

Nice to Matcha | Called to Apostle | Carrie Welch

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SPEAKERS

Carrie Welch, Robin Linkhart

Robin Linkhart 00:30

Welcome to Nice to Matcha, a Project, Zion Podcast series where we meet new people, leaders, movers and shakers, or all of the above. I'm your host, Robin Linkhart, and today I'm here with Carrie Welch, who has been called to serve in Community of Christ, Council of 12 Apostles. If that call is sustained in legislative session at the 2025 World Conference, Carrie will be ordained during a worship service at that same conference. It is great to have you with us today, Carrie.

Carrie Welch 01:05

Thank you, Robin. It is good to be here and with the listeners today.

Robin Linkhart 01:09

Now you've only been on Project Zion twice before, and both of those times you were on a panel of people. Today, we're going to get to know you much, much better. But let's start with the basics. Please take a minute to introduce yourself to our listeners.

Carrie Welch 01:27

Sure. So I live now in Salem, Oregon, with my husband Donald, and our son Lucas, who just graduated high school. Our daughter Jane lives in Portland, and we are also close, so that makes me happy. My job title is FMS Bishop, but I'm currently serving as the field support minister for the Western field and as the team lead for the whole of the FSMs. I've been in this role for about seven years, but have worked for the church overall for over 18 now.

Robin Linkhart 01:57

Wow, that's exciting information, and a great update on your family. I hadn't heard a recent update, so it's great to hear about your kiddos, too.

Carrie Welch 02:06

Thanks.

Robin Linkhart 02:06

Carrie. We would really like to hear all about your growing up, your growing up story, so to speak. So where did you grow up, and what was life like for you and your family and your community, and tell us everything you want to tell us about your interests and hobbies, and then, of course, we are very interested in your faith journey. So where was God and faith in the mix of all of that growing up time?

Carrie Welch 02:33

Okay? Well, I was born in Oregon and lived here for about eight years before my whole family moved to the Kansas City area Blue Springs, specifically, and I spent the rest of my childhood living there until I left for college. I grew up with my younger sister, Julie, and church was a huge part of our childhood. My whole extended family was actively involved in the congregation, and we were reminiscing yesterday about how we even used to play church by building a podium out of boxes in my grandparents garage, and we would take turns preaching, and even made hymnals and oh my. Anyway, it was really just an integrated part of who we are. I remember attending my first youth camp. Can't Follow My Foot at age seven here in Lewis River Campground. Which ironically, my husband was at too, but at seven, we didn't even know each other, but it's been a fun part of our story. Growing up, I was in Zioners in Zion's League, which is what the names of our youth groups were called at the time. I participated in camps and reunions and Spectacular and even just made the age cutoff to attend the first IYF, the International Youth Forum at the Temple, and so that was super fun. I'm also the daughter and granddaughter of artists and entrepreneurs. Creativity was always a huge part of my life, and at that time, I expressed it through music. So the band and the theater and the choir kids were my people. My high school graduating class was huge, about 1200 people. And so I had to find a niche. My closest friends were my camp friends, though, and luckily, because of where I lived, I had a lot of people who were both school and church friends. So that was really great. A significant part of my life was when I was 10. It was when Doctrine and Covenants, Section 156 was adopted by the World Conference. So I was young enough to just know that it was happening, but not old enough to know how that would affect the rest of my life. My mom was called to the priesthood about a year or two later, and while my dad had always shared a strong testimony of her call, the rest of her family really struggled with the adoption and accepting women in the priesthood, and chose to leave our church over that, and started to attend the restoration church. And that was really significant to me as a kid, because we had always been so close, always having Sunday dinners, and it was just who we were and that changed and has healed over time, but at the time felt like a huge loss. It was definitely a significant shift in the family dynamic. I remember, even in fact, as we were kind of working through that our, my home congregation divided, and we would split our times of Sunday school and worship, and we would switch the hymnals in between worships. As a kid, I just wanted to be with my friends, and so I always felt like I had the choice to attend two Sunday schools or two worships, if that's what I needed to do. I was there and active, and that seemed to be enough for my parents, and I really appreciated that, but I'm super proud of my mom, and even more so in recent times as I have begun to consider the sacrifices that she made to follow her sense of call, and the pathways that that has kind of opened up for me, even in this time as I accept this call her example, and that has been a significant part of my story.

Robin Linkhart 06:00

Wow, I love that story. One of the blessings for me as a host on Project Zion Podcast is interviewing people and hearing the story of their lives. And it never fails, no matter how long I've known the person that I learn something new about them. So that's been super, super exciting. And what a novel way to handle a congregation that splits for whatever reason, but there were several congregations—like we lost half our congregation—but to use the same building and just flip it so that you're still like in association with each other, because we had...

Carrie Welch 06:36

Right. Because we had all been friends, and, you know, even the grown ups had all worked together for years, and so we had enough respect for each other to allow us to kind of make our own ways. But for a while, it worked, and I think we're all just trying to figure it out.

Robin Linkhart 06:52

Yeah, yeah, I really I would love that part, and I didn't know that you were big into band and choir.

Carrie Welch 06:59

Yes, choir and band and art and all of that, until I had to start making a choice in my schedule. So.

Robin Linkhart 07:06

And what did you play in the band?

Carrie Welch 07:08

I played flute. <Ooh!> I cannot still play flute. I did try the other day. That was funny, but I grew up taking piano lessons as a young kid. My mom's a pianist, and so all of that just kind of came naturally.

Robin Linkhart 07:24

That's wonderful.

Carrie Welch 07:25

Now I play the radio and...

Robin Linkhart 07:28

The radio. [laughing] Okay, so that's super exciting. A huge high school graduating class, and you are getting set, and I'm assuming that you're have your sights set on going to college. So tell us about your next few chapters of life with college and beyond, with career and family and so forth.

Carrie Welch 07:51

Sure, so I grew up knowing that I would go to Graceland College. There's pictures of me with little bees on yellow overalls, and it was just kind of never a question, and it was never something that was forced. It was just something that I always assumed. My grandpa went there, my parents met there, my camp friends were going. I never even considered anywhere else, and for me, it was just the best experience. I loved my college years. I would spend my summers working at reunions and campgrounds, selling books and materials for Herald House. So I would go and spend nine weeks at a campground and sing the same songs and the same camp themes over and over and over. But in my weeks off, I would

counsel and became amazing friends with camp directors that even after my Herald house days, I would still continue to go back and participate in those, especially Blue Water in Michigan, it's just part of my heart is up there. I received my bachelor's degree in business administration and entrepreneurship from Graceland, and after graduating, I moved to Denver, Colorado with some of my friends, where I had a position waiting for me to work for American Century Investments. I think at the time it was 20th Century Investments, but it was my entryway into finance, and I learned a lot there. But not the least was how to create family out of friends. So many of us had just we were all that same kind of age group of being young adults and moving for a job and not having family nearby. So it was really great to be able to create Thanksgivings with our new family of friends and and what. So that leads me to your next question.

Robin Linkhart 09:38

Alrighty, that, and it's exciting. I didn't know that you had lived in Colorado for a period of time.

Carrie Welch 09:43

I did.

Robin Linkhart 09:44

That's very exciting. So I am aware that you've had two separate times in your life, a full time employed ministry with Community of Christ. So tell us about those two eras, and include the interlude of life in between, because a lot of stuff happened there, too.

Carrie Welch 10:00

It did. So I had been working in Denver for a couple of years, and was finding God in the mountains, rather than in a congregation, which is typical of a lot of young adults at that time. But my dad was super excited about a new initiative of the church called Transformation 2000 and sent me a DVD to watch of President Grant McMurray sharing his vision of hiring 200 plus ministers. While I was watching that, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was going to be one of them, and that was brand new feeling. Nobody in my family had served in full time ministry. I didn't know what that looked like on a personal level, but it was absolutely the beginning of that sense of call in my life. So I applied for a job transfer to the Kansas City office, and worked there for a couple of months until I was hired to be a youth minister alongside Matt Frizzell in Kansas City Stake, and that began my full time ministry journey. From there, I went on to serve as a young adult minister at Central Mission Center and then started seminary during that time at Saint Paul School of Theology too. So

Robin Linkhart 11:11

during that time, had you already been called to priesthood? And if so, when did that happen?

Carrie Welch 11:17

No, I had not been called to priesthood previously. It was during my not even as a young adult Minister, I think, I think it happened when I was starting young adult ministry, okay,

Robin Linkhart 11:31

Yeah, make sure to include that so we understand how that all came about.

Carrie Welch 11:34

Good idea, yeah. And so I was called to elder during that time. So working as a young adult Minister, I loved that I was focusing on spirituality in young women was kind of my key focus, part of of Seminary and transferred to Graceland's master's program, because that led me back to Graceland University now to serve as a campus minister, and that's where I finished my Master of Arts in religion, and that was by far my favorite job. No shade to previous ones, but for me, it was just at the right time, the right place, and I loved it. I had imagined myself staying there a long time, but as life happens, I fell in love a long distance relationship with Donald Welch, and decided that if we were going to be serious, we should maybe live in the same state. So I uprooted my life and took a big leap to move to Arizona to get married. And so that is kind of a pause in my full time ministry, but still super significant So, and by far the best choice I could have made.

Robin Linkhart 12:47

Let's back up just a second. So you were Graceland University campus minister, full-time.

Carrie Welch 12:53

Yes, I was working with Blake Smith. It was a team.

Robin Linkhart 12:56

Okay, okay, so you came in after Shandra.

Carrie Welch 12:59

I did. When Shandra left, she called me and said, Carrie, I'm leaving. I think you need to be in this role, which was such a great entryway. And of course, I had to interview and whatnot. But it was wonderful to work with Blake and to follow Shandra and so,

Robin Linkhart 13:14

So what years were you there ? Two years...

Carrie Welch 13:15

I was there, 2000 to 2003

Robin Linkhart 13:18

Okay, okay, that's great. Okay, so you have moved to Arizona.

Carrie Welch 13:26

Moved to Arizona, my husband was working as a full time minister, and, you know, there were only limited jobs there, so I didn't have any opportunity, and had to find something else. So I went to work in the nonprofit sector, working as a director with a great company called Child Crisis Center. We worked with children who were in the shelter environment for whatever reasons, and that really just kind of started to make a significant part of my heart. Not only did I learn a lot working with another organization, it planted seeds in my life that led us to adopting our youngest kid at the time, there too from foster care and wow, that has been a journey, but again, totally worth it, and something I would

have never expected when I was making that leap to Arizona. So I married my husband, had a daughter from a previous relationship, Jane, she was fabulous. She was five when we started dating, six, when we got married, and Lucas came along, and I was learning lots in this nonprofit world, but after seven years of being in Arizona, we were ready for a new adventure. So we ended up in Council Bluffs, Iowa, my husband had accepted a full time pastor position there at Council Bluffs Central, and so I took my non profit history and applied it in new places, there in Omaha, Nebraska and Council Bluffs, Iowa. And while I was working there, I also began a new ministry in my home congregation that I had learned about in Phoenix called the Open Table. And so a lot of you may know me from those days of when I was coming to talk to you about that. That program was just an incredible way for congregations to take tangible steps towards our mission initiative of Abolish Poverty and End Suffering. And I got several of my other local area congregations to try it, and as our success continued to blossom, I began to imagine the impact it could have on our broader church. So I wrote up a business plan to present to my apostle at the time, Stassi Cramm, and she created funding to hire me. And so thus was my entryway back into full time ministry, and I worked as the Compassionate Ministry Specialist then for five years I loved that.

Robin Linkhart 15:52

So did you still hold the Office of Elder at that point? Or had you had another call before you moved to Council Bluffs, Iowa, Omaha, Nebraska area,

Carrie Welch 16:02

Yeah, at that time, I was still elder. During that time, I was called to high priest. So locally, I had gotten involved, even previously to being rehired, just in my home congregation, I was teaching parenting classes and Financial Peace University classes for the community, growing my bishop skills. Now I can look back. So when that opportunity arose to transition to a Field Support Minister team, it felt like a natural progression of my ministry and of my career, really, at that point. Then I was ordained to bishop, and had been serving on that team ever since.

Robin Linkhart 16:41

It's really awesome from this juncture to look back as you talk about the unfolding of your life and these different development opportunities and how they dovetail, but they they add such depth and breadth to your skill set as a minister. But also everything that you've done in your career and even your growing up life and college and such, just adds to deepening and widening that experience, and it just dovetails so well together.

Carrie Welch 17:14

Looking back, it makes all the sense in the world, but looking ahead, I never would have imagined it.

Robin Linkhart 17:18

Right, right, right. And then that Field Support Minister role was developed—a team of specialized ministers, I think we started with six—that walk side by side with apostles in the field and support the USA as a larger field. <Right.> Even though we have separate apostolic fields, which kind of launched, at least the USA, part of the church into a new way of looking at a nation with fields in it, so that we could collaborate much more than previously, and with the Field Support Ministers, and you're the team

lead currently, that's been a really...you've kind of pioneered ground, because you all are very tight together and work so closely together. Can you tell us a little bit about what that journey's been like?

Carrie Welch 18:09

Sure. You know, that was a new adventure that I wasn't quite sure what would bring either in that role. You know, I could see the job description on paper, but you never really understand what something will be until you begin to live it. And I was fortunate to be able to work alongside Apostle Barbara Carter. And the idea, I think, was to allow apostles an opportunity to vision and minister and the Field Support Ministers, then would do a lot of kind of, what I call behind the scenes work. So we worked a lot with fiscal services and the Presiding Bishopric and legal and that became really significant during the time of Bridge of Hope, especially as congregations were working to create funding for that and or maybe sell property. That was a significant part of my life for several years doing that. But our team is really close, and we continue to share resources all the time. And that has been such a valuable asset, not just to me, but I think, to the church, knowing that we really coordinate well, and they're good people.

Robin Linkhart 19:14

Yeah, it's been a blessing all the way around. And rich, rich ministry. And I think it's, it's a reminder that we, we really bifurcate the holistic nature of discipleship when we separate finances or administrative task from mission, because it all is integrated in together, and it's all about mission and the ministry of the Field Support Ministers has just been integral to walking through a very challenging period. Because all of those relationships and those administrative type decisions or steps that congregations have to step through—for example, if they're going to sell a building—has been so important to the health of the community: as a congregation, as a Mission Center, as a church, and everything that the Field Support Ministers do is just connected to the heart of mission. I just want to underscore that it's all about mission.

Carrie Welch 20:15

Thanks, yeah.

Robin Linkhart 20:16

Okay, so you are on your second era, then, of working with Community of Christ, which brings us up to what you're doing now, anything that you left out that you wanted to add to that part?

Carrie Welch 20:34

Um, no, I think you are moving on to number six. Is that right? Okay, sorry.

Robin Linkhart 20:40

Yeah. I just want to take a quick little side trip here, because it may seem odd, but often, as full time ministers, we can be so consumed by the doing of ministry and church life, and, you know, prepping for this that and the other, that we neglect the being and that continuing need of our own souls. So Carrie, how do you nurture your relationship with God?

Carrie Welch 21:08

That really resonates with me, in my case, because my husband, too has been a full time minister the whole time we've been married. We very much live in the world of church, so we have to intentionally nurture other parts of our lives, so we have anything else to talk about. Personally, I still see God in nature, most significantly in the waves of the ocean that instilled in me as a young child growing up here on the coast, and that's still where I find my spirit most significantly. So moving back to Oregon has been really good for my spirit, and I'm so fortunate to be able to just go over and spend an afternoon there and reconnect and then come home back to my regular life. But I do that as often as I need to, and that's been a blessing. I also had to be really intentional to develop some hobbies. I had reached a point where, like, I don't have any hobbies, and now I feel like I have too many but I learned that I love to sew and enjoy designing my own quilts, and have made dozens of them now, and that is as much a surprise to me as probably my mom, who taught me to sew when I was a kid, and I was totally uninterested. But I also like to sketch and watercolor. I have a little travel journal I take with me. So I do that mostly when I travel, but that too, has been fun to look back at and remember where I have been and the ministry provided. I remember even last World Conference I was sketching the front podium with all of you guys up there, and you know, had taken a long time and made me laugh that maybe this year I'll have to sketch it from the other perspective,

Robin Linkhart 22:46

That's a shift, isn't it?

Carrie Welch 22:48

It's so weird. Especially when at that time, I would have had no inclination that that's where I would be the next year. So more than anything, I really just try to explore and experience joy and laughter and community, and I'm always seeking those opportunities.

Robin Linkhart 23:06

Thank you. Thanks for sharing that with us. Okay, so now let's talk about why we're having this conversation. You have been called to serve in the office of apostle on the Council of 12 Apostles, and we would love to hear about how that call came about.

Carrie Welch 23:24

Sure, I am still sorting that out in my head, but my heart is confident in this call. You know, people talk about that still small voice within you, and that has always been kind of a guiding force for me. You know, we talk about that sense of call in a number of ways, but even when it was small, I recognized that it was growing louder and more persistent over time, and when Stassi presented the call to me, that voice began to sing, I could literally feel the vibration in my chest. And after I decided that it was confirmation, rather than a heart attack. I let it go and rode out the waves of that but it helped that I woke up with absolute confirmation that morning of what our call and our discussion would be. And it's so weird, because it's not a place of I've earned this or I deserve this at all. It's very humbling position to hear those words and hear somebody else present that opportunity to you and express why they think that you have been called and this is the right time for you to serve on this team in this way, and I'm still just taking in, you know, all of that she shared and all that I'm being called to and will just have to do my best. You know, I'm confident that this is the right place the right time, but that doesn't mean I'm

confident about what I'm be facing and what I've agreed to, but I've learned to trust my sense of call even when it calls for change.

Robin Linkhart 25:00

Yeah, yeah, what was your husband's response? Donald?

Carrie Welch 25:04

Donald was like, "Well, yeah." He's been saying it for years, and, you know, I always just dismissed it and laughed it off. So he was, he's my biggest advocate by far. He's like, absolutely 100% so he's along for the ride. He has his own role, and he is great in it. And so we have, really, over the life of our marriage, been able to, you know, separate our own work life from our home life, and keep confidentiality when we need to. And you know, all of that has worked really well for us. It's been a blessing. I know there's not a lot of couples anymore that both work for the church, but we've made it work. And he was just thrilled. Probably more than me.

Robin Linkhart 25:11

I was sure that would be the answer, but it's always nice to hear.

Carrie Welch 25:57

Yeah, thanks.

Robin Linkhart 25:59

So I realized you're on the front end of this, and as we're recording this interview today, this is not information that's broadly known. So this question, I recognize, is a beginning question of something that will be an ongoing thing. But so far, how has this unfolding of this new chapter in your adventure with God. So far, how has that changed things for you?

Carrie Welch 26:26

I used to worry a lot about where my life would lead, because I didn't feel like I had a strong sense of purpose. Even in college, I got the business degree because that's what I felt I should do, and full time industry, like I said, I hadn't had any examples of that. It wasn't really even in my purview that that was would be an opportunity for me. So I used to joke that my life didn't turn out at all like I planned, but it did turn out far better, and that was a lesson I would tell it, you know, even with youth at camps and I'm like, Just keep going. It's gonna be okay. Looking back, my advice to my younger self would be to worry less about where you're going, just keep moving forward. Learn as much as you can, and remain open to possibilities. And that's really led me on this adventure to where I am so far, and it's what I'm trying to remind myself of in this moment, as I approach this next chapter, too. I know I can't predict the path ahead, but I expect that I will look back in awe.

Robin Linkhart 27:26

That is great advice. I love it. I'm going to tell myself that.

Carrie Welch 27:32

You can remind me of that again later.

Robin Linkhart 27:33

Yeah, yeah, right. So Carrie, what are your hopes for Community of Christ into the future? I mean, here we are. It still feels like we're in this place of in between, on the heels of the pandemic, on the precipice of what is to be. There's so much going on in the world and in our nation, and just the rapid change of life in a digital world is a lot, but you add in all the human dimensions of things and struggles and violence in the world and all kinds of things that are constantly in motion. How do you see God moving in that world, and how does that connect with our movement of Community of Christ and the heart of God's vision for all creation as we understand it to be?

Carrie Welch 28:23

That's a huge question, Robin. You know, and the best that I can do is approach it with the skills that I have, knowing that I don't have to be the only one to respond, that each of us have the opportunity to do that, but I'll bring what I know and what I can do to all of this that you just mentioned. I'm really hopeful that we can creatively come together and provide opportunities to explore what church is. You know, "church" in quotation. You know, I grew up thinking church was one thing. Then I grew up thinking I don't want what I think church is. And now I'm actively involved in church. But there's a lot of people who are still trying to figure out what that is, what it means and where it fits in their life. I'm mindful that we've lost people along the way, and others don't feel like church fits the same way it used to, and I hope that we can work together to explore what being the church really means, that we still have doors that we can open to experience Christ in new ways, and to just explore and be creative and say yes to new opportunities that come. I still love our name, Community of Christ, and I still truly believe it's our calling, and it's it sounds so simple. But you know, if we can be a Community of Christ together that's where I'm headed. That's what I want to do. And I don't know how exactly, but I'll keep moving. I know it's one step at a time and one foot in front of the other, even if what becomes looks different from what is now, or what I even can imagine it might look like in a few years. I don't fear change. I've done it a lot, but I also don't have a crystal ball, so I'm bringing my curiosity and my ability to listen and to dream to this position. I believe there's more than one path to get where we're going, and so many more ways to live the mission of Christ in our world. So I remain open to the voices of emerging leaders, those from different cultures and life experiences, and you know, I'm excited to hear their story and how that contributes to where we're going. I'm just excited that we can do it together.

Robin Linkhart 30:30

I am excited too, and I love as you talk about that, it speaks to the diversity of how church can be and feel and look like and that that's a strength. And so, so exciting, just filled with possibility. Exciting. So Carrie, is there anything you'd like to share today that I haven't asked you about?

Carrie Welch 30:55

You know, I just want to take the moment to acknowledge the value of this community in my life. The Sunday school teachers, the camp counselors, the people that paid for airline tickets for me to come back out and keep working at camps as a 20 something when I had no money. So many people contributed to my life and my ministry along the way, and I want to do that for others. You know? I hope that I can open doors for some of our youth and young adults for new opportunities, they have as much to give and offer the church as I do, and I really want to help create pathways and pull people along the

way as we go in the same way that I has been pulled along. So just acknowledging that I'm not here alone, that I have a community of support behind me, and that I want to do that for others in the church too.

Robin Linkhart 31:41

Thank you so much for making time to be with us today, Carrie, it's been great to hear your story.

Carrie Welch 31:47

Thanks, Robin. It's been good to spend some time with you today.

Robin Linkhart 31:50

If you would like to hear more from Carrie Welch, check out Project Zion Podcast episode number 346, on the topic Online Ordination or episode number 524 to meet the Field Support Minister Team and how that team supports mission in the USA. 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.