

Fair Trade | Linda Stanbridge

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SPEAKERS

Linda Stanbridge, Blake Smith

Blake Smith 00:28

Hello and welcome to Fair Trade, a Project Zion Podcast series where courageous people share the candid stories of their Faith Journeys, and what brought them to Community of Christ. I'm your host, Blake Smith, and I am here with a friend of mine, Linda Stanbridge. And if you have been a listener to Project Zion for any length of time, you will know that Linda is not new to Project Zion Podcast. As a matter of fact, I was telling her that even as being a host, she's posted about as many podcasts as I have. So welcome, Linda.

Linda Stanbridge 01:01

Thank you. Thanks for having me again. It's always good to be on (Project Zion).

Blake Smith 01:05

Well, it is great having you. So out of those episodes that you've been on, and I think there are eight, seven of them were where you were a guest, one of them dating all the way back to 2018. And that was a Chai Can't Even episode. And then the last one was the episode, the live event that you and I. co-hosted.

Linda Stanbridge 01:24

That was so fun. That live event was so fun. I really enjoyed that. That was neat.

Blake Smith 01:25

That was good. And I'm hoping that we're going to have several more in the near future so. Well, anybody who has listened for a while Linda has probably heard your story. But let's start off with just tell us a little bit about yourself. Some of our listeners will know you will others may not at all. So can you just give us a little background?

Linda Stanbridge 01:47

Sure. Yeah. Well, my name is Linda, my pronouns are she and her. And I live in Crosswell, Michigan, which is in the thumb. And it's just a few miles off Lake Huron. So the thumb of Michigan, I guess I have been thinking Michigan for too long. I said the thumb like everyone would know, maybe no other states have thumbs. But we're here on Lake Huron. I have a husband and two kiddos. And my girls are seven, and nine. And what else? I have a really badly behaved dog who I thought I had the fence completely fixed. And this morning was somehow in the front yard. She's a little Hudini. That's Pepper. And then

we also have for cats. I work for the Michigan Mission Center. And I go to an online congregation called Beyond the Horizon. So yeah, those are the high points maybe?

Blake Smith 02:43

Well, that's great. And this is off. Well, not off your subject, because you're talking about your dog. Last night, I went to take the trash out. And my dog, we have an invisible fence and my dog loves to go out in the front yard. And so I took the trash out, and I came back inside. And we were watching the Olympics. And my son in law says Where's Wyatt? And I kinda looked around? I don't know where Wyatt is. They said did you take him outside with you? I like oops. And he was he was having a great time just kind of watching cars drive by Oh, wow,

Linda Stanbridge 03:16

Oh wow! Mine would have been long gone. She would have ended up at the gas station that has happened. She's crazy.

Blake Smith 03:22

We we have a little Pekinese who doesn't seem to care about the invisible fence and he too would have been gone. But the puppy's a little smarter. So anyway. Well, it's great to have you back again. And I know that you've probably touched on some of the parts of your story in some of the episodes before, but I thought it would be great to just have you on here and have you share your story with us. So, take us back to the beginning, wherever you want to start and tell us a little bit about faith and God and church during your growing up years.

Linda Stanbridge 03:59

Sure. So my parents actually met at church, which is kind of how our family got involved or connected to this church. So they were both going to an Apostolic Pentecostal church in South Flint. So I spent my first handful of years in Flint, Michigan. And so we were Apostolic, which is a it's a flavor of Pentecostalism that in my experience in this particular congregation was super conservative and controlling is a word I would use for it. And so our family was involved there. My dad did some, you know, men's groups and later type things. And my mom was really involved in what the women were doing. And this is maybe more my parents, you know, story than mine. But the way that the church was, you know affecting their relationship, and our family life is ultimately why we left. You know, and I think for me, that's kind of what put me, you know, on a whole path of kind of exploring and figuring out for myself, was having this really strict foundation, and then we kind of, you know, walked away from it. So, I wasn't in a congregation really all that many years. But when your family is formed around that, you know, that evangelicalism kind of becomes like the bones, you know, or the structure of what you're building a lot of the other information that you're taking in as a child about who we are, and what is our purpose and you know, especially in evangelicalism, the differences between men and women, and there's a lot of like, you know, rules that you kind of have to learn. And so even though I, you know, left evangelicalism fairly young, I definitely am still at 40, seeing the ways that it's part of the internal structure of things, you know, that I, that I think, and it's, it's been a journey. As I've talked to other like ex evangelicals, we all—and I have a particular friend Jenn, who else send like a tic tac to once in a while, because I'll be like, Oh my gosh, is this like the most triggering thing you've ever seen? Or is it just me? You know, so we'll kind of have these connections? Or it's like, Oh, I thought I totally forgot

about, you know, this random, you know, evangelical thing that will just kind of pop up. Yeah. So that was kind of my, you know, the first faith community that I belonged to was Pentecostal.

Blake Smith 06:39

So that's quite a, that's a significant difference. <Yeah.> In many ways.

Linda Stanbridge 06:43

Yeah, really different. When I, when I went to seminary, the Community of Christ seminary, Tony (Chvala-Smith) said something that really I think, like looking back now is, is helpful. He said, "People need to meet a god they can love." And I think for me, and Tony was so helpful for me and and Matt Frizzell, in kind of unpacking some of the evangelical things I didn't realize that I was still carrying around. But, you know, when I think about that phrase, and the, and the God that I was introduced to, as a kid, I think that's was part of the disconnect for me, I think, the God that I was introduced to, and I don't want to paint broad strokes, about all evangelicals and all conservatives, that's not fair. So I'll just, am speaking to my own experience. But for me, you know, I think the main things my take aways were, you know, my responsibility for my body and modesty. So it was like no jewelry, no makeup, no pants, we couldn't have our hair cut. I mean, it was really, really strict, and the things that were allowed. And the pastor had really intense control over the congregation. My mom and I will sometimes talk about, again, these just weird memories that come out from, you know, this like past life, you know, of the things that were really controlled that women could and couldn't do, and how differently men and women are treated in that feeds tradition. That was kind of just the one thing was I felt like the church really needed control over us and our lives. And I think the other kind of takeaway for me from that time was that I sorta of felt like God had one main job, which was to decide which direction people were going, right? So were we doing well, and we were going to end up in heaven. Or were we going to have this, you know, we're all gonna go to hell and extreme torture, which is very real. It's a, it's a very real thing in that faith tradition. So I can remember being, you know, like, my daughter's age laying in bed at night, like, I hope I don't burn in hell forever, you know, as a very small child, and sometimes I'll just, oh, you know, I'll think back on that. And I'm like, Oh, my gosh, you know, what were we teaching our kids? So it, it's, I think ended up really being true for me was I just didn't meet a God that I could love. I met a god that was really pretty scary to me as a kid. So, yeah, how old were you when you were introduced to Community of Christ? Let me think, Well, I started going to Community of Christ. And of course, we were RLDS back then. And so it would have been around let me think I was probably in seventh or eighth grade. I was in middle school. And I was actually going with my boyfriend at the time. he would take me to... I don't remember what they called it, but it was like this Friday, maybe it was just called Friday nights, I don't remember but they had like a weekend activity like a youth group activity. And there would be people from at the time there were three or four congregations in Flint There's two now, but kids would be there and have kind of a just a youth group thing. And so it was like an easy introduction. The kind of thing that, you know, kids would bring their friends to, it's just a youth activity. And that kind of transitioned into going on Sundays. But my real you no introduction or interest in Community of Christ, or in becoming part of Community of Christ was really through youth camping.

Blake Smith 10:25

Okay. Okay.

Linda Stanbridge 10:27

So let me think that would have been, so it would have been like in the late 90s 97, 98 99, somewhere just before the name change. And it's funny to think back on that too, and as an outsider's perspective, of how the name change was going and things that people thought were important. It's just funny sometimes when I when I think back on, you know, what, what it felt like, to me, becoming a member of the church at that kind of interesting time. But I ended up there really, because I would say I was 13, or 14. And I would lay in bed at night, and I would just have like, almost panic. And one of, one of the things I think it's even still kind of hard to talk about, I guess, I would just lay there and think about like, what if God's not real? You know what I mean? What if this is all there is. And I think for me, evangelicals focus so much on where you end up. And to me, it had kind of seemed like the heaven that I was being sold, didn't really make sense to me. And the how I was being sold was terrifying. And also, it didn't make sense to me. And so it was like, if this isn't valid, and this isn't valid, is God real, because to me, that was God's decision, right? Is deciding whether we go here, or here, I mean that... And I and I would lay in bed at night and worry about that. And I just thought, I need to kind of start over. And so I talked to my dad about it. And I told him I was really nervous. My dad still is non religious, I think he would say he's atheist. And so each of us in my family have kind of ended up different places as we've transitioned out of that. But I told him, you know, what I was really nervous about and I wanted to find a place where I could try to meet God. And so my dad went with me to a few churches. And then some there was one that was like, within walking distance at our house, we lived right in town. So I went to a Baptist church, I went to a Methodist church for a while. And actually, really, they had a good youth group, which was nice. So I tried a few different few different places before I ended up going to what was RLDS at the time with yeah, my boyfriend, and there were a few people there who I really connected with other young people I still have relationships with, which is pretty cool. So really, my introduction was, was just through relationships, like most of us, probably.

Blake Smith 13:06

Just listening to your story, I realize how much I, in those days took for granted. <Sure.> That I am a lifelong member of the church, you know, sixth generation, it was all I knew, and at 13, 14 15, I wasn't asking any of those questions. I've shared in many venues that I believed what I believed, because that's what I was told to believe. And that's what my mom believed and Dad, and you know, and generations had believed so never questioned it never never had any of those...hose moments, those lying in bed, moments. Didn't really think about faith a lot, actually, until I met my, the woman who would be my wife when I was 20. And she coming from the outside began to ask questions. I'm like, oh, I don't know, I've never thought about that. So what was that like? I mean, that's got to be fairly traumatic at 13 or 14, <Yeah.> to be having those kinds of thoughts.

Linda Stanbridge 14:05

You know, what, it haunted me for a long time because, you know, thinking about having questions that's not really encouraged in the faith tradition that I was raised in. And so it felt almost like you were doing something wrong to have too many questions. And I think it really didn't get reframed well for me, until I went to seminary. And what I...the questioning piece, the doubt piece. Because in my conversations with other people, folks that I was in seminary with and with Tony, I kind of had this realization that it was like, you know, what if what I'm thinking is doubt or questioning is really more like wonder. Like a desire to deepen the relationship and understand more, because I had had enough

experiences at youth camp with other people that told me that there was something else, you know, there was this God that is greater than me. I mean, I've experienced that many of us have. And so what I was thinking were these, like, negative doubts or questions that you shouldn't have was really seeking a deeper understanding and maybe a deeper relationship with God. And so kind of reframing that as wonder, as an actual expression of faith, was really transformative for me and kind of getting over so many of the barriers that I had allowed to be, you know, built up and in my mind just over time and trying to really process my faith transition.

Blake Smith 15:34

Great. Well, you came in during the time that we were RLDS. And so just even from late 90s, to 2024, there's been significant movement in the church, as we've deepened our understanding our own understanding about who we are, and that kind of thing. How has, how has that been in your process? I mean, obviously, there were some things, predominantly relationships, that you said, that kind of brought you in, initially, through seminary, etc. But, but how has it felt as we've kind of continued down that lane?

Linda Stanbridge 16:12

Yeah. I think in a way, and I, I've written about it this way before, I think I just kind of got lucky because really, I joined Community of Christ, specifically, because of the relationships. I mean, I was no theologian, then I could certainly tell the difference, you know, women were serving in ministry and had been for over a decade by that time, nobody really cared what I wore. Half the time, I didn't wear shoes in the sanctuary, nobody made a big deal out of it. And so for me, it's just like a young teenager, it really was just like, I felt very accepted. And that, you know, was what made me want to get baptized. And then I went, I went to Graceland. And after Graceland for a handful of years, I didn't really do church, not for any, you know, negative reason I was just being a young adult, I think, to some degree, that's, you know, really normal part of the experience. But when I came back, the Enduring Principles hadn't been around, I should have left up, when those came out. They hadn't been around for super long. And I got kind of introduced to the Enduring Principles through I think it was a Mission Center event. And I was just so impressed. I was so amazed. And I was really shocked, in a way at how different that was and what I was used to experiencing, and congregational life, you know, in my congregation in Flint, which, you know, had been several years before, but then also, my husband and I ended up in a very rural congregation out here. And it was just so very different to hear the church kind of talked about that way, and what the visions and goals were. And so I kind of felt like, oh, good you know, I can actually just stay here, I'm trying to get back into the church, and I don't have to do a faith transition again, like, look at the great stuff they've been doing well, and like you know, having fun with my friends and doing whatever young adults do. It was just sort of a relief. You know, I was impressed that things that had become important to me, you know, through my experience at Graceland, and just the relationships that I had developed in the church, it was really good for me to see that stuff articulated. And a while, in a way that felt, you know, really structured and pretty holistic, that has a lot of room for growth. It's good bones, right? <Right. Yeah.> For me, that was just very different and really great to see it, like all kind of spelled out. And that's kind of what got me excited again, about Community of Christ, and made me want to get involved more in the Mission Center and in our local congregations. I have felt very relieved, as we've gone. I think we have a lot of work left to do. But I'm, I'm really proud of the progress that

we've made in the time that I've been with Community of Christ, which has been I mean, 20, over 20 years. So in that time period, yeah, we've made amazing, amazing leaps. We've done really courageous things. So I'm really confident we can do lots more courageous things.

Blake Smith 19:05

I'm hoping so. I know, I hear often people saying, well, it's nice that we've taken that step, but we really have a long way to go and that in a variety of areas. <Yeah.> I'm interested to know, you've you used the term triggering, the TIC TOCs and stuff that are just triggering from some of those old things. Are there parts of that journey even 14, 15 year old and before that you found helpful in your continuing journey?

Linda Stanbridge 19:39

That's a really interesting question. I went, I went to a private school for like the beginning portion of elementary which it was a Christian school. And so I have found that I got—and this is not me bragging—because don't anybody come at me with Bible quizzes or any of that? I'm not talking myself up. Okay. Keep the bar low. But I think I had maybe a better Christian Ed experience than a lot of other people who have grown up in Community of Christ. One, I didn't get any of the Book of Mormon stuff, which is an advantage and a disadvantage in different ways and depending where you're at in the church, but it was really pretty focused on like the big Bible stories, so I had pretty solid Christian Ed between church and then you know, going to private school. So, I'm really grateful for that. I can still remember— and I must have been in second grade—we had to memorize these, like two songs to learn all the books of the Old Testament and all the books in the New Testament in order. And still when I get out my Bible, and I'm flipping through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, okay and that's how I remember it.

Blake Smith 20:46

My wife taught me those songs after we met.

Linda Stanbridge 20:49

Did she? Okay, so like <Very helpful.> Yeah! So there's some, you know, some just like really practical things that that conservative churches do really well. One of them is like, really structured Christian Ed. So I will say the downside of that was in seminary, I felt like I kind of had to learn the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament over, because while I knew the stories, the lens or the approach was completely different, which is cool to be given the opportunity to try and see something in a new light. Not everybody gets to really, I mean, seminary was a privilege, but not everybody gets to really kind of take apart all the pieces and look at it and see what's here, and whether it fits. And that was a really cool experience. I am thankful for that. I think it taught me a lot about how people are valued in churches and how churches can be, you know, a structural institution that that needs repair. And you know, that churches have to stay vigilant on that, ourselves as well that we don't, you know, fall into the traps of the things that we're supposed to criticize, and, and help reconcile and grow.

Blake Smith 21:59

That's great. I know, we really kind of talked about what was new in this tradition. So different from the Pentecostal evangelical perspective, are there particular things and you like, again, you kind of talked a little bit about it, but are there particular things that will, that have been hopeful for you or that have been important for you in that transition?

Linda Stanbridge 22:27

I mean, I wouldn't be here if it weren't for women in the priesthood. I think that we can all look around and see how many women are in churches, you know, what percentage of our congregations are women, and that's, you know, in many denominations, it's not exclusive to Community of Christ. I think, had we not made that change, I wouldn't be here. I did a women's retreat, you know, a year or two ago. And I was telling them as an outsider to Community of Christ or a person, sometimes I still feel like that, but you know, as a person who's fairly new. I think it's pretty amazing to sit here and know that I have never been alive, outing myself as a millennial. I've never been alive during a time when Community of Christ didn't ordain women, I was born in 1984. So how incredible that my girls, I have two daughters can look at generations of women who are serving in the church, and in, you know, the highest positions of the church. I have a friend on Facebook, who they're Catholic. And she posted a couple of years ago that her daughter loved the priest and was fascinated by what he did. And she wanted to be a priest when she grew up. And the mom said, and I just don't have the heart to tell her she can't. And I'm like, as a parent, it just broke my heart. As a parent of girls. I'm thinking, both my girls have gifts, and we would be lucky to have those as part of our church. And so that has, is really significant to me. As a mom, that's something that's important to me. I am really passionate about LGBTQ inclusion. And so I'm really proud of that in Community of Christ. I think it's an area where we can keep growing on the local and mission center level continuing to do that. But I'm really, really proud of that. And I think some, we've got some other cool things I think that we can be doing as well, we have such a good framework for justice and for what the world is really hungry for. I think we have a lot of opportunities if we can get a little more courageous.

Blake Smith 24:29

Well, that's a great segue into the next part of that is and that's the say, what do you think are the obstacles that we face in making those next steps that we need to make and becoming more aligned with what we believe and what we say?

Linda Stanbridge 24:45

Yeah, it's such a complicated question, isn't it? I mean, we have a lot to do. I think one of the things that, and this is just and I've probably I've spoken about this before, it's kind of a thing that bothers me personally. I'm an issue or a topic I think the church needs to draft is cohabitation for folks in the priesthood. So officially, you know, you need to be married. If you're living together and you're in the priesthood, that's been the rule for a long time, it's not a new rule. And I think sometimes people think that's like strictly an LGBTQ issue or strictly like a young adult issue. But you know, when I'm in my congregations, and we have 63 congregations here in Michigan, when I'm here, and I'm talking to folks, it's really folks who are disabled, and folks who are older who are also really impacted by this. And we're going to be relying on like the full diversity of people, if we're going to make this thing work. And so I just hate to see people excluded, because of things like that, you know, folks who are on disability, if they're married, they can lose disability benefits. And so if we're requiring them to be married, they

can lose their benefits, or they have to try to maintain two households. So that's an area where I think that we can really grow and do better. You know, our Enduring Principles are really clear that we want to abolish poverty, we want to make people have the best situation that they can have. And I think there's a way to live together outside of marriage that can fit within the Enduring Principles. And people can disagree with me if they want, because I, I enjoy talking about it. But, you know, I think that's something that that we can do better on. And that topic to, you know, engaging a wider diversity of leaders. We did some demographics on our mission center, not too long ago, and we are a bigger mission center. But you know, most of our priesthood are older. We have not a lot in my age group. Many of them are serving in roles that don't have as many responsibilities. I don't know what role priesthood will play in the future of the church. So I don't know if the ordination part matters to me, but promoting people into leadership roles, and really just giving people the permission and courage to try something new. We're doing a lot of new expressions in Michigan, and we have had really good success with several of them. So I think figuring out, you know, we've had this conversation for years and years, the church 2.0, 3.0, (John Dorhauer) all that whatever words you'd like for it, but it's not going away. You had a pastor recently told me, we just got to hold on, and we're just, you know, we're gonna get through the bumps, it's gonna go back to the way it was. And I'm like, it really isn't. Like, I don't think that's gonna happen. I could be wrong. But you know, we're, we're going to have to—not that the congregation's have to go away, they still have a really important role—but we really have to stop talking about doing the next thing for church and actually just start doing it. You know, getting courageous starting groups, whatever that looks like, and empowering people and encouraging people to do that, hopefully re engaging some folks. I think if we can do that, if we can get a really strong justice element in what we're doing that will appeal to a lot of people. I don't have a, have a one on one solution, I guess.

Blake Smith 28:02

Well, hopefully, I don't know how you feel about it. But I feel like we are, have been making some strides in that direction, moving toward a more principle based understanding of things versus a legalistic stance. I was encouraged by the resolution at the previous conference, allowing the Council of Twelve to consider, for instance, definitions of marriage and that are culturally appropriate and not making changes, necessarily, but at least bringing that into the conversation. <Yeah.> For me, that kind of shows some acknowledgement that this is such a different world. I mean, yeah, even our discussion back in 2019, about what is essential in communion? And what is tradition? We've never asked those questions before it was, it was just there were things like covering the communion with a tablecloth that was considered must, it must have some kind of theological background, right?

Linda Stanbridge 29:07

And blocking the blessing from getting down there.

Blake Smith 29:10

That's right. Well, and well, yeah, because I heard even during the pandemic, well do we need to open the little cups so that when we pray the prayer, it will bless the wine?

Linda Stanbridge 29:18

Fair questions. They're totally fair questions. For some people, like we said earlier, they haven't taken a moment to consider it. This is the way they've always done it. And now here, we have to face all these things, because we can't do it the way we did it. I was doing my D. Min. I started in December of 2020, which was a dumb time to start in the middle of the pandemic. But... <Now that you know,> Nevertheless, you know, listening to my colleagues trying to figure out how they were going to navigate communion was really interesting, because we had already had that conversation. And because Community of Christ was able to do the majority of our sacraments online pretty quickly. I mean, our response time on that was, I was really proud of that in talking with colleagues from other traditions because we do have sort of that open mindset that things, you know, should be up for discussion and reinterpretation, as our kind of context is changing. I think that's one of the things that we do, we do really well.

Blake Smith 30:12

You mentioned a bit about, like new expressions in Michigan and that kind of thing that are going on, what is your role in the Michigan area now.

Linda Stanbridge 30:24

So, work for the Michigan Mission Center, and I am the invitation support minister. So it has a job description, and you know, kind of what my role is in different different, aspects of what we do. But I think that role has looked different depending on who has held the position. Noelle Gaffka was one of the people, I think, who served in this position before me. For community of, or for Community of Christ in Michigan, I do a lot of the communications. Dan Nowiski is our mission center president. And he and I work on the communications together. So our social media, website, newsletters, all that stuff that I, I go ahead and try to make sure that we're staying on target and helping and provide some support to the congregations as well. So I help manage a few of their pages and have helped them get set up and updated and all that good kind of stuff. And then I also work directly with congregations on a few different things. One of the things that we've been working really hard on in Michigan for the last year and a half or so, is increasing the number of congregations who have gone through Harmony's Welcoming and Affirming program. So we started kind of set our goals in 2023 in January. And we had at that time, three congregations that had gone through that program. So that was let me see East Lansing. Spiral, which is located in Lapeer, Michigan, and Big Rapids. So we had had three congregations who had gone through that, but no new congregations in a really long time. So we wanted to increase that. So we've got eight now. So we've increased by five since then, which is great, we've been working really hard. I have <Wow!> two more waiting for a business meeting and three more starting in the fall. So I think, January, February, next year, we should be up to 12 or 13. So we've been working really hard to try and increase the number of congregations that are, you know, actively, openly welcoming LGBTQ folks. So that's been a big focus of mine over the last couple of years.

Blake Smith 32:27

And what is the total number of congregations that you have?

Linda Stanbridge 32:29

Right now we're at eight. We have two that are waiting for their fall business meeting. So we'll for sure be at 10 by the end of the year.

Blake Smith 32:36

But I'm talking about how many, how many congregations in the mission center?

Linda Stanbridge 32:39

Oh in the mission center. See, that's the trick. We have 63 congregations in Michigan and one emerging congregation. So it's an interesting situation in Michigan, because it's like, you know, we're barely at 15% or something. But we're still, if you were to look at the number of congregations by mission centers, it's like we're blowing everybody out of the water. And that's how I tell the story because I get kind of competitive about it.

Blake Smith 33:05

I didn't mean to diminish the work that's been done, At 12 congregations. That's amazing. That's amazing.

Linda Stanbridge 33:12

Yeah, we've been working really hard at that, which is cool. And it's, and I love it because you get to be in congregations. And it's like a 10 part. Normally we meet nine or 10 times sort of depends on how it goes. But you know, I'm there for an hour and a half. And that many times whether it's on Zoom or if they're close by I'd like to go in person to or sometimes I'll do kind of a mixture. But I love it because I get to know people in congregations and we have the best people. You know, we have such good conversations in there. And a lot of times they give me potluck. So it's been, yeah, I have really, have enjoyed doing it. It's cool just to sometimes when you're working in the Mission Center, and you do kind of the you know, paperworky type stuff, you miss that piece. And so I really love this aspect of my job I get to be with people.

Blake Smith 33:58

Well as the Mission Center president of a Mission Center who just had their first congregation have their first meeting with Harmony. I think you're I think your accomplishment is amazing, though. I know how difficult that is. So

Linda Stanbridge 34:12

Thank you! Yeah, we're really proud of it. We're really proud of it. It's been a really cool experience. And then I provide, you know, support to youth camps and the directors there helping support them, especially with communications we use online texting platform called Flocknote. We use that for all of our youth camps so they can communicate with parents and we send out registration links and updates and try to support youth camps and campgrounds however I can with that stuff, jump in with a little bit of everything, but the variety is good.

Blake Smith 34:42

Of course this episode is to talk about your faith transition. But I'm interested to know with you as an invitation support minister and I would assume encountering folks who are from other traditions, at least some, how have you found your experience to be helpful in that process?

Linda Stanbridge 35:03

Yeah, that's a good question. My own congregation has quite a few people who have been through a faith transition. And this is probably an area where we can, you know, better train our pastors and leaders too. Because if you haven't been through a faith transition it may be a little bit harder to understand what that experience is like. But I think the main thing is that you kind of know what questions people might be coming with, even if they haven't started to formulate those questions yet. Sometimes they know something is wrong, their gut tells them something isn't right. And being able to point people be...(I cannot talk), being able to point folks, you know, in the, in the right direction of resources, being prepared to have conversations. And really just, I think one of the things that's been most helpful for me is realizing that it's really not about having the answers. It's about helping people figure out how to explore their question. It's probably going to raise more questions, every every question you come up with an answer, it's going to come up with two more questions. But it's really not about providing people with answers. For me coming from a conservative tradition, that's the whole thing is that they have a canned answer, which for some people, is very comforting, because you're being told exactly what to think and feel. And you don't have to go through the emotional and spiritual kind of turmoil of unpacking everything. So, you know, being prepared kind of for, for that experience for them to want an answer. And to know that in Community of Christ, there might be some things we have an answer for. But I think really, we lean kind of into the mystery, the wonder, the ability to just explore and listen to each other and be in different places. But it's very different for people coming from other traditions, and that can sometimes be really uncomfortable. They want to just be handed an answer. And so to know how to how to walk people through that, I think it's something that you just learn. But it's, it has been really great for me to have people who have come from other traditions as well, I think it really enriches our experience as a congregation. But it also makes me feel seen when the certain things come up. And I'm like, Oh, my gosh, flash back, you know.

Blake Smith 37:23

Right, speaking of triggers.

Linda Stanbridge 37:25

Yeah, like so my congregation just finished a book study we did. My Body is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church, it's by Amy Kenny. It's an awesome book, it's really challenging. And it really is about facing ableism in the church. And she described so many of her experiences, which are, like horrifying things people have said to her in churches. And it helped me to kind of remember and realize that this really like harmful rhetoric that she's describing, this whole no wheelchairs in heaven idea was totally what I was raised around, that's totally what I was raised around. And I hadn't really, I mean, it was my own ignorance, I had not taken the time to kind of unpack that. And I think, you know, in evangelicalism, I had kind of learned to associate disability with suffering. And so there was no room for disabled folks to reflect God's image. And she unpacks that really, really well. So whether a person's coming with ableism or not, isn't, I mean, they definitely should unpack that, and I'm glad that I did some work on that, and I want to keep working. But it also just teaches you a little bit how to unpack if you have like a partner to walk through something like that. So I found her book, you know, really helpful in that way. But things are going to come up 20, 30 years past, a faith transition that sometimes

just, it's just like, that's where I had that weird idea planted in my head, you know, and I'm so glad I explored this through someone else's lens, because I know in my gut, that's not right. But it helps me someone walked it out with me. So yeah, Faith transitions are really weird, but having a partner in that.

Blake Smith 39:08

Well, I appreciate that. That's very helpful. And perhaps another idea for yet another live event. <Yeah.> for Project Zion Podcast, and have some folks on and help us, help us through that. That's a good topic.

Linda Stanbridge 39:18

My gosh, yeah. Yeah. And if you if you know, Wednesday Jones, she's amazing and super experienced on that topic. She's really cool. Maybe you should have her on as a guest.

Blake Smith 39:29

Yeah! All right. Well, of course, you know, as we've talked about this, a lot of a lot of this stuff overlaps and but I'm interested to know if you could specific, if you could narrow down to what are a couple of your hopes for Community of Christ specifically, what would they be?

Linda Stanbridge 39:50

My main hope for Community of Christ is, you know, that we get through this period of change for the church and that there continues to be a Community of Christ. You know, as a parent, I'm so proud of the work that we've done. I love hearing the way that my kids talk about people and talk about the planet. And I know that a lot of their way that they're being formed is because of Community of Christ, because of the family that we've created. My hope is that we'll continue to be here and you know, shape and change lives for a long time. I think we're gonna have to get a lot more courageous. That's the hard part. We've talked a lot for a long time about what the future of the church might look like. But this is the future of the church right now. And so I think it's time to stop talking about it, and just get out there and do it and see what's going to work. You know, relationships are a really strong capital that people need, and that a lot of people are craving and lack. I think maybe we're making it more complicated than it needs to be. So I think if we just keep being ourselves, we have an amazing structure for who we say we want to be. But it's just time to jump in and do it. I don't think we can drag our feet much longer.

Blake Smith 41:11

You mean, we don't have to set up a series of committee meetings and talk about it?

Linda Stanbridge 41:15

Nope, we probably don't. Maybe one or two meetings...

Blake Smith 41:19

We could actually just go out and have relationships.

Linda Stanbridge 41:21

We could. We could. We were I was doing a class through the CIMM program, at the seminary, and we were talking about that. In one of the books that we read, the guy said that he just dragged his lawn chair out in the front, he opened a cooler and he had beer and coke and whatever in there and just waited for his neighbors to come by walking their dogs. And he'd invite him to sit down and have a drink with him and just start chatting with people in his neighborhood. So you know, starting relationships, and connecting with people is probably not as hard as we make it out to be. We've got some institutional things we have to cover and insurance and all that boring stuff. But you know, we just have to dive in.

Blake Smith 42:03

My hearing that story about that gentleman, my neighbors and I laugh. My neighbors across the street. I wave to them on a regular basis. But we talk once a year and that's on Halloween night, because we both typically set something up out on the driveway, and I'll go over and sit with him for a while or they'll come over and sit, and we think every year we say oh, we should get together more often. And then the next thing we know it's Halloween. So...

Linda Stanbridge 42:32

Yep, absolutely. Yeah, we're gonna have to do it on purpose, aren't we?

Blake Smith 42:35

That's not hard stuff. But we have to be intentional about it. Yeah, yeah.

Linda Stanbridge 42:40

I think there's a lot of hope for us. I think we've got a bright future.

Blake Smith 42:44

Yeah. So is there anything that you would like for the church to hear you say, while you've got the, while you've got the floor?

Linda Stanbridge 42:53

Oh, man, you're giving me the whole floor.

Blake Smith 42:56

I'm giving you the whole floor.

Linda Stanbridge 42:59

You know, I think I'm really grateful to the church. I really am. Sometimes I look back on all the different pieces in my life, my friendships and my marriage, my kids and all these relationships. And so much of the good things that I have in my life are because of the church. We mess up, we make each other mad, you know, we complicate things. But I'm so grateful for this church, and the people. It's been a pretty awesome experience to be able to grow here and continue to feel, you know, accepted and invited. So I'm really grateful for the church.

Blake Smith 43:38

Great. Well, how about is there anything that I haven't asked that you'd like to talk about?

Linda Stanbridge 43:43

Yeah, everybody, check out Harmony, Harmony.LGBT, check out the website. And you can meet us for Sacred Pause, which is an online gathering for allies and LGBTQ folks. It's a really cool worship opportunity. And check out Harmony Table too it's a really great way to get connected to other people who are supporters and the LGBTQ community. It's really lonely out there. But you are not alone. There's a big group of us and there's support to be found. So I'm a big supporter of Harmony, definitely check out what we do. Everybody's welcome.

Blake Smith 44:20

That's awesome. I am so thankful, Linda for you not only for being willing to do yet another episode here, because I think you have some great things to say. But just for all that you're doing all that you represent, and your advocacy for all of those folks who are on the margins. It's a model to all of us. I hope that we can all get there that at some point and sooner than later. So thank you for being with us here today.

Linda Stanbridge 44:48

Yeah. Oh, thank you so much for having me. It really is fun to be here and just be able to chat and catch up. I really love being able to talk about faith and it's cool stuff.

Blake Smith 44:58

Well, one of these days hopefully we'll will this actually get to sit down together and have a cup of coffee and who knows what we'll talk about but yeah.

Linda Stanbridge 45:05

Really, and it won't even be a recorded conversation we only ever talked when we're recording.

Blake Smith 45:09

Exactly. So then you can say what you really think, no. Well, special thanks also to our listeners today. Thank you so much for being with us here at Project Zion. We've been with Linda Stanbridge for a Fair Trade episode and gotten a little bit extra there. That hopefully will be helpful for you. Thanks for joining us. If you want to hear more from the Fair Trade series, you can go to Projectzionpodcast.org and click on the series drop down menu and go down to Fair Trade. Of course, you'll also find all of our other series there. There are over 700 episodes on the website. Thanks for being with us. We'll put the book title in the show notes so that everybody can get a chance to look at that and also encourage you to join us when we have our next live event. So it sounds like we've got some good topics for that. Until next time, though. Have a great day.