



Ross Chapman (00:01):

Really every person's work should bring hope in life to their place, to their workplace, to their city, to their community. That's why we get out of bed in the morning. That's what we want to pursue.

Speaker 2 (00:16):

You are listening to the Faith and Work podcast where we explore ways to serve God and others in our daily work to bring life and hope to workplaces and cities.

Brian Gray (00:30):

[00:00:30] Welcome to the Faith and Work podcast. My name is Brian Gray and I serve here at Denver Institute as the VP of formation.

Ross Chapman (00:39):

And I'm Ross Chapman. I have the pleasure and honor of serving as the CEO at Denver Institute.

Brian Gray (00:46):

So we're on this thing today, Ross, because we are co-hosting. Now I'm not of late, a more regular voice, but we're a year end show on some things that you and I have been working on together. And so what that basically means is that our [00:01:00] listeners get to hear me attempting to manage up with my boss live on podcast as we go. I see no problem how that works out.

Ross Chapman (01:11):

No, I think it's actually just a really good picture of reality. There's a lot of people at the Denver Institute team who have to just help me out and do the job well. So this is getting at transparency. Totally.

Brian Gray (01:23):

Well, hey, as we're making a transition, we're coming in, this is going to be last, one of our last podcasts [00:01:30] of the year. And so we, like a lot of other nonprofits are thinking in year end review and we're



thinking in preview of the year upcoming. Here's our goal for our listeners today on this podcast is we want to talk about some ways we've begun to pursue and are going to continue pursuing collaboration for our city. So that's a particular emphasis Ross has brought. So what we're going to do is I'm going to start by interviewing him a little bit about how that's working in Denver. We are going to talk [00:02:00] to a friend of ours who's working this out in a different organization down in Colorado Springs, Stu Davis. And then we're going to talk to two leaders who are working on housing affordability issues, both in Denver and nationally through policy legislation and then through some particular consultation work with churches to attend to that. So as we talk about all three of these, what I want you to hear is we're going to use some specific examples from three different contexts, but our hope is to encourage believers about what it might look [00:02:30] like to think of themselves as collaborators in their place for their place. So Ross, just to get us going, let's talk a little bit of the context that we are coming from here in Denver. Give us a really high level overview of the four campaign that we've started this year in 2024.

Ross Chapman (02:50):

Yeah, it's really about the future of workers and cities and we basically framed the four campaign as our five-year strategic plan, [00:03:00] our vision of what we want to try to pursue and accomplish, but we framed it in problems. Well, there's five problems that result from one big problem. So the problem is really like what keeps you up at night? What is a thing that you're just like, man, this is wrong in the world. I want to do something about it. For Denver Institute, we decided it's that society doesn't have a very compelling vision for work. It's changed a lot, but it's not compelling. There's a lot of frustration about work. And then the five problems that result from that that we think we can work [00:03:30] on. I won't tell you all five of them, we'll link to them in the show notes, but it's just a very quick overview of a couple of them.

(03:37):

One is that there's an anemic view of work that perpetuates from Christians if they don't have access to vocational discipleship opportunities. That's been the core work of Denver Institute for 11, 12 years now. So that's one of the big problems. Another one is the gap that exists between, Hey, I understand God's vision for work, but I don't know what it means [00:04:00] when I show up in my workplace on Monday morning or



whatever day of the week that is. And so practically, what does that mean? We think that's an imagination gap that individuals have. And we also think another problem is it's an imagination gap and an implementation gap for organizations, whether that be businesses or churches or organizations. The fourth problem we could talk about is loneliness and isolation That continues to increase in our society, and we think the workplace is a place where that continues to [00:04:30] happen through remote work, hybrid work, just feeling less interested in your work, less engaged.

(04:35):

But Christians being people who are rooted in Christ and belong to one another ought to be people who can help with that issue in the workplace. So the one that we're talking about today, we just called rare collaboration, and it is simply that it is rare when marketplace city social and church leaders find practical ways to work together on big [00:05:00] issues in the city. A lot of them are doing it separately. And so we would just frame it as what does it mean for marketplace leaders to not just be asked to fund solutions from the social sector and public sector, but to help find them. Typically, marketplace leaders are good at their job because they're good at finding solutions to problems. So let's invite them into that process on some big issues in our cities. So that's a big one. And then of course that requires building trust [00:05:30] among those leaders, identifying the needs of the city. There's a lot that goes into that, but that's the one that we've been working on and Brian specifically has been working on. So that's kind of the context. That's the four campaign and that's what we're hoping for. If we're successful, it's important to say the vision of that is that really every person's work should bring hope in life to their place, to their workplace, to their city, to their community. That's why we get out of in the morning. That's what we want to pursue.

Brian Gray (06:00):

[00:06:00] That's great. So we've given you a bit of a context from out of Denver. The way we're thinking about this for folks listening to the podcast, we're hoping to inspire you towards collaboration, to catalyze change. Let's take those two at a time. Ross, start off with collaboration. What do you actually mean by that for us as an organization and how might people think? Well about the idea of collaboration?



Ross Chapman (06:26):

Well, I think really it starts with a theological grounding for what do we [00:06:30] mean by collaboration? I think we think about union with Christ, and in fact, if you haven't listened to the last few episodes of the Faith and Word podcast, we've got two episodes talking about why this idea of union with Christ is so central to living as faithful workers. And I think if you want to be a catalyst towards collaborating for change in your city, you need to wrestle with this. So if Christ is in you and you are in Christ, that also means that your Christian neighbor is also in Christ. So the thing [00:07:00] that you have in common is that you are both in Christ that is common union, which creates community and that is the foundation for working together as believers. And then I think another big part of it is to recognize, and Brian, you can poke at this if you want to, but the word kingdom is mentioned 121 times in the four gospels.

(07:23):

The word church is mentioned three times. The word disciple is mentioned 261 times in the [00:07:30] New Testament, the word Christian is mentioned three times. Now I'm not saying that church and Christian aren't important, but I am trying to frame that what God is after is his kingdom and disciples, not Christians and churches. And so if that's the case, then disciples are working towards what the kingdom looks like in their place and they should be doing that mostly with others who have that same ambition and goal. And I think the other reality is that sometimes people who are not in Christ still have [00:08:00] a longing for what we would say is what God would want or this new city in the vision of shalom or flourishing or thriving life to the full that they're actually working towards, that they care about housing, they care about food, they care about poverty, they care about foster kids, they care about whatever it is.

(08:20):

Those are all things that God and Christians care about. So if that's the case, then let's bring a mentality that says, if you care about that [00:08:30] and I care about that, then we can find ways to work together on that thing. And that actually gets Christians in proximity in their place around people who may or may not be Christians or come from a different background. So when we think of collaboration, to me it starts with that idea of being rooted in Christ and then saying, Hey, I'm also participating then with Christ on his mission



alongside everyone else. So we really have a mandate to work together and to collaborate [00:09:00] with other believers in our city, but not only other believers. It's an invitation to do that with all of God's people.

Brian Gray (09:09):

So there's a really nice common ground you've established at different times and places people may have felt more or less comfortable towards establishing common ground with people who aren't exactly like them and mentality, philosophy, theology, et cetera. But one of the things that I think has been helpful that you've brought to Number Institute is the idea of one, [00:09:30] encouraging a collaborative spirit with other organizations, with other people, but even put some real specifics on it. Just give us a quick overview of the TRE scale, the idea of how we work this type of collaboration out isn't always the same. And then we'll link to this little diagram, which is really helpful in the show notes for our listeners.

Ross Chapman (09:49):

Yeah, it is really great. The Tamarack Institute's based out of Canada, and it's all focused on what does collective impact look like and what does collaboration actually mean? And so they created a continuum [00:10:00] and they have scale. Basically if you look at it, it goes from compete to co-exist to communicate to cooperate, coordinate, collaborate, integrate. You don't need to memorize those. But the point is there are different words that better describe the kind of working together that you may be after depending on what you want to get done. So I would say the first step in all collaboration is communication that you would share [00:10:30] relevant information with the people you want to work with. Anything before that would either be we just coexist or we're actually competing and then moving into the next couple steps, it's really thinking, are we cooperating here on a discrete project that's going to be short-lived or are we doing something more coordinated where our organizations are more systematically aligned on a longer term project for greater outcomes? And then collaboration [00:11:00] they define very clearly and I think it's really helpful because it's really about shared decision making, shared resources, shared vision, and that takes a lot of effort and listening and learning one another and learning to trust and having an abundance mentality. And so they just do a good job of delineating when we say collaborate, what do we actually mean? Because people come into that with a



lot of different ideas. So it's just an easy way to start thinking this is what I actually mean [00:11:30] in this case.

Brian Gray (11:31):

Yeah, this is, again, we're going to link to this. And to be honest, I love podcasts and listening to them. I rarely go hit the links in the show notes. This one's Jim. I'd say this is worthwhile because I think it could be a practical tool for our listeners to think about how to operate inside of a team, how to operate between two different business units in a larger organization, how to be a company that's a part of a supply chain or two nonprofits that are in the same city. [00:12:00] Whatever it is, this could really be applied from the personal to the team to the organizational level as people think. So it becomes a really nice practical naming and therefore defining type of tool. So I'd highly encourage you towards that. Ross, give us a, we talked with this idea of collaboration, but we're encouraging people to think about collaborations towards catalyzing change maybe in their workplace or in their city. Let's focus on the city because our guests that we're about to interview next are going to be working on that. Why [00:12:30] should Christians work to catalyze real change at a city level?

Ross Chapman (12:35):

Well, it's a great question and probably requires a couple more podcasts, but I would say the big picture is really the moment that we've just entered in the church calendar. If you think about advent, Jesus decided to enter the darkness to catalyze some kind of real change. He didn't just come to save us out of it. He could have just swooped in and done [00:13:00] that. No, he actually came and put on human flesh, moved into the neighborhood as Eugene Peterson puts it in the message so brilliantly that we have the same idea as people who are in Christ. We get to be in the places where God has us. We may not stay in this job forever. We may not live in that neighborhood forever, but while you're there, move into the neighborhood, the light has entered the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. I mean, it is a [00:13:30] real change.

(13:31):

It is not just, Hey, let's just make sure everybody knows Jesus. Of course, that's a big part of the change, but it's also what did God intend when he created? What was life supposed to look like? Jesus is the representation of



that. Jesus came to fulfill that and his second coming ensures that, and we get to participate. It's this amazing invitation and our everyday work is one of the best ways that we get to enter into that [00:14:00] because it's easy to look around and see darkness and brokenness in the places where God already has us. In that sense, we're kind of his eyes and ears, even though he sees all and hears all, then we get to go into that. And so man, it's just what a disciple is, Brian. I don't know how else to say it. A disciple is a person who catalyzes real change because they have been changed themselves and they know what the real change coming is going to look like. So let's help more people get on board with that. Let's see. This place [00:14:30] look more and more like the real place that's coming. Brian, we've identified two issues that we think this is not good in our city and we think we are disciples who should be catalyzing real change. So can you just describe those two issues and tell us what we've been working on as part of a solution and how we're trying to collaborate?

Brian Gray (14:54):

Yeah. So when Ross mentioned the four campaign earlier, we said that one of these key problems [00:15:00] is that typically these different sectors of our city don't collaborate together on some of their common problems. And so we said we're going to identify three city issues where we try to be co-laborers collaboration on catalyzing change over five years. So the first one is around what we're calling redemptive employment. What do we mean by that? This could be anything from encouraging people of faith inside their organizations to pursue fair chance hiring, second chance hiring for people who are [00:15:30] either post-incarceration or have a checkered record, maybe to pursue intentional job upskilling or to help people who are working and still caught in systemic poverty to advance themselves through career development and seeking better career pathways work maybe higher up if you will, Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We'd like people to be thinking redemptively about their employees, not just as cogs to drive the machinery of bottom line [00:16:00] production, but to also see them as their own congregation to care for, to love to serve and to develop.

(16:07):

And so employee care and employee flourishing fits into this. So this first one, this umbrella is redemptive employment. And so there are, in our city here in Denver, there's a good 30 to 35, maybe 40 organizations that are working on these types of issues. And so part of our collaboration right now is just to work with some



friends to learn to map that landscape, to know who's [00:16:30] the best fit and that brings expertise in what types of areas, and we're taking some next steps to then communicate that out through the ecosystem. So if you need tech-based job upskilling, you talk to our friends at Activate work. If you're looking for folks that are doing some intentional post incarceration training, you talk to our friends at Mile High Workshop. So again, right now the collaboration is let's map this whole thing, let's communicate it clearly. Let's know our lane and share.

(16:59):

The [00:17:00] second major issue we've identified very common for many people who are listening to their cities is housing affordability. By that we mean housing, affordable housing proper, which could be folks that are living and working, let's just say 60% of area median income or north all the way up to the problem that organizations are having in being able to attract and retain entry level or frontline talent because they can't afford to live near enough to [00:17:30] the place where they work in their cities. So we're working on that. A couple of our guests that we're about to talk about talk with are going to be examples of how they're collaborating. And so we're going to weave in our own how to that issue as we go. But Russ, why don't you start by just giving us a quick introduction of Stew.

Ross Chapman (17:47):

Yeah, I'm so excited. Introduce you guys to Stu Davis first and most importantly, he is a graduate of my alma mater, so we have that in common. Taylor University, my team gets tired of hearing it, but [00:18:00] man, just greatest place on earth. Can't say it enough. Go. Trojans Stu is the founder and executive director of Because I Love You, that's COSI Love you based in the Colorado Springs community, and he's working toward a Thriving Springs community through collaborative partnerships, strategic innovation and public private faith participation.

Brian Gray (18:22):

Okay, Ross, wait a minute. That was the most buy the book introduction and you forgot the most important thing about Stu Davis and that [00:18:30] is that he is a fan of the greatest football club on the planet, top of the table in Europe, top of the table in England. Stu Davis, you'll never walk alone. Thanks for being with us



Stu Davis (18:43):

Up the Reds, my friend. Let's do it.

Ross Chapman (18:46):

No, Stu, thanks for joining the Faith and Work podcast. We're really glad to have you. We'd love for you to start off by telling us about, because I love you. What is this organization? Where are you in the country? What do you guys do?

Stu Davis (18:59):

Yeah, guys, [00:19:00] it's such a pleasure to be here with both of you. I love our friendship, I love our partnership. Anytime that I can just hang around Denver Institute and what you guys are doing, I feel better for it. And actually I am just depending on how you want to count it either down the hill or up the hill from Denver in Colorado Springs.

Speaker 5 (19:16):

Technically

Stu Davis (19:16):

We're higher, so I'd say up the hill, up the hill, but a lot of people would say down the hill, because we're south, so we're an hour south of Colorado spring or of Denver, Colorado Springs is a city of proper. Our MSA is about 750, 700 [00:19:30] 50,000 proper. We're about a city of about a half a million. And yeah, it's a pleasure to be able to, the way I say is sit at the intersection of the church and the city and just find ways to bring the resources of the local church together and in partnership with our city and its partners to work on addressing some of our city's major challenges. So it's fun to be a part of that work.

Ross Chapman (19:56):



Well, it's been really fun to learn a little bit about it, the journey [00:20:00] along with you a little as well, and just really thankful for the way that you are helping other people love one another, love their city. And Brian and I were just talking about collaboration and how we're trying to work on that here in Denver and at Denver Institute. And in your introduction, we actually use this phrase to describe you working through collaborative partnerships, strategic innovation and public-private faith participation. We love that we're after the same thing. So we'd love for you to talk about not the why [00:20:30] as much, but really what does that look like? How is that happening through the work that you're doing? How do you see that happening in the springs?

Stu Davis (20:38):

Yeah, collaboration. You guys know this. It's become a buzzword. It's one of those things that everybody kind of talks about. They throw that idea around out there. I actually try to differentiate between collaboration and partnership. Partnership is one of those things where one plus one equals two. And I think collaboration is synergistic in a way that allows one plus one [00:21:00] to could be either more than two or it could be something kind of completely different. And so there's an aspect of innovation to collaboration and there's something that takes it beyond just the addition of two or more parts together to create a sum. And so this idea of collaboration really has been something that, because I love You has kind of built itself around really since our beginning, which was just six years ago. We've been doing things for a little longer than that. But it's really this idea that when you can bring [00:21:30] the resources of the local church, and I use that term resources very broadly, people dollars, expertise, advocacy, energy, compassion, whatever it might be, but you bring the resources of the local church together in humble partnership with city partners, city being big C like our officials, our administrative and elected officials and those kinds of folks as well as the marketplace leaders and others.

(21:54):

But when you can bring 'em together with kind of the starting point of listening and humility, [00:22:00] there are a lot of things that the local church can contribute to meeting local needs and addressing local challenges in ways that can just springboard some things forward than perhaps would otherwise not be possible. So just as an example that I think helps paint a good picture is one of the things that we feel really proud of in our history was even though the Covid era was really difficult for so many people, we had a lot of organizations that were



all trying to figure out how do we help? What do we do? Where can we [00:22:30] best contribute here locally, probably many other communities around the country, all of our hospitals have been forced to close their cafeterias as public gathering spaces. So you had shift workers that were working 8, 10, 12 hour shifts who didn't have a way to get access to a meal on very long and already difficult emotional and physical shifts.

(22:50):

And we had local churches who were kind of in that first round of the government's disbursement of dollars to help keep the economy stimulated. [00:23:00] We had folks in our local churches who were saying, Hey, we actually are in a great spot. We maybe don't need all of this money. And so we had about a dozen churches who pooled together about 80 grand from their congregants, and we decided to use that money to pay local food trucks whose business had all fallen out of the basement to show up and provide what they do, which is meals at no cost to hospital workers. So you had the local church contributing dollars that were in excess of what it needed to boost up the business [00:23:30] community, the small local business community who were struggling to survive and provide a tangible need to people who were obviously having a very difficult time.

(23:40):

So public sector, private sector, church community, all working together to catalyze something that hadn't really been done before. And I'll tell you since then, just in that one example, I mean our relationships, my relationships with our hospital CEOs and our hospital system administrators is just wide open and there's such a level of trust, not because [00:24:00] we did something great, but because we just listened and then tried to do what we could in partnership with others who can do what they can. And so I think those kind of innovative approaches of just listening well, bringing what we can to the table and asking how we can creatively bring it alongside the resources of others, I think it creates these opportunities for the church to show up in just some amazing ways. So that's kind of an example, I guess.

Speaker 6 (24:27):

Hi, my name is Parker Abnet. As a financial advisor [00:24:30] with I Am Financial, I'm enriched by Denver Institute's programming and content, including this podcast. I love Denver Institute's mission to prepare people



to serve God and others in their daily work so that workplaces and cities are transformed. I know my monthly donation gives the organization I love reliable support, plus I get great benefits like free or reduced admission to events and access to digital content to become a monthly partner. Please [00:25:00] visit the givePage@denverinstitute.org.

Brian Gray (25:07):

Stu, as I'm listening to you, I'm thinking, well, that's not uniquely Christian, but it is certainly a distinctly Christian way to view your city and approach it. And one of the things that a lot of our listeners might've experienced is there was, I'd say oftentimes the church has historically been a bit more unto itself taking care of its people. Well, maybe even its local [00:25:30] neighbors and geography well, but for whatever reason, whether that's politically or socially civically or maybe theological reasons, they feel some hesitance to jump into partnering with civic issues. Now, this has never been the case in the traditional black church, but for a lot of other church traditions, they've been less hesitant. And you're describing this really beautiful common ground opportunity because you've got three different sectors that have in essence a common enemy, which is exhausted, overworked, and in this case, [00:26:00] underfed hospital workers. It's just a really beautiful way for the church to be distinctly the church for, because I love you to be distinctly Christian in how you approach it. Let's take that same concept and you have begun giving attention to housing affordability in the springs. So first of all, talk about why that issue, and then maybe in the same vein, how you're beginning to think about those same types of collaborations as you move forward on that.

Stu Davis (26:25):

Yeah, so for the first part, the why I mentioned it in just [00:26:30] my previous response a minute ago, this idea of starting with listening. So we take that very seriously. It is foundational to what we do is that anything that we're going to do has to start with listening well to our city and that it's official leaders and that kind of thing, but also people who just have a finger on the pulse of what's happening in our community and so many other cities around the country. Our city has specifically said this affordable housing thing is a major issue and it touches every neighborhood. It touches every [00:27:00] kind of socioeconomic level. And if we are going to continue to grow, thrive, prosper, whatever that adjective is that you want to use in our city, if those things are



going to be true, we have to figure out ways for people to have an affordable, accessible, sustainable place for them to live. So as we're listening well to our city, and if we're saying what matters to our city should matter to the church, then the question then becomes, well then what does it look like for the church to care about an economic [00:27:30] systemic infrastructure level type of problem? It certainly affects people, but it affects people maybe in a different way than healthcare does or education does. It's kind of this

(27:40):

Massive level issue. So what role can the church play? And that's when we started digging around and realizing churches actually own a lot of land and a lot of undeveloped land. And maybe 30 years ago or 40, 50 years ago, a church bought a parcel of land with a dream of building a bigger church or some expansive project. [00:28:00] And in the time since they bought that project, they struggled to raise the capital, they struggled with the development process or whatever it might be. And that land has just sat there empty and perhaps a new pastor or leadership team or elder board is now sitting on a piece of land thinking they may not have the energy for what once was a dream and now feels like an impossible idea, raising millions of dollars for a project that maybe doesn't even fit the neighborhood or the church the way it did when they bought that piece of property.

Speaker 5 (28:27):

So

Stu Davis (28:27):

We started gathering church leaders together who fit [00:28:30] that profile that have access to excess land and invited them into a conversation with our city, with some developers, with some finance partners, people who understand the affordable housing landscape and how to navigate the channels within it. And just said, let's have a conversation and let's just ask some questions about how do we get started if our church is interested in addressing this issue. Nobody had to sign their name in blood. Nobody had to commit to a huge process or a project. They just simply had to be willing to get in [00:29:00] a room and just say, let's talk about this and figure out a next step. So we did that about a month ago. We had about 15 churches in the room, and it was a great start, and my hope would be out of those 15, perhaps one or maybe even two every year for the



next couple of years, could start pursuing some plan to provide a solution to this affordable housing crisis in our city. And if that's the case for the next 10 or 15 years, that's a win. And I think the church can be a great contributor. They can do the other things, whether [00:29:30] if they don't have access to land, but for those who do, it's a very practical way for them to think about how they can serve their neighbors, serve their city, provide a solution, and step into a very complicated process just by saying yes.

Ross Chapman (29:43):

Wow, that's awesome. Brian, before you ask to the last question we have for him, it just struck me, you were talking about the collective resources, which you use as a very broad term of the church and all your examples were basic needs [00:30:00] provision of food relieving suffering through healthcare, housing. And it just reminded me of Matthew 25, where were you when I was hungry? Where were you when I was sick? And what an incredible expression of God's love for his people everywhere. And particularly in the springs to go, man, this was a bunch of people who love Jesus saying, we've got access to excess, which is true for every single one of us in Christ. What a great [00:30:30] phrase. Let's put that to work, to love our neighbors and help them experience life a little bit more to the full. So really awesome example.

Stu Davis (30:37):

And without getting too much on any sort of soapbox, I think it's really great for people to think about that Matthew 25 passage and think, how can I hand a meal to somebody who's hungry? How can I provide a shelter bed to somebody who doesn't have one? But we also can't acknowledge the reality that we are in an era where we have a beautiful spectrum of nonprofit organizations, some faith-based and some not [00:31:00] a variety of government agencies who share the same commission to care for people who are struggling. And even though our temptation is to sometimes want to be the deliverer of support, a meal, a shelter bed, a hand around the shoulder, we also get to partner with agencies and organizations who do that every single day. And so Matthew 25 can be exercised by handing somebody a meal. It can also be exercised by providing additional resources and firepower [00:31:30] and sustainability to the organizations who do that very thing, whatever problem it is that they're trying to solve. So I'm a big believer in both, and I just think that it's worth the



opportunity for us to step into those partnerships and create the kind of collaboration that I think can happen when we do.

Brian Gray (31:48):

Stu, I love that we're going to, at the very end, talk about a couple of ways for our listeners to be able to take some next steps, learn some more. Most of them are coming from outside the Colorado [00:32:00] Springs area, but while we've got you, for those who are in or near you, give us a quick peek. What might they expect in early 2025 from your organization and what are ways that they could learn more partner with you? Just stay in touch with that.

Stu Davis (32:16):

Yeah, easiest way to find us is just at our website, which is simply COS and the words I love you.com because I love you.com, that's how we say it. Some people say, C os, I love you. We'll take either one. And then we do a monthly newsletter that people can sign up for where we're [00:32:30] constantly pumping out waste for people to serve in the church, in the city, and through, because I love you early in 2025, we're actually going to do an event on March the fifth called the City Summit, where we're actually going to help allow people to kind of self-select into conversations around probably 15 to 18 different problem areas in our city, housing, healthcare, education, foster care, immigration and refugees, you name it. And people can kind of opt into conversations where they can discover who are the organizations that are doing great work in that arena [00:33:00] and how can they best their church, their organization, their business, be a contributor. So look forward to that in early 20, 25 and March. We'll start pumping out information about that when we turn the calendar year.

Ross Chapman (33:11):

That's awesome. Cool thing.

Brian Gray (33:14):



Yeah, Stu, we just appreciate you and I'm deeply struck to bookend this with our shared love of Liverpool. I'm deeply struck by the fact that our club's mantra and functionally the philosophy of ministry of your organization are the same thing. You'll never walk alone.

Stu Davis (33:30):

[00:33:30] Well, thank you. I would say go Reds and Ross. Go Trojans.

Ross Chapman (33:35):

That's right. Thank you, steel. Thanks for joining us Steel. We

Brian Gray (33:38):

Appreciate

(33:39):

You, you both. Well, I'm excited to be able to introduce to you two friends of mine who I've had the privilege of working with, but mostly learning from. And we're going to talk particularly about the idea of collaboration that they've been doing regarding some really creative housing policy and opportunities. So first, Jessica Dominguez [00:34:00] is the owner of Love Thy Neighbor Real Estate and is Directing Abundant Ground, which is a congregational land use initiative out of Mile High Ministries in Denver. And Michelle Warren is the president of Rago Strategies. She's also an adjunct prof at my alma mater Denver Seminary, but she works with nonprofits and is working in political advocacy, in essence to do justice in the public square. Michelle, Jessica, thanks a ton for joining us.

Jessica Dominguez (34:29):

That's [00:34:30] great. Thanks for having us.

Ross Chapman (34:32):



Yeah, so glad to have both of you as deep thinkers and very good practitioners as well. Join us. So Jessica, just start with you. Can you just tell us a little bit more about Abundant Ground, what you're working on and why this initiative is so important right now?

Jessica Dominguez (34:49):

Sure. So as Brian said, we work with churches to help them think creatively about their land and how they are being called to use that. We love affordable housing, [00:35:00] but we recognize that churches do many things with their land. And what we do is we have a process of discernment and helping churches discern what they're supposed to do. And we do that through education and technical assistance. And the end process is to connect them to a line developer that can help them make their dreams come true. And it's a lengthy process. It involves a lot of meetings and a lot of answering questions, [00:35:30] and we have finance advisors and we have planners and architects and just people with a heart to serve the church and to help them answer some of these technical questions that they need to know in order to make a wise decision.

Ross Chapman (35:44):

That's really awesome. Thanks for sharing about that and thanks for doing that work. This episode has really been about how do we collaborate to catalyze change in our city from wherever our location is or role in the city. And the reason it needs to be catalyzed is because, so [00:36:00] challenging to to get civic church business collaboration to take place you're kind of seeing and working towards. So can you share what have been some of the challenges that you've noticed, and then also most importantly, what has overcome those challenges? What has worked?

Jessica Dominguez (36:19):

Yeah, so I think definitely the collaboration piece has helped in all of the challenges. I'll talk about that later. But this really started [00:36:30] out of a community of practice with the congregation, land committee out of California, and they're working with faith-based groups out there, and they grabbed seven of us across the country and said, Hey, we want to mentor you guys. We want to think about best practice. And we meet once a month and we discuss and we learn. And that group has grown, and recently they came up with this list of



people doing this work across the nation and there's like [00:37:00] 20 on the list last time I looked. So partnership is key. Having Michelle and Brian in my corner has been so great. I think the challenges with getting development going is the amount of time it takes, the amount of money it costs just to do some pre-development work. I also think that, oh, I know that churches are kind of waiting a long time before making the decision, and then it puts them in a spot where [00:37:30] they have to make maybe a quick decision where they're not able to take their time to do their due diligence.

(37:36):

And so they're feeling panicked and then they're feeling in a rush to either sell the land or sell to the first person that comes by and it may or may not be a good deal for them financially. I think that's an issue. Entitlement and zoning has become an issue in some points. I think over, at least in Colorado, [00:38:00] I would say 90% of the churches aren't zoned for doing housing development. So that becomes a challenge. Did I answer the question?

Brian Gray (38:11):

Yes. Yeah. Can I want to emphasize something I think I heard from you, but I want to backstory this about how you and I became friends

(38:22):

About a year ago, in late 2023, Denver Institute said, we'd like to help work with other people in our city towards [00:38:30] the important civic issues, housing affordability seems to be one of 'em. I went and took 30 meetings to say, who's doing the best stuff in housing? And at the end of it I said, alright, Jess, it's you. It's abundant ground. The point of this being from the outset, we thought about we won't, we're not a direct services organization here we are running a little podcast. We do vocational discipleship, we work with business leaders. So we just thought, who are the best people doing some direct services opportunities that we could support? So [00:39:00] just coming in with this collaboration mentality, one of the things that's been really great that I heard from you in the California group and that you mentioned about your process, I've had to learn the hard way. So I said, oh, find the great thing and we'll just put gas on it. It's so much hubris in that idea that I had, but I just heard from you, Jess. I'm thinking about other folks. One is the idea of going and finding wisdom



from other people and then sharing wisdom once you've got it. I love that there was a group in California that committed to that. But then also, if you're going to do anything that's collaborative, [00:39:30] it's going to take longer. You got to have some organizational patience.

Jessica Dominguez (39:35):

Absolutely.

Brian Gray (39:35):

The ideal is that it's going to be better together with others. It'll be more careful, it'll be more well done, and you'll have greater buy-in, then you can go real fast by yourself. Does that all feel fair? I think I'm just saying this is what I've learned from you and with you.

Jessica Dominguez (39:50):

Very, very fair. And churches usually have this board of directors in this body that it's not one single person making a decision, [00:40:00] but there is so much wisdom in that and it'll take us maybe two weeks to make a decision, but people are asking questions and bringing up things that I didn't think of or that maybe even our technical experts didn't get ahold of. And yeah, I think you're exactly right. Better together.

Brian Gray (40:20):

Well, Michelle is a really great example of that. At one level, Michelle has been working basically spearheading the community organizing with Jessica on policy [00:40:30] here in Colorado that would fast track the type of projects that abundant ground might want to be working on. You'd mentioned zoning. There's just number of barriers that make it more expensive and longer for a religious community consider something really missional and community serving. And so Michelle, tell us first, what does ybe mean and how is it getting applied to housing legislation coming out of Colorado in the next year?

Michelle Warren (40:57):



So Ybe is actually a response [00:41:00] to another acrostic called nimby. It's sort of not in my backyard. I don't want a lot of certain types of buildings, certain types. It's not just housing, but anything like I don't want it in my backyard. And that response has been, well, instead of saying no, how can we say yes? And so Yik be actually is from yes in my backyard, except because it looks specifically at church owned properties. Yes, in God's backyard.

(41:28):

And so it's just a real clever way to [00:41:30] show a subset of land in communities that can begin to imagine and also get the necessary zoning that they need to allow housing to be a part of what they do as a church to come alongside their community. So if you think about communities and how they're organized, you have housing for people and sometimes it's apartments, condos, single homes, et cetera. But there's also schools and there's also churches. And a [00:42:00] lot what we have found, especially in the shifts of population and different movements, that there's a lot of underdeveloped land not just on the front range and not just in Colorado, but all across the country. And there's a lot of creative ways that churches can use it, but because zoning can create a barrier, this particular legislation would allow the different municipalities to create a way forward so that religious institutions, and then of course also we've added to the bill education property. So public [00:42:30] schools, higher education that land to be able to be, have their zoning include affordable housing in addition to that school and that church.

Brian Gray (42:41):

So let's apply the similar collaboration question we just asked Jessica. So I've learned from you that ideas like this have relatively strong political will behind them, and yet anytime most of us look at [00:43:00] either the perceived largely divided polarized political moment or even how legislative process works, we've got to imagine that it's going to take a certain amount of trade-offs, conversation, collaboration to get any type of policy moved forward. Can you talk about what are some key attitudes and practices that drive real political and hopefully bipartisan legislation? What are those types of things that we could apply to our other settings?

Michelle Warren (43:28):

I think part of it is when [00:43:30] you come together, you have to hold what you care about loosely.



(43:36):

You have to have conviction and you have to be strong in why you're coming to the table. But you have to come to the table with a posture that says, you know what? We may have oppositional, even personalities and egos can sometimes clash. We need to let those relax for the greater good and realize that even if at the end of the day I don't get everything that I want, if I can leave the table feeling really [00:44:00] good, that one we worked together, but we got a good product because you don't want somebody to come in with a good idea and everybody just, yes it in government, that seems like it'd be so much easier and in a partisan, I guess you could say minefield, that we all have to walk through and navigate. We keep thinking, oh, if everybody would say yes, that would be so much easier. But that actually we know in collaboration and compromise is everyone's saying yes, then everyone's probably not being heard. And so we really need to [00:44:30] understand that the whole process of collaboration, which is also in government called democracy, is its strongest when we have all the voices there having the opportunity and equal voice to speak into it. So I would just say is come full of conviction, but hold your positions with a little bit of open handedness so that you can build bridges to other people.

Brian Gray (44:59):

Yeah, Michelle, [00:45:00] that's really good to both of you. We are such big fans at Denver Institute of the incredible thoughtful work. So we have just tried to a little invisibly and silently just get behind it and push on it, but it's really because of that type of spirit that you just mentioned. I just want to publicly appreciate the character with which you've approached some of this innovative policy and development work, but then also just the creativity that you brought to it. I love the idea of people of Christian faith being [00:45:30] known for love in their community, and you're a wonderful example of that and getting there collaboratively. So thanks so much for your thoughts and your expertise on this.

Jessica Dominguez (45:37):

Thanks. Amen. Thank you, Brian Ross,



Brian Gray (45:40):

Why don't you walk us out of the podcast. What are a couple things that you heard from yourself from, from Jessica, Michelle? What's one or two CTAs calls to action you want to leave us with?

Ross Chapman (45:53):

Well, I think one of the biggest ones is there's a lot of creativity that's required no matter what [00:46:00] your role is or where you live in your city, I would encourage you to lean into that impulse to be creative and say, there's something here that I see that's off or it doesn't really align with what I know God would want it to be. So take the initiative to be creative and say, okay, I think I could probably do something about that. And then we've learned it's a long road. Stay at the table. As Michelle just said, there's a commitment level that's required [00:46:30] if you want to collaborate and catalyze change in your city, but also it's one of the reasons God put you right where you are. Take the opportunity to do it. I think that's really big. And then more specific to the issue we're talking about, if you're involved in a faith community that owns land that has a building, start thinking about what does your community need and then go talk to your church leaders about it and say, Hey, I think we could be more creative [00:47:00] with this thing that God's given us, that many people over many generations have funded us to have.

(47:06):

Are we doing all we can with it? What else is needed? I think that's a big takeaway. No matter where you are in the country, you've got an asset that you're a part of, that you're contributing to, that maybe God wants to do more with.

Brian Gray (47:20):

Well, we're going to link to a couple things that are going to be in the show notes so you can learn a little bit more about this idea of YG B. And you could take it and begin advocacy in your place, [00:47:30] give you an opportunity to learn about abundant ground because they're doing just brilliant work and a number of the things that you'll find. So we're really glad that you've taken the time to think about this stuff. Year end. It is our hope that we might be able to with you, respond to God towards having a greater creative imagination for our



places and get there together. And so thanks for joining us on the Faith and Work Podcast. Almost merry Christmas and blessed New Year to you.

Speaker 2 (48:00):

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