

Oral History with Rob Harter

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SPEAKERS

Diane Livingston, Rob Harter

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- D** Diane Livingston 00:05
I'm Diane Livingston, and I'm here with Rob Harter a Park City, Utah resident, and Director of the Park City Christian Center. Today is November 11, 2020. I've known Rob for a number of years. And it all started when my church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints helped in his Park City Christian Center Sub-for-Santa program.
- R** Rob Harter 00:26
Yes, it's hard to believe it was like nine years ago, I want to say, and we were able to get you on video, though, to prove it. So, it's been fun.
- D** Diane Livingston 00:32
[laughing] It has been fun! That's such a great program. So we're getting together today, over Zoom conferencing to record some of Rob's personal life experiences, as well as recording how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected him and his organization in the context of faith and worship. So before we get started, I need to ask, Rob, may I have your consent to record this interview?
- R** Rob Harter 00:55
Yes, you do.

D

Diane Livingston 00:56

Thank you. So usually, we begin by asking the narrator some questions about childhood and growing up, because fifty years from now, when people listen to this tape, they want to know who you are, and where you're coming from, so to speak. So where you're born, what life was like for you growing up. Would you like to share, maybe, where you were born and any life experiences you'd like to put out there?

R

Rob Harter 01:18

Yeah, you bet. Sure, sure. Yes. So I was born in Columbus, Indiana. It's a town just south of Indianapolis. If people have heard of Cummins Engine Company, that's their headquarters, among other things that happened there and that's what brought my dad down there -- my mom and dad -- because he worked for Cummins Engine Company. I was the youngest of five kids and grew up in a great home. It was one of those homes where I felt very blessed to have parents who loved me. I had a really good upbringing. I grew up going to church from birth all the way through high school. It was just one of those things that was part of our life. Now, we did try a couple of different churches. We were going to a Presbyterian Church for a while, and then my parents shifted, around my fifth grade year, to a Lutheran Church. So we did switch from a Presbyterian to a Lutheran church, but outside of that, again, church was always a part of my life. I got involved with Youth Group right away. And again, it was just something that we talked about a lot. We prayed before meals, we prayed as a family. So it was a big part of me growing up, for sure.

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Diane Livingston 02:30

Okay, cool. Did you have any hobbies that you liked when you're growing up?

R

Rob Harter 02:35

Oh, definitely. One of the big things growing up was my love of sports. Growing up, I had three other brothers that were very competitive, and we are still competitive to this day. So whether it be board games, or sports or anything else, fantasy football, we're all very competitive. It's funny. I loved every kind of possible sport. I ended up playing competitive sports quite a bit. I ended up playing all the way through college, playing basketball in college. That was certainly one of my main hobbies. But I also loved music. I think all of us kids learned some type of instrument. I learned to play piano initially, when I was young, and then I moved into playing the double bass in Orchestra and Jazz. I did that up through high school and I loved that. So I still love music to this day. Now, I just "play"

Spotify quite a bit. That's how I have my outlet, and my main hobbies. I also was involved in church, with a lot of leadership opportunities. Academics and school were really important to us as well.

D

Diane Livingston 03:40

So was there any special little experience you can recall? You mentioned the youth groups, is there something that you remember that you'd like to preserve here, that meant something to you -- any little experience you could share?

R

Rob Harter 03:54

That's a good question. I mean, I think, yeah, I think, you know, just kind of an "in general," I think the fact of growing up at a home where, again, my brothers and one sister are still very close today. I think because we were so family-oriented, when I think back to my family, so many things that kept us together, but one I can share is that I try to continue in my own family. One of the things that may seem a little corny, but we look back and it really was a special time. My parents were very much into having slideshows of the family pictures, you know, my dad took a ton of pictures. And back then, I don't know if you remember the carousel, where you put on a little projector and then we had the screen and the pictures were these you know, you put the individual Kodachrome pictures into a slot, put in a carousel and you'd have a slideshow, right? And so we would do that and that was kind of a big family thing, so we do it, you know, I don't know, probably every other month or maybe certainly every quarter. We'd just pull out, we'd do a family picture show and it would just be a way to kind of tell our family story. We'd look at vacations, we'd look at fun activities, could be a sporting event that we took pictures of and then there's always commentary going on about what happened. [laughs] And sometimes there was controversy, what really happened or like my dad would have pictures of a certain golf course, and like, "No, this is hole number eight." or "No, no, no, it's hole number six, and I got a par!" or "No, I got a birdie!" So there's some controversy that would happen. So over the years, things maybe were not always as crystal clear as we first took it. But I look back and I think of, you know, throughout generations, people would pass on stories, right, among families. And I think that was kind of the way we did it was through looking at pictures, and then retelling the story, laughing about it. And so I've done that with my own family where we -- now we've switched to videos, of course, and now things online and on the computer, but same kind of thing, where it's just fun to look back and tell stories again, and recognize the value that each person has, and their unique role and funny things that have happened that brought us together as a family. So as I look back, I think that's one of the things that really just, I think, kept us close. And in a sense, we have an oral history, if you will of our family, because we would do that on a regular basis. So anyway, that would

be one thing I could share.

D

Diane Livingston 06:05

Oh, that's wonderful. What a great idea. I love that. Well, okay, so you're part of a family, then you went away to college, I assume? Could you talk just briefly about what that looked like for you?

R

Rob Harter 06:19

Yeah, yeah. So I went to a school called Wheaton College in the Chicago area. So it was about four hours away from my hometown. And great school -- it's a small Liberal Arts college. Oh, about, at the time, there was probably a little over 4000 people part of the college. So it was, again, small, but it was a great size where we can really -- I felt like you got to know your classmates and got to know your professors. Or I remember, we would go to the professor's homes, sometimes for dinner or meals or whatever. So I felt like it was a small school that you really got to have that personal connection, which now looking back, because a lot of my siblings and other friends then went to major universities that were much larger in size and have 200 people in a class, and I think the largest class I ever had was maybe 80-90 people in one class. So, it was pretty unique. And I really loved it. So yeah, moved to Chicago, went to school. And then ironically met my wife [Leah] there in college. She was a year younger than me, but she was there also at Wheaton College. She was from the Denver area. And so we met at school, and I ended up graduating, of course, and then had, I had a job right out of school working in a large church in Chicago called Willow Creek Community Church. I was an intern with their Youth Ministry, and also did a side job just to make some money. And we continued dating and then after -- then she graduated, then we ended up getting married. And then we moved to Denver. And that kind of got us away from the Midwest. And so I've kind of been in the West ever since I moved to Denver, once we got married, and then I went to a school called Denver Seminary. It's right there in Denver and I never looked back in a sense that I've visited, of course, but I've never lived again, back in Indiana, where I grew up.

D

Diane Livingston 07:53

Alright, so what did you graduate from in college?

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Rob Harter 07:56

Yeah, so I had a double major. It was called a Christian education, and then Bible degree or Theology degree. So I doubled up on those two. I knew at that point, once I went to my

undergrad, certainly by my junior year, I thought, okay, I'm probably going to go into some kind of faith orientation of a job, whether it be a Pastor, or a school of some type that would have faith as a major component of that. And then once I graduated, I knew I was going to go to Seminary. And so it really set me up well. So that's why it was nice to have that Bible double major because it prepared me. I took like things like Greek. I took Hebrew. And then, actually, when I went to Seminary, I was able to test out in one year of Greek because I already had it my undergraduate which kind of saved me some time. And I just, I love languages, anyway, so it's kind of a fun thing to learn.

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Diane Livingston 08:40

Very cool. Okay, and so then, I'm assuming then you headed up to Park City at some point, which is brought you here?

R

Rob Harter 08:48

Yeah. Yeah, so fast forward. So yeah. So I was in Denver for all, all total, about 16 years. And I was a Pastor of various churches. And then, yeah, then fast forward to 2010 when I moved to Park City, and I came for this job, the Christian Center of Park City. It's a non-denominational humanitarian organization. So, it was different. It was not, I wasn't a Pastor, in a sense, as my full time job, even though I still wear the hat of Pastor in many ways, and I'm a faith leader, and I end up working with local churches. And a lot of the work is still ministry, you know, if you want to define ministry in that way. But overall, it's a non-profit, and it's not a church. We don't have, you know, it's not a denomination, we don't have church services. So it's not -- it's very different than when I was a Pastor of a local church. But I love it. It's been a really, really good fit. I've been in for 10 years. And you know, really, the Christian Center started, even though the name sounds like a church, the goal really was to create a humanitarian community center that sought to meet the needs of this community. In particular, those needs that maybe fell through the cracks, otherwise; people in this community that maybe would not be served, you know, other than having a humanitarian center that could really bring the resources together in this community to serve the needs of this community. And it was started in 2000 so we've actually been around for twenty years. When they first came out in 2000 -- little history real quick, Jim and Susan Swartz were second homeowners here in Park City. And they really saw this vision, like, there needed to be a place, a humanitarian community center, again, that really had, as its main goal, to serve the needs, particularly initially of the low income community, as it was growing and to make sure that those needs were met. And then also this organization, the Christian Center, would be a catalyst to reach all the various churches and help bring them together to foster a sense of, "Hey, let's serve the entire community together and the Christian Center could be that catalyst to provide,

whether it be food or other ways of meeting the needs of this community." So that's how it started twenty years ago. The Executive Director that first came out was a guy named Tim Dahlin. He and his wife, Patty. He was the first Executive Director; she was the Director of Finance. They came together, started it kind of as a family -- mom and pop shop, if you will -- you can kind of compare it to that. And then their daughter, Tracy, came and ran the thrift store, and the food pantry, kind of anything they needed right away. She's still with us to this day, twenty years later. She runs our Heber store; for the thrift store there. Anyway, so it started that way -- as a humanitarian center. And then I came, as I mentioned, ten years ago, and it's been FUN to see it -- Diane, you've seen the growth of this place. I came ten years ago; we'd just had moved into a new building. And we had about nine paid staff, and lots of volunteers. But now, looking back ten years after the fact, we have 53 paid staff, with over 1000 volunteers on a given year. COVID obviously has been a little weird, a little different than normally, but that's what we normally have. And it's just been so fun to see it grow. Like, we have a campus in Heber and we have a campus in Park City. We had this huge capital campaign -- a \$9.3 million capital campaign -- that we finished two years ago at our Park City campus. And then we have programs now that reach the entire state. We're in Wendover, and in the Ipabah, Utah area, which is right on the border of Utah and Nevada, because we work with the Goshute Native American reservation there. And we work with the indigenous group, the Navajo nation, in the southwestern part of the state. In fact, I'll be taking turkeys in two weeks to the Utah Navajo community. And so we love really expanding a lot of the services and programs we've had here that started in Park City, but now we're reaching out to the entire state.

D

Diane Livingston 12:20

So amazing to see how it's grown. Really, so amazing. What do you attribute that growth to, honestly, and we don't want to spend a lot of time on that, but I'm just so curious.

R

Rob Harter 12:32

It's a good question. You know, as I look back, I think a combination of -- we had a great start, I thought our founders, number one, were super generous financially to help us get going. They invested in this organization to begin with. We have had great people. Tim and Pattie Dahlin really set a great stage, if you will, for me to come in ten years after the fact. They had a healthy organization, they got it off the ground. Because they came with nothing, you know, it was just an idea. And so they build it from scratch. And then, we just really feel like the community has come alongside us because we've grown it. And really it's grown and grown last ten years, I think because the community has seen the needs. They responded. I think we've got a great team. Again, we've hired more and more staff

and the staff together -- this team has really come together to make sure people are aware of all the different services. And then as we've served and provided -- like our food pantry is one of the largest now in the state -- as we've continued to discover that there is a much bigger need than people ever realized in Park City for FOOD just as one thing that we do, people got really excited about that. And they realized, yeah, let's make sure that there's no one that goes hungry here in Park City and Summit County. And then of course we reached out to Heber. The reason we expanded in Heber was because we had people that worked in Park City, but lived in Heber. And so we thought, "Well, why don't we just provide services right there in Heber as opposed to having them having to drive here." Now a lot of them work so they could do it, you know, while they're coming to work or going back home. But it just made sense because the needs there were quite high. In fact, maybe if this is important for the video, I could share that right now in the Park City School District, about 20% of the kids qualify for free and reduced lunch. That's what--

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Diane Livingston 14:08

Wow.

R

Rob Harter 14:09

Yeah, so that's a federal standard of poverty that they come up with. And it's through the school. And so those are some of the families that we meet -- in terms of the needs that come up and I think a lot of people outside of Park City are very shocked by that. That there's that much of people that fall into that category of need. Now, again, I could go to Salt Lake and the Granite School District, for example, and it's a much higher percentage, but I think it's just the mentality that, "Oh, Park City, everyone has money in Park City, there's no need there." That's just not the case. A lot of the people that keep the restaurants going and keep the resorts going and often have the one, or two, or sometimes three jobs -- are low income. They're heavily -- the majority of the low income community here in Park City, anyway -- are from the Latinx community, not exclusively, but it's a large percentage. And then the Filipino community is a growing minority community here and it's been fun to see them grow. So anyway, so we end up serving a lot of them and we also serve people from the refugee community. Salt Lake actually over the years, again -- it's changed just recently -- but over the years has been one of the primary spots where refugees come from all over the world. And Salt Lake has been a very great city that welcomes them. And so, Park City, because of all the resorts and hotels and the restaurants, there's a lot of jobs. And so there's people that come up from Salt Lake every day to work at the restaurants and hotels. But they're very typically low income. Now some move up here, and even some that just work up here, they'll stop by the food pantry, because they often have needs. Or they'll, you know, have need of

clothes or household goods or furniture. And so those are the types of services we've seen that really have sought to meet people's needs. And then when the community hears what we're doing, they get super excited. And so they turn around and financially support us, they jump in as a volunteer, or like your church has been so great about jumping into our Operation Hope program and making sure kids have a great Christmas and things like that. So it's been really fun to see it grow.

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Diane Livingston 15:54

Yes, yes, that has been a really fun -- Sub for Santa's rolled into Operation Hope. And it's been really fun to be involved with that. Thank you, Rob. So just to back up for a second, so you personally, your family, do you remain in the Lutheran faith?

R

Rob Harter 16:14

Good question. So I don't, you know, even though it was a great foundation, and I enjoyed, like, when I went to Seminary, I really enjoyed delving into all kinds of different theology. Once I came out -- actually when I was at Wheaton College, Wheaton College, for the most part is a non-denominational school now. They have people from all different backgrounds, Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Baptist, you name it. And so that was a really, I thought it was a very good experience in my mind, because then I got involved with the church called Willow Creek, as I mentioned, and that's a non-denominational church. They're not tied into a specific denomination, and really I've kind of carried that through my experiences, I would really say. That's where I feel most comfortable [in] a non-denominational community type of church. And so the way I describe it to people that are maybe unfamiliar with that is really a kind of focus on the essentials, or I feel like the non-denominational approach is more looking at what are those essentials of the Christian faith. And let's focus on those. And we may agree to disagree on things like baptism or communion or specific doctrinal issues. But we can agree on a lot of the general key doctrinal issues when it comes to Christianity as a whole. And so I've just felt the most comfortable in that setting. And it actually set me up well, because the Christian Center, as I mentioned before, we're non-denominational, or maybe a better word is an interdenominational because, again, we have people, as I look at Park City, we have people from all different denominations, you know, the Episcopal Church, the Baptist Church, the Catholic Church, they all come and serve. And so we're open to everybody. And we love that. And we really, I feel like it helps for at least the Christian Center, to the role that I have now, we're able to focus on the things we agree on, which honestly, we agree on so many more things than we disagree on. And sometimes, we don't always emphasize that. But when we do, when we focus on the things we actually have agreement on, we can get a lot more accomplished, I've found and we can serve a lot of

people doing it that way. So, it's been just a good fit with I guess where I come theologically speaking and how I ended up working here at the Executive Director job here at the Christian Center.

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Diane Livingston 18:14

That's great. So would that be Mountain Life that you go to?

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Rob Harter 18:18

You know, I actually go to a church called Capital Church, and Capital here locally. They actually are based in Salt Lake, but they have a branch in Park City. And so yeah, we've, that's a Saturday night service here in Park City. And then their main service is Sunday morning. They have, actually -- well now COVID changed everything -- but before COVID, they had a Saturday night service and two Sunday morning services. And they have a building right next to Judge Memorial School down in Salt Lake. So, that's been kind of a fun way to also stay connected to Salt Lake and the faith community down in Salt Lake through Capital church.

D

Diane Livingston 18:41

Right. So that kind of opens up the question for me: So what did pre COVID worship look like? And then how did it change for you and your family?

R

Rob Harter 19:02

Yeah. Oh, it's been, it's been just so strange. And I'm sure with all your interviews, it's been so different. But yeah, essentially, you know, when COVID first broke out, it was, everything was online. So, we just did everything online. And luckily, we have computers and internet and that's been okay. Now, I don't like it. I like being with people. I like seeing people, I like connecting, you know, shaking hands and just you know, being in a group in a meeting room where there's a lot of people like that. I feed off of that. I just feel like that's the way we're wired, too. So, it's been hard. It's been an adjustment. So I would not say it's been great overall in the sense of I miss being in-person with people. However, the one positive thing I would say is it -- for our family -- is been great because we ended up having Sunday mornings. Before that, Saturday night was when we'd typically go to church because that was when Park City had their Capital Service here. So Sunday mornings were kind of nice because it turned into a family day because went to church on Saturday night. But now we said -- it was Sunday mornings. So we made Sunday mornings our family days. So we'd have breakfast together, we'd watch church online, and then we'd

talk about it. And then we just have this, you know, we'd have a prayer time together. And it was really fun. In fact, we got to the point where we were doing it week after week after week, and our kids REALLY LOVED IT. I was kind of surprised, because you know, kids are kids, even though, for the most part, they're great kids. But you know, I, when I was a kid, and a high schooler, I wasn't super excited about...I wouldn't be super excited about sitting down or watching something on the TV screen. But my kids have really enjoyed it. I think it's because we have had it -- just made it a special thing. Like we make breakfast together and they can choose what we make. And we all kind of do a different part. And sometimes it's pancakes, sometimes it's eggs, or whatever. But we all make it together and we end up just making a special time together. So as I look back, that's probably one of the more positive things of COVID is that I think we have had more family time. Because our kids are very busy and they're active in all kinds of different things. And they scatter, right, and we're often driving them all over this region of whether it be going to basketball games, or choir concerts, or violin concerts to whatever. And that all was shut down. So we ended up having more time as a family and more time together. And that's been probably one of the more positive things.

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Diane Livingston 21:17

That's wonderful. How old are your kids right now?

R

Rob Harter 21:19

So yeah, so now we've got actually a Junior in college. And she came back -- she was going to school in California. Right before COVID, actually, she was already thinking about maybe transferring to the University of Utah. But COVID kind of, you know, just was like the final nail in the coffin, so to speak. And so she chose to come back home. So she's with us now, even though she's a Junior in college, and she's going online, but she's at the University of Utah. There actually is one class, it's online, or sorry, in-person. and then the rest is online. So it's a hybrid approach. And then I have a Senior in high school, and I have a Freshman in high school.

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Diane Livingston 21:50

Okay, so you are right in the middle of it.

R

Rob Harter 21:53

It's really fun. I've got three girls, and they're super fun to be with.

D

Diane Livingston 21:56

What are their names?

R

Rob Harter 21:58

Yeah, so Emma is my oldest. Elyse is my middle and Evie is my youngest. Okay, cute. Very cute. All right. So now you're back to -- Okay, so you came home. Are you still home -- streaming? Or have you guys gone back to services? Yeah, good question. So we did actually, they've had now a couple of in-person services socially distanced and mask wearing and all that. But we did, ironically...and then the governor just came out, of course, with the new...I know, faith communities are supposedly exempt but our church decided to go back to an online starting this Sunday. So we had, what I think, about a month's worth of in-person. And now we're going back to online, which is unfortunate. Now we're just going to do it for the first two weeks. I think that's what Governor Herbert mentioned, it was just through the 23rd. So I think at this point the church has said, "Let's try the next two weeks online." And then hopefully, you can go back to in-person services. And now, it's better than nothing. When we've gone to service the last couple of weeks, it's been socially distanced. So it's a little odd, right? But it's still, it's something. Like we're together; we can see each other. We've got masks on, of course, we can sing. And it's just fun to finally see, you know, even if it's across the room or just look at their eyes with their masks on, but it's been nice. it's a little bit of a bummer. I understand why we're doing it. But I'm hoping that we'll be able to get back into in-person services soon.

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Diane Livingston 23:16

Yeah. Do you, in your church, have some sort of Eucharist or Sacrament?

R

Rob Harter 23:22

We do. Yes. So, yep. At this particular church, they offer what we call Communion. Yeah. So the Eucharist, once a month. Mm hmm. Now, it's funny, we have not done Eucharist yet, or Communion, since we've been back in person. So that is really difficult, right? Because -- now they've done it online. And they've encouraged, you know, families to do it on their own. And so we've done that a couple of times over the summer where they lead online. And, you know, they walk through the same terminology and walk through the Communion elements. And then we were supposed to take care of the elements on our end. And so for our tradition, we would have like grape juice, for example. And so we just had grape juice, and we had bread, and so we did it just as a family. So, that was kind of fun. And actually, that was kind of special. I kind of envision the first church having similar

things where it was a family where they broke bread together. And maybe it was just two or three families together, house to house doing it. And so we kind of had that experience. Now, so yeah, we've not done it in person, and I'm not sure how that's going to work to be honest with you. Because they know there's, again, a little bit of a health issue. We have to be super careful. But anyway, that's how we've done it so far.

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Diane Livingston 24:29

Interesting. Yeah. That's, it sounds like it was kind of a special experience for you. As a family.

R

Rob Harter 24:35

The family was kind of fun. Yeah, actually was pretty fun.

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Diane Livingston 24:37

We did the same and it was fun. It was fun to do it just as a family. So unique. So, so unique.

R

Rob Harter 24:43

Yeah, yeah.

D

Diane Livingston 24:44

Okay, here's a question, so I wonder if you feel like it was... it sounds like it wasn't for you. Was it hard at all to go back once you heard. "Oh, it's lifted." Had you found yourself really comfortable being at home and it was a little hard to pry yourself out of the house? I'm curious if you had any of those feelings?

R

Rob Harter 25:13

I, you know, it's interesting. So the organization, the Christian Center, of course, that I lead, we are an essential service. And so we actually never shut down. So we kept our food pantry going the whole time during COVID. So we've never closed our doors. We did move our basic needs online. So in other words, basic needs is where we help with people's rent, or utility bills, or a medical bill they couldn't afford or things like that. So we were able to do that all through online giving, and connection. And then our mental health counseling for about almost two months was telehealth. But then we moved to in-person because we

had such an issue, which maybe we want to talk about. Just the suicide ideation, the depression, the anxiety was REALLY, really -- it's still very, very intense. So probably more than any service we provided outside of our rent assistance, I guess, mental health has been really, really important. But anyway back to your question, so we never shut down. So I was still going to the office. Now we did modify our schedule, and our food pantry was, you know, drive-thru system, it was by reservation only, we didn't have personal interaction, we would literally have a -- Diane, you know how our setup is, we also are a place where, like the DI or the Goodwill, we're a donation center. So people would donate, you know, household goods, clothes and whatnot. Well, we shut that down during COVID for a period of time. We turned that drive-thru system, though, into our food pantry. So it was a mobile food pantry, essentially. And we set everything outside. And so we got the food together, put it in boxes, and then set it aside for each family as they would come by. And then they -- we would you know, walk away, make sure we had a safe distance away, they'd grab the box, put it in their car and leave. So there wasn't interaction. We had the Health Department actually come through and give us guidelines of how to do this safely. But we kept it going the whole time. So all to say we were not at home that much. We pretty much were here. Now again, we did a lot of Zoom meetings, for sure. And a lot of our interactions with people were on Zoom. And so coming back into person, actually, I liked it because, again, I'm an extrovert. I like being with people. So that was something I was looking forward to. Because we kind of were already in the office pretty much every day, it wasn't that unusual. Now having said that, it was interesting you ask it because I did notice a lot of other nonprofit leaders, a lot of volunteers, that was a really hard jump to like come to our campus and start volunteering in the food pantry again. And people that -- we did shut down our stores by the way. We have three thrift stores, we did shut those down during a period of time during COVID. And then we shifted the staff to help with our food pantry during that time. But then when we moved them back, we had to make sure we were really careful. You know, we were one of the first ones right away, I mean, in Summit county for the state, right, we were still like having masks right away. We never really were in a place where masks weren't being encouraged to wear, if not mandated. So we've had masks the whole time, we've got this protocol down. Again, the health department gave us protocols to wipe down high touch surfaces. We were, you know, hand sanitizer everywhere; we limited our hours. So there was a lot of things we put into place to make sure that our staff felt comfortable, and they kept safe. And then that our volunteers were comfortable and safe as well coming as well, as of course, the customers that came through. And so I would say the last three months, almost four months now, before Governor Herbert's most recent, you know, mandate, we've been pretty, I'd say almost normal. Again, everything's with masks and hand sanitizer. I think our hands are raw now [chuckling] how much sanitizer we put on our hands. But we've been able to function somewhat normally, if you will, I'd say now for about four months. And so it feels very normal. So hopefully that answered your question.

D

Diane Livingston 28:47

That's good. Yeah, that's great. So I'm kind of wondering about the people that you serve. Yeah. And you kind of alluded to it a little bit. What are some of the struggles that you feel like COVID has [pause] I mean, you deal mostly with the physical, it sounds like, but you also have those emotional needs that you fill. And it seems like you are also filling some faith needs, you know. And so, with this interview, all three of those are interesting. I would ask first, though, about the faith needs. Have you seen people struggle with their faith during this time? Or has it helped with their faith? I'm kind of curious what you've seen.

R

Rob Harter 29:32

That's a really good question. And I would say, in general, I do think this has been overall a very challenging time for people of faith, or people that have a faith community, mostly because of what we talked about earlier. You know, we couldn't gather together in public with each other. And I think a lot of people really, you know, that's really an important part of their faith is gathering together weekly, if not more, you know, throughout the week. We didn't have that opportunity. Now, funny enough, having said that there are, you know, I think the introverts of the world, really enjoyed this, they're like, "Hey, this is fantastic! I don't have to go outside, I could still have my church online." So I wouldn't say that's for everybody. But I think in general, I guess I heard more people really struggling to stay engaged with their faith, to stay plugged in, to feel like they were connecting with other people, which again, is a big part of their faith. I think the other piece that made it difficult that did bleed into people's faith is the people that we're serving, you know, it has been really challenging. Like the number one, just the fear of getting COVID. I think early on, people were just really afraid, like, I'm not ready to die, you know, I don't want to get this disease. And so I think it created a TREMENDOUS amount of anxiety. And so I think, for those who didn't have maybe a regular faith community, or resources in their life that gave them support and encouragement when it came to faith, that it was difficult to kind of work through that anxiety, that fear of getting the disease, the fear of having people over. Or then, also, the fear of maybe passing it on to parents that are elderly, and not being able to see them -- THAT made it difficult. So I think it made all the relationships very challenging. And so I think that made, I think, things very difficult. Now, on the positive side, again, I think it's been a mixture of both, I guess, to answer your question. The positive side, there's been more resources out there than ever that are online that people can access on their computer or on their phone. You know, there's been services, you could on a Sunday morning, or anytime, actually, anytime of the day, you could dial in and listen to services and sermons and messages from a whole variety of different faith backgrounds and denominations. I mean, different speakers from all over the country, all over the world. So I think in that sense, if you kind of had your standard, you go to church, around the corner in your community, now you've been opened up to an opportunity

where you've got resources from all over the place that really I think could be a real benefit. So as long as you were taking advantage of those, and knew where to go to get those resources, I think that's been a positive for people faith-wise. And now we kind of go into like the mental health and the physical. I think, certainly the first six months of this, our biggest need was food and rent assistance. So here in Park City anyway and Wasatch County of Heber, we were able to give...we've given almost a million dollars worth of rent assistance since this pandemic started. And I think there's going to be more need for this, say, in January and February. There's a moratorium right now, of course, nationwide, the CDC has said you can't evict somebody for non-payment. That ends, right now, at the end of December. So there is some fear that at the end of December, if that's not extended, which right now, it's not been extended, that right in the middle of the winter, people potentially could be evicted. I mean, I'm really, really hopeful. I guess I'm always looking at the bright side that I can't imagine that we would allow people to be evicted right in the middle of the winter, across the country. That this HAS to be extended into at least for another six months. That's my hope anyway. But in the meantime, you know, people have had a little bit of a reprieve in that no one has been evicted right now. Now, having said that, it's not a rent forgiveness, though. This is an eviction moratorium. So people still have to pay the rent. So we still are helping people because they've gotten behind, a lot of them have not gotten back to 40 hours of work. So they still can't pay all their bills. So we've had, for example, we've had a lot of people come to us with a bill of \$3,000, because they've gotten in a hole, and they're not working full time hours, they're working as many hours as they'll give them. But around Park City, again, hotels are not open fully. The resorts are just going to start opening, one in a couple of weeks, but not fully. Again, it's going to be more scaled back. Restaurants are scaled back, dine-in is not often available. It's only drive through, and things like that, has impacted our working class here. And, therefore, they don't have the money that they used to have. So we're still helping. So that's been a big, big need is just helping physically with people with the rent assist, and then of course, food. Food, we've had plenty of food to give. That's one positive thing is we've had plenty of food. That's not been an issue. And people have taken advantage of that in a good way. Like they've come to our food pantry. We were serving 1000 people a week at the height of COVID. So there's been -- yeah, so between Wasatch and Summit County, we've been serving a lot of people. And then finally you touched on it. I think the biggest need that, every time I've been on a Zoom call recently, I just have mentioned it over and over again, because it's such a big need. And I don't know why -- it's not talked about a lot on a national scale, every now and then I'll hear about it, but I would not say it's been the number one thing that people have talked about. Now, maybe in our country because the politics have been front and center for everybody because of the election, but, the mental health needs of our community and I'd say our country, I think are something we'd have to really continue to look at. Because we've had rates -- so far they've seen more -- a higher rate of suicide in a short period of time than ever in

recent memory. There's been higher rates of people just with anxiety and depression, again, tied with maybe they had the ability to meet with the psychiatrist or a counselor, but now they can't because they can't afford it or their insurance went away. Or, because of COVID, they're only doing telehealth so they can't see somebody in person, so that it doesn't have the same impact when they meet with the counselor. And so all of that has impacted people's mental health. And if you've lost your job, say, you've lost somebody to COVID, you've lost a loved one and you're isolated a lot in your own house, maybe, some sadly, a lot of homes, there's abuse going on in homes. I mean, there's just a whole series of things that are going on, that we don't often talk about, and all of it is in the area of emotional and mental health. And I think that's still a real area that we need lots of emphasis on, and more counselors out there. Just remove the stigma from having -- if people have a stigma of going to a counselor, this is the time I hope it's wiped away. Because counselors are available; psychiatrists are available. There's people to talk to, there's hotlines out there, suicide hotlines and I just encourage people to do that. Because I think people of faith in particular, sometimes we think, "Wow, if we just pray hard enough, or if I just go to church, or if I, if I surround myself with people of faith..." all those are good things. all those are really important. But there are times where, in addition, even if you have those things in your life, I still think there's a great need for counseling in your life. Sometimes people just need medication management. They need medication to help manage schizophrenia, and they're you know, maybe that's an issue or major depression, where they do need some help to have someone give them some medicine that can really manage that for them, because of the physiological issue that they're dealing with, it's not really a faith issue. It's not a lack of faith, in other words, why they're having depression, it's because, physiologically, they're experiencing depression. So, there's so many tools out there, I just hope people know that there's resources that are compatible with faith. It's a both/and, right? It's not an either/or. And so that's one of my big messages that I've passed on is that this is a great time to combine faith with all these other good resources that can help you emotionally and mentally.

D

Diane Livingston 36:54

Yeah, I think for me, one of the biggest concerns I've had is the abuse, that I know that abuse is a big issue and to have all the children home all the time and parents really stressed or working. So I mean, are you are you personally seeing that that has become more of a problem here in Park City area?

R

Rob Harter 37:17

Sadly, it has. We work, for example, we work very close with Peace House. It's another nonprofit that works with domestic violence. And that is been a big issue. And here's

what's challenging. Here's just a couple of scenarios. So, say, it's telehealth now where you can only talk to your counselor through online. Well, if your abuser's in the same home, how do you get away from them to have a conversation about the situation. So, it's made it very difficult. A lot of people have to kind of go underground, so to speak. And then secondly, because of COVID, it's made the options of leaving and going somewhere else much more difficult. and then I think, then, third, is normal people that are just, you know, trying to make it day by day that maybe had not dealt with mental health issues. Because of isolation, because of maybe losing a job, because the financial pressures and the unknown and the uncertainty of -- how long are we going to be in this COVID-- you know, pandemic. All that's created issues for just, I would say, people that normally don't deal with mental health. But the people who have had mental health issues or underlying mental issues and then all the COVID and all the isolation, all the other issues, has caused those issues to go to a whole nother degree of severity. And so, therefore, if domestic violence was an issue, or abuse was an issue, it's gotten worse. And so, yes, we've seen it, our counselors have seen it. It's super sad. And that's why, again, I just mention, please reach out, there are a lot of resources out there. I'm thankful for that. But yeah, here, the Park City area, the Wasatch community area, the Salt Lake area, please just reach out because there are areas. Now, I think, at least in Park City area I could speak to most to the faith leaders in this community do have accessibility and resources available. So, like, if you contact your Pastor, or Priest or your Bishop, they should have resources available for you, if you need mental health, or certainly for food and different things like that. So I do think people are informed in this area. I don't know about throughout the state, but I do know for Park City and Wasatch community, that people seem to be very informed. And so if you are struggling, and for some reason you're watching this video, or you know people, there are resources out there and your faith leader should have access to those resources to pass on to you.

D

Diane Livingston 39:22

Thank you so much, Rob. Such great, great thoughts.

R

Rob Harter 39:25

Yeah, you bet.

D

Diane Livingston 39:26

Here's another question. As we wrap up here, is there anything that has surprised you with respect to COVID? That you, you know, when you think about what's happened, religious or otherwise, is there anything that surprised you that you didn't expect? What happened

during this time?

R

Rob Harter 39:48

That's, I like that question. Surprise. I'll say personally, a little bit then maybe just my reflections, you know, globally, I guess. I've been surprised personally again, how much, for our family anyway, it's actually been a benefit. Because we've spent so much time together, it's really kind of forced us to be together. And that's a positive thing for our family. It's been really a unique treat and kind of surprising how much we've really just enjoyed spending time together. And even as things kind of opened up, over the summer, we're like, "Hey, we really enjoy actually still hanging out together." And, and I'm so glad as a parent that my kids actually want to hang out with us still. That may not last, [chuckle] but, right now, they still like hanging out with us. Now, on the maybe the negative side, I think what's been challenging has been, I, you know, I think all of us have experienced this, where this has been the most impactful, holistically, pandemic we've ever experienced in terms of it's impacting everything. It's impacted our jobs, it's impacted social life, it's impacted the faith community, it's impacted, you know, our ability to get food to people, it's impacted relationships, it's impacted abuse situations. I mean, it's impacted every aspect of life. So I think, you know, people that usually depended on whatever they depended on maybe family, or their faith, or their job, or their relationships, or whatever it was, it feels like everything has been pulled out from under you. And I think what's been challenging, too, is that there's not a solid like, "Okay, well, it's all going to end on January 1, and we can all go back to normal." And I think, you know, humans were wired to have the sense, "Okay, I can get through kind of anything almost, as long as I know there's an end date...."

D

Diane Livingston 41:23

Yeah.

R

Rob Harter 41:24

"...as long as I know when it's going to be all done. And I have closure. Okay, I'll suck it up for another two months. But boy, January 1, I can't wait to get back to normal." And I think this sense that we don't have closure, we don't have a sense of when this is going to be over. When are we going to go back to normal? That's still up in the air and I think-- I don't know, I guess I've reflected on -- as human beings -- I just don't think we do really well with that level of uncertainty. It's really challenging to know how to live our lives with so much uncertainty. And so I do think faith can be a wonderful grounding thing, that faith can make the uncertainty a little bit better and more manageable, because at least you

have this internal certainty of your faith, and your connection with God, and your sense of centeredness. So I do think that's a positive, that faith comes into the situation. Like if you're a person who doesn't have faith, I think it's even more difficult because I don't know where you find your groundedness or your centeredness. But even for people of faith, I think this uncertainty and lack of closure and lack of end-in-sight is really difficult. And I guess I've been surprised how much it's impacted me. But so many people I've talked to, same thing, like, "Can we just go back to normal? You know, can we go back to the way it used to be?" And, right now we can't and we don't know when we can. So that's a real challenging thing...

D

Diane Livingston 42:43

Yeah, yeah, I would echo that. Definitely. You just want to go back to normal and what is normal anymore? It feels like...

R

Rob Harter 42:50

Then, that's the concern. It's like, can we ever -- Is there ever a normal again? And now the fear is, "Oh, my goodness, no." And there's almost like a panic that comes in like, "Well, what does that mean?" Like, you know, anyway,

D

Diane Livingston 43:00

Forever? [laughing]

R

Rob Harter 43:01

Right. Right. That's what it kind of feels like. Yeah.

D

Diane Livingston 43:03

I know. Well, do you think that there are any permanent changes that you've seen? Do you think there's any, any changes that you have seen that you want to keep permanent in your life or with your organization?

R

Rob Harter 43:17

Yeah, I think I have loved, again, I go back to the same thoughts, I'm a broken record, but I think going back to this real emphasis of the family. Again, I know they're families that are not feeling...that they're dysfunctional. And so I'm careful to say that. I know not every

family feels closeness and safe when they're at home. But for those who have a safe home, and, you know, a functional home, it's been wonderful. I hope, like for our family, I hope we never lose that sense of -- that's really important that I know, before COVID, we were very busy. I mean, we're a busy family, we just got a million things going on. My wife runs the Counseling Center, I run the Christian Center, you know, we have a LOT going on. I mean, our days are very full. And I look back whenever they kind of shut down, even though we stayed open, but we weren't as busy because the kids didn't have activities. They weren't running around, you know, to school activities, or we weren't traveling as much. And so that busy-ness factor, what I would not want to go back to is that level of busy-ness. So I think eliminating things that maybe pulled us away as a family, or pulled us away from friendships, pulled us away from relationships, even my wife and I just having more time together as a married couple. Like, I don't want to go back to that CRAZY busy time where we just didn't have as much time together, where we were just kind of passing in the night. And you know, texting occasionally, but not really having quality family time, quality relationship time, quality friendship time; that I hope we never go back to. So I think that's been a good thing. And I think then in terms of, maybe as a whole the faith community, I hope we never lose that sense of -- when we went back, when we finally opened back up and we actually had services -- people were SO EXCITED to see each other! Like, I hope we never lose that sense of excitement, of seeing each other. And maybe when something's taken away from you, you realize how much value it has in your life. So I hope we never lose that sense of value of faith, our churches, our families, our friendships, I think that made it very special. So I hope we don't lose that.

D

Diane Livingston 45:16

Yeah, that's, yep, I agree. Are there any other thoughts that you have, or maybe you could share hopes that you have for the future, either personally or with your organization?

R

Rob Harter 45:29

You know, a big one that I've just, am super thankful for -- I feel like then another thing that I hope we don't lose and I don't think we will -- but the community here in Park City, and again, I'd say Wasatch, in Summit County, this whole region, people really responded to the need. I mean, the reason we were able to give almost a million dollars worth of rent assistance, is because people gave us money, you know, that we turned around, we didn't have that kind of budget. So that all came from community support. So I just thank the community for that support. So, I hope we don't lose that. And I hope that people continue to not go back to normal of if they're -- you know, I think people now are aware that there's a lot of disparities in our culture and a lot of disparities in our community. That there's not always people that, have margin in their finances, or they don't have access to

the same resources that maybe some other people do, whether it be educational resources, or job resources. So I think the sense of, "Let's do this together, let's not lose that community aspect, that together, we can do a lot more." And let's make sure, particularly for the most vulnerable in our communities, to rally around them, and make sure no one falls through the cracks. I think that's a good thing that I hope we continue. And I think as a Christian Center, you know, that's actually as we look into this next year, we're going to, as we've grown, and want to add more staff, we're adding more staff in the mental health counseling, and we're adding more in the area of empowering people, by helping them navigate through all the resources that are available. And one of the big ones is job training, really giving people more skills, so they can expand their job opportunities. Because I think there's -- having a job and a good paying job is so important for people self worth, you know, just a sense of them, just feeling good about themselves. And of course, economically, they need jobs to pay the bills. And so providing more job training, maybe it's education, maybe it's English training, whatever it is to help people expand themselves and have better jobs, better paying jobs, I think all that's going to benefit everybody in our culture in our community. And so we're going to invest in some more job training, and providing people that maybe have expertise and entrepreneurial skills. And then you know, Diane, you and I have been talking about how do we help people manage their budget, and do some financial planning. Those kinds of skills, I think becomes so important. And I think that's going to have a long term impact on these families, particularly that struggle with, you know, making ends meet day in and day out.

D

Diane Livingston 47:46

Yeah, I agree. I think it is very important to help people to see how they can figure out how to be self-reliant. And I mean, your job probably is to try and work your way out of a job in a way, you know.

R

Rob Harter 48:00

That's right, exactly. We don't want them to keep coming to the food pantry forever, just during an emergency. That's right. Self-reliance is a real big goal. That's right.

D

Diane Livingston 48:09

Okay, um, that kind of closes my questions. This has been so wonderful. And you and your organization are so highly respected in our community. And I just want to thank you personally, for all the work that you've done. Oh, thank you, Diane, really appreciate it. You are tireless leader, and people really respect you. I know that those who work with you in Interfaith Council always speak of the good that you're doing. And we really do need

you and we love working with you, too. So thank you.



Rob Harter 48:44

Thank you. Thank you. I feel your support, you and Lance, your church I mean, have been amazing. So I just wanted to say right back at you, thank you for your support. It feels good to be supported. That gives us that encouragement, inspiration to keep serving the many needs that we see. So thank you, it takes a community.



Diane Livingston 49:00

It does. So I'm gonna speak for Lance and myself that we wish you the very best going forward and in everything you're doing. And thank you very much for your time today, Rob.



Rob Harter 49:11

Oh, yeah. Thanks for great questions. Really appreciated it.



Diane Livingston 49:14

Thank you.