

Nice to Matcha | Jannè Grover | Called to the First Presidency

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Jannè Grover

Robin Linkhart 00:20

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 Jannè Grover, who has been called to serve in Community of Christ as a counselor to the prophet/president and member of the First Presidency, if that call is sustained in legislative session at the 2025 World Conference, Jannè will be ordained during a worship service at that same conference, Jannè, it is great to have you with us here today.

Jannè Grover 01:12

Thanks so much, Robin. It is always great to be with you and to share in the Project Zion Podcasts.

Robin Linkhart 01:19

So we know that you've been a guest on Project Zion before, but today we are going to get to know you much better. Let's start with the basics. So just take a minute to introduce yourself to our listeners.

Jannè Grover 01:34

All right. Well, first of all, my husband, Kevin and I live in Lee's Summit, and our family has been active in the Woods Chapel, congregation. My husband, Kevin, is a retired school administrator, and we have three grown children. Zach is a computer programmer at Community of Christ international headquarters, and he is married to Eryn Tinsman Grover, who is a cardiac ICU nurse at KU Med. Our son Dillon is starting his final semester at Northwest Missouri State University, studying exercise science with interest in further study to be an athletic trainer. And our daughter Caitlin is a sophomore at Graceland University, majoring in biology and chemistry with interest in becoming a veterinarian. And, we have a sweet dog at home named Nike.

Robin Linkhart 02:32

I love that. I forgot about your sweet dog, Nike.

Jannè Grover 02:38

Today, you may hear her, hear her in this interview at some time.

Robin Linkhart 02:43

Oh, okay, that's good to know in case you hear from Nike. Jannè, tell us your growing up story. Like, where did you grow up? What was life like for you and your family and in your community? Tell us about your interests and your hobbies. And we really want to know where was God and faith in the mix of all of that for you?

Jannè Grover 03:05

Yeah, well, I'll begin with the last question, and that is that God and this faith community have been at the center of my growing up story. My parents, Gary and Ramona Collins, have always been active in church, ministry and leadership, and my sister Jerry and my brother Brad, and I grew up immersed in all of the activities of congregational life, involved in every youth camp and reunion possible. So I was born in Maryville, Missouri, and lived in Salt Lake City, Utah for a short time as a toddler, while my dad was pursuing his PhD studies. And then we lived in Ottawa, Kansas for a couple of years, where I started kindergarten, but my formative years are mostly in Lamoni, Iowa and Maryville, Missouri. So my early elementary years were spent in Lamoni, which is where I was a, I was baptized, and I experienced my first business meeting, first of many, many business meetings, and that is what I was most excited about after being baptized and confirmed, was participating in a business meeting. I had no idea how many there would be in my life, but my middle school and high school formative years were spent in Maryville, Missouri, and we lived near my maternal grandparents on their farm, and while I was not crazy about farm chores, I am grateful for the experience, the values and the work ethic associated with growing up on a farm. What I loved most about growing up on the farm was raising and riding horses, and my two favorite horses were Rocky and Rafty. And another essential part of my formative years was music lessons. I began violin lessons at the age of four and piano lessons at the age of five, and in middle school, I began playing the saxophone, which really became my love. I've always loved to read. And while I was never a great athlete, I enjoyed playing sports of any kind, but especially volleyball at Far West church camps, and that's Spectacular. And in high school, I was highly involved in music, especially band, and I participated in some forensics and theater and cheerleading and track. And I really appreciate that I was nurtured as a disciple and as a church musician by the rural congregation of Bedison, Missouri, I will always be mindful and grateful of that beloved community out in the country by the incredible potlucks that we enjoyed, but also by a sense of belonging and a sense of value to that community. And section 156 came forth during my sophomore year of high school, and I remember thinking immediately that this would open the door for my mom to serve in priesthood. But at that time, I had never considered the possibility that I might serve in an office of priesthood, certainly not in the office of priesthood to which I have been called.

Robin Linkhart 06:57

That's amazing. Yeah, yeah, wow, that's a lot. Jannè, I do have to say that there's nothing like a potluck in the rural community of the US.

Jannè Grover 07:09

There is nothing like and the homemade pies. that could be its own Project Zion Podcast.

Robin Linkhart 07:16

That's right, and all that fresh produce that, yes, makes its way to the table in many wonderful forms. And I honestly see a lot of homemade, homemade bread sometimes show up. And yes, yeah, yes, that's great. So, you were in band in high school. Did you do marching band in high school?

Jannè Grover 07:36

Yes.

Robin Linkhart 07:37

Oh, don't you love it?

Jannè Grover 07:38

I do. I never played an instrument. I was a twirler my freshman year in high school, and then I was drum major for the rest of my time, but I loved marching band.

Robin Linkhart 07:50

Yeah, me too. I played flute in marching band and oboe and concert band, but marching with a flute, you've got to always know when you're passing the tuba, get it down out of your mouth before you lose all your teeth.

Jannè Grover 08:04

Exactly!

Robin Linkhart 08:05

Alrighty, so, there you are in the in the heart of the US, actually, and not far even Marysville is not that far from Lamon, where you spent some time. So, you're done with high school and you're ready to launch off to college. Tell us what comes next for you in these chapters of college and beyond, and you know your career and the continued unfolding, as you say, of how your discipleship and ministry takes place in those years.

Jannè Grover 08:41

Yeah, so I went to the University of Missouri in Columbia for my undergraduate work, and I majored in vocal and instrumental music education, certified kindergarten through 12th grade. And I should add that I never wanted to be anything but a music teacher. So that is what my interest was going into college. That's what I pursued all the way through my studies and where my first career took me. So, in college, I was involved in all aspects of the music department, but again, particularly with marching Mizzou, and again, I served as a drum major for three years. Interesting fun fact during my time there, GTE was doing a commercial that was illustrating how the phone system had connected the campuses, and I think that's hilarious now when we think about the online connectivity, but this was a phone system that connected the University of Missouri campuses, and they used the marching band to illustrate for this commercial. And because I was the drum major, I was upgraded to a principal character and I received royalties for this national commercial. So that's kind of a fun fact. I don't know if anybody would even recognize me if they saw that, but, but anyway, you never know where those opportunities will open up. But during that time, the Columbia congregation was a wonderful church

family for me that nurtured and supported me during my college years. I loved it when I would march by and there would be a group of them that would wave and see me and as wonderful connections. So, it was really a valued community to me after I graduated. I taught band for two years in Harrisonville, Missouri, and then went to Florida State University to pursue my master's degree in instrumental conducting. And following that, I taught band in Marietta, Georgia for a year, and during this time as a young adult, I was involved in every congregation where I moved, and was always welcomed as a music minister, especially as a piano player. But I was also a seeker at that time, and not necessarily a seeker of another faith community, but really a seeker of finding my own faith journey, or finding a faith journey that was my own, or an understanding of it as my own, not just one I inherited. And so, during this time, while attending a congregation in Atlanta, I was looking for the adult Sunday school class, and I accidentally walked into the adult pre-baptismal class, but I was welcome to stay and enjoyed that journey of kind of rediscovering this faith community through the lens of another seeker. This was also around the time that the temple was completed, and I had the opportunity to tour it with my parents and with Larry Norris before it opened. And that experience was transformational for me as I felt the welcome into a global community, just as I walked into the narthex lined with flags from around the world and under the cross made of wood from around the world, as I experienced the meaning of the worshipers path, the expanse of the sanctuary and the awareness of God and the call of the World Plaza, I was home, and I discovered a deep sense of belonging and recommitment to this faith community that is dedicated to the pursuit of peace. So, in 1994, I moved to Blue Springs, where I taught band, and I also started my specialist degree in secondary school administration and superintendency through Northwest Missouri State University. And while I never used that degree to serve as a school administrator, it has certainly been of great use as a church administrator in terms of principles about relationships and leadership. And this is where I met my husband, Kevin, who at that time was teaching science and coaching track and cross country at Blue Springs High School. So we were married in 1996 and I moved to Lee's Summit high school to teach band, and then in 1999 is when I switched to teaching orchestra at Lee's Summit North High School, and absolutely fell in love with the orchestra, and this is when our oldest was born. And so, I taught at Lee's Summit north for five years, and both boys were born during this time. And so, in 2004 I decided to leave teaching in order to be home with our boys, and our daughter, Caitlin, came along shortly after that in 2005, and while I was home with my kids, I taught private music lessons. And in fact, President of Seventy Joelle White was one of my students. She was a saxophone student of mine, and I also took care of my sister's three kids and one other sweet little boy named Hudson. And during this time, I was immersed in all aspects of congregational life, especially all aspects of music ministry. I enjoyed working with various musicians and ensembles, and I directed the adult choir and the children's choir, and I loved the opportunity to do some Christmas and Easter cantatas that included a full choir and a full orchestra at Woods chapel. And I helped lead vacation bible school experiences and even composed original music for Bible school curricula. This is also where I lived into my first priesthood calling before our first son was born. I experienced in a dream that I was called to priesthood. And I journeyed with this possibility for quite a while, maybe even resisting it at times, but I came to a place of peace and offered to God that, whether or not I was ever called to serve in priesthood, I would faithfully serve in whatever way was needed, as a disciple and as a music minister. So shortly after that is when I was presented with the call to serve as priest, and I valued this call, and I carried the ministry of the priest as presence, as friend, as minister with families into each of my priesthood calls, and as an elder and a high priest, I served as a member and leader of the worship commission was part of the pastorate and coordinated worship

experiences for reunions. And as our kids grew up, church was always one of their favorite places to be. In fact, one time I actually used the threat of taking away church privileges if some behavior was not modified, and I find that hilarious, but they all value the community that nurtured their discipleship and that has loved them since the day they were born.

Robin Linkhart 17:22

Well, I just, I just love your story, Jannè, and I'm sure it did not go unnoticed by all of our listeners, that somewhere out there, there's a GTE national commercial featuring you. I can, I can imagine that might show up sometime in your future, in your future, for sure, really, really appreciate your journey as you were going in to young adult, 20s, early 30s, of becoming a seeker. I think for many of us, we go through that, and you articulated it so well, kind of moving from a second hand religious experience to a first-hand religious experience, when the our story that's been passed on becomes truly your story that that's just so inspiring and how that kind of as you talked, it felt like it culminated into this really major experience, as you experience the temple, and that global identity that's expressed in the architecture and the different things that are present in that building, as well as the paths and, you know, that call out on the big, what is it called, the World Plaza. The World Plaza, yeah, right, there is, it just feels like that, that reconversion kind of experience. I mean, Darrell Guder talks about the continuing conversion of the church that, yeah, reconversion is so important to an ongoing faith journey, so absolutely and then listening to how that sense of call and deepening commitment to discipleship evolves into ordained ministry. So Jannè, I mean, gosh, your life has been full and so nurtured by the church. And you know your whole family church is part of who you are as a family, as it is for many families in Community of Christ, but then there's this shift of deepening focus. So, what brought you to going into full time ministry with Community of Christ and tell us about the roles that you've served in over the years as a full-time sustained minister.

Jannè Grover 19:49

Yeah. So, first of all, when I was, when I was staying at home with the kids and working in different ways from my home, I also was seeking any opportunity for continued education with the church or deepening formation experiences. And so, I really soaked up every opportunity, and I found this, this kind of hunger to learn more. But during this time, a friend of mine who was working in the communications team at the time, told me about a part-time prayer for peace coordinator position that was open at International Headquarters. And I was intrigued by this, but I thought the timing would be better in a year. So I said, Yeah, so let me know if there's something like this that's open in a year, but after several months and persistent invitation in early 2011, I applied and was hired in that role, and it was an experience that I value deeply as I began to see myself more and more as a member of a global community and shaped by this daily practice of praying and working for just peace on and for the earth. And it was also fun, because my kids enjoyed learning about the countries that we prayed for each day. So, it was this shared experience in our family. And then, in late 2012, I transitioned into the full-time role of disciple formation specialist, and this position aligned with my lifelong passion for teaching and learning, but also all of the ways that we are formed in Christ-centered community. And so, during this time, I also completed my master's of arts and religion degree with the Community of Christ seminary through Graceland University. And that was, that was really challenging as a mom with kids at home and all sorts of activities. But it was a richly rewarding journey that I loved. In fact, during my last class, I started grieving the fact that I was going to be finishing seminary, and I started Googling

PhD programs, but my husband encouraged me to just simmer down on that one for a while, maybe revisit it so it still lives in the realm of possibilities. But it was in early 2016 that President Veazey stopped by my office and shared with me the call to serve as an apostle in the Council of 12 apostles, and I had been wrestling for about a year with a sense of something, something stirring, and I wasn't sure what that was, but I spent time after being presented with a call, I spent a good deal of time discerning. And there was one moment when I was going to bed, and I had this sense of grief, because I felt the call so strongly, but I could not imagine how I could serve in the role and be present to my young family. And I felt this sense of choosing one or the other, and I had this sense of grief about that, because there was no choice. There was no choice. It was not a matter of not choosing my family. But I woke up the next morning with kind of a fresh awareness that this was not for me to discern alone, that this was for us to discern together, and that I needed them to join me in this journey of discernment. And if we could be in it together, then I could serve in this calling. And so, when I brought the family into this discerning journey, my oldest son's immediate response was, Mom, this is important. You have to do this. And that was the spirit that my whole family brought to this call, to the call to serve as an apostle, but also to this call to serve in the First Presidency, and it is the incredible support of Kevin and the kids that has been integral to my faithful response and service as an apostle of Christ's Peace.

Robin Linkhart 24:39

Wow, when you spoke those words of what your son said to you, Mom, this is important. You have to do this. Wow, that that just spoke volumes all the way around. What a profound experience, and how wise of you to bring your family into that discerning process. Yes, I want to take just a quick detour at this time, because this is a question that comes up and also a challenge. And it may seem odd, but often, as full-time ministers, we can be so consumed by the doing of ministry and church life that we neglect the being and the continuing need of our own souls. So Jannè, tell us a little bit about how you nurture your relationship with God in the mix of all of the press of a full-time minister and apostle for Community of Christ.

Jannè Grover 25:42

Yeah, well, first of all, there was some wise counsel given to me in one of the first conversations that I had in responding to this call of, get your calendar under control and schedule intentional time to nurture your own spiritual journey. That was wise counsel, and I recognized almost immediately that my calendar would just fill up as much as I would allow it to, and that I had to be very intentional about creating time to nurture my own journey as a spiritual leader. I love to read and write, and so studying and journaling have always been a part of my daily spiritual practice. I also love walking and prayer, and so that is also an important spiritual practice for me. So, daily journaling has been an important part of my ongoing discerning journey. And like I said, when I accepted this call, I recognized the importance of tensional and intentional time for prayer and study. It's also interesting that as a mother of young children, I can't really say as a young mother, because I was older when I became a mom, but when my children were young, I was introduced to a book that was titled, *In the Midst of Chaos: [Caring for] Children as Spiritual Practice*, and it's by Bonnie [Miller]-McLemore. I think, I hope I got the author correct on that. But anyway, the title alone of that book opened me to a broader understanding of holistic spirituality that was fully integrated in the whole of life. And so that way of being shapes how I view the world and how I understand life in the fullness of God. So folding laundry is a practice of gratitude for the people with whom I am folding and journeying with and for whom I am folding laundry

and this gratitude for the opportunity to share this life journey and to care for them and to tend to this simple, basic need. Cooking can sometimes feel like a chore, but it becomes a practice of gratitude in honoring the abundance of God's blessings and the fruits of the earth and the opportunity to care for my family. So that, like I said, that opened up a whole different way of being and understanding spirituality and spiritual formation, and I still make intentional time for prayer and study and meditation early in the morning and usually on my back patio when the weather is nice. But I also embrace a sense of spirituality that is more broad and deep than by what might be measured in mechanical time. It is better understood in relational time and a spent sense of spiritual wonder and curiosity and a sense of belonging to the whole of creation and all of humanity, so that in and of itself is broad beyond imagination, but it's also just a glimpse of how I view my place in this world, and not a compartmentalized way of viewing spirituality or spiritual formation.

Robin Linkhart 29:44

Thank you so much for sharing all of that Jannè. You've really brought spiritual practice and spiritual being into such a broad scope of opportunity of connecting that way. I love the, you said, it becomes relational, spiritual, a sense of wonder and curiosity and belonging, it just kind of weaves it into the fabric of your everyday life. Thank you so, so much for that. All right, now we are ready to hear all about how you received your call to serve in the First Presidency as a counselor to the prophet/president of the church. Just that whole journey for you. Share whatever you'd like to share with us about that.

Jannè Grover 30:37

Yeah, so I guess I have sensed the spirit stirring within me throughout our collective journey of discernment as the World Church Leadership Council, our journey of discernment that began in 2020 is ongoing, but throughout that intentional journey, and also through our recent and intentional journey as the Council of Twelve discerned who was called to serve as the next prophet/president and I recognized in my own sense of call, both a deepened sense of apostolic, apostolic calling that perhaps included a prophetic voice to it, but I also had a disruptive sense of possibility that another call may come to me. So, when Stassi approached me and presented the call to me, I was both surprised and not, not because I assumed that that call would come, but like I said, just a sense of stirring that there may be another call because of my deep love for all with whom I have served on the Council of Twelve, and because of my love for all who are a part of the field with whom I have served, there is a sense of grief in leaving the council, and that just reflects how much I love and value all of my colleagues and the whole of the experience of serving as an apostle of Christ's peace. But I'm also excited about creating space for new members of the council, and I consider it an honor and a privilege to serve the church in whatever capacity is needed. So, I have to say that I bring to this call an ongoing and tenuous balance between humility and self-doubt, but I also bring my deepest longings and convictions and trust in what the Holy Spirit is up to among us. So, this call is ultimately not about me, it is about the whole of who we are and how we collectively and faithfully respond in this moment in the life of the church. And so I come to this calling with a deep sense of humility, but also an excitement about who we are together.

Robin Linkhart 33:46

I realize this is still very new, and there is a long journey yet to come. But so far, Jannè, how has this new chapter in your ongoing, and I'll call it adventure with God, changed things for you?

Jannè Grover 34:04

Yeah. So, it's interesting how you begin to view things through a new lens as you lean into whatever calling it is. And so, I never viewed my apostolic calling from one particular field perspective, but through the shared lens of the council. And so, as I start to lean into this call, I'm beginning to broaden my gaze in seeing the church through a collective lens of how the leading quorums work together. So that has become just a slightly different lens of how I view my call and how I view the work of the leading quorums and the response of the church. So, it's both an experience of broadening and refocusing. Back a bit, and I cherish the relationships that have been nurtured through my relationship with the central USA mission field and other places where I have had opportunity to share in ministry. And I look forward to how new relationships will form and develop in new and different ways through this calling. There was one time when President Veazey asked if I missed teaching, and in that moment, I said, Yes, I missed the relationship with the students that I had, and I missed creating music together. But I don't really feel like I have ever left teaching. I feel like this journey has just been a shift in the classroom, because I view it as a shared journey of learning and formation, and I feel like that is ongoing. So, I look at this new calling in much the same way, just a shift in the classroom and the makeup of those with whom I share a mutual learning journey.

Robin Linkhart 36:16

As you look to the future, Jannè, what are your hopes for Community of Christ and maybe, how do you see God moving in today's world? And it seems like today's world changes from one day to the next. Yeah, and, and how does that reality connect with our movement and with the heart of God's vision for all creation as we understand it, as a faith community.

Jannè Grover 36:46

Yeah, so my, my initial response in to one of your questions is to ask, Where is God not moving in the world today? In that sense, I feel like the world is immersed in holy possibility, and we see the significant challenges that are before us, but also the hope filled mission opportunities. So, as a small but vibrant global community, we will continue to faithfully discern what matters most as we respond in Christ's mission through whole life stewardship and our response in the midst of all that God is up to. And I hope that we will not be consumed by anxiety around numbers. I'm sure that the Presiding Bishopric might have different thoughts about that statement, but I hope that we are instead renewed and strengthened and wildly generous in our call and response to share the peace of Christ on and for the Earth as the heart of our calling, as a journey the people of faith, I hope that we will expand our ecumenical and interfaith partnerships, while also embracing the important voice that we bring to that larger table. I hope we will not be limited by either tradition or emergence, but that we will live into a healthy both/and blend of all that is meaningful and hopeful. I hope we will continue to expand our understanding of the importance of sacraments and fling wide the doors of invitation and holistic pastoral care through sacrament ministries and sacramental living, and I hope we never tire of the blessing and power of who we are when we sing together, and that we will continue to expand and embrace the canon of our heart songs that express who we are and who we are called to be as a global community, and I hope that someday I never hear, "Why is this church such a well-kept secret?"

Robin Linkhart 39:42

Oh, I love that today, all of that, and that phrase, beautiful phrase, “canon of our heart songs,” that is wonderful. Okay, Jannè, is there anything that you would like to share today that I haven't asked you about?

Jannè Grover 40:01

Well, I I just wanted to share that in my limited but incredibly formative travels around the church. And I certainly look forward to more of those opportunities. I am powerfully aware of the blessing of this beloved community. I am inspired by how people are being the church as the body of Christ, wherever they live and serve, and I am humbled by how much I have yet to learn about the power of unity in our diversity. And I know that most people's perspective of the church is what they experience in their local context, and that is incredibly important, because that is where mission is most tangible. But I hope that the view, that our view of the church is always broadened by who we are as a global community and what our collective responsibility is in liberating and healing unjust systems and protecting the most vulnerable.

Robin Linkhart 41:18

Well, Jannè, thank you so much for making time to be with us today and for sharing your story with us so authentically and transparent, it's been a window into not just your life, but into your soul and your deep, deep commitment and sacred yes to Christ's call to come and follow me, and I know everyone joins me in our joy and anticipation of your new call and what you will bring to the church. You have always been a blessing to this community, and I know you will continue to share your life and ministry in ways that will bless us all for many years to come. So thanks for being with us.

Jannè Grover 42:10

Thank you, Robin. I am grateful that you are part of my unfolding life story, and I value this journey that we share together.

Robin Linkhart 42:21

Thank you, listeners. If you would like to hear more from Jannè, check out episode 60, where Jannè shares more about her life story and ministry. Links to other Project Zion podcasts featuring Jannè can be found in the show notes for today's podcast, as always, a very special thanks to all of you, our listeners for spending a portion of your day with us. This is your host, Robin Linkhart, and you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take Good care. Bye, bye.