowship. And let's sing together some and I will say a little shout out to the Seagraves family, if you don't know them. They're a family that isn't Sierra Pacific and three generation household and they became our family band. And so they were great and leading us in music, we're pretty laid back. We don't use PowerPoint, we just get together. And so that's been happening as well, but also this for me, who is an introvert in a lot of ways being able to be home, all of a sudden, I had these creative bursts of hope. And they helped me see things differently. So we created this covenant, because people were coming. And we wanted to say to them, This is who we are. And so based on the Enduring Principles, we were contextualizing the language to say when you come, this is who you can expect us to be and that covenant is on the Sierra Pacific Community of Christ website, if people are interested in going there, to see it, but it focuses us as a Peace and Justice people. Out of that has grown our dedication to be a prophetic people as well. Because you know, during COVID, we were sort of turned inward in a lot of ways. It was hard to be Invitational, we didn't know how to do all those things. And so it was okay to be a covenant community and figure out what that meant. But at some point, we realized only turning inward is not our call. Our call is to actually turn outward, have the same heart of God, and then turn outward, his prophetic people to make a difference in the world. And so that's where we are now. We meet to talk about missional work and love and we use the mission prayer. In one of our conversations that we have every week to sort of look at how that is meaningful in the world. We still we've had for two and a half years, what I call Love Out Loud, which started as an anti racism book group. And now we have looked at what it means to be a person of color, be sure she would identify as a queer person, but all sorts of stories of people who are different than those of us who showed up. And we go in trusting that their story is true, so that we can learn from them. And that's been a really powerful thing too.

**Robin Linkhart** 44:27

That's awesome. Appreciate that window into the ministry that emerged in such a beautiful way through a time of separation and isolation. A testament to God's ongoing presence and unfolding future like the metamorphosis metaphor, it feels so profound in the midst of that. Okay, now we're at your call to the office of apostle which, which I know that is a very interesting story. So tell that.

**Shandra Newcom** 44:59

I would say that when I was 19 years old, I, like I said, I wasn't often a delegate until later. So what I used to do was sit up in the balcony in the auditorium during World Conference. And I sat, if you're, if you've ever been to the auditorium, and you look, there's this amazing, gorgeous pipe organ. And I would sit to the left of that up on the balcony. And I would look at the faces of the people on the floor, the delegates who were there to do the work of the church. I was 19-20. Somewhere in there, I was sitting up there. And I had a sense, not so much of the Spirit, sort of impressing something on me, but of the Spirit, opening me to be able to say something true. And what I said was, I will serve your people in this community, and say yes, to everything that comes before me. That's my promise. That's who I want to be. And I will do it, you know, as best I can. And I thought at the time, will anyone ever want me to do that? You know, I'm 19. Like, I have this strong sense, that is beyond my understanding. And then there's like this little hesitation where you're like, does anybody ever want that? Is that actually a thing? I don't know. I'm still, I'm in college. So I just decided when something was put before me, I'd say yes. So that's happened, I was ordained to different offices, I was hired to different jobs. And I took this job in California. In spite of and because of all that I was, and the call that was there, I responded. And when I got to California, I sat down on the sofa in my house, and I looked around and said, "Ah, this is, this is it. This is where I am to be." And out of COVID, and my experience of relationship with the people in Sierra Pacific Mission Center, the times I took away to spend time in discernment. So I often often I sometimes would say to the folks there. I mean, it takes three days of discernment. Will you pray for me, I will be praying for you to see what could be next for us. And so I was doing all of these things that really were new to me, I was getting more and more quiet. I was listening more to the Spirit and to the people. And I was becoming creative in ways that I hadn't experienced before. And about two years ago, I had the sense that something next was going to be put in front of me. I had no idea what that was. And so rather than spend a lot of time thinking about it, I just kept doing what I was doing, knowing I was preparing for whatever that next was. And then about a year ago, I thought maybe it's something to do with my work in the church. I wasn't assuming that I would be called to be an apostle. But I was sure that there would be something next. And I didn't know I didn't even know what that possibly could be. And so I talked myself out of my promise, I decided that maybe I wasn't right for whatever this was going to be I don't know what it was. Maybe it wasn't right. Maybe I wasn't wanted, maybe I would make huge mistakes, maybe I wouldn't continue to be authentic, like I got in my own way. And I got in God's way for a while. And I was having these experiences with people in the Sierra Pacific Mission Center and my connection to folks in Rocky. And actually all the people that I've talked about and the different places I've been within the church who were reflecting to me that I was in the right place. And so on one of the days that I just wasn't thinking about it and either talking myself out of it or into it not knowing what it was. I got an email from President Veazey. And it it was an email to meet with him in a day or two and I said how about an hour because I figured now I was gonna know.

**Shandra Newcom** 50:03

So we met. So we met. And he shared with me my call to the Council of Twelve Apostles and to the office of apostle. And because of the two years of what I now see was courageous, uncomfortable discernment. I said Yes, right away, right away. Because it was the thing that was put in front of me. And I trusted that it was what God was putting there. And so I said, Yes. And then I realized I was gonna go from what I call obscurity when you're a Mission Center President. I mean, you know, your people know who you are, but most people in the church don't. And I felt like there was this huge cliff that I was walking up to. I said, Yes. Like, turned off the Zoom, walked up to a cliff, and just jumped. I just jumped off the cliff. And now I'm kind of free falling with you right now.

**Robin Linkhart** 51:03

Yeah, so Shandra, has just completed attending as an apostle designate, to excuse me, as an apostle designate attending World Church Leadership Council, and followed by the Council of Twelve Apostle meetings. So which brings us to my next question, how has this unfolding of like this brand new chapter in your life, this ongoing adventure with God, which has really been quite an adventure, how has it changed things for you so far, understanding we're, we're just barely into it. But still, it's a major thing. And I think it's already had an impact.

**Shandra Newcom** 51:40

Yeah for sure. So, I love the words, ongoing adventure with god, that's amazing. And I also, my favorite word is wild. So wild adventure with God, you'll hear me use quite a bit. And so I go into this experience, the first thing I know is, I do not know much, I don't know everything, in fact very little about this new position, this new way of being a minister. And so I don't let that stop me, I actually let that be. And I choose everyday to jump into the flow of God in the world and learn, like I just want to be open hearted, and I tend to be confident, come across as confident, and I really want to live my life as who I am. And part of that is being open hearted and listening to stories that are radically different than mine. Because mutuality, for me, is a priority. And I see that in my new position. I'm so excited about meeting people with whom I get to have mutual relationship, I just am so excited about that. And I also really am thinking a lot about this idea of everyone being welcome at the table, which is, you know, our grounding and so important to us, while at the same time acknowledging that Community of Christ has values and principles that we uphold, and how that works. So that we can really be peace and justice, focus and follow Jesus, the peaceful one, while still welcoming everybody with us. I've really been called to Blessings of Community one of our Enduring Principles late lately, and it seems simple, almost. But it's so complex, and it's so difficult. And it's very transformative. And to me, it's the most loving thing that we can attend to. And I guess finally, I'll say, I am deeply dedicated. And if you've been with me, in my leadership over the past six years or so, you'll know this is true. t'hat my ministry is no more special or meaningful than anyone else's. And I'm talking to you, listener, I'm talking to you. My ministry is no more special than your ministry. If we aren't in this together, and if we don't see each other as the same as beloved children of God, then we're missing the point of interdependence. At the same time, I am willing to step into learning things and being in places and walking with people. And those opportunities will come because of this call.

**Robin Linkhart** 54:49

So I have one more question for you. Shandra, before we say goodbye today. What are your hopes for the future and and, you know, how do you see God move In the world in ways that connect with Community of Christ, and God's invitation to us to boldly follow into the heart of God's vision for all creation?

**Shandra Newcom** 55:14

So my hopes first, I hope we change as we go along. I hope we love each other so wildly, that no one feels excluded. I hope we name injustice for what it is a systemic scourge that's going to need bold and courageous Jesus followers to act for Equity and Inclusion. I hope we regularly take a look at ourselves and see in our community, our strengths, and our weaknesses, and all of that, which comes for who we are, which is human. I hope that we make a difference in the world. I hope that each day we bring the peace of Jesus Christ to creation in tangible ways. And I hope that we sing a lot, and love a lot, and read poetry a lot and laugh a lot. And I hope that we grieve together, and wrestle with the difficult things together, and learn from one another. And I hope that we recognize Christ's love in all we do. I hope we remember that we are a resurrection people. And that rising new begins each day. And we fall, and we get up, and we fall, and we get up and we can't do that alone. And we will never survive if we don't know and act in relationship to the planet. And I hope we see that we are a Community of Christ, in all the best ways. And I think what we have to bring if we will get out of our own way and listen to the Spirit that calls us and do this together, is a way of being in the world, that can make a difference in a person's life and heart, in the systems that oppress us in the creation that is longing for us. As co-creators, God calls us and the flow of God's energy and love exists around us now. And I think Community of Christ is poised to jump into the flow in a new way. And it's kind of like jumping off that cliff that I did, because it turns out, I jumped off a cliff once and there was water below it. I didn't like the experience. But if we see that at the bottom of this cliff, there is that flow of God. And if we see that the one standing by us on the cliff is God. And if we hold hands, I believe we can make a difference in a hurting world. And that's what I hope we do. That's really really what I hope we do.

**Robin Linkhart** 58:10

I love that and I'm ready to be a cliff jumper right with you there. Shandra thank you so much for being with us today and being open and willing to share your story. It's been a joy. And even after knowing you for many years now I've learned several new things and I appreciated that time. Listeners if you would like to hear more from Shandra Newcomb, check out Project Zion Podcast episode number 190 Holy Grounds, where Shandra explores spirituality, both living and practices. As always a very special thanks to 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.

**Josh Mangelson** 59:15

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