

Living the Mission Episode 6: Citizenship and Joy with Dr. Krista Stevens

Delaney [00:00:05] Welcome to Living the Mission with the Center for Service and Social Action. I'm Delaney Burns.

Caroline [00:00:09] And I'm Caroline Maltese. Pull up your Adirondack chair.

Delaney [00:00:12] Or grab your favorite snack from The Tween.

Caroline [00:00:14] And come chat with us and some friends about experiences that have shaped our values to promote social change.

Both [00:00:19] And Live the Mission.

Delaney [00:00:24] Hi Caroline.

Caroline [00:00:25] Hey Delaney, what's going on?

Delaney [00:00:28] Nothing much. Just hanging in there, doing pretty good actually. How's your week been?

Caroline [00:00:33] Good. We're separated this week.

Delaney [00:00:36] Yeah, we are.

Caroline [00:00:36] Normally guys, we record in our trusty AD-10, but this week had to come home to, you know, get those get those votes in, so the dynamic duo is separated, but we are still here in spirit together. Yeah, my week's been good. I came home, had some quality time with my family and just trying to get through the week in terms of school. How are you doing?

Delaney [00:01:01] Good. I think I'm starting to be able to manage my work. I've had a little issue like focusing, you know, I'm just thinking about a lot even when I'm trying to get things done. But here's what I heard this week. It's about guardrails. Oh, OK. So I was listening to a homily and he was talking about how the Department of Transportation is so good in America. You know, there's no cliffs where you just drive right off of them and you're not able to stop yourself. There are, you know, signs and, you know, there's things on the ground that are marking it and there's guardrails. And he was talking about how we can set guardrails in our own life so that we don't just run off the cliff. You know, we know what sets us off, what spirals, what's not good for us our heart, our mind, our souls, whatever. So I'm setting guardrails and things are better.

Caroline [00:01:49] There you go. The guardrail metaphor, lots of metaphors today.

Delaney [00:01:54] We love metaphors here on Living the Mission.

Caroline [00:01:57] All right. So tell us what we're talking about today.

Delaney [00:01:59] So citizenship. I'm excited because this isn't something that I'm very strong in personally. But I think, you know, the season of life that we're in, it's so relevant and it's always relevant. It's the model that actually brings together the individual self and the collaborative

group, and it wants us to become responsibly connected to the community inside in society, through our leadership experience. And then it's also in its own category, because, like I mentioned, it brings those two components together. It's in the society and community category, and it really recognizes the unity between these different Cs and values that we've been talking about. And this is our final C.

Caroline [00:02:41] Yes. And so I'm super excited about our guest today. I have had the privilege of having her for a Globalization, Theology and Justice class. Our guest is Dr. Krista Stevens. She is a professor in the Theology department, and she's awesome. She has been a teacher here for three years and she has really good insights and reflections about how we can use specifically Catholic social teaching to guide how we behave in this modern world and how we make decisions in terms of our political views and how we behave in accordance with the church. And she's got me really thinking about some of these different issues that we might be facing in light of the election season specifically, but just in life. And so we're really excited to have her on and hear about how she integrates the value of citizenship into her life and what this means to her.

Delaney [00:03:34] All right.

Caroline [00:03:35] Let's get started. Welcome Dr. Stevens. Thanks so much for being here today.

Dr. Stevens [00:03:47] Thanks for having me. I'm really excited about this.

Caroline [00:03:50] Absolutely. So if we could have you for those listeners who do not know you, if we could have you introduce yourself and any, like, things about your family or your work or your background, anything you would like to share and then any fun facts, just to give us a little bit of insight on who you are.

Dr. Stevens [00:04:06] Yeah, absolutely. So as you said, my name is Krista Stevens. I am in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at John Carroll. Just kind of the boring stuff, I guess, my academic background is in theology, particularly social ethics, particularly questions of social justice, Catholic social teaching, racial justice, global justice, international justice, that kind of stuff. It's my third year at John Carroll, so it's been a good run so far. I guess more that, in my opinion, at least, the more interesting stuff. I am originally from Alabama, so just a few years here in Cleveland. I live here with my husband Scott, my dog, Texas, whom Delaney and Caroline know is right here with me. So if he barks, I apologize. But other things about me, I mean, I think you know this Caroline, I'm a pretty big nerd. I like to read, I like to watch TV and listen to podcasts and I'm a pretty avid sports fan, so that's kind of what takes up my days lately. So it's kind of me in a nutshell.

Delaney [00:05:11] Thank you so much. So our little opener, the question we like to ask people, I'm not sure, have you been to the Inn-Between?

Dr. Stevens [00:05:18] No. So I saw your your your list of questions and I'm like, I don't know what that is. And so then I like Googled it like, oh, OK. So I did know what it was once I read it, but now I have not eaten there. So let's do this. Why don't you tell me what my options would be if I were to go there and then I would tell you what my favorite of that would be.

Delaney [00:05:40] Yes. So the Inn-Between is a magical place. There are different options. Our favorite thing and kind of the running joke that we've been telling people the tender basket. But

Caroline recommends the mozzarella sticks, sometimes, all your favorite snacks. So like your favorite, like gas station snack or something like that.

Dr. Stevens [00:05:59] I mean, mozzarella sticks are up there.

Caroline [00:06:02] They have one of those, like Forreal smoothies slash milkshake machines. That is also a personal favorite of mine. You can get, like, you know, strawberry banana smoothie or if you're feeling it like a peanut butter cup milkshake, it's like super.

Dr. Stevens [00:06:13] Well, that sounds really good. When I was in college, ours was called The Cloister and it had similar mozzarella sticks, French fries, chicken fingers, really good milkshakes. So let's go with mozzarella sticks. I mean, I think that's a winner. You can't go wrong with those too much, I don't think.

Caroline [00:06:28] True. True. So today we're going to be talking about citizenship. So our first general question for you is, what sort of is your definition of citizenship or what does it mean and how does it apply to your life?

Dr. Stevens [00:06:42] Yeah, I mean, so I appreciate the question and particularly I don't know when this will when you guys will send this out to air, but the date as we're talking is November 4th, right, today. Yeah. So a very relevant and pertinent question, I think, given our current election season. And so I was thinking about this a lot. You know, I feel like in the American context, we have a really specific definition of citizenship as someone who is either born in the United States or someone who migrated here, the term legally, which is problematic and then who has applied for legal citizenship. But I think that definition is too narrow. I think for me, citizenship ultimately is about your place and participation in in your community. And that obviously can be, you know, actual citizenship in a state or a nation, but also just your belonging and your communities at large, both more communally. Right. Like your small communities in your neighborhoods, but also more broadly. Right. I think it's really important to consider citizenship from a global perspective as well, particularly given our current kind of global reality where we're more interconnected than we've ever been. And so I guess kind of the broader definition for me is, is membership in the human community is how I would frame would frame citizenship more broadly.

Delaney [00:08:08] Awesome, and then kind of moving forward with that, we're just curious about, you know, for the beginner or for somebody who's kind of just trying to be an informed citizen, and especially in this season that we're in. What are some ways that you think that someone can take steps towards being an informed citizen and maybe even be that person who can inspire citizenship for others?

Dr. Stevens [00:08:29] I think it's a really important question. And there's lots of different avenues, I think, to pursue informed citizenship. But I think the key part in your question, Delaney, is the informed citizen part. Right. And so when I talked a minute ago about citizenship as kind of belonging in a in our human community, that definitely comes with a host of responsibilities. Right. So, like, it's a privilege to be a member of our human community. Right. It's a privilege to be in this this human thing that we're all doing as best we can. So and you know the different avenues, I think is is anything you do to inform yourself about anything. Right? I mean, reading, talking to people, particularly talking to people who might hold different perspectives than you do, searching for information, really digging deep. This idea of fact checking, I think, has become a

really common term and almost an overused term. But I think it's important to really kind of dig into, particularly in regard to issues of social importance about what's really going on, what are the actual facts that that we can kind of uncover. And then, you know, the the Catholic Church, the US Catholic bishops in particular, also put out a document really every election cycle they'll update it called Faithful Citizenship. I haven't read the one from 2020, the most recent one. But in these documents, they do a really nice job, I think, of kind of identifying important moral social issues. This includes, I think the most obvious one that people are most familiar with would certainly be abortion. But they also look at things like immigration and poverty and hunger and education and health care. And so just the broader gamut of citizenship issues that affect all of us. And in this document, they don't say you should vote for this person or that person or affiliate with this party or that party. And which is good, because I think that's beyond the scope of what they should be doing. But they do say here are the things that you need to consider and then it's on us to kind of discern is the word they use a lot, right? Discernment of faithful citizenship, discerning how we approach those issues, what we think about them, which candidate best fits within that discernment, which obviously is a hard question because no candidate fits perfectly with anything. Right. But I think the most important part is. Doing your own research, doing your own digging, doing your own thinking and and coming to your own conclusion about what's really important to promote the common good for all people across the board.

Caroline [00:11:17] And this is I've been having conversations with the people in my life, and Delaney you've heard this, but I'm going to share it again because I think it's pretty relevant. Talking about like in terms of the election, which candidates we're choosing and where we're putting our, you know, focus on what issues we think are important. But I've been having this problem that's a common theme in my life where I call it the bucket problem. So it's like where are we bucketing, our what are we bucketing in our life? And like, is this something that should be bucketed? So, for example, talking about, like, political candidates. Right. So, like, you sort of have to bucket you got to put, like, your eggs in this basket or you have to put them in this basket. But in life, like, should everything be in a bucket? Should we put it on like a spectrum instead? So should we. You know, and we talked about this a lot in your class. And I think that maybe that's what sort of started to get my mind thinking about this was like, you know, some issues are not as black and white as they seem. And it takes like that, you know, intentional conversation and ability to be uncomfortable and sort of those issues to see that, you know, there's there's gray area there's in between. And it's not just like black and white. And I think that that's an important part of being an informed citizen is not just like taking such a cold, hard stance on an issue, but. Well, and you can but like being able to see both sides of it.

Dr. Stevens [00:12:37] Absolutely. And I'm glad you brought that up. And I'm also glad that you kind of took that from from our discussions in class, because there's, I can't remember exact quote that we used in Class Caroline, but we were talking about Catholic social teaching. There's a quote from Thomas that said basically that that thing. Right, that moral issues are not black and white. Right. There is complex gray areas. And that's important because then we get into issues of like or I think problems, I suppose, of single issue voting. Right. Where that idea of basketing like you put on or bucketing, I think the word you used to put all your eggs with one person for one thing. And on some level, that makes sense. Like I think we can understand why a person might do that if they feel particularly strongly about something. But I do think that's a problematic approach because these issues are so complex and because no person or political party will seamlessly fit into any sort of Catholic social ethic. And ultimately, when we talk about citizenship, I talked about with our communities, but, you know, from a theological perspective, at least, this idea of citizenship within the kingdom of God. Right. And I think the reality that we have to grapple with is

that nothing we do on this earth will be perfect. Right. Will fit seamlessly within these bigger ideals of social justice and ethics, moral theology. But we have to do our best right, the best we can get as close as we can to that reality because we're participating in this kingdom of God. And so and then just to support your point, then, if we become focused in on just one thing, we lose so much other stuff that we could also be doing better with.

Delaney [00:14:17] I think going along with that as well. It's so important to look I mean, I like that you gave some steps like an actual resource, because I know that's where kind of my point comes in, where I have problems and finding that resource that you can look to, whether it be something that's tied to religiously affiliated things or whatever you're looking to kind of use as a guide, but then using that and then seeing that there is a next step that you have to discern and you have to make the choices and you have to kind of work in the tension. And it's not going to be perfect like we're talking about. You know, it's not like a clear answer. And I think that that's maybe what stumps people sometimes and can kind of like cause me to give up in certain aspects with this or with anything. You know, there's not a clear answer that I can make or see. But I like the idea of, you know, still coming back to we're all having to make those choices and we're connected in that and we're having to discern and and make sense of everything together.

Dr. Stevens [00:15:20] And I think that's why broadening our understanding of citizenship to just more of a human community thing is so important, because ultimately, whoever wins whatever election we have to be voting in on local, state or national level, that doesn't mean that's the end for us. Right. So even if our candidate wins and we're like, oh, great, this person won. Well, OK, that doesn't mean we just quit right until the next election comes around because of those tensions and gray areas. Right. There's always work to be done regardless of of kind of the political game. Right. And so we can't I think citizenship can't be just politics. Right. It has to be more communal than that for sure.

Caroline [00:16:03] And so other than being informed, which, you know, I think most people that I've talked to that have sort of not been informed because of the election are trying to be a little bit more informed now, other than just like a general education, is there any other tips that you have for maybe students listening that want to be a more socially responsible leader?

Dr. Stevens [00:16:23] Yeah, I mean, I have a couple of thoughts on that. You know, I think the service-learning component I know is really embedded in John Carroll's kind of mission and identity. But I also know that lots of students do it just because they have to, because it's part of the class. Not all students, of course, but definitely some. But I, my experience has been is that even students who are doing it just to fulfill the requirement for the class at the end of the semester are like, oh, I'm really glad I did that. Right. And so I would definitely encourage students who might be hesitant because I know you all are so busy and have so much to do to try to find something, even if it's just for like one of the one off service opportunities that John Carroll does, even if it's just for a semester, do something that allows you to kind of put yourself in the shoes of someone else whose lives might be radically different from yours because they're immigrants or because they're homeless or because they're dealing with some sort of health issue or because they're elderly or because they're kids in underperforming schools. That that, to me, is one of the most important things we can do because it allows us to see those gray areas in these moral questions that we kind of default to trying to do from just a black and white perspective so really getting into, well, what's the story of migrants in migration and why have these people migrated? What are they experiencing? That's key. Same thing with people who are experiencing homelessness. Right. What are the kind of the root causes of homelessness? It's not because

people are lazy, right? There are bigger issues at play as to why people experience certain injustices. So I think that's key as well, or the first step. I think the second thing, and I say this to almost every class is, you know, you all come to John Carroll for a variety of reasons and you study a variety of things. And obviously, let's be real. Right. The ultimate goal is to get a job after John Carroll or maybe you go to grad school and then you get a job. But ultimately. Right. You're working for this job, whatever that might be. And we have to be realistic. Right. Like, you have to have money to live. That's a valuable goal. But I really encourage my students to pursue things. academically and career wise, that will bring them some sort of joy or satisfaction, so not just to pursue a career because you think you'll make a lot of money or because your parents say you have to, I know that gets tricky or because you just think that's what you're supposed to do. Pursue something that you enjoy. Be realistic about it, of course, because again, you do have to pay your rent and your bills and all that kind of stuff. But from the theological perspective, there's just really heavy emphasis on work as vocation. And so if you're in a place of kind of educational privilege where you have options as to what you can do, pursue something that's fulfilling. And I think from that will come social leadership. Right. Because you'll be more engaged in what you're doing and you'll be doing it for the right reasons. And I think the spill over there just kind of by default translates into some sort of social leadership and and productivity there.

Delaney [00:19:48] Mm hmm. And this kind of goes along, you know, we want to be engaged civically and we want to do the service-learning and we want to be able to take that with us into our jobs and hopefully, you know, into something that aligns with joy and vocation. And the last question that we kind of like to leave people with is how do we take this value of citizenship and align it with the John Carroll mission where we're serving and we're leading and we're working towards our academics. How do we use that value of citizenship to fully live out that mission?

Dr. Stevens [00:20:25] That's a great question and a complicated question. I think just with the John Carroll mission and the kind of the Jesuit charism as a whole of finding God in all things to me is what brings this question home. Because when your mindset is to find the joy in all things, which in my mind really kind of equates to finding God in all things, then whatever career path you take, right, you can find God in that thing. And that brings you joy and that brings you connectivity to other people, which in turn, I think helps you be a a better citizen in terms of giving back to your community, bringing joy to those around you in the workplace, whatever that might be, and then also just the care for the whole person. Right. And I think caring for yourselves, ourselves, is really important and helping us create a solid foundation for citizenship as well. It's so hard with all of the different kind of news sources coming at us and social media and the 24 hour news cycle. Sometimes it's hard, I think, to take a step back from that and kind of take a deep breath and say, OK, what do I think? What do I believe? What do I hope for? What do I want? And really listening to ourselves and trusting ourselves, right. To make good decisions moving forward, that puts us in the best position to serve those around us, whatever that might look like, right, down the road. This is what I tell students. I think we have this this mindset and just across the board that if we want to be servants, then we have to do something like social work or be a teacher or. I don't know, a mental health worker and all of those things are obviously incredibly valuable, really, really valuable professions, but obviously not everyone's cut out for that, right? Like I would be a terrible kindergarten teacher, which is not be something I would enjoy doing. And so that's why I think it's really important. Is this idea of discernment and finding out what brings you joy means that you can be of service if you're a lawyer or a banker or an accountant, an author, a businessperson, a CEO. Like this idea of service doesn't need to be pigeonholed into certain professions. Right.

Caroline [00:22:52] And I love this, that this is sort of one of the last values that we're talking about, because everything that you were saying there, we've like we've sort of covered that. We talked about consciousness of self and how that allows us to be a more socially responsible leader and collaboration and, you know, the connectedness of humans and how we're social and how we thrive in those social situations and we thrive being, you know, in community with others. And so those are all I feel like you like hit the nail on the head with all of those just sort of just like checking all of the seven C's. And this is like sort of we're wrapping it up here and and how we can use those values along with citizenship to to live out the mission and to be men and women for others and to be in community and to work for the good of, you know, the common good.

Delaney [00:23:35] And I think too, one thing that I'm noticing is I don't usually, equate like citizenship and joy. But here it's like, you know, you need that foundation. We need these other Cs and we need these other components in order to fuel ourselves and in order to to be informed and then to move forward and then to be, you know, socially responsible and to partake in citizenship. And I think that one thing that I've been noticing, you know, and and these themes and these values, we need to fuel ourselves. And then that's what helps us to go out into the world and be able to to make a difference and to do what we were called to do. And, you know, like you're saying, it all serves the kingdom. It all serves a purpose. And as long as we're, you know, taking those next steps forward, we don't have to, you know, reach perfection on this side of heaven and and everything, we're able to just keep striving and working. And that adds it all together.

Dr. Stevens [00:24:29] Absolutely. Absolutely.

Caroline [00:24:31] Yeah. Well, thanks so much, Dr. Stevens, for coming on here. It was great to catch up with you and have this, like, valuable conversation, especially in light of the election and maybe some tensions that we all might be experiencing. But to recognize that we're all part of this family and we're all going to, you know, continue to work for the the good and we're going to keep moving forward and everything that we've got going on this year.

Dr. Stevens [00:24:52] And I think that's key, Caroline, right. Keep working for the good, whatever that might mean, wherever that might take us. That that's that's the goal. Right.

Caroline [00:25:00] That's the citizenship.

Dr. Stevens [00:25:02] Yes. Thanks for having me. I really, really enjoyed this.

Delaney [00:25:06] Thank you so much. We're so glad.

Caroline [00:25:07] All right. Dr. Stevens, thank you again.

Dr. Stevens [00:25:11] Thank you both. You have a good one.

Caroline [00:25:12] All right. We'll see you later.

Dr. Stevens [00:25:14] Bye.

Caroline [00:25:15] Bye.

Delaney [00:25:18] Thank you for gathering with us here on Living the Mission.

Caroline [00:25:20] We hope that you continue to journey with us as we learn how to be socially responsible members of our community.

Delaney [00:25:26] In the meantime, connect with CSSA on all your favorite platforms:

Caroline [00:25:30] Instagram,

Delaney [00:25:30] Twitter,

Caroline [00:25:31] Facebook.

Both [00:25:32] See you next time.