

# Say What | Matt Frizzell | Director of Human Resources

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

youth camps, World Conference, theological reflection, human resources, seminary

## SPEAKERS

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam, Matt Frizzell, Kassie Ripsam

### **Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam** 00:20

Hello and welcome to “Say What?” podcast. Today we're interviewing Matt Frizzell, employee of Community of Christ Human Resources. He has worked in higher education and social services. He's learned to advocate for the most vulnerable and those on the margins of society. So hello, Mr. Matt.

### **Matt Frizzell** 00:48

Hello. How are you guys doing today?

### **Kassie Ripsam** 00:52

Pretty good. We have a few getting to know you questions that we ask everyone. First, would you survive a zombie apocalypse?

### **Matt Frizzell** 01:06

I would survive a zombie accomplish. I just called it a zombie accomplishment. And I don't think I meant to do that. I meant a zombie apocalypse. Um, I think I would survive that pretty well. I would last a long time, but I don't think anybody fully escapes the zombie, the zombie apocalypse. So, I'm pretty resourceful, and I'm good with my hands, and so I do think I would probably evade the whole zombie apocalypse for a while, but eventually succumb to becoming a zombie myself, because that's just what happens in a zombie apocalypse.

### **Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam** 01:45

Yeah, yeah. Fair. So, like, you could just so you, say you would go with your hands, you're, like, build a fort, or, like, huge weapons or something. [Matt: Yes] Which one is it? Is it like building?

### **Matt Frizzell** 01:59

Probably both, probably both. It would be building, and it would probably be use of weapons, and of course, my feelings about non-violence and ethics and all that would be suspended because dead people are already dead, so we would go right in after it with full vengeance and protect my family and my pets and both of you. Yeah.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 02:26**

I think that would be pretty cool. Have many people with us as possible until, like, all of them becomes obvious, just like that, all of them would not be good, no. So what part of a driver's test do you think you would most likely fail?

**Matt Frizzell 02:44**

Probably the one that everybody fails in the driver's test, and that is coming to a full stop. I don't think anybody comes to a full stop in the US. I think everybody has rolling stops. And back in the day, we would get docked for that. I mean, they would take points off and give me a warning. So, that's definitely the part I would fail.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 03:11**

Yeah, it's like, oh, there's a stop sign. I don't care.

**Matt Frizzell 03:15**

Exactly. It's more like a yield, a yield sign, a stop sign. Mean the same thing? Yes.

**Kassie Ripsam 03:22**

So um, I caught myself yelling at my computer the other day. Do you ever talk to inanimate objects?

**Matt Frizzell 03:31**

Well, your example is perfect, because, of course, when you're talking to an inanimate object, and it doesn't make any sense. Like, if I was to ask my couch for a meal, I mean, that would be a little weird, right? Because it's like, what are you doing? But if you, something that's inanimate, that makes sense to most people, and so yes, I talk to inanimate objects when they don't do what they want, what I want them to, even when it's my fault, I blame them and I, you know, do what you did with your computer, and that's tell them what I think.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 04:11**

Yeah, technology is great when it works and when it doesn't, they're not your friends anymore.

**Matt Frizzell 04:20**

Absolutely. And at the same time, I will own that sometimes it's working exactly the way I'm telling it to, but it's not what I wanted or intended. And so that's when I kind of had my little fit like everybody else.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 04:35**

Yes, exactly. So, what is the weirdest dream you've ever had?

**Matt Frizzell 04:43**

That's a good question. Yeah, I've had some pretty weird dreams, but the one that came to mind, I wouldn't say I would have the weirdest that would be hard, that would like, take more time than I have. But. One of the really super weird dreams, like maybe the top seven or eight, um, when I was, when I was, like, eight years old, I had a nightmare. And I didn't have nightmares as a kid, so it was kind of rare. But I had a nightmare. It took place, of course, you remember when I was eight years old, that

would have been 1981 and so in my in my nightmare, it was a scene from Star Trek, and I ended up face to face with one of the like villains or bad guys in Star Trek, and it had just this really creepy face. To this day, I'm 51 years old, and I can see that face in my head as I speak it, and I can see it as I dreamt it, not as it was in the show. I don't even know what show it was or what episode it was, but I can still see it in my head, and it scared me to the point of trembling. And I don't tremble. I don't know about you, but I mean, trembling is like that happened, but it scared me to the point of trembling. And the reason why it sticks out to me is I went to my mom's, I went to my parent's bed, and I was like, I had a nightmare. I'm scared. I want to sleep on the floor in your bedroom, you know. I want to. Please help me, you know. And they're like, Matt, we love you. That's fine. You'll be fine. Go to bed. And so, they gave, they basically gave me exactly what I did not want, and they sent me back to my scary, dark room by myself. And so, I did what I often do, is I defied them, and I was like, I don't care. I'm going to wait 15 minutes. They're going to go back to sleep. And then I crept in the room and I snuggled next to our Newfoundland. Her name was princess, she was a, she was a big, fluffy, black Black Dog. And I went to bed and I woke up the next morning. But before I went to bed, I had a prayer that I would never, ever have a dream like that again. And you know, you know those prayers when you're a kid and you're like, super earnest, you're like, I will never do blah, blah, blah. It was one of those prayers. I was just like, please don't again. And I haven't had a nightmare since. So, boom, that's the weirdest. That's the weirdest dream I ever had. And it turned into a testimony. How can I say? What can I say?

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 07:07**

Cool. So, I just like, I've never heard of Star Trek, giving any kid nightmares so bad. Yeah.

**Kassie Ripsam 07:27**

So, all right, um, you sent us an amazing bio. Um, we already feel like we could be great friends. Thank you for that. So, you grew up in Michigan. We have only ever sampled Michigan in the fall, winter while visiting our family. What was it like growing up in the Far North? Um, remember, we're Floridians, and we love our sweet tea.

**Matt Frizzell 07:55**

Yes. And of course, I did not grow up with any sweet tea whatsoever. I didn't know what sugar was doing in tea to begin with. I run into this a lot. I'm a true Northerner. I realize, you know, sometimes you know people are like, you're a Yank, you know, and I can tell I'm from up north. It's a, it's a, it's, it's what I'm used to in what's it like growing up far north? One of the things that I think a lot of people my age will remember, who grew up in Michigan and surrounding states, is that in the summer, you basically went out on Memorial Day and did not go back inside until Labor Day. I mean, the summer is just awesome. And it's, there's what in Michigan, there's, 10s of 1000s of lakes. So, I mean, there's just lots and lots of lakes. And so, we were constantly spending time outside or swimming or jumping into some river we hadn't been in before, and building forts like you described earlier during the zombie apocalypse. So, I mean, we were always outside and that, and I would say summer was like utopia. Summer was like Zion. It was like the Lord's reign came to the earth. Because, you know, you're right, it is cold, it is snowy, it can be very windy. We got lake effect snow, which means, you know, it's like twice as much as other places when you're closer to the lake. But then the summer would come, and it was just perfect. And in Michigan, it never got quite too hot. I mean, it, if it got over 90 or 95 it would be maybe for a couple of days. If it was a week, it'd be like, Oh my gosh, sweltering heat. What are we

going to do? But, but it, that was as long as it would last. So, it was really comfortable, great outside weather.

**Kassie Ripsam 09:41**

Personally, down here in Florida, it's sweltering hot all summer. And eventually, although we do do a whole lot of outside activities, especially in like the forest, where we are, this Black Water River that we go down, but eventually it's just like, Okay, I'm. Yeah, I'm going inside.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 10:01**

Yeah, eventually, eventually sweat and summer become the same work.

**Matt Frizzell 10:06**

Oh, exactly, exactly. I can't relate to Florida, but when I moved to Kansas City for the first time, and I was there for the first summer, I mean, they have it's, it can be, it can be 90 degrees and humid, basically through July and August, and I spent the whole summer being angry. I mean, I was just not used to it. It was like a bit too much. So, yeah, I feel you. I'm not even sure I could live through a Florida summer. I'm just not sure.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 10:33**

You also, you also mentioned that you grew up in the Community of Christ. Shout out to our mutual Union Avenue friends. Amen, you were a SPEC brat and a SPEC camper. Attended many youth camps and went to World Conferences. What was one of your most memorable experiences from your youth?

**Matt Frizzell 10:51**

Oh, that's a good one. That's a really good one, because I have so many, right? Oh, I have so many from reunion and from SPEC, from Spectacular, you know, Graceland. It was crazy, because that's right, I would say this is a testimony I share very much, but it's because it fits your question. It was the most memorable. So, when I was, when I went to SPEC as a SPEC brat, it was because a lot, there was a group from Michigan that basically ran the whole basketball camp, the basketball part of camp. So, they, we said, we scheduled the courts. Of course, this is all grown-ups. I was just a brat running around, but they scheduled the courts. They made the brackets, they refereed the games, they kept the score keepers. And so that's why I went. And I was one of the little kids who would often sit through game after game after game, keeping the clock or flipping the numbers. That was back when you used vinyl letters on a piece of cardboard instead of, like these cool electronic ones they have now. And anyway, there was a game that I'll never forget. There was, and it was at the time, it was a St Louis team, and it was a blue team, and blue was the lowest at that time, it was only gold, red and blue. Green was invented like in the late 90s, I think, or early 2000s to kind of be this in between red and blue, but blue is the lowest skill level. And anyway, it was a blue team, and it had a player on it who was clearly a gold level player. He was, he was incredible. The kind of guy that never misses any layups. You know, he's shooting better than 50% from the three point line. He was just a really great player. But he was on that team because the other four players were clearly and fairly profoundly developmentally disabled. They were unable to drive in many cases, they would try, but often be unsuccessful. So, it was a challenge just getting down court. And this guy made that team work. I watched for the whole four quarters. This gold level player helped them bring the ball down the court, making it maybe half of

the time. And, also, saw him having a clear ability. He could have laid up and just won the game 50 to three, but he didn't. This guy never shot the ball. He always went up, set up the shot, and then one of these other guys, he would dish off the ball to. And some, I would say, about half the time, they throw up granny shots, and just rarely ever made it in. But the laughter and the fun on their faces, to this day just brings me to tears. It was like watching Jesus play basketball. It's like, if you can imagine how Jesus would play basketball, it would be like this. And so anyway, I'll never forget that game. They rarely won, but they could have won every game they played. And I remember thinking, this is what Spectacular is all about. They ended in just great celebration. Everybody had a blast. And in the end, that guy made a sacrifice that made SPEC great for not only the team he was playing with, but also the people they were playing against. I'll never forget that story. That's the most memorable experience.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam** 14:21

Wow. That was, that's amazing. Honestly, I think I'll be sharing that with some friends. That's, yeah, awesome.

**Matt Frizzell** 14:30

Well, I appreciate it. Yeah, it's one of those stories that's easy to embellish these days. You know, because when I was a kid, they didn't have, like, social media, and everything is hype, hype, hype. The way I tell it is the way it happened. That it's one of those things that is not, there's no hyperbole in there. That's the way it happened, and it was beautiful. So thanks. Go ahead and share it. Please do so.

**Kassie Ripsam** 14:47

You mentioned that you were in attendance at World Conference the year that they passed the Doctrine and Covenants section 156, which approved women to be ordained to the priesthood. Even though you were a kid then, you have strong feelings about it and could read the room. But what was your takeaway during that moment?

**Matt Frizzell** 15:08

No, that's, it's, I really appreciate this question, because it's funny. I think about this probably more than you realize, even though it happened so long ago. I mean, it was 1984 if I recall it was April, because that was the, that was usually the week we had Conference. If I remember, right, yeah, yeah, until it got moved around, there were a lot of things that happened that week that have kind of burned into my memory. One of them was that, leading up to Section 156, I think this experience happened before 156 there was tension around lots of things, actually at that time. Later on, I did some reading myself in college to understand that there was actually a lot of tension in the church at that time. And for many people it was, it wasn't like the church was harmonious. And then all of a sudden, women in the priesthood came along and it blew up. There was lots of things kind of, you know, in churning in the church. And there was, you know, a sense of the polarization you feel in the in the USA today. I mean, some of that started, you know, in the 60s and 70s and 80s. And we were feeling it then. And anyway, I had this, I have something I've never forgotten. So, one of the, one of my memories, is that during one of those really tense discussions as a young kid, I was feeling the tension in the room like you described, and then we stopped and stood up to sing a hymn, which is what we still do to this day. I mean, we start and end our legislative sessions with song. And I remember my dad leaning over to me as he was listening to the full, you know, the auditorium just filled with song, of singing, that moments

before was full of tense legislative debate. And he said to me, Matt, we can do this because we sing together. We don't fly apart at the seams because we do these spiritual things together, and that really taught me something about spiritual practice and the power of building community. The other thing that I remember from that time is just how intense it did get. I don't remember the Conference floor getting more intense than it did at that time. I've been to lots of World Conferences since then, but there were a regular standing up of people who were challenging the chair, and that doesn't happen very often at all. There were people who stood up and said, No, we don't trust your vote. Count again. I mean, it's like it was watching a US election. Everybody's doing everything they can to challenge the vote, challenge the rules, to oppose what was going on. And that was a reminder for me that how democracy works. It wasn't a reminder. It was teaching me how democracy works, and that has stayed with me. Often when I think about democracy, interestingly, I don't think about elections, though. I do, but I think about what happens at church, you know, people debate things, and there's opposing views, and we reason together. And to this day, you know, I, when I think about even what's going on in US politics right now, I think about those moments and think about that we can reason together. We are supposed to dialog, and it can be full of conflict, and that's okay. So, those are some of the most memorable takeaways from those moments that I think still live with me. You know, 40 years later.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 18:47**

Wow. Honestly, I think that I didn't stop to think about the fact that we do stop and sing right before we end. I didn't stop to think that that, how much that would bring us together. But, yeah, you're right because of, yeah.

**Matt Frizzell 19:10**

No thought, Well, you said it. I mean, you may have missed some things because I wasn't in your head with you, though it sounded like I could have been. I, you know, when we talk about unity and diversity. Oftentimes, I think that's one of our enduring principles. And I think sometimes people think about it in just romantic terms, like, Oh, that's a nice thing to believe. Or, how do you actually do that? Or, you know, it sounds nice, but, you know, that's not really real. In reality, it is. I mean that, and that's what I was describing on the floor, the same people that were opposing each other were praising God together and singing the same words, and adding to that moment of being a community in Christ at that time. And then we went back to arguing. So, I mean, it can hang and that is how it can work. Work. I, one of the things that are sad today is I think we've forgotten that, and in many places, obviously it can't happen anymore, people have left, you know, and we're really divided. So, it's, for me, it's a good touchstone and a memory about what's possible when we do follow the rules and we do engage each other really, really and honestly. So, anyway, yeah, I'm trying to join you. I think, I think, I think you're on the right track.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 20:33**

So, um, you graduated from Graceland University, right?

**Matt Frizzell 20:35**

Yep, it was Graceland College when I graduated, but yes, it's Graceland University now.



**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 20:41**

Well, yeah, so I'm curious what was your favorite part of your Graceland experience?

**Matt Frizzell 20:47**

Oh, there's so many. When you get a, when you get a Gracelander to start running at the mouth, they have all sorts of things that come to mind, right? I mean, we there's so many great memories from college in general, and Graceland in particular, um, I think, I think one of the things that I loved about Graceland is that, when I was there, you know, they recently had the theme, for many years, the power of together and that feeling of community really did, was there. When I was at Graceland, I was on Clausen house and, but ironically, all my friends were on Aaron house, which it doesn't, it's not, doesn't exist anymore, but it's a different house. I didn't want to be on Aaron at all, but that, but all my friends that I hung out with were over there and, and we all just had a place. I mean, you didn't have to be in the same group to just belong and have these great friendships and, and that was, that was a hallmark of my, of my Graceland experience, very much. If you want to be involved, you just plain can be. There's opportunities everywhere, and the campus is small too. I mean, I planned on going to Michigan State, and then just kind of pivoted and went to Graceland. So, I mean, there, there's Graceland small. If you were to drop it in the middle of Michigan State, it would feel like, oh, yeah, this is where they study biological sciences. You know, it'd be just one small piece of the whole campus. But at Graceland, that that kind of sense of the smallness of campus and it being in the, what feels like in the middle of everywhere or nowhere, depending on what word you want to use is, was very much a part of my Graceland experience, and it made the relationship shine. And I that I'll never forget that.

**Kassie Ripsam 22:38**

Awesome. I think that people talk about that sense of community, like every single time I ask them about it, it's really cool. We've been to Graceland for SPEC, and I, it felt about the size of an, of our campgrounds, but I somehow managed to get lost.

**Matt Frizzell 22:59**

That can happen. Do you know where you got lost? What building were you by?

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 23:05**

Where were you coming from?

**Kassie Ripsam 23:07**

I was coming from, uh, from the from the morning class, and I couldn't figure out with, I couldn't figure out from the direction I was facing, I can't remember my schedule. I was supposed to go over to the Shaw center, and then I was supposed to go over to lunch, and then I couldn't remember. Well, what is that going to look like? Where am I supposed to go?

**Matt Frizzell 23:34**

Oh yeah, yeah, you could definitely take the wrong turn there, because obviously the gym and the mess hall or the Commons are on very different sides of the campus. So yeah, I can see how that would act. Oh, yes.

**Kassie Ripsam 23:50**

So, we listened to one of your podcasts, and it spurred a couple of questions. You said you had a tattoo on your arm that says Luke 15. How is that significant to you?

**Matt Frizzell 24:04**

Oh, that's a good one. I'm showing it now to all your radio listeners, as they can, you know, see it so clearly. So that's a great question, and I love answering it. Interestingly, I got it tattooed, actually, not because I always wanted to, you know, share this story, but it's, it's kind of been a bonus that sometimes people ask about it. Um, as you guys probably know or, or might have seen, I, I studied seminary for quite some time, and teach seminary. And one of the things I learned, I learned a ton about Scripture. I went into seminary not really caring about scripture, because I've seen it weaponized so much. It's amazing how you can take a religion of love and a testimony about God's activity in the world, which is what you know the Bible is, and turn it into a way to hurt people. And that's the way I'd seen it used even against, you know, I, people in my church because they didn't fit in other Christian boxes. And so, as I learned about Scripture and delved deep into Scripture to learn it better, I read a New Testament theologian who had talked about how Luke 15 was what he described as the gospel within the gospel. I thought, what does that mean? You know, if you wanted to, you know, try to tell somebody about what the mission of Jesus is about, how would you, how would you do that? You know, in shorthand, and he was basically saying Luke 15. And what's cool about Luke 15 is it's not a story about beliefs. It's not about doctrines. It's three parables that Jesus tells back to back, and it's the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, which many people grew up hearing about as the prodigal son. And of course, the prodigal son is by far the longest of the three, but if you read them in context of the time that it was written, and you try to imagine what the first readers of these stories would have been like before Christianity was a thing, or when it was just becoming a thing. You have these stories about this homeless preacher who's telling stories about a God who chases after the things he loves or the things she loves, however you want to call God, the things they love, um, and their wild love stories. Because this is a, this is a time that's a lot like now, you know the gods of power win us wars, and the gods of, the gods of heaven give us wealth. That, you hear that in churches today. You know, Dear God, help me have lots of great things because you love me. That's not the story Jesus tells. Jesus doesn't tell stories about gods who win wars, or gods who, o make people wealthy so that they can drift away from God. There, he tells stories about, you know, this, these, these very human experiences of missing something that's yours, that you love, and you've lost, and you go looking for them, and, of course, that's you and me, right? I mean, we're the sheep, we're the lost coin. We're either the son who came home and said sorry blew it, or were the, or we're the good son who was like, he never threw a party for me, you know? And that happens in real life, right? I mean, when somebody gets something you feel like they don't deserve, you're like... And it's a great lesson about what love is really like. And I have needed this love. You can't see me point to my finger or point to my my tattoo, you know, I'm telling you this without a lot of emotion right now, maybe, but I've needed this love in my life. My testimony is that when I felt lost and when I drifted away from my own sense of self, from my own sense of center, and was even just really deeply depressed, something in the world, I call it God's Spirit came out and found me and just would wash over me with a sense of, your home with me, and I will make you home with me, and together, we will be home. And that, that is why I'm in this. That is why I work for a church and I'm not doing something else. That is why I feel called to do what I do, and so it's on my arm, so I don't forget.



**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 28:25**

Yeah, I definitely have to go back and read that now, just because I love hearing new perspectives on that. So yeah, thank you.

**Matt Frizzell 28:34**

Anytime. I think it's a story worth telling, it's a story the world needs. Yeah.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 28:42**

You enjoy blogging about your theological musings. We have read a few of your blogs and think they're awesome. In what ways do you keep yourself grounded in Christ, and when is your favorite time to spend with him?

**Matt Frizzell 28:56**

Oh, that's a challenging question. I'm honored that you read my blog. I'm used to like, that's boring, that's theological stuff. I don't want to read that. So, the fact that you read it is great. I, you know, one of the things I do to keep myself grounded in Christ. I should preface it by saying this, one of the reasons why I blog is partly to keep my own mind alive for me. For me, theological reflection is the hoity, toity term that we use. But I mean, it's really basically saying, I take time to think about my life in God's perspective. How does God look at it? But also, how do I look at it? Because I believe God is real and involved in my life and in the world. So, that's, even though it takes more words, it's a simple way to talk about what theological reflection is. And blogging makes me do that. Blogging makes me stop and say, you know, I see God in this. I don't see God in that. I see injustice in that and it provides a, you know, a spiritual discipline to kind of think out loud as time rolls by about my own life and living in this world. Seminary and theological education is a lot like going to church. It makes you think in what I call a theological framework. In other words, you start looking at the world as if God exists, and you think about what God's doing in it like I just described theological reflection. And so, when I think about, how do I stay grounded in Christ, part of it is just asking the question, What's God up to here? And what would Jesus be doing? And where is Jesus right now? And Jesus is sometimes just a name for the redemptive work of God to bring creation into its full thriving and potential. You know, how is Christ moving? And how can I, if I can't see it, if it's not obvious, how can we imagine it? So, theology plays both roles, right? It? It, when I blog, I try to point out things I see, but also things that I don't see that are how this applies, or that applies, like my Luke 15 tattoo, you know. I think about how who is lost, and where is God, and how is God seeking them. But there's, of course, lots of other scriptures and stories that we can apply. So, my favorite time to spend, I think, with, with the living Christ. And for me, it's important to point out the living Christ, not just a dead story, but a living Christ, is through blogging and reflecting together and asking questions. You know, where do you see God in the world? What's the God moment that anchors your life and affects how you see things? That's, that dialog is something that we do in seminary all the time. And you learn to see the whole world that way, and your whole life that way, which ironically or not, or so, maybe it's not ironic at all. Maybe it's obvious. That's what theological education and becoming a disciplined Christian with spiritual practice is supposed to do. It plops God in the middle of everything and say, What do you see and what's going on? So yeah, dialog is one way to do that, and blogging is a way to dialog with others. So, thanks for reading.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 32:22**

And honestly, it, for me, just the whole figuring out, um, how God is moving, just becomes this whole kind of, it kind of becomes this whole kind of mystery thing, you know, like, where is he here? Where is he here? You know, kind of a fun way to think about it.

**Matt Frizzell 32:39**

It is, and it is, your word mystery is actually an excellent one. It's profound. Because one of the things that I see missing in the world today, particularly in politics sometimes, is that we have, we have different camps who think they are absolutely certain about what God is doing and where God is. And one of the things we teach in theology is you have to have humility before God to even begin to see God. And so, you, that mystery is one of the things you yield to. It's a way of honoring that I'm not God, and so I can't necessarily see everything the way God sees it. And so, your point is really, really well taken. There's a lot of fact in that word mystery, and it's from that mystery and that humility that God reveals God's self to us, and that's what's beautiful about it. It is a living relationship that way. And so anyway, good choice of words.

**Kassie Ripsam 33:37**

We wanted to, we wanted to hear you because you are currently the Director of Human Resources with Community of Christ Church. What other roles have you served in the Community of Christ Church? And do you feel these roles have led to you, have led you to your current position?

**Matt Frizzell 33:58**

Yeah, that's a, I appreciate that question. Um, you're making sense out of your life is something that just is part of it. And, yeah, when I look back, I, I was involved with the church, you know, like at Graceland, and was involved in campus ministries. And I always like to add to that, I was a normal guy. So, I mean, some I didn't always, I wasn't always straight-laced and perfect person who was involved in campus ministry. So sometimes people are like, what's he doing there? But I was a normal person, right? And I did things that people do in college, and still, though, was searching out God's movement my life, and I knew I had to do that by being engaged. So, I was involved before I ever worked for the church at Graceland, and took advantage of all the opportunities I could in terms of roles there, working on the campus ministries team, participating in worship, organizing activities, that kind of thing. But when I left there, um. When I graduated, my first job with the church was as a youth minister in Kansas City Stake, what it, what became Midlands Mission Center. So it was, you know, near Independence, but not in Independence. And then from there, I became a pastor of a large, active congregation called Highlands Community of Christ, which is still around today in North Kansas City, and I was a pastor there for a while. I should say specifically, I was in a pastoral role. I was associate pastor there. Then I became a mission center president. After leaving church work for a while, I left church work to go back to school, and then I came back to work for the church as a mission center president. And so, I did that, and then I was a campus minister at Graceland. That's when I moved to Lamoni and got to appreciate Lamoni sunsets all over again after living there as a student. And then I became dean of the seminary, which technically I worked for Graceland at that point. But it was, it was serving the church in many, many ways. So, I've done that, and it was from my Dean's role, that was where I was in higher ed for those seven years total, that I moved to the Director of Human Resource ministries. And the Director of Human Resource ministries was a, was a new kind of turn. I was always involved in ministry roles.

While Director of Human Resources Ministries is certainly a ministry role in many, many ways. I also had to work on the business side of the church, right, you know, with employment and payroll and all these things that are part of just being a church organization. And I do think the things that I've learned all along the way in a variety of different ways, has helped lead me to where I am today. And part of the challenge is going, looking back and trying to see God's signature on it all, and in those quiet moments when I humble myself and try to peer into the mystery even of my own life, I see God's work in it, and I'm humbled by that in a major way. So, thanks for the question. It's something we all should look at. How's God messing with you?

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 37:18**

So, you said you used to be the dean of the Community of Christ seminary. So, what was the most difficult part of shifting from the academic setting to human resources?

**Matt Frizzell 37:31**

Wow, that's quite a question. That's like a career or professional question, but it's a great one. It's a, I mean, it's a really good one. Um, because, I mean, if you know, higher ed is something that not a lot of people have the opportunity to do, and, you know, at the same time, human resources not something everybody does. So that's a, that's a very interesting question. Um, a lot of things were similar. Like administration, you just have to make sure that things get done. Rules get followed, you know, deadlines are met. You have people who do things that they're supposed to do, like teach classes and file grades and write tests, you know. So, there's the administration, and in human resources, it's, you know, make sure people are hired and make sure people get paid, and make sure that your policies are up to date. Because somebody might say, hey, I want to go on vacation, and you have to say, well, you have this long you know, so you have to answer questions and make sure that everybody's treated fairly. I think the most difficult part was, really something that I think happens in the church a lot, and that is, there's a lot to learn when you become a human resources director for an international organization. So, this may sound a little strange to your ears, but I've learned that it's true. It's probably, in some ways, I can't say for sure, but I would speculate, I guess, that it's easier to like be responsible in human resources for 100 employees in one location than for 10 employees in 10 different countries, because the rules are different in every country. I mean, yes, so it's like, remember, with these 100 people, you just kind of have to know them personally, but the rules are generally the same. But when you, in, for working for world church. We employ, we employ, you know, well over 100 people just in the headquarters area, you know. And that's, that's not as even count all the people who are like in Central Mission, who work for, you know, the congregations and Independence. That's just at headquarters. And then we've got, you know, we employ in over 20 different countries. We have ministers, you know, who are doing Community of Christ stuff. And so, learning all that has, was a really, was really a powerful learning curve I had. I learned that even if I could learn human resources, like, you know, rules about minimum wage and, you know, all sorts of rights people have as employees, which is the stuff you have to learn in the US and in Missouri, none of it really applied outside of the country, so I had to figure out the same things in all other parts of the world, and that required help and staff. And so that was a real challenging part, and it's one of the most kind of dynamic areas of working for the church, because we're a global family, and we have ministers all over the world,

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam** 40:24

Yeah, honestly, that would probably be my problem to trying to remember what rules apply for which and try not to mix them up. And this gets nuts, really overwhelming.

**Matt Frizzell** 40:34

Oh, it is, and it's important stuff too. I mean, like to give you an example, because this might strike home. You know, when you think about it, sometime, a lot of us will become a parent. At some point. You guys might become parents someday. And in one country you might be entitled to a certain amount of days off because you become a parent. And another country you might be not allowed any and in another country it might be more than the other country before. And in the other country, it'll apply to women, but not men. And so, it's like just figuring out what we call paternity leave can leave your head spinning. I mean, it's just oh my gosh. And so, yeah, you're exactly right. That's a concrete example of, like, how the rules can change so fast.

**Kassie Ripsam** 41:19

Yeah. So, um, your experiences with universities were quite theologically based. So how have your education and experiences in theology shaped your work in human resources?

**Matt Frizzell** 41:32

That, that's actually, oh, that's a bad that's actually a really profound question too. Um, you're right. I've spent most of my time studying theology and ethics to prepare, you know, to serve the church and leadership positions, or just, you know, kind of talk about people in their own faith life and teach in seminary. So, you're right. That's exactly where my, most of my education takes place. I studied some other things, but it's been mainly that I also, I also, in my area, particularly focused on theology and ethics. So, the question ethics has to do with kind of, what are the rules and principles or the outcomes that we, that we that should be the way we live and the way we work. Um, ethics has lots of different ways...

**Kassie Ripsam** 42:20

Right and wrong.

**Matt Frizzell** 42:22

Yeah, right and wrong is part of it. I interrupted you. Go ahead.

**Kassie Ripsam** 42:27

No, it's, it's, um, base I only know, like the baseline of what ethics is, just like, is, if I were to do this, would it hurt the other person? What? What would be the right thing to do in this situation?

**Matt Frizzell** 42:39

Exactly, you just gave two excellent examples. You know, one is right and wrong, you know, following, and that's usually determined by rules. You should do this and you shouldn't do that. But you also named another one. You asked a question that is a part of right and wrong, but it's more complicated. That is, Does this hurt a person? So, there's a whole field of ethics that has to do with minimizing harm, because some of the things we do harm people. Surgery is an example. How do you minimize that

harm? How do you, how do you argue and say, well, this surgery is risky. They may not live, but the benefits outweigh the risks, because it's a day, because they're also facing something that could kill them or harm them, like having cancer, so or chemotherapy, which is actually, you know, you get really sick. So, I made it really concrete, really fast, right? I mean, so does it harm a person? Question? That's a thick question. And so, anyway, yeah, ethics has to do with those things, as well as similar questions like, not only how do we not harm somebody, but how do we do the most just thing? How do we do what's fair and, you know, as well as I do, as soon as you turn like five, you start, you know, saying, you know, you start learning what fairness is right away, because you see your, you see people being treated differently than you. Why did they get three cookies and I only got one? What the heck, you know? So, there's, there's, that's, that's actually ethics too. It has to do with fairness. So anyway, you can see where this is going. Human resources is full of fairness questions all over the place. You know, when do you treat people differently, and when do you treat them the same? And even when you think about how you pay people, or whether certain people earn certain privileges that others don't have, like if someone works hard, this doesn't happen in the church, but you can see it happening anywhere. If I work harder and sell more shoes, do I get a higher commission? How do you know what's fair? And so that has been a huge piece of my work in human resources, partly because it's just part of doing human resources in general. I'm always asking myself, who does this benefit and who does this harm? Is it fair? And those decisions are really complex sometimes. So that's a really great question, and ethics has helped me out a lot. I would say fairness and what a principle that we call equity, are probably the most, some of the most important questions in in human resources and equity, is that question of like, you know, is, are things proportional? To give you a concrete example of that. You know, somebody who works 40 hours a week gets paid more than somebody who works 20 hours. Why? Because it's equitable. I mean, they're working more, so they're getting paid more. And so, equity has to do with like matching reward and effort and risk and all that stuff. So anyway, great question. Yeah.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 45:42**

So did you feel that the Director of Human Resources was a perfect fit for you when you first moved into that position?

**Matt Frizzell 45:53**

I hope I don't get into trouble, but I'm going to be honest. No, I, No. I mean, I, so it's a good question, and I and it's, it's, it's important that I answer why? No, sometimes in ministry, when you feel a sense of call, you do what needs to be done. So let me give you, you know, a concrete example, if you're, if I'm participating in a, in planning for a youth retreat, because I just want to contribute to the experience of kids meeting God, having God moments, loving on each other, having those campfires you never forget. And if the only job left that needs to be filled is maybe night watch or and I, and I like to go to bed at nine, or it's, it's the cook, and I don't want to cook for, you know, 50 people. Sometimes in life and ministry, you do the things that need to be done, and you feel called to do them, even if they're not exactly what you want to do. And I had an experience like that when I when I applied and got the Human Resources position, at first, I was like, No, I you know, that position had been open for a while and I didn't want to do it. But the more I prayed on my choices and my opportunity, the more I felt that serving in this way was part of the call to serve in the church, and its overall call in mission in the world. And so I said, you know, this is something I think I can do, and I'm going to study up on it, so I'm

prepared to start it, and I'll learn along the way. And that's how I approached the whole thing. And they hired me, and the longer I was in it, the longer I realized I was adding value. And that was, that was, that was a good thing.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 47:46**

So, um, what has it taught you about yourself?

**Matt Frizzell 47:53**

That's, that's, that's a good question. That's a vulnerable question. Um, it's taught me. It's taught me all sorts of things. It taught, it's taught me that decisions weigh on my heart heavy, little decisions that I make all the time because I care about fairness and I care about ethics. You know, I, Human Resources is one of those areas where it doesn't matter if you're working in a church or in a McDonald's or, you know, in a factory, you're constantly making decisions that affect people's lives, and so I take that home with me every night I sleep with it. It's one of those things you carry into your night, and you might be stressed out and dreaming about things. So, it learned, it taught me that I carry things on my heart and it's hard to let things go. But it also, it also taught me some quirky things about myself. I get sometimes, I just get overwhelmed during the day. I mean, HR is one of those things where you wake up one day, you open your email box and you're like, none of that was on my to do list, and you just have to do it. It's like getting homework. It's like getting, it's like getting homework. They're like, this is what you have to do. And have to do, and it was due yesterday. And you're like, you didn't tell me. HR is like this. And so, um, you know, I get overwhelmed, and I have to constantly stop and get organized. My daughter Katie kind of convinced me that I'm a little attention deficit disorder. I kind of get you if you were to open, if you were to look up my screen, right now, it's like, Why do you have 12 tabs open? You know? But it's like that. I mean, you have you. It's like this confluence of all these decisions and all these aspects. And so, I learned that in some ways, my A if I don't think I'm actually ADD, but if I do have some of those tendencies, it probably is good for me, but it also can be overwhelming in this job. So those are some of the things I learned about myself.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 49:49**

Yeah, I am very ADHD, so yeah, I'll be. I kind of agree with you on the whole I had like, I. What 20 tabs open on my phone earlier? Like, I don't even remember opening some of these.

**Matt Frizzell 50:09**

I can totally relate. And I reading somebody who said, you know, one of the things that's a gift for people who are kind of have those tendencies, ADD tendencies, or ADHD tendencies, is we tend to associate with our mind very quickly. That's how we jump from thing to thing. And the people around us may not at all see the connected, the connections we just made, but it's actually really a powerful source of creativity, because you see things sometimes other people can't see, and if you stop and think about it, you can usually explain it. So anyway, good for you.

**Kassie Ripsam 50:46**

I like that. So, you sort of explained this earlier, but I just want to ask, in case there's more. What does a human resources person do for Community of Christ?



**Matt Frizzell 50:58**

Well, that's a good question. It depends what role you're in. And it, like I described, that human resources is one of those areas where all sorts of different parts of study come together. Like you have to know the psychology of people when you're talking to them, because you're trying to get them to work differently, or maybe work better, or to address a conflict. So, you have to learn a little psychology, you have to learn a little sociology, because you're like, you know, you're paying attention to the culture. Be concrete. I'll give you an example. Like in the church, if somebody is like, sick, we immediately want to pray for them. They're like, Oh, you have X and Y, oh, we're going to pray for you. But in human resources, it's like, no, we don't share each other's medical information unless you're sharing your own. I mean, that's, there's just a rule against that. So, you have to, like, figure out, how do I work in this environment? How do I follow the rules, but also understand our culture and how it inflect, how it influences our employing environment. Because, you know as well as I do, that your school has a feel, it has a culture, and it's kind of a way it works, and you can feel it when you're in it at church. You know, churches are like that in congregations, but also our corporate environments, you know, like, like, where people work. So, you have to do that, and you have to be able to do math, like somebody runs all the payroll and makes everybody, make sure everybody gets paid. I mean, because I've learned that if you don't pay people, they get upset. And so anyway, that's but, um, but, you know? And so, the Director of Human Resources, like, works with, you know, a variety of staff to make all that happen and sometimes it's as simple as just keeping documentation, you know, if somebody was sick and they're out for 10 days and they go, Well, how long were they out? Well, they were out this day till this day, but this day was a holiday, so we only count these many days. HR does some of that simple work, but sometimes it's really complicated too. You have to ask hard questions, because HR is one of those places where you have to balance, like I was talking about fairness. You want to pay people as much as they're worth, but at the same time, if other people are paid less, you don't want to pay that person unfairly. So, you have to think about, hmm, what can we pay them, which is fair to them, but it's also fair to the other people who do similar jobs, you know? And so sometimes it's challenging, but it's also pretty important,

**Kassie Ripsam 53:19**

Yeah. So as a director, what are your specific responsibilities?

**Matt Frizzell 53:24**

Good question. So, the director is responsible for the whole department. Then that's the way, kind of a headquarters works. If you're, you know, the director of, let's say, Fiscal Services, which means you know you oversee the accounting department, more or less that that's HR the director is the same way we're responsible for my department, or the department that I work with is, is responsible for all the HR stuff. So that's hiring of people. That includes all their benefits, like, you know, health insurance and retirement plans and dental insurance, even we don't like to talk about it, but life insurance, you know, what happens if somebody passes away, or, let's say someone gets sick at work, meaning they maybe they got injured, and that's an area called workers comp, so that's something that we do, and I'm responsible for all the people who handle that. So, you can see it's kind of overwhelming. There's all these little things that are important, and sometimes they're things that you don't talk about very much. You know, it's like, it only happens every once in a while. Like, you know, if we have life insurance situation and somebody tragically was lost to us, which does happen, but not very often, then HR is a

part of not only caring for that employee and their family, but also the benefit. And so, it's kind of where the tire hits the road, working with people in the church, when they're employees and it's, it's, it can be a really busy place.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 54:59**

And. You're like, um, but you're the grown adult in the situation.

**Matt Frizzell 55:05**

Sometimes we have to be, yeah, sometimes we have to be, you know, sometimes HR has to handle delicate situations, and yeah, that stuff comes up, and sometimes you have to do some adulting. That's right.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 55:20**

So what joys do you have in your position? What are some your favorite experiences of working for the church?

**Matt Frizzell 55:29**

Uh, I'll give you two right off the top. So one of the things that the HR director can do is, you know, I get to be the person who says, we've come to terms on all these things, and now you get to work for the church, and you can do, you know, as a job what you feel called to do, you know, and that's really exciting. And I have to say, sometimes the things you have to do in a job aren't all the things you want to do. I mean, I describe that as being HR director, right? You know, sometimes I get to go do a retreat and preach and teach and enjoy that. But then I gotta go back to, you know, making sure the numbers add up, that kind of thing. So, we, every job has things in it that you love and don't love, but when you come to hire somebody who gets to serve in the church and really focus on some of those things that they feel called to do in their job, that's really exciting and sometimes, you know, we get to help people fulfill their sense of call, and there's no greater reward for that. And the second one I would lift up is that in seminary, I got to do the same thing, but in an educational environment. So, sometimes people would come to us in seminary and they like had never really seriously studied Scripture before or church history, or really understood, you know, why baptism? Why do we say we're going to get you wet and now you're a member here? I mean, what's up with that? You know, in the, in, so they learn all the history of where baptism comes from and why it's been happening for centuries and millennia. And, you know, they've never knew that before. And so, in that environment, I have seen so many students at the end of their program just go, Oh my gosh, I didn't know what I didn't know. And now I feel so confident to give a sermon or share a testimony or sit in like an, like an interfaith religious group in their community, and they're listening to all these people go, blah blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and sound really, you know, educated. And they're like, I can do that now too, you know? And it's like, yeah, exactly, you can do that now too, because you've studied it, you know. And so, seeing those people totally become confident, you know, is, is that's like seeing a light come on. It's electric and it doesn't matter what somebody's doing, whether they're doing a job that they love, or performing something that they love to do, or just, you know, engaging in ministry with other people and feeling like I'm really providing a powerful role here. And this needs to be done. It's important seeing people do that, man. It's awesome. Yeah,

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 58:05**

Trans, so like the transformations from beginning to end, you know, like the before and after kind of thing,

**Matt Frizzell 58:12**

Exactly you hit it exactly on the head.

**Kassie Ripsam 58:18**

So, flip side, what's the most annoying experience you've had in your Human Resources job?

**Matt Frizzell 58:28**

Well, I can't talk about people, so I won't go and I'm just kidding. I mean, that's funny. I really can't talk about people, but there's no, there's, no people who don't really like that. Um, no, sometimes, uh, because that that's just kind of Human Resources silly. There's always somebody who kind of, like, goes, really, you know, but we all do that, um, I would say the most annoying thing in Human Resources is just the same thing that's true in so many other jobs. There's always something more to do, you know, there's just always something more to do. There's I, I've had to learn in ministry. Sometimes it's really hard to, like, just shut off the computer, turn off your mind, um, stop preparing and reading and studying. You know, go home from the shelter that you're serving at. It's hard to put it down and just, you know, go to bed or be with your family or watch a movie about the zombie apocalypse. It's hard to just, you know, walk away, and that can be an annoying part in human resources too, you have to learn how to just shut everything down and walk away, because it'll all be there tomorrow, because there's always something more to do. So you guys can probably relate.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 59:49**

Yeah, honestly, just, just studying for doing schoolwork, it's just like, it's kind of hard to know. Um, am I done yet? I think something will have to but I'm getting done. You know.

**Matt Frizzell 1:00:08**

Totally, totally. It's like, good enough to turn it in.

**Kassie Ripsam 1:00:13**

Yeah, and, um, we, we do our we do our volunteer work. And sometimes it feels like that takes a while, but it's something we like to do, but it's sometimes I'm just like, All right, okay, I'm kind of done.

**Matt Frizzell 1:00:29**

Checking out. Yeah.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 1:00:34**

So without going too deeply into what lies ahead for you, how have you experienced your roles in church prepared you for your next journey.

**Matt Frizzell 1:00:49**

That's a that's, again, just a really great, you know, personal reflection question. You know that it's, it's easy to say, the experiences in ministry help prepare me to move forward in my life into new responsibilities. You know, right now that's, you know, the answering yes to the call to be a member of the Council of Twelve. But in the end, you know, some of those things that have prepared me, I think are, are not. I mean, all those experiences, but I would name some different things. One learning that I came from a family of people who have served this church in ministry for generations that actually really helped shape my sense of identity and belonging here, sometimes it's hard to feel like you belong, um, but one of the ways is I feel like I belong is I just recognize this is my roots. My great granddad served the church as an itinerant minister. You know, he went around and preached and gave evangelist blessings and his dad did that too. I even have a great uncle who served as the president of Graceland for, like, several years, a few years, I can't remember how many. My point is, is that this, these are my people. This is where God kind of planted me, even if it was random, it's where I find myself, right? And so that, really, I think, grounds me with a sense of belonging. And the other thing that I'll just touch on, but it's a longer conversation, is Margo and I are adoptive parents, one of our daughters, Kyla, we adopted when she was 11, and we I have permission to talk about this. She's one day I talked to her, I said, Kyla, sometimes I talked about you, and you know, our journey together and some of your background, is that okay? And she goes, Oh, totally, that's fine. So anyway, she's, she's 19 now, and she gives me permission to talk about it, but she has a trauma history. I mean, she, we were her ninth placement in the foster care system, and then we adopted her. And we learned so much about trauma, and we learned so much about just learning to walk with each other and love unconditionally. And I think in some ways, you know, that's what walking with Christ means, is you learn to just journey with people and love them unconditionally. And ironically, as simple as that is, it can be the hardest thing to do. And so those things, I think prepared me, because we're all imperfect, and sometimes I really need somebody to just journey with me and love me unconditionally, because I'm still working things out, and I'm not perfect yet. I'm still a little broken, and still a little finding my way. So I think those things are what ground us in a sense of following God wherever God leads us,

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 1:03:48**

That's awesome. Yeah, we, we were adopted, but we were lucky enough to not ever have the foster system.

**Matt Frizzell 1:03:57**

Oh, wow.

**Kassie Ripsam 1:04:01**

Yeah, I was about to say, we praise you that adopt, that choosing to foster and adopt a child. It's beautiful.

**Matt Frizzell 1:04:12**

It is, it is, and it's a really, I mean, you guys know this better than I do. I mean, sharing your story and the journey of adoption is just every story is unique and crazy enough. I'll just mention it. Um, adoption is a theological idea too. Um, it's this idea that God adopts every one of us kind of and that's one of my

favorites. Yeah. So, maybe someday we'll do, we'll do an adoption talk. That would be fun. Our stories, I'll interview you.

**Kassie Ripsam 1:04:48**

So last question, if you could have coffee or tea or blue cheese and crackers, whichever you prefer, with anyone alive or dead, who would it be? And what would you ask them?

**Matt Frizzell 1:05:04**

Oh, Okay, last question. Good question. Well, you know, because I think I shared with you, I like blue cheese better than chocolate. So, I would have blue cheese and crackers or blue cheese dip with Triscuits or something or pretzels. And who would I have them with, hopefully, somebody who's not lactose intolerant, and you know who I'd love to sit down and have a conversation with. I know I'm supposed to say Jesus or Joseph Smith or some great saint, you know, like Thomas Aquinas or somebody else, but I actually would love to sit down and talk with Robin Williams. I watched a documentary on him recently, and I realized in that documentary that his like come into fame and his work as an actor happened over my lifetime. I, you know, Mork and Mindy, which was the first time he ever was like on TV, for real and in a major role. I know that you may not even know that sitcom, but it was, it started when I was a kid, and then I saw him go into movies and all these other things. And in the end, you know, he passed away from a brain disease that they didn't know until after he died, and he struggled with mental health the whole time, and it was a source of his humor and his brilliance. And I think people like that are just amazing. Because I think we're all a little, not quite, you know, normal, and we're all trying to make joy out of it. And that's, that's something I'd love to talk to him about and and hope that he would be open with me, because I'd like to talk to Robin Williams, and hopefully he likes blue cheese and triscuits.

**Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 1:07:04**

Yeah, honestly, I did not know that he suffered with some mental issues. [Interruption]

**Matt Frizzell 1:07:20**

Yeah, I'm sorry. No, just distracted me. Great. Pyrenees, yeah, you see? Yeah, too bad our podcast listeners can't see the video. Yeah, Jenny and Gus are with me all the time. They're like Newfoundland and a Great Pyrenees, and sometimes they interrupt my interviews or my conversations, my I shouldn't say interviews, because I don't do really any of those, but it's the, it's the meetings. That's what I meant. Yeah. Robin Williams, I think, spent his whole life kind of journeying with mental health, in a way. And I would encourage anybody to look at some of the documentaries. I think there's more than one that was done on his life. And it's his life is a very interesting one in many ways, it's beautiful. So anyway, I'll stop there. That's a whole nother subject. So...

**Kassie Ripsam 1:08:09**

Thank you for being here, and don't forget to risk something new and always put on your full armor of God. Thank you.

**Matt Frizzell 1:08:16**

Amen. Thank you. I loved it. It was Good to be with you.