

Oral History Cover Sheet

Interview Information	
Project Name:	Gateway City Church, St Louis and St Charles, Oral History Project
Narrator:	Larnise Boain
Interviewer:	Katie Sweet
Interview Date:	April 27, 2026
Interview Location:	Zoom, St Charles, MO

Descriptive Information	
Narrator's Biographical Information:	
Interview Summary:	The interview with Larnise Boain is a reflective and heartfelt conversation about her spiritual journey, community involvement, and experiences within the International Church of Christ (ICOC), particularly in St. Louis. Larnise shares her upbringing in a church-going family, her period of spiritual searching during college, and her eventual baptism in Washington, D.C. She discusses the challenges and growth she experienced through personal losses, family transitions, and moving between cities. Larnise highlights the warmth and serving spirit of the St. Louis church, recounting impactful community outreach efforts such as the "Living Water" event supporting trafficked and homeless women, and partnerships with organizations like Tiger Lily. She emphasizes the importance of scripture, mentorship, and community in her faith, offering advice to new disciples to cherish their early spiritual experiences. The interview also touches on leadership changes, the impact of the Henry Creed letter, and the unifying nature of the ICOC worldwide, concluding with Larnise's gratitude for her faith journey and the supportive church community. (Adobe AI Summary)
Interview Key Terms:	International Churches of Christ; Gateway City Church; Gateway to Hope; Tiger Lily; Reach Conference; St Louis; Community Service; Henry Kriete Letter;

Technical Information	
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Interview Quality and Recording Conditions:	No technical issues for either participant on Zoom; possible tornado siren in background
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Administrative Information

Workflow Process	Name	Date
Cover Sheet Completed By:	Katie Sweet	April 27, 2026
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Transcript Completed By:		

Narrator's Name: Larnise Boain
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Date of Interview: April 27, 2026
Location of Interview: Zoom (St. Charles, MO)
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Interview with Larnise Boain Transcript

Narrator's Name: Larnise Boain

Interviewer's Name: Katie Sweet

Date of Interview: April 27, 2026

Location of Interview: Zoom (St Charles, MO)

Transcript Completed By: Katie Sweet

Transcript Edited By:

Additional Notes:

KS: So today is April 27th, 2026. I'm here with, uh, Larise Bowen. We're both in St. Charles, Missouri, thereabout. Do I have your consent to use this interview for my digital history class, and also eventually for the ICOC oral history project.

LB: (16:06:44) Yes, you do.

KS: Excellent. So now we can officially begin, since I have your consent.

LB: Yay!

KS: (16:06:52) And the first question is going to be, what is your testimony?

LB: (16:06:57) Oh, yeah, this is great. So, I was reached out to in 1999 in Washington, D.C, when I became a member of the International Church of Christ. We were, um... you know, part of... well, I was part of the congregation there in D.C, and I think there are probably about maybe 350 members in that church. But having grown up in St. Louis, Missouri, I went to church as a kid all the time, like... three to five times a week. So it might have been for midweek services, two services on Sunday, or... choir practice, um, things like that, but I was always in church. My family had us, uh. You know, my mom was the pianist at church, my dad was the deacon, and I sang in the choir, and I was on the usher team as a kid, so we were always there. Um, but when I went away to college, I decided that I really wanted to get away from a lot of hypocrisy and things that I had seen growing up. And I really made a choice to not go to church. Like, I was like, I don't know that this is for me, and I'm not gonna go. But I think the longing in my heart was always there.

And I remember my senior year in college when I was walking across the lawns, um, I was so stressed out, and I just kept singing this hymn that I had learned at church, and it was called His Eye is on the Sparrow. And I just sang it and cried and sang and cried. I feel like probably for a couple weeks until I was. At the point of graduating. Um, what I also did while I was in college is I kind of vowed never to go back to St. Louis, so I knew that when I finished school did not want to come back here. And I ended up going to Washington, D.C, and starting my professional career there. I knew I wanted to be a consultant, and that's what I did. So, here I am, 6-7 months into my career in D.C. Um, I'm dating a guy back in St. Louis. I am, you know, working around the clock as a consultant. I'm getting winded and tired, and I'm just doing it. I'm just thinking that this is great. But at the end of the day, I still felt like something was missing, and so I remember distinctly praying that God would help me find a church. Um, I was kind of at a point of one loneliness, because I was the only one in town. I knew, like, one or two other friends from college, but I didn't have deep roots. But I also realized that the relationship that I was in with this guy was just not great, and I felt so guilty about being in a relationship, and the sin that I was in was really just causing me a lot of turmoil.

So, I was praying to find a church. I had vowed that the following Sunday, I would go to the 16th Street Baptist Church, which was, like, on 17th Street, but I was like, I don't understand that, but I'm just gonna do it anyway. And so, that Saturday morning, I was getting myself together, finished praying. Uh, a lady reached out to me, um, right outside of the laundry room in our apartment complex, and she asked me to go to church with her, and I said, uh, maybe. So she gave me a card. She said, look, I'll be attending services in New York City at our church there, but this is great. We meet at a high school. And, you know, call this number and somebody will come help you. And I just thought, that's the oddest thing, like, who meets in a high school? Like, what in the world is this about? And I

didn't know where it was, it was, like, halfway across town, I was new to DC, and albeit that I had MapQuest, I got lost constantly, so I really was not trying to do this. And then, um, within an hour, another person, literally in the same space. Uh, right in front of the laundry room, actually in the laundry room, around the dryers or somewhere, asked me to go to church, and she said, hey, I go to this non-denominational Christian church, it's a D.C. regional church, would love for you to come. And it just dawned on me, like, in that moment, that, God is answering your prayer. So I... I said, yes. Yes, I will go with you. And, you know, sometimes we can be so dull at heart, we're just going through the motions, and we aren't really listening to the spirit. But God helped me out, brought a second messenger within an hour of the first one. I went to service, and even before I got there, I feel like God just took away all of my excuses. Um, the young lady said, hey, we live right upstairs, I'll come and meet you in the lobby, we'll leave at 9.30, service is at 10, we'll be back by, you know, noon. She brought me a muffin, which I love, you know, blueberry muffins. I was like, oh, this is totally God.

So, I went, I studied the Bible for somewhere between 7 and 9 days, and I was baptized. And I remember, um, you know, going through the Bible studies because I had grown up in church. But I don't think I really understood what it meant to follow Christ and be a disciple of Christ. Um, I didn't have a lot of examples of accountability. Um, I didn't see people's lives transformed through the scriptures. And so we had a lot of traditions and a lot of really great people who loved God and who are very faithful, but when it came to leaning into the scriptures and walking the way that Jesus walked, this was my first encounter with that, and it was really super encouraging, um, tough, for sure, but that is how I became a disciple, and that was in August 11th, 1999.

KS: (16:13:07) How does your parents feel? You've mentioned, um, sounds like you grew up in church. How does your family feel? About you, um, becoming a disciple.

LB: (16:13:15) Yeah, I think they were questioning why I got baptized again. Um, I had been baptized somewhere around the age of 11 or 12, I think? And so they did wonder, like, what's going on with her? Why would she get baptized again? And I just explained, hey, this is what I want to do. I looked through the scriptures, I'm an adult. And I made a decision as an adult, and they didn't, you know, really question. I think there probably is still a lot of wondering as to, um, like, why... why this church versus our church, where we grew up, but I think there's also a healthy respect for just my decision and the life that I lead as a disciple, so it... you know, not a lot of blowback. Um, I think my siblings, however, the combination of becoming a disciple, moving away really did kind of erode some of my relationships with my siblings. Um, they got into a lot more trouble than I usually got into, and their lives are very, very different than mine, and so coming back as a disciple in 2007, when I moved back to St. Louis was a little rocky. Um, I think even the back and forth over the years may have made them feel like I was better than them, or I thought I was better than them, and so we had a lot of work to do in our relationship, we still have work to do in our relationship because of so many years gone by.

But otherwise, you know, not a lot of pushback, or questions, or resentment related to me becoming a disciple? Yeah, we did. Um, in 2000... That's right, yeah. So, in 2006, I was engaged to be married and I broke off my engagement. I remember coming home that November. And my uncle was really, really ill, and my uncle had passed away. Uh, at the same time, my dad kind of started developing a cough, and. A few weeks later, he would get really sick. So, I was in a place of coming back because of family. I was frustrated, faithless, you know, sad from breaking off this engagement to someone I had been engaged to in the church for about 4 years. And I just felt like God just had me starting over. Like, everything that I kind of felt like, was near and dear to me was kind of gone. So first, broke off the engagement. Second, my uncle passes away. Um, right on the heels of my uncle passing away, my aunt, his wife died, and then right after she died, my dad died. And so, I was in this season between November and April of 2007... of April 2007, that I just feel like God had me in a little bit of a holding pattern. So when my dad passed away, I decided I want to move back home.

There's a couple scriptures that ran through my mind, but at the time, it was really, I just vividly remember the scriptures that talk about how. We sit at the banquet table, and, you know, even the dogs long to eat the crumbs that fall from the table. And I just thought, well, how am I going to help my family become disciples if I'm so far away? Like, I'm enjoying all this wonderful blessings and treasures from the kingdom, but I don't have opportunity to give it to those that are closest to me, even. If they could get a few morsels, um, from my presents, it's worth me

going home. And so, I decided to go home to be closer to family. Um, hung out with my mom quite a bit, uh, just to check in with my mom and see how she was doing.

And yeah, that's kind of what brought me back to St. Louis. My mom was kind of like, well, what are you doing? This is not the place for you, like you, you aren't intending to be here. Um, but, you know, it was just totally God that I would come back here, because then in 2000... um, late 2007. I met and married my now-husband, Scott, and then, uh, we were married in 2008, and by 2009, we were. Both together back in Washington, D.C.

KS: (16:18:05) Yeah, like, one of the questions that kind of came to my mind was thinking about how, like, the loss, all the different types of losses in such a short window of time, and, um, that, you know, all disciples, we go through those periods where God is silent.

LB: Yeah.

KS: You know he's there with you, but you don't hear him, and um, I was just curious, like, what helped you through that time, spiritually speaking?

LB: (16:18:26) Yeah, you know, I remember a sermon when I broke off the engagement, it was a sermon about humility, and I just I remember reaching out to really spiritual women in my life, and also reaching out to my mom at that time. And I think those are the conversations that really got me through. Um, I had a humongous amount of gratitude to God because I feel like God saved my life. Like, I would have stepped into such a different life had I made a decision to go forward with the marriage. And I just... I mean, while I was a little frustrated and lonely and sad. I was so grateful. Um, grateful that God had preserved my life, grateful that what His plan was, was better than what I thought I could do for myself. Like, I learned so many lessons through that experience. Um, and then when my uncle died. And then when my dad died, I just didn't know what... what... what was going on, like, I just felt, and I just felt like, one, I was called to come home, and I didn't understand what that was about.

All of the grief of the broken relationship, my uncle, and then my dad. Really had me wondering, what are you really doing with yourself? Um, and so, even coming back home to be with my family, not knowing exactly where to start to repair relationships, to be a disciple, I really just turned to the St. Louis Church. I remember having conversations with Tony Marcord. Uh, we both were single probably, as I was going back and forth, this is prior to 2026, but Toni Meyerkord and I had become good friends. And so, when I came back in 2007, Toni Meyerkord was the one that I reached out to, and it was the relationships in the church that really helped me during that time. So she would hang out with me, she would, you know, encourage me along. She introduced me to Scott, she and Doug. Um, and I just, you know, it was just really encouraging.

The other scripture that always has been my go-to is I will never leave you nor forsake you. And so even when things were rough, and I felt very alone, I just knew God was there. Like, He said He'll never leave me or forsake me. Like, I just held on to those scriptures. Um, I held on to scriptures like, even though you walk through the fire, not a hair on your head will be scorched, like, I'm with you, I've snatched you like a twig from the fire. Isaiah was just a book that just helped me through some of those times where I felt like there was a lot of desolation. And so, you know, between the scriptures, between, you know, really building and kindling my friendship with Toni and some of the other single ladies, like, oh my gosh.

One of my, really, my bestie during that time was Wanjico. She's no longer in St. Louis. She's, um, a Kenyan woman, and she and I would go on prayer walks in Greencore Park and just you just walk and walk and pray. And I think those connections and relationships in the church here, as I was kind of rounding that corner. Help me feel much more deeply rooted in Christ, but also connected to the body.

KS: (16:22:14) Kind of ties into the next question I was thinking about of what was the St. Louis church like when you moved here? Did they have a building yet, or...

LB: (16:22:20) Yeah, there was a building, um...

KS: (16:22:23) Right. Okay.

LB: (16:22:27) I think we had... I don't know, the church had probably been in that building a couple years before I arrived, so I got... I came to St. Louis, moved back in 2007. Um, and the church was, uh, already in that location. I do remember years before that, where we would meet at, like, the Marriott Hotel, or the Renaissance Hotel as well, by the airport. I think we were at the Westport Plaza at the Sheraton Hotel at some point as well, so I do

remember those days, but the building was fairly new when I moved back. And it was just really cool, because at the time. I remember Jeff Mantle, um, actually, the Lusks were leading the church when I was, uh, coming back, so in 2007 John and Barry Lusk were leading a church, and then I met and married Scott. We got married in 2008, and the Lusks married us. And then we left about 2009, early 2010. And I believe Jeff and Lori Mantle started leading the church shortly after that. We came back in 2016. And the mantles were still leading, and... and then we had, uh... what is his name? Jason Alexander started leading the church, I want to say, like, in 2017 or 2018. He decided that this wasn't for him, and we kinda unofficially appointed Tyler Moser. For Tyler. So he was kind of at the helm for a couple, couple months and then we interviewed for, uh, Robin and Vince, and they started late 2019. They took us through COVID, and, you know, here we are.

KS: (16:24:39) Oh, mine blank for a moment. Um, okay. So, uh, you said you came back... so you moved, um... so you were here, you married, you moved back to D.C, and then you moved back here in 2015.

LB: (16:24:54) Yep, yep. So many transitions. I'm amazed that I could even keep it straight.

KS: (16:24:55) Yes. Okay. I don't know. That is... okay, so 2016, were you here for the REACH conference?

LB: (16:25:08) We actually came back just in time to go to the REACH conference, yes. So we were not part of the exhausted planning crew, because everybody talked about how grueling it was to do that conference. And we were like, hey, we're just here to just hang out and be at the conference. Sorry, it took so much effort. Um, but yeah, we literally were rolling into town, uh, maybe 2 weeks before the conference launched. I came back with Hunter, Scott came into town so we could go to reach, and then he left. And brought all of our goods back after we sold our house in Maryland, so yeah, we were here.

KS: (16:25:47) So, other than the, like, rolling in two weeks before, what are some of your favorite memories from the REACH conference?

LB: (16:25:51) Yeah. Oh, you know, I feel like I was so exhausted and disconnected that, um... There were a couple things that stood out. One was... We were all engrossed into childcare because, um, Hunter was, like 3 years old when we came back here, um, and so... my, my probably greatest memories are of childcare. Because I was always back there with him. Um, him and his... his cousin Olivia, they were, they were reach babies. Um, but I do remember just being in the main, uh, worship service, and just being in that auditorium of so many people the ability to have a really connected worship experience was just amazing to me. Um, and it was just it was so good. Like, you just felt like, oh, I could just stay here forever. And so, that was... that was great. We have wonderful speakers at the event, but then I also remember they did the production of Upside Down, and I remember going to... they have a small theater inside of the convention center in St. Louis, where the Reach Conference was held. And, um, we had tickets, and so we were able to see the production of Upside Down, so that was really cool.

KS: (16:27:21) That is really awesome. Um, yes, I... Michael tells me about the REACH conference, so...

LB: Yeah, yeah, it was... it was outstanding.

KS: (16:27:31) Um, so, since you've been... you've been a part of, but probably have also visited a lot of our sister churches, uh, from your perspective, what makes St. Louis unique?

LB: (16:27:38) Yes.

KS: (16:27:42) Like, what makes it St. Louis?

LB: (16:27:44) Yeah, you know, I think this is such a serving church, and not to say that the others aren't. Like, I've been to the church in Trinidad, and you could not top the hospitality and the devotion to the kingdom that I experienced when I was in Trinidad when I was 24 years old. Um, but I think the St. Louis Church just has a warmth about it, like, it just when you're... you know, particularly when we were all in the same location, and that's where you grew up spiritually, and we welcome people in, and there was always a meal to be had, like, we eat constantly, that's just our signature to come to St. Louis, and somebody's gonna invite you over for a meal. And I do remember that so many times where people had me over, and we would sit, and we would eat, and we would just hang out. Um, so the warmth, um, the giving and serving spirit. I love our spirit of community focus in St. Louis as well, like, just being able to, you know, work alongside one another, serve in the community.

I remember in I think it was 2018, I kicked off an event called, uh, Living Water. And just to see all the sisters come together, rallying around women who are trafficked women who are homeless with children. We did... we had

guest speakers come in, but everybody was working together. They had multiple sisters who taught workshops and classes on friendship budgeting, um, self-esteem and relationships. Like, we just... it was a day of giving and service, but it just describes how giving our ministry in St. Louis is, and our focus on, uh, connecting people to the heart of Christ through community. So it was... that's... those are the things I think that stand out most to me about St. Louis.

KS: (16:29:43) And you predicted my next question, um, kind of, like, how our church has helped serve the community of Tiger Lily, which I know you've been involved with, and, so, also now, tell me more about Living Water, so take your pick of where you want to start, and let's just have fun.

LB: (16:29:58) Yeah, so we were actually introduced to Tiger Lily through Jason Alexander's wife, I can see her name, but I cannot call her, call her name, I see your face. But she ended up meeting Meredith Sino and, um, and just had her come to a women's midweek service. And I remember it was... I was going on my... I think it was my 40th birthday. So yeah, this had to be 2017 or so. So it was my 40th birthday. I remember sitting down, praying, God, what are you gonna do with me? Like, what are we doing here? Like, I need to figure out what my purpose is, and I ended up finding these YouTube videos just out of nowhere. About women's ministries that would go into nightclubs, and they... strip clubs, and they would bring casseroles to the girls who were dancers, many of the girls were prostitutes, they were dancing, um, because they needed the money to take care of kids, or what have you. And it was so intriguing to me, and I thought, wow, we could do that. We could go to Illinois, we could go into these clubs and bring faith and hope and feed women. And I thought, my husband is never gonna let me do that. Nope, he's not gonna let me do that. And uh... and so...

I also had on my heart, maybe I need to just do something, like, I want to do a conference for women and children, and I want to figure out how we can help them have great faith and believe. Like, as the woman at the well, and that's what Living Water was really patterned after. This was a woman who had 5 husbands, you probably had prostituted herself at some point, but she was broken, and God could see through all of that and bring her to a better place, and so I was thinking this concept, so I picked up the phone, called some of my closest girlfriends, I kind of had my faithful five. And I said, hey, for my birthday, would you guys go in with me to do a conference for women? And they were like, yeah, yeah, yeah, we'll do it, we'll do it. So I started writing the concept up somewhere along the way, I just lost complete focus and I lacked a lot of faith. I was like, we cannot do this, it's too big, it's crazy, can't do this.

And the following March, I remember being introduced to Meredith, she came, and she said, there are women being trafficked right up the street from this church building. Those hotels that you see at the end of the block, next to the Holiday Inn, and the Golden pancake, those hotels are filled with women who are being prostituted. She said, my organization, Tiger Lily. We saved a girl who is 17 years old, and based on our numbers, she was there for 45 days, or whatever the number was, and she had to, um... She had to service at least... 8 men a day. Every day, for 45 days. And she talked about the women that they were supporting and serving in, and my heart just broke, because here I was trying to figure out, okay, God, what do I need to do? And then I was like, I'mma just set that to the side. And then God brought it right back to my face with Meredith, and he was just like, okay, let me just help you understand. Literally down the street are women who are hurting.

And, I don't know what happened, but I just stood up in front of all the women's ministry, and that's just not my character. I usually don't say a whole lot at church. I'm an introvert, and I don't really... Big crowds, I do it because I have to do it for work, but when I don't have to, I sit down. So I stood up, tears running down my face. And I said, Meredith, we're going to help you. I said, I don't really know what that help is going to look like. I said, but I will tell you that this one, this ministry, will help you. And I shared with the whole room. I said, I want you guys to hold me accountable, because this was something that God put on my heart for my birthday. All 5 of my friends, I told them we needed to do something special. We needed to support women and children in our community.

And I said, Meredith, after hearing you, I'm so convicted. My heart is breaking for women and children who are in situations that are dire that cause them to be in harm's way. Women who are being prostituted, snatched from their homes, drugs, etc. So, I, um... So I... I decided at that point, that we were gonna do living water, and people got

up. They held me and hugged me, we all were crying at this point, and before we left. For the night, they were like, what can I do? People were... what can I do? I want to help, we want to do it, we're going to make it happen. I called a friend who was, uh... a sister in a church in D.C., and I didn't know anything about her. The Holy Spirit just said, call her. I pulled over on the side of the road. I said, I don't know where I'm calling you, but I feel compelled to talk to you. I just feel like the Spirit has led me to call you Pam. And I told her what we wanted to do. We wanted to help women who were victims of sexual assault and violence, women who are being trafficked, you want to help kids. And I said, I don't know why I'm asking you this, but I'm asking you to be our guest speaker. And she was like, in tears, she said, Larnise, do you know my story? I said, no, I don't know your story. She said, when I was 18 years old, I was brutally raped and beaten and left for dead by my uncle. And she went on to tell me the story about her life. And I thought, oh my goodness. This is why I called you. She said, I don't know when you guys have this plan, but count me in. And I stayed on the side of the road just crying, because I was like, okay, God. Uh, you clearly are doing more than I can ask or imagine.

And we did it. We pulled together our women's ministry. We served hundreds of women. We had a room where they could get a makeover, and we brought in Dress for Success. We had, um, donations from Chick-fil-A and a couple restaurants, and we gave everybody lunch. We had several sisters that brought bounce houses and games, and that allowed the women to bring their children, and their children could eat and hang out and have fun and do crafts while their moms were in workshops, helping them with financial acumen, budgeting, relationship building, and and spiritual growth. We had our keynote speaker, um, with my friend and sister from... from D.C., and several others, women who spoke about living water, and it just was a huge success, like, we... we just... I was just so amazed. I mean... I just couldn't even believe it.

But, um, that was really kind of a foray into then, Helping the Sobers with No Hunger Holiday. There were several organizations that, because of the work we were doing with women and children, that we ended up building relationships with. So, Tiger Lily, the Women's Safe House, Haven of Grace, The covenant house, places where women who were trafficked, women who had pregnancies and they were homeless. We just kind of made these wonderful relationships in the community. Loaves and Fishes was another one. And so, these all became opportunities for us to... to...give turkey dinners to families and support them. Continue to build those relationships with, uh, organizations like that. And that really, um, launched us into one of the biggest agencies that works with the Knights of Columbus, because we had such a big remit, like Hadrian and Yolanda were able to get in touch with Rittner School District to get the word out there, and we, you know, where our church is situated, we are just in a place where people can get to us easily, and we can service a lot of different zip codes. By being, um, a face for the community.

In addition to those organizations, Yolanda reached out to the local food pantry around Woodson Terrace. And again, they would have... we would have sign-ups at the food pantry, and people could come by and pick up their donations that way. So, we just... we did so much. Like, it was just really cool to be part of that, and um... I was an advisor on, um... we called it Gateway to Hope, which is our arm of, um... of Hope Worldwide, and uh... so the St. Louis chapter is called Gateway to Hope, and we had several people that were advisors, helping to figure out where we would give our dollars, what organizations we would pull into stuff like No Hunger Holiday and different events that we could do and support the church with.

KS: (16:39:44) Like, uh, yeah, I remember the Women's Day when Tiger Lily came to speak, um, and human trafficking has been something that, for my mom and I, it's been on our radar, and I've even tried to, when I can in my classes, I teach, talk about it, like here are the resources, and especially being in Arizona, that it's like, y'all were... Like, we need to be aware, um, so yeah, but that... my heart is right there with you. Um, yes. So, let's see, like, how do I segue from that? But, um...

LB: (16:40:17) Oh, no.

KS: (16:40:20) How about... talk about, like, what... so for your... from your time here in the church here in St. Louis. What would you consider some of those pillars or piles of stones, um, as I've kind of described it, like, in the Old Testament, when God's like, okay, there was a great defeat, there was a great victory, have the stone soap next generations, like, for our church here, what are some of those?

LB: (16:40:36) Yeah. Oh, wow. Oh, I don't know if I have enough longevity here to go through, so, I feel like... Of course, the building in and of itself was probably one of those big ol' foundational stones, and I don't know the history of how we came about that, you know? I know that several people that end up coming to our church have told us, I used to go to this school when I was in kindergarten, but certainly the acquisition of that church building was a big deal for us. Um, I would imagine that was huge.

As you mentioned, REACH has been foundational. Like, I think that talk this small congregation that God could do big things through us, and that God not only will grow us and strengthen us, but he will use us for His own purposes, and He'll do great things through us.

The sending out of a big portion of our congregation, probably in the early 2000s, to start and plant the church in Texas, I think, is another one. You probably want to talk to a few disciples about what that looked like, and how all of that came about. We also have planted and sent out a mission team into, uh, Springfield, Missouri. And so that was a big deal.

The same is true, like, the St. Louis Church is really kind of known for building strong leaders, and so through our leadership, I think it's called... Uh, MIS? I don't... I don't know now the acronym, but, um, but it is really kind of a pipeline for leadership and really strong discipleship for the region, but also other churches that are benefiting. Like, we have so many folks that started out as interns in the St. Louis church, and then they go on to be ministry leaders in other Heartland churches, like Tyler Moser is an example, um, and other people who have just kind of come through St. Louis, um, as interns. So it's just been really cool. To see that, like, Casey, um, uh, is back, her and her husband now leading our youth and family ministry, but to see her see how far she's come over the years. Um, the Allbirds were here, and now they're down in Texas. So, lots of... lots of great stories about leadership that has come through St. Louis, has grown up here, were trained here, and now they're deployed in different places.

KS: (16:43:38) So how about for yourself? What are those pillars, piles of stones in your life, in your walk of thoughts?

LB: (16:43:46) Well, I think the miracle of finding a husband, with all the twists and turns, I remember writing out a list. It was like... I had this list of things that rr about the character of the person that I wanted to marry. And I also remember my fasts. I got fasted from wearing jewelry, because I said, you know, God, you're gonna adore me with the person that I'm gonna have. And then I just, I don't know, I remember just letting all of that kind of stuff go. And then God's still blessing me anyway. And I remember pulling out after meeting Scott and agreeing to be his wife. I remember pulling out the list that I'd written, Months and months ago Before even meeting him, and he was everything on the list. And I was just amazed that God remembered even when I had forgotten. And so that was a... just a beautiful chapter, a beautiful story, a beautiful stone for me to just kind of build on.

My conversion story, as I talked about, just how God answered my prayers, really led me to a place of deeper spiritual growth, accountability. I'm just a completely different person because. God heard my prayer, and he just, you know, brought something really to my doorstep. I mean, my doorstep was across the hall from the laundry room, like literally. Uh, right, write to me, and, um, help me to see that that was actually him.

I remember struggling for 5 years to get pregnant with Hunter, and I had a sister in the church. She just brought me this bag of maternity clothes and I so resented her for bringing me that bag of clothes. What are you doing? I'm struggling here, like, don't be putting false hope in front of me. And I remember, one after the next, I would see an announcement, somebody else is pregnant, somebody else is pregnant, somebody else is pregnant. And so, you know, Misery loves company, so I connected with another sister. She was also struggling to get pregnant, and we decided we were gonna pray together. Um, she went into fertility treatments. I started down that path, and then Scott and I were like, it's just not for us, I can't do it. But she went down that path, and probably 3 or 4 months after we all, we started praying together every week. She got pregnant. And it was so hard for me to be happy for her for, like, a couple of weeks, because I just was like, I knew the right thing was to be happy for her, but my heart was still like, what about me? It was amazing that, uh, she got pregnant, and literally, I think, 6 months later, I was pregnant. And it just was God. I just felt like God just was moving.

Through all those situations, helping me in my faith, helping me to figure out that he was enough, and letting go of everything with reckless abandon, and just saying, you know what, if this never happens, because that's what we did.

We just said, forget it. Don't worry, we're not gonna stress ourselves. God is good, we're gonna just live our lives. Let's open a bed and breakfast. Either God was saving us from the torment of a bed and breakfast, or... He's answering our prayers of both. But anyway, we ended up getting pregnant in San Antonio, on the Mountain of the Lord, which was that big ol' San Antonio conference, and uh... and that was... that was, again, that's a really cool way of seeing God doing the impossible in my life.

Then I remember just being in the valley, uh, spiritually after having Hunter, I was so exhausted. My boy never slept. I had a really rough job at the U.S. Postal Service, I had been there, for almost 3 years. Um, Hunter was an infant when I started, and I would be up at 5 in the morning, be on my bus at 5.30, and be in the office by 7. My commute was an hour and a half each way. If there was snow, rain, just call it 2 hours for me to get to work, and then 2 hours to get back home. I was just run ragged. Scott and I were leading a family group, and I promise you, of the 8 couples we had 5 of them were leading to divorce. It was just like, are these people disciples? That's all I kept saying. Are they disciples? Are these really, and then the church was going through some changes, too. It was just a rugged, rugged time. But I do feel like God facilitated change in all of that. Like, He pushed us right on back to St. Louis. I remember asking Scott... no, Scott turned to me, he was like, are you happy? And I just broke into tears. I'm like, no, I'm not happy, I'm miserable. And he said, let's go home. I said, well, I need a new job. He's like, you do need a new job. My job was driving me nuts. And uh... and it was totally God. I made some phone calls, I applied for 3 jobs. One of... two of which I really didn't want, one of which was like, okay, I'll take it. But, two of them, they closed the job opening, and then the other one I got. And I moved back, and God just took care of every detail, like, they paid for the sale of our house in Maryland. They paid the closing costs for the purchase of our new home. They gave us a realtor. They put our stuff in storage. They paid for the movers to pack the house. They pay for us to be in temporary housing for 30 days, and I just... just laughed, you know, when God is ready for you to get up and go, He just makes a way. And so that was huge for us, because I just feel like so many... Things that had to be put in place fell into place so seamlessly. And, um, and God moved us back here so quickly. It was... I mean, our heads were spinning.

The same was true when he rescued us from, you know, near financial calamity when we lived in St. Louis. I had lost my job, Scott had lost his job, we were newlyweds, we decided, hey, I probably need to go back to D.C. in order to find a job. I can use my connections there and within a couple days of me making phone calls, I had gotten a job, but that meant that Scott would have to leave everything and move to DC, so... We... I left him behind to pack up the house. And our house was on the market in 2009 during the financial crisis. It was... we put it on the market in December, which was a terrible time to put a house on the market. And there were at least 105 houses within a 2 to 3 mile radius that were also on sale. And so I turned to Scott and I said, babe, we're gonna have to pray. I'm praying that this house will sell in 2 weeks. And he was like, this house is not gonna sell in 2 weeks. I said, oh yeah, it's gonna sell in 2 weeks, babe. We got it right. God would not pray this prayer. He just was like, that, that, that, that don't make sense. So, I'm praying. Scott's not praying. I'm traveling back and forth. Two weeks goes by. Three weeks goes by. It's the end of the year. I looked at Scott, I said, are you praying for this house to sell or not? He said, well, yeah, uh, 2 weeks, you can't do it in two weeks. I said, would you please just pray with me? So he started praying. Two days later, we had a showing at the house, because we had no showings, okay, up until this point. Nobody came. Two days later, we had a couple people show... we had a couple showings. One of the couples that came, came back a second time, and they bought the house. And they called our realtor, and they said, can they close in 2 weeks? And I turned to Scott, I said, if you hadn't jumped in, presser, we could have gotten out of here! And so, uh, Scott was like, I don't think I can close it up in two weeks' time, but we can do it in 3. And so we closed it in three weeks. After that offer, and we moved on to Washington, D.C.

So I just feel like, you know, so many things. From jobs, to moves, to my baby, to my marriage, to just even my own faith, or just smooth stones. God has just kind of allowed me to add a little bit more, a little bit more small pebbles, big stones. Um, and just, I... the foundation has been tested, but God has just allowed me to stand firm, so I'm grateful for that.

[KS shares a story about the sale of her and her husband's house in Phoenix that echoes LB's story]

KS: (16:54:02) Okay, we're close to the end. Um, I couldn't fit it in earlier, but, um, what do you remember about when the letter came out?

LB: (16:54:12) Henry Kriete letter? Yeah, I remember a lot of turmoil. I was in Washington, D.C. at the time. Man, I just... a lot of people were shaken. A lot of people were frustrated and angry. And then more individuals started to come forward with their stories of, um... You know, how... how they were treated. And, um, it... It was... it was a... it was an eye-opening moment for so many people, like, you could just see God's hand was just, like, with everybody all at the same time. And I just thought, that was remarkable. Um, but I love the response in some of the ministry, not all of the ministry in the DC church, but it was, like, we're gonna keep our eyes on Jesus. And, um, we're gonna address what needs to be addressed. We're not sweeping anything under the rug. But certainly, we cannot, you know, solve for everything that has happened. But we can go forward in a better place. And even before the Henry Kriete letter came out, the couple that was leading, Um, me and the ministries that they had in their purview were shielding us from a lot of the crazy, right? The metrics-driven approach to stuff. The constant leader meetings, and being pulled into discussions, and then grated about your numbers, and how many people you have, like, they... They just loved us. They were gentle with us. They were like... Amen. They asked us the question, how are things going? How many of you reached out to? What can you do? How are you sharing your faith? And if it wasn't going great, let's pray. God is in control, we're gonna pray, and we're gonna give our hearts. And it was really more about the heart versus the behavior. Um, because anytime, you know, you start trying to correct behavior and put consequences in place for people, you get the wrong outcome. But they really disciplined our hearts. And... and that... from that approach, you felt loved, you felt supported, and I didn't even know all of the stuff that was going on in the Henry Crete letter. I was a young disciple. But at the same time, it was... I wasn't in a dysfunctional and unhealthy ministry. So, um, so that's kind of, you know, that's been my experience, and I think that's helped me so much to have a different perspective on the letter itself.

What that meant for our fellowship of churches, what it meant for me personally, as I think about like, people will come and go. Leaders are leaders, they are human beings, they're gonna make mistakes, they're gonna sin, they're gonna sin against us, they're gonna sin against whoever's in their space, because that's what we do. We sin against them, they sin against us. You know, but we gotta be transparent, we gotta be quick to repent. And it's funny, because I've been reading in, Luke chapter 17, and it says, if my brother offends you, um, forgive him 70 times 7. And the disciples were like, Lord, increase our faith.

So, I think that's what I learned through that Henry Kriete letter, is just really keeping the main thing the main thing. Address stuff, absolutely. Don't... don't listen faster for years and then write a letter to blow it all up, but just address the sin, repent, be honest and transparent, but really look to the heart and try to disciple the heart, as opposed to correcting for outward behavior and appearances, because you will always mess up something with that kind of... like the, like, you know, Jeff Ryan said, like, puppy training. You really... that doesn't help.

KS: (16:58:12) What does the ICOC mean to you?

LB: (16:58:17) You know, the ICOC has been, uh, encouraging, connecting, and unifying family of believers in my mind. That's kind of what it means to me, largely because I've been to so many different churches, even just recently having visited the church in Athens, I mean, just the love, the kindred spirit, the songs, we sang songs in Greek and in English and even in Greek, you could understand what they were talking about, because you know the songs, and it's just a unifying way of being connected to the body of Christ and giving ourselves an ability to see that the movement, the efforts of a few are so much bigger than what we see day-to-day in front of us. Um, and it was just really, really cool, because then you can start to understand why Paul was writing letters to the different churches. What that community of believers and faith, um, meant to him. And how that community of faith and believers all over the world, you know, can be, uh, modeled, but also can be nurtured through Scripture and common convictions in the Bible. So it's just really special to me. I just... I've loved being part of the ICOC, learning from other disciples.

Even on some of the calls that we're on for the Thursday quiet time. I mean, it's brothers and sisters from Europe, from Africa and Nigeria, from, you know, the States, and you just learn so much more from different people's vantage point and their perspective. Their life situations, and so that's only possible because of the ICLC and being

able to love each other, connect with one another, hold up each other in prayer, but see that the Bible is the standard for our lives, and how that is really so unifying across the globe.

KS: (17:00:26) Okay, so you've already talked about verses that have helped you in your walk. Um, are there any others you would, um, like to share, or perhaps give, like, what advice would you give to a baby disciple?

LB: (17:00:41) Oh, wow. To young Christians, I would say every day has its own worries and just enjoy being fresh and new in Christ. Like, it's a special thing to be newly baptized, even in your struggles. Just kind of enjoy those fresh moments, those first times with Jesus, the things that you do in the very beginning are gonna help you grow, and establish deep roots, so go deep if you can. Find the right spiritual guides and mentors, and, you know, find people who you can ride their coattail of faith for a while, and then you find that you're gonna need to look for some others, but just enjoy time in the Word. There's no perfect recipe or prescription, it's just consistency.

And, um, you know, I just remember my first quiet times, you know, they were a hot mess, I didn't know what I was doing. But I would just have tea with Jesus, I would sit down with my journal, I would have my Bible open, and I would just read. I thought I was doing something. Who knows what I was doing, but it was just the relationship, and I feel like Jesus just met me where I was at. And my little silly little self, the little things that I would do, how I would talk to him during the day, like, those are just the sweet little tender things.

And it does remind you of 2- and 3-year-olds when they are, you know, learning to do something for the first time, or they're curious about things. I just I love that heart and new disciples, the zeal that they have, the conviction that they build, and it's just wonderful. So, I would just say enjoy those early moments, those early years, the first chapters of your life as a disciple are just so meaningful and so valuable. Share your faith with so many people. I remember praying prayers and sharing my faith on the subway with a bunch of friends, we would street preach, we would preach on the... yeah, we did crazy stuff, you know, and that's just... it was fun, and we met people and baptized a lot of people because we had that zeal for God, and so, you know, enjoy those times.

And then, for those of us that have been around a long time. I think it's just really sweet to cling to the young at heart, um, to not put out their flame. But to encourage them along, because they will spark that flame in us, like, I loved how Kathy, uh, shared on Sunday that she had a little ember that was burning in her heart, and the disciples came, and they would just blew it. Little things would blow that amp in those embers, and cause them to rise up and reignite her relationship with God, but I think that's what our campus, our young ministry leaders, younger new disciples, they do that for us, and so it's really kind of embracing it.

There are so many scriptures I would share, but, um, a couple that have been my favorites are over in Ephesians, and let me just make sure I get it right. One is Ephesians 1:18. It says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and His incomparably great power for us who believe that power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."

And I just love that, um, we're reminded that we have that same great power that raised Christ from the dead, and uh... that seated Him, and so the strength is ours. We have riches in His glorious inheritance, and we also, um, have a hope in our calling. And so just love reading through Ephesians, love reading anything that Paul writes, but, those are the kinds of scriptures that I think have just helped me to stay faithful and helped me to build up and encourage other people along the way.

KS: (17:05:34) So, is there anything you'd like to share that I haven't asked the question, but I should have asked the question?

LB: (17:05:40) Not that I can think of, no.

KS: (17:05:47) Any closing thoughts? You get the last word.

LB: (17:05:47) That's what's fine. I think that scripture says it all, so I'll close with that.