

Nice to Matcha | New Leader | Jenn Killpack

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Robin Linkhart, Jenn Killpack

Robin Linkhart 00:27

Welcome to Nice to Matcha, a Project Zion Podcast series where we meet new people, leaders, movers and shakers. I'm your host, Robin Linkhart, and today I'm here with Jenn Killpack, who has been called to serve in Community of Christ as the president of the High Priest Quorum and member of the World Church Leadership Council. If that call is sustained in legislative session at the 2025 World Conference, Jenn will be ordained during a worship service at that same conference. Jenn, it's so great to have you with us today.

Jenn Killpack 01:06

Good to be here. Thanks for having me on the podcast.

Robin Linkhart 01:11

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

Jenn Killpack 01:25

I will do that. I live in South of Kansas City, so it's a town called Raymore. I live here with my husband, Dave, and our 17 year old son, Colston, who is a junior in high school. We also have two older daughters. Lainey is our middle child, and she's 22 she just graduated with her undergrad degree from University of Central Missouri. I always have to double check this, but her undergrad is in cellular and molecular biology, along with minors in chemistry and Hispanic studies. She's completing a disaster and crisis management certificate this spring so she can finish her senior year of softball, and then she'll be applying to PhD programs for spring of 2026. Our oldest daughter, her name is Jillian, and she is almost 25. Jillian just started a new job with Graceland, actually on the admissions team, and she's really loving it. She and her husband, Tyler, live just about 40 minutes away from us. They moved back here from Baltimore and purchased some acreage where they live with their two dogs. I'm currently serving the church as Director of Communications for Community of Christ, and I lead a team of really incredible individuals. I worked for the church in a variety of roles since 1997.

Robin Linkhart 02:56

Wow, that's quite an update. I love hearing those updates. It's great. And gosh, the kids grow up so fast, don't they? [Absolutely] Alrighty. Now it's time to tell us your growing up story. Like, where did you grow up? What was life like for you, in your family and in your community? Talk about some of your interests and hobbies, and as you paint that picture of your growing up story for us, where was God and faith in the mix of all of it?

Speaker 1 03:32

Yeah, um, my parents, Dave and Cindy Landon, were married in 1972 in the Midwest. My dad was in the army and was assigned to Washington, DC soon after they were married. I was born a couple years later in the city proper. So, when people ask where I was born, I can legitimately say Washington, DC. I was born at Walter Reed Medical Center, and I spent my whole childhood growing up in Northern Virginia, so several different suburbs there of the Washington, DC area. My younger brother, Todd, and I had tons of friends. We used to ride bikes all summer long. We lived in what you call townhouses or row houses, and there was green space kind of all around. We always call it the big hill, but now looking back, it's not really that big, but we used to build forts there. We played outside all the time. We went to the pool in the summer. We just kind of lived our best, like 1980s feral children lives and had a great time. We attended church at the Springfield congregation, and were really nurtured and grown by what became extended family and then family of choice. We were really far away from all of our blood relatives. So, our church family became like our aunts and uncles and bonus, moms and dads and grandparents. It's a story you know, that I hear a lot of times from a lot of different people, how church family becomes family in many cases, and that was the that was our case as well. We moved to a new city when I was in eighth grade, which meant a school change, and that was really, really hard, because I was really shy in new settings. I don't know, people may not believe it, but I'm an introvert. I don't that's my, my primary mode of operation. And so, new school was really hard. Also, in this we moved into a new school district, so there were no school sports. Our old school had school sports. I played volleyball on the school team, and that was, you know, like a place where I felt like I belonged at school. So, when there's, when there's not an option for that kind of, you know, built in way to make friends, that was a hard transition. And really, I found my way into a really sweet group of friends due to the kindness and humor of one girl named Terry. She sat next to me in band, and since volleyball wasn't an option, I really leaned into swimming, which was something that I had done just mostly in the summers beforehand, but that helped expand my circle of friends in high school as well. Like most kids who don't live in the Kansas City area, I was the only Community of Christ kid at my school. So, I really loved going to youth retreats and camps and other, you know, youth group stuff. We didn't own campgrounds in the area. So, we would rent National Forest campgrounds that were nearby for local events, for retreats and camps, and that was all I knew. And so, for me, sacred space was really more about the people that I was with and the intent of gathering versus the importance of a specific location. I've learned that's a very different experience for most people who maybe went to the same campground year after year and feel really tightly and deeply connected to those locations, but I think that's also been a really helpful learning for me to kind of separate out place and people. We did make some connections, though, with youth and leaders in like the Mid-Atlantic states, so a little bit north of where I lived, and they invited us to camps at Deer Park in Pennsylvania, as well as some of their ski retreats and rafting retreats. So, our circle of friends that were connected to the church grew in that way. I think some of those were some of my favorite high school times, those times when I felt like I could be my best self. I didn't have to worry about like, you know, putting on the mask like I did at

school to try to fit in and navigate through some of those difficult social waters. I also think that it's a time in my life when I was really blessed by people who recognized a leadership skill, maybe in me and encouraged and pushed me to take on some of those more leader-ish tasks and roles with my peers. So, I was really blessed by some youth leaders that encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone.

Robin Linkhart 09:09

Wow, that's a fascinating story, and I love the image of feral children, which, which actually I find very endearing, because there's a sense of liberation and safe space in a community, right?, where you can be out and about and doing your kid thing. But you were, you were safe, safe. And what? What town did you live in? When you moved away, you said you went to congregation in Springfield,

Jenn Killpack 09:38

Yeah. So we, we used to live in a town called Lake Ridge. It was just a little further outside the circle of what's called the DC metro area. And when we, when we moved, we moved, actually, to Springfield. We didn't change churches. That was the only one nearby. So. Yeah, but we moved a little bit closer. So, yeah.

Robin Linkhart 10:04

Alrighty, okay, so I think we're ready for the next few chapters of your life. So, tell us about college and beyond, like career, family, church and ministry,

Jenn Killpack 10:21

When it was time to think about college, most of my high school friends were going to attend schools close, you know, fairly close to home. Like most of my high school friends went to either University of Virginia, George Mason, Virginia Tech. But I wasn't sure that's where I wanted to go. And after I attended Spectacular, I really felt like, yep, Graceland was the place for me. So, I absolutely loved everything about college. I will admit there was quite the culture shock going from Washington, DC, where, you know, something's always happening to sweet little Lamoni, where, like, the drugstore closed at 5pm and I didn't understand that the bank there was like, no ATM. So that was a fascinating experience, but really, really formational. I majored in communications and English writing. I took on leadership roles within the house system at Graceland, I was a Shalom house president, and I was on the board for student activities and served on House Council as well, so lots of really good growth opportunities there. I met my husband in college. Dave and I got married after graduation, and lots of our friends were living already, or were moving to the Kansas City area. And so, you know, we thought about where we wanted to live. We were like, you know, maybe this, this might actually be an okay area. We had a lot of friends here, my extended family, a lot of them live nearby, and it was kind of a good compromise. Dave grew up in Lamoni and so good compromise between, like, small town life and big city, you know, life that I kind of missed. My first job after I graduated, was with a large mutual fund company in Kansas City. I worked as part of their customer care staff, and I learned a lot about mutual funds and investing, but I did not love the work, and eventually left after about nine months to move to a kid's program with Della Lamb community center. They focus on at risk youth, and so that was a really eye-opening experience too and really rewarding, also really difficult. One Sunday at church, I was looking at the bulletin before the service started, and noticed that there was a posting for an administrative assistant on the comms team, or communications team at the church headquarters. And

I thought, you know, maybe, maybe I'll apply for that. That sounds interesting. It's in my field. It was about, this was about a year and a half after I graduated, and so I decided to apply, and then through the process, ended up getting hired. On my first day, Linda Booth was, she was the Assistant Director of Communications at the time. She handed me a box and said, Let's start packing. Our offices are moving across the street to the Temple. So, that was my first day on the job, was packing boxes from our offices in the Auditorium on the fourth floor to move over to the Temple. The comms team at that time included Jim Cable as a director. Linda Booth was the assistant director, and Susan Naylor was the public relations specialist. And that group of people took me in. They grew and nurtured me. They let me dream like crazy ideas and gave me a place to belong on the comms team. I have served as the admin assistant. I've been a writer, editor, I've been the public relations specialist, digital media specialist, Team Lead and now director, and I have actually loved every minute of it, even when it was hard and it was not always fun. There's just been a deep sense of love and commitment to this work, because I love it so much.

Robin Linkhart 14:54

Wow, that's quite a story. I've always wondered you know, how you came to discover a role at head, for headquarters in the comms team. So, during that time, were you and Dave active in your congregation, and did you have any calls to ordained ministry during that time?

Jenn Killpack 15:17

Yeah, actually, I received my first call to priesthood as a senior in college. It actually came from my home congregation in Springfield, and I remember our pastor at the time, his name was Ralph Gunn, and I had a conversation on a break. I don't remember exactly what break, but on a school break, and when he presented that call, I just remember thinking like, Is he serious? That's so weird. But anyway, so that was the first, that was my first, my first call. And then Dave and I were active with Liberty Street congregation in Independence area for like, 25 years, 30, almost 30 years. And at that time, I'm trying to remember, I, my parents actually, at some point in our lives, moved back here to the Midwest to be close to their extended family and us, and they were pastors at the time. So, when I received a call to elder, it actually came through the Mission Center, because my parents were the pastors, and could not process a call for me at that point in time. So, that was another interesting calling experience. But we ended up kind of falling into some youth ministry work in the congregation that we really enjoyed with the junior high and senior high kids. And then as our kids came along, we kind of shifted into some of the more kids or children's ministry, things like Vacation Bible School and helping with some of the local camps, etcetera. So that's where kind of our local ministry took place, at Liberty Street.

Robin Linkhart 17:31

So, your life in with employment with Community of Christ has been a unique journey compared to many people that I'm talking to as we go to World Conference and get to know new leaders in the church. And that is because when you first went into employment, it was a role that did not require you to be an ordained minister. Is that correct? Yeah, that's right. And I would say sometime along that journey, you stepped into a role that that would require full time ministry in the church. So, it and you haven't been in the field, so to speak, as a field minister assigned outside the Headquarters complex area, although you take field assignments, and you've probably done that for several years. So, did you

have a sense of shifting and going into full time ministry with Community of Christ at any point on that journey? And how did that feel for you? It? Did it shift things at all?

Speaker 1 18:37

Yeah, I was thinking about that. And like, in a weird way, I kind of fell into full time ministry, which seems odd. And it really wasn't that long ago that it, you know, that it came to be a full, you know, full time ministry became part of my, my paid job. I think, I think I've been a paid minister for less than 10 years. But being active in congregational life and holding a priesthood office, working for the church as a regular employee, not a minister, I found lots of opportunities to say yes. Before, you know, being employed as a minister, and most of my experience actually comes, you know, from being a volunteer. Susan Naylor actually was one of the Spectacular directors in the early 2000s when we worked together in the communications team, and she asked if I'd be interested in coming up to take some pictures and post online about SPEC, and so I started doing that, and then a few years later, asked, they asked if I would be interested in being on the planning team for Spectacular and taking on responsibility for theme classes and some of the elective class options. So. I said yes, and then years later, I found myself being asked to consider taking on a director role for SPEC as well. It's one of my absolute favorite things, and being part of that team and being able to make that event come to life for our campers is just the ultimate I guess I love it. You know, we talked about congregational life a little bit, and pastoring in my local congregation was another minister role that was really rewarding, but also really hard. Honestly, being pastors, I think one of the hardest things I've ever done. I have such a deep respect for people who Shepherd congregations, because balancing the needs of the administrative role and the pastoral role is so difficult. I served on a team. I was really glad that I served on the pastoral team, because, you know, you kind of lean into the strengths of your team, and they kind of bolster your weaknesses, or your, you know, areas where you are, you know, maybe less skilled. So that was a really, that was a really formational time for me. I pastored for about five years on the team, and the team shifted a little like the dynamics of the team shifted a little in terms of personnel, but it was a really, was a really good and enriching experience. It was also fascinating to me as a member of the communications team at Headquarters, and then also, like as a local congregational pastor, it's fascinating to see how the messaging that you think is, you know, shifting or going out from this one place, and to see how it actually trickles down to get to you, like on the full circle around was really fascinating and very, very educational, too. So that was kind of a an interesting side benefit.

Robin Linkhart 22:13

So what role on the comms team did you take that was going to require you to be an ordained minister?

Jenn Killpack 22:23

Prior to Linda's retirement, she asked if I would take the team lead position, and that position included ministerial responsibility. So, I think I had that position maybe for four years, three or four years before she retired, and I was appointed as director.

Robin Linkhart 22:55

Alrighty, we're going to take a little side bar tangent now, before we get into your call to serve as president of the High Priest Quorum? And this may seem like an odd question, but often, as full time ministers, we can actually be so consumed by the doing of ministry and church life that we find

ourselves neglecting the being and the continuing need of our own souls. So, Jenn, how do you nurture your relationship with God?

Jenn Killpack 23:29

I think it's taken me a really long time to let go of what I think my relationship with God should look like, and just allow space for the divine to breathe and move in my life. I was able to participate in the series of MEADS classes, The ministerial Education and Development Studies classes. And also, was able to attend seminary. Those studies did so much to help kind of deconstruct old ways of thinking about God and really kind of give me words to help describe and explain faith in a new way. Kind of like, you know, what actually is prayer? Why do I want to follow Jesus? What does it look like to live holistically? And what does that even mean? I, for sure, don't have all the answer is like, please don't ever hear me say that, but I'm learning to be more kind to myself and less pressure to be perfect. Almost always, I think keeping that relationship in the forefront is about putting aside distractions, distractions like technology or tasks or, you know, just whatever the next thing is on the list of things to do, and the truth is, even if it's just for a minute or two, sometimes prayer looks like a quiet walk with my dog in the morning, where I'm, you know, just trying to keep my mind and my heart open to whatever maybe, you know, prompting. Sometimes worship is coloring with my niece during church, and again, just allowing the spirit to move in ways that I'm not trying to direct. I think at the heart of it, I try to stay close to God through gratitude, through awe, and through community.

Robin Linkhart 26:00

I love those three words through gratitude, awe and community, those are awesome. Thank you for that. Jenn, Okay, we would really love to hear about receiving your call to serve as the president of the High Priest Quorum. What can you tell us about that experience?

Jenn Killpack 26:20

So, as the Director of Communications, Stassi Cramm is my official supervisor, and we talk and connect on teams and zoom regularly. So, we had a meeting scheduled, and we were talking about some of the regular things, you know, on our list of back and forth. And toward the end of the meeting, Stassi paused and then presented the call to serve as president of the high priest quorum. And for me, the experience of calling is so, is so strange, I guess. I'm not sure how to even describe it. As I mentioned earlier, I've had several priesthood calls presented, and each one has been both like an immediate sense of knowing and also, at the same time, a feeling of like, No way, You must have made a mistake, like, I'm sure that you need to talk to someone else. And that's, I mean, that's exactly how I felt when Stassi shared this call. Part of me took a deep, like, knowing breath, and the other part of me panicked and was sure that, like, I have no idea what I'm doing, and I have no business saying yes to this at all. Um, having served as, having served the last several years as counselor to Dave Anderson, who is the current quorum president, I really liked being the supporter, the sidekick, the, you know, the counselor. I'm good at the side, the side gig, and it fits my strengths in a lot of ways. And I wasn't sure I was really cut out to be the one in charge. I told Stassi, I would think about it and pray about it, and I'd let her know in a few weeks. And in that time, I talked with trusted friends, I talked with Dave Anderson, I talked with my family, and I ended up saying yes, really trusting that small knowing part of my heart that breathes Yes, knowing that it would overcome that loud doubting part of my brain. Thank you for that, Jenn, and thank you for saying yes. So, we're still kind of early on in this new chapter in your life.

But how, how is this ongoing adventure with God already beginning to change things for you? I know you've been attending and participating in the World Church Leadership Council meetings. So how do you see this unfolding, and what is it feeling like for you? Yeah, I think it's really interesting for the most part right now, you know, things are moving along, similar to always. Conference is coming, and the comms team has a huge part in making sure that event is a success. The core meetings are continuing, and we're still looking to Dave, you know, for leadership and support in that way. It did occur to me not long after I said yes, that I would have to be thinking about who I will ask to serve as my own counselors and secretary of the quorum. And I was like, Oh, that is not a small responsibility, and it's one that I'm currently discerning and praying about. So, you can add me and that task to your prayer list as well. I think, I think the biggest change so far is that. Actually been my participation in World Church Leadership Council meetings as a designate. I've attended a couple of times, you know, short, short periods where I've had to come and either make a presentation as comms director, or there's been, you know, a subject where you all have wanted to hear, you know, my feedback on particular things, but I've never participated at length with that group, so it's been a really interesting learning experience to see how the council functions and the way that discussion and consent and cultural context like blend together. It's been really fascinating. And I, I'm, I'll be interested to see how that continues to unfold.

Robin Linkhart 30:48

Yeah, there'll be a lot of new faces around the table after this World Conference. Some of my colleagues and I have been reflecting on, you know, historically in the life of the Church, has there ever been a larger number of seats changing? And, you know, we have a large number of people coming in to roles that have not previously served in the World Church Leadership Council in some capacity. So it is, it's going to be exciting. I was chatting with Stacey last week, and I said it really feels like we're writing the pages of history as we shift from one era to the next era, you know, a new era. Not that either one is good or bad, but just this, it feels monumental. You know?

Jenn Killpack 31:40

Yeah, yeah.

Robin Linkhart 31:42

So what are your hopes for a Community of Christ into the future? How do you see God moving in the world, and how does that connect with our movement as a Peace Movement, and the heart of God's vision for all creation?

Jenn Killpack 31:59

Yeah, that's a no easy questions here, huh? That's a huge question. Community of Christ has really given me a framework through which I see the world. It's one built on hope and love and justice and peace, and I really want to help others have opportunities to experience Community of Christ and begin to see the world through that lens too. I absolutely believe God moves in the world through simple actions of kindness, acceptance, love, community and compassion. When we engage with people that we encounter in our day from that posture, I really believe they can catch a glimpse of God's vision for the world. You know, some of us, I think, are called to big public displays of activism and peacemaking, and some of us are called to individually participate in activism and peacemaking. One isn't necessarily

better than the other. I think it just, it really depends on, you know, your own personal sense of call and commitment to the work. I can't help but think about, you know, invitation a little bit in this, in that question too. Like, how, how do I how do I tell people about Community of Christ? I am not a 70. I don't have any of those leanings even. And I've heard people say Community of Christ is the best kept secret. And I always have to wonder why that is. I'm a pretty terrible inviter. Like, the doubts kind of creep in real fast. Like, what if someone thinks we're so weird, or, what if someone says something crazy? Or, you know, what if? What if? What if? And I've also been thinking about, like, well, what, you know, what are we what are we inviting people to? Are we inviting them to church on Sunday? Are we inviting them to an online workshop? Are we inviting them to a small group meeting or a weekend retreat? And instead of those negative, what ifs, you know, I try to turn those to like, what if? What if people feel welcomed? What if they find out that it's okay to ask hard questions? That you know there may not be easy answers for? What if they find a place to belong? I just, I keep thinking about that a lot, like, how, you know, how as current members, how do we reach out to people and invite them to something that doesn't feel not relevant? I don't have an answer to that yet, but I'm pondering it some more.

Robin Linkhart 35:19

Yeah, I think living in the question and reflecting in powerful ways, as you've just done is the journey of finding what are, what our answers are, better yet our responses to those questions may be. I love as you consider inviting. And I think the fears that you speak to and that the doubts and sense of feeling about people might have a not great experience, or they might run into something odd. But when you shift those, I love this, what if they find a place to belong? Question that that is powerful. Jen, so is there anything you would like to share today that I haven't already asked you about?

Jenn Killpack 36:13

Something else I've been thinking about a lot is, you know, the answer to the question like, Oh, where do you go to church? Or where do you attend church? And you say, Community of Christ, and someone says, Oh, what's that? Tell me about that. Like, what's your what's your 10 second pitch, what is your elevator speech? What is your you know, quick answer to that? Growing up in, you know, pre-Community of Christ days, when someone would ask where you attended church, and you gave them the long Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days, name you almost always had to, you know, start from a place of, oh, but we're not, you know, we're not Mormon or whatever. And so, it's for me that's been a really hard thing to like let go of. Not necessarily that I that I really wanted to explain it, but it was just like, that was what I that was the first place that my brain went to try to, like, explain our history to someone about, you know, about the church and Dale Luffman, in one of my seminary courses, had the most amazing answer to that question. And I was like, I'm gonna write that down, all of it like word for word, but he talked about the origins of the church as coming out of, you know, the American reformation. And he didn't deny the, you know, the Mormon history roots, but that wasn't what he led with. And so when I think about that question, I think, and we should all make sure that we know what we would say and how we would say it. And mine is, you know, it's this little church that I love, and how do I explain it to someone who doesn't know anything about us? And so, I'm still, I'm still, you know, workshopping this a little. But the answer to that question right now, if someone asked me, Where do you go to church? And I say, Community of Christ. And they say, what's that? Or tell me more. I say, well, Community of Christ is an international faith community, and we're trying to create

authentic connections with each other and with God. We work hard to affirm the worth of every person, to challenge unjust systems and find a way to be peacemakers in the world. Community of Christ really tries hard to provide a place where people belong, where they feel loved and valued, where they can grow spiritually and discover a purpose that can change lives and communities. We're not perfect, but we're just trying to make the world around us a little bit better.

Robin Linkhart 39:06

I love that answer. That is a great answer. So Jenn, thank you so much for being with us today. I know you have a busy, busy schedule every day of the week, so thanks.

Jenn Killpack 39:20

It's been really good to be here. Thank you so much for having me.

Robin Linkhart 39:24

If you would like to hear more from Jen, check out the Community of Christ YouTube channel for her sermon, *Be that Blessing*, and Episode 623, right here on Project Zion, where Jenn and her co directors share about Spectacular, an annual event sponsored by Community of Christ for youth from all over the world. Look for links for both of these in the show notes to this episode. 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.