



Stephanie Summers:

There are more distinctive witnesses who are winsome out there than you think.

Joanna Meyer:

You're listening to the Faith & Work Podcast where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work.

Hi, and welcome to the Faith & Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, and I'm joined today by Jeff Hoffmeyer, a member of the Denver Institute team. Hi, Jeff. What have you been up to lately?

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Hi, Jo. It's good to be with you. Well, of course, in Colorado what I'm up to is dictated by the seasons. We're deep into the winter and I have been skiing the pow, Joanna. It's been a great winter so far in the mountains and loving it.

Joanna Meyer:

What a thrill. I love getting to host the podcast with you, Hoffs, and we have a really fascinating conversation in store today.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Absolutely.

Joanna Meyer:

A recent study by the American Enterprise Institute revealed that since the start of the pandemic, so just a few short years, the percentage of Americans who've never attended church has increased in all age groups, most notably among those who are under 30. So in that short window of time, the number of people under 30 who say they never attend church has risen from 30% to 43% of that age group. And data out of the UK is revealing that, for the first time, Christianity is no longer the majority religion in England and Wales. Culture is shifting in really profound ways.

Today's episode is the second in a three-part series of new skills for today's leaders. And I wanted to talk more about how we respond to a culture that's becoming increasingly diverse and pluralistic, specifically, as a leader, what does it look like to live with Christian distinctiveness in a culture that's rapidly changing? And Hoff, I wanted to hear from you because you have lived in a very diverse community spiritually. You've lived in Boulder, Colorado, for years. That's where I went for school for my undergrad.



And Boulder prides itself on having diverse worldviews, but I'm wondering in your life, what does it look like to be in that community for years?

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, indeed. And I love Boulder. The people of Boulder are my people. They love the outdoors and they do value diversity, pluralism, tolerance. And I'm just, really quickly, responding to your question, Jo. For one, what is a definition of pluralism? And in some communities, like Boulder, who really lift that up as a value, that doesn't always mean plurality for all, right? For example, if there's a worldview that might seem to exclude others, and this kind of brings up one of the topics we're going to be talking with our guest today about, then that worldview is not valued and you're kind of bumped off the island.

So it raises that question of, what is true plurality? But in a more positive sense, I have learned to listen well. And I think that's really one of the practices of plurality, is what I would call generous listening. Joanna, my role at Denver Institute is to lead fundraising, and I try and go about that work by listening generously.

And that's just one virtue of what I would name as a larger virtue, which I think I also picked up in my community of origin, which is empathy. So I think empathy really is a cardinal virtue, specifically around this question of plurality. It's really like that one ring to rule them all. And out of that virtue of empathy flow so many others that really kind of guard plurality.

Joanna Meyer:

I didn't know you were going to say that, because part three of this short series is exploring the topic of empathy and being a person of dialogue with Christy Vines, founder of the Ideas Institute. So we'll be talking to her in a couple of weeks.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Awesome.

Joanna Meyer:

So it's really fun. This conversation about living in a pluralistic culture pushes us to define our posture towards culture. Is it something that we will fight against to try and maintain what we perceive as an important value that may be changing? Will we retreat and try and protect ourselves and our freedom to exercise our faith or will we engage?

And today's topic is about engaging a changing culture. And I honestly believe, from my experience, there's less in contemporary Christian thought that's training us to be people of engagement. But I want to be fair as we start today's conversation. I want to offer a disclaimer because we do have a diverse



listenership and many of our listeners may be wrestling with some of these same questions. The goal of today's conversation is not to critique either of the postures that I just described, but to expand our understanding of a perspective that, in my opinion, is less developed in contemporary Christian thinking, which is why I'm so glad to have a true expert on this topic with us. Hey, Hoff, will you tell us a little bit more about Stephanie Summers?

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Absolutely. So excited to have Stephanie on our podcast. She served as the CEO for the Center for Public Justice, a nonpartisan Christian think tank. And so jealous, I've always wanted to work for a think tank. But that's what she does. And they engage in public policy development and civic education, and she's been leading that organization for the past 12 years.

She also serves as a trustee of Eastern University, where she received her MS in nonprofit management, and she's the recipient of the inaugural Duke Divinity Reflective Leadership Award. Prior to joining the center, she served in executive leadership with the Coalition for Christian Outreach, and that's a campus ministry serving students all over the United States.

Longtime fans of the Denver Institute may have seen Stephanie serve as a panelist at 2020's Politics for Neighborly Love event or at our 2021 Women, Work, & Calling. Stephanie, welcome to the podcast.

Stephanie Summers:

Thank you. I'm delighted to be able to be here. Thanks for the invitation.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

So Stephanie, just to start off, for listeners that may not be familiar with the Center for Public Justice, would you tell us more about what you do?

Stephanie Summers:

Sure, happy to. So the Center for Public Justice is a not-partisan Christian civic education and public policy organization, which is sort of another way to describe a think tank. And through all of our programs, we equip citizens, we develop leaders, and we work to shape public policy. And our goal is to do that in service to God that advances both justice and leads to the transformation of public life.

Joanna Meyer:

So this job seems like a long way from your role as a campus ministry executive. How did God lead you into this work of policy making?



Stephanie Summers:

Sure. That's a great question. And it's actually through campus ministry. I met the first president of the Center for Public Justice when I was a college student at the CCO's annual Jubilee Conference, which has a large focus on vocation and calling. And the gentleman's name's Jim Skillen, and he gave a talk on the biblical theme of justice, which included what I call a vision for Christian engagement for politics that was big enough to live for.

And over the next 13 years, I had the opportunity to learn a lot from CPJ. And ultimately, God brought me into organizational leadership, but there are so many ways that working as a Christian on a college campus with a broad diversity of worldviews actually prepared me for the work that I do every day now at the Center for Public Justice.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, I love hearing that, Stephanie. We talk a lot about difference, too, about vocational stewardship, and always glad to just hear how God has directed a career like yours and so crucial for the world we're living in.

Joanna and I have been looking at your website, and I just want to read what is kind of a loaded just full statement from your website. And by the way, we'll link to your site in the show notes and encourage our listeners to check that out and learn more about what the Center for Public Justice is doing, but here's just one statement. And then, Stephanie, I'm going to have you kind of unpack this for us.

So, "Rather than supporting polarized views of issue-oriented, short-term, pragmatic politics that dominate today's government, we work towards the soundness of public institutions, the art of long-term constitutional statecraft, and the common good of the republic as a whole." So there's a lot there, Stephanie, but maybe can you just lift out the most salient of those words? And why are those words and that statement so important to you as an organization?

Stephanie Summers:

Yeah, thank you. I'm happy to do that. Think about the difference between when you were at Chuck E. Cheese as a kid and you played the Whac-A-Mole game and sort of a differently tempoed set of activity that's operating in response to the Creation mandate. So by command, God sends us out into the world to develop institutions that are reflective of God's good intent and purpose for them, so stuff like family, schools, businesses, the Denver Institute and the like, but that also includes our political institutions. And so, while the Center for Public Justice works on public policy issues of the day, which sometimes has a little bit of a Whac-A-Mole element to it, we're also constantly coming back to the foundational work of shaping stronger public institutions. And we do this through training public officials, we do this through training citizens, helping them to understand the important role and responsibilities that they bear.



Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Love that. And thanks for summing up that loaded statement with a really compelling image. Let me just follow up on that because research has shown lately that actually institutions are kind of on a downward trend. Or, I should say it better, trust in institutions is on a downward trend. Have you found that to be true, and how does that influence or impact the work that your center is doing?

Stephanie Summers:

Sure. I mean, you are definitely right in what the data have to say, trust in institutions is on a downward trend, but sound institutions really matter. And in this case, sound institutions and constitutional statecraft really matter, not only to Christians and not only to people who live in the United States. The bit that you read at the end of your excerpt from our website about "the common good of the republic as a whole" has a lot to do with this. You can see embedded throughout Scripture, a nation's relationships to the natural world and towards other nations, not just only itself, it's of tremendous importance to God. And on a super practical level, constitutions and sound institutions are what keeps nations with diverse worldviews within their population from killing each other over their differences.

I'd also want to just add that working towards sound institutions and constitutional statecraft requires a posture of constant renewal, which is a posture of hope. And that's different than sort of periodic outraged reactions against something that has happened that seems egregious. So I like to think about it this way. If someone yells at me for doing something they don't like, the likelihood that I take it to heart and change is a lot lower than if someone comes alongside me, points out the error, asks what I think about what they've just said, and offers me possible routes forward with a promise to help me make the change.

It is much slower work to be involved in shaping that kind of political community, but it is far more efficacious in ensuring that our political leaders take seriously the concerns that are being presented to them, and that both citizens and policymakers are motivated to act in response.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

That's such an encouraging word, Stephanie.

Joanna Meyer:

One of the tenets of the Center for Public Justice's work is a commitment to principled pluralism, and I'm wondering if you could define that for us.



Stephanie Summers:

Sure. I'm going to define it in contrast to maybe two other perspectives that your listeners are probably more familiar with as Christians. In one of those more familiar views, some Christians would say America's a Christian nation, and their advocacy would be that government protect that Christian nation. In another familiar view, some Christians would say that America's going to hell in a hand basket, government itself needs to be saved, and we're not Christian enough as a nation, and so the church needs to set direction for society again.

Principled pluralism takes a different approach than either of those postures. Principled pluralism takes seriously God's good design for the world, which gives different roles and responsibilities for different types of institutions, so all the ways we live outside of government, business, families, schools, and the like. Principle pluralism means that our posture towards government is that government's obligated to do justice to all of society's non-governmental organizations and institutions, what we often lump all together as civil society.

And in a principled pluralist approach, government has to protect and support civil society institutions. But in a principled pluralist approach, government also has to recognize and protect and support equal treatment and sort of equal public room, if you will, for people and institutions of differing faiths, of all faiths, and of no faith. So that's the commitment to religious freedom. So proponents of principled pluralism say that the church or faith-based organizations need appropriate room, appropriate legal protection, made for them by government in order to continue to strenuously make our case for the truth, but we also acknowledge that government has a God-given role beyond just that protection. Government has a responsibility given to them by God for things like laws, a constitution, defense, criminal justice, regulation of relationships between institutions, and regulations of the institutions themselves when they fail to uphold their purposes.

It's definitely a distinctive posture, but it's one that, the more time you spend getting to know it, as I did for many years, it becomes a really compelling way of trying to understand our role as Christians who are citizens in a political community that we share with our neighbors who don't all share our view.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, just to follow up on that question or your definition of principled pluralism, Stephanie, for one, that it brings to mind this other maybe related concept called convicted civility. That's a phrase I get from Richard Mouw. I don't know if you've read him at all, but in his writing of public theology he lifts that up as a way that Christians can engage in civility but still very much hold on to their convictions.

But it also brings up a parallel with some language that's important to Denver Institute, which is the common good. So we have our upcoming business event called Business for the Common Good, and just wondering about your thoughts on that. How is a commitment to the common good a Christian virtue?



Or, if you prefer, where do we see that reflected in Scripture? But reflect for us a little bit on that phrase, common good, in reference to principled pluralism.

Stephanie Summers:

Yeah. Man, there is not enough time to do justice to answer this question. So let me just say, Scripture's full of commands to neighbor love; respecting that human beings are created to bear God's image; and the exhortation to practically seek, in word, prayer, and deed, the welfare of the place one inhabits, including the wellbeing of its citizens who don't share your own view, including its political leaders. Scripture's very clear that this commitment is how we as God's people honor and love God. So if you start looking for these themes in Scripture, you're going to actually find them everywhere. So I would just commit that kind of idea, if one goes searching for it, one will definitely find it throughout Scripture.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, maybe even a charge for those of us who've committed to reading the Bible through this year, to be looking for those themes.

Stephanie Summers:

Yeah, great.

Joanna Meyer:

Oh, that's actually a genius idea, Hoff. I hadn't thought about that. I have a few themes I'm looking for as I read, but common good is a beautiful one to pursue.

Okay, so this is the point in the conversation where we invite Stephanie to put on her superhero cape because, as we talk about constitutional statecraft, you do that in just amazing ways. And so for the sake of illustration, to help our listeners just to get a picture of what this looks like as it plays out in your daily work, I wanted to hear a little bit more about some legislation that you've been working on. Some is in process, some has been passed, but the one that comes to mind first was the recent Respect for Marriage Act. And if our listeners were watching the mainstream media, chances are, the coverage that they saw was really hailing another step forward in codifying civil marriage for the LGBT community, but what they may not have seen is that there were critical provisions for religious liberty that were included in that.

And so I wanted to hear a little bit more about your work behind the scenes. Why was it so critical for the religious liberty provisions to be included, and what in the world did it look like for you to be able to see that included in this legislation?



Stephanie Summers:

Yeah, sure. I'm happy to talk about this. So the Respect for Marriage Act was signed into law in December, and what it does is it adds to the federal legal code important new protections for religious organizations that profess traditional marriage while it also affirms a right for same-sex couples to marry. And this right already existed because of the Supreme Court's Obergefell decision in 2015. And the Respect for Marriage Act assigns the duty to solemnize and recognize same-sex marriages to government officials, not to private organizations.

And the respect for Marriage Act provides significant religious freedom protections in it. It explicitly provides that the duty of government to recognize same-sex marriage cannot be used to deny the tax exempt status, accreditation, licenses, or government grants and contracts of non-governmental organizations that profess a traditional understanding of marriage. And the Respect for Marriage Act extends this to all religious non-profit organizations, these similar constitutional rights already held by houses of worship, not to facilitate or celebrate same-sex marriages. So Christian colleges, for example, would not have to facilitate or celebrate same-sex marriages as a result of the protections in the Respect for Marriage Act.

So it valuably reminds government officials and our society that professing God's design for marriage is not an expression of bigotry. And this is a strong indication for future legislation and also for future court cases that government does not have a compelling need to suppress belief in a biblical view of marriage, nor does it have a compelling interest to coerce the people and organizations who hold that religiously based belief.

Joanna Meyer:

What I want to know, Stephanie, is that, to get to this point, you had to come to the table with people who had a very different view of this issue of marriage, and you were able to reach a point where you could say, "Differing opinions can exist in the same space and they could both be good," and I'm wondering how in the world that happened at a relational level.

Stephanie Summers:

It's the result of about seven years of work on a different piece of legislation. We've been part of a coalition of faith-based organizations that have been working to advance a much more comprehensive piece of federal civil rights legislation called Fairness for All. And it's a bill, it has not passed, to add LGBTQ civil rights protections to federal civil rights laws while strengthening religious freedom protections in a whole bunch of areas.

Our goal as principal pluralists is to protect individual religious-free exercise as far as possible and to strongly protect religious organizations that engage in the shaping of cultural attitudes alongside the



protection of other importance civil rights, such as access to housing and employment for LGBTQ people. So behind the scenes, for seven years, we've been engaged in what many people would call relational diplomacy. We've been building relationships with LGBTQ rights groups to understand their concerns and to help those groups understand the concerns of religious organizations with traditional views of marriage and human sexuality. We kind of started that work because we were inspired by work that had been done in Utah earlier between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the LGBTQ community. And that work had resulted in some state level legislation that had protected both LGBTQ civil rights and religious freedom.

And as we kind of looked at the proliferation of lawsuits involving LGBTQ and religious freedom, one of the members of CPJ's team talked to a couple organizations about what, would it look like to engage in a similar effort to make peace? And we really talked about it that way. And we talked about it as an effort to work upstream or ahead of court decisions rather than just having to deal with the downstream impacts of court cases, because court cases decide one winner and one loser, and court cases often have really narrow applicability to other groups based on the narrowness of the court decision and the question that was being considered by the court.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Hi, I'm Jeff Hoffmeyer, Vice President of Advancement, here at Denver Institute for Faith & Work, and I'd like to invite you to become a part of our new monthly partner community. Whether it's a monthly commitment of \$25, \$50, or any amount, your generosity will support Denver Institute's ongoing efforts to help men and women love God, their neighbors, and society through their daily work, including this podcast. To say thank you, as a monthly partner you will receive a welcome box. You'll have exclusive access to private digital content, personalized vocational coaching, and discounts for Denver Institute content and experiences. To become a monthly partner, simply visit DenverInstitute.org/give or see the show notes in today's episode. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Stephanie Summers:

So we went looking for LGBTQ groups who would talk with us about this about seven years ago. And our initial approach was this: Please help us understand how you're being harmed by people like us.

And after we listened to understand and asked questions to say, "I hear you say this. Do I get it?" And people could tell us, "No, you missed it," or, "Yes, you got it." We were able to ask, "Are you okay to hear how the people we serve, who often are incredibly vulnerable people, are being harmed by these lawsuits about LGBTQ rights and religious freedom?" And if someone said, "No," we said, "Okay, maybe another day." And that went on for a while, right? Sometimes we didn't get to talk about what we wanted to talk about. Sometimes, instead, we got asked really difficult questions.



Over the course of the last seven years, I've been asked to explain a lot of things to LGBTQ leaders and to gatherings of pretty much every LGBTQ organization in the country. I've been asked things I never thought I'd be invited to explain or address publicly ever. And as we worked together to understand one another, we were building trust. And so, eventually, we got to a point where the question was, could we work on legislation together that might protect both? And the approach to the legislation was, does this address or does this prevent the harm we think we understood? Did we get it or did we miss it? And again and again, we worked really hard to invite one another to address our misunderstandings in real time.

You might imagine, this is super relational, highly in person, with a rhythm and a cycle that was repeated, and continues to repeat, again and again as we add new supporters to this approach that protects both LGBTQ civil rights and religious freedom. This is not a conversation we're having on social media, for example. And there were also some things that we just had to be really clear in acknowledging that were helpful to clear some ground. So for example, it was important that religious organizations acknowledged that there are people who identify as LGBTQ for whom their faith is central to their lives. It was really important that we acknowledged as faith-based organization leaders that there are a wide variety of theological perspectives on LGBTQ identity. So one way of shorthanding this is like the church is having its own fight that isn't the public policy fight.

And I guess I'd just add, at the last, we still need legislation like Fairness for All, something far more comprehensive, to address these many other questions of civil rights conflicts that exist in our society. We talked about the Respect for Marriage Act and what it does to be so incredibly protective, but it only has to do with marriage. That's all it was designed to address. And Fairness for All is designed to address so, so much more and has been worked very carefully to do exactly that.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Wow, Stephanie, it's such important work, and so much to celebrate there. I just want to lift up a couple of things in what I just heard you say. And we're on screen together, and Joanna was doing a happy dance on screen as she was listening you describe the work you're doing.

Just with that persevering work, for one, this hope of this could beget more legislation like this, or more work like this, even that you learned from this collaboration that happened in Utah with the Mormon Church and then that was the inspiration for this owned work on the legislation you've been working on; but also, this idea that we win the right to be heard by gracious, generous listening and by a posture of empathy.

Because this series and the podcast we're doing is actually about practical skills. And that's certainly one to learn from that I as an individual Christian, I win that right or I gain that right first by listening, first by practicing empathy, and then actually by asking that very simple question, "Would you be open to



hearing about," and then X, Y, and Z, whatever it is that you would want to put on the table. So I, for one, think that's a really practical skill that I and our other listeners can put into practice.

Joanna Meyer:

We talked a lot earlier about posture, the posture of fighting or withdrawing, and you had to adopt a very specific posture or mindset in the presence you took into these conversations. Will you tell us a little bit more about that? What had to happen for you as a Christian woman to frame the way you showed up in those conversations?

Stephanie Summers:

Practically speaking, it was really important. And I would offer these almost in the same way as to respond to the question of, what are the practical skills people can learn? These sort of fit in the same category for me. I had to really get clear on what I believed and why I believed it. And I would just encourage folks, you don't have to be able to say everything perfectly or say it the right way every single time, right? But if you are unsure what you believe or why you believe it, it's important to do a little bit of homework and maybe spend some time with people who can articulate better maybe than you what you think is true and why you think that matters. That I think is just something that was important for me, to be able to put into words more clearly the posture and perspective that I was coming from.

I think another piece for me that was just huge, and this was true with our whole team and I would say with all of the religious groups involved in our coalition, we spent a ton of time praying, and very specifically for things like wisdom, for protection from error, for patience, and for the attentiveness to God's correction. Even if that correction was delivered by someone who would say they were not a friend of God, we needed to be attentive to that. And so we prayed a lot, and I think that was a huge important piece. And certainly, we prayed corporately, but individually... I'm not going to read to you from my journal, but if we were going to do that right now, you would see that it is peppered with me beseeching the Lord particularly for wisdom and protection from error and for patience.

I think a lot of people go into these conversations believing that their goal is changing someone's mind. And I've been given the great grace of having people in my life early on in my faith formation who were super clear that that's God work, not mine. It's what helped me live into campus ministry. It's also my own story. I mean, people had to share the Gospel with me 200 times before I relented and said, "Okay, God, I think you got me here."

And Steve Monsma, who was a longtime political scientist, he's passed away, but one of my mentors, he often used this phrase, "Obedience and love, when not given freely, is neither," right? So if my goal is to force someone to see it my way, or my goal is to use the force of government to live my way, that's not an obedient response or a loving response to God, which is what God wants. And so me being a little bit



more patient and not thinking that I'm God, but, rather, let God be God was also really important, and I think an important skill for other folks.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Stephanie, just following up on this question about practical skills. I'm curious, seven years is a long time to be working on this Fairness for All piece of legislation. You've been at the helm at the Center for Public Justice for 12 years. And you were talking about the value of prayer for your team. But spiritually speaking, at Denver Institute, one of our principles is to seek deep spiritual health. Any other spiritual practices that have enabled this perseverance for you? Because as we're having this conversation and I'm seeing your face on the screen, there's a lot of peace on your face and in your voice. So what's behind that? What's underneath the surface of your ability to stay in this hard, difficult, important work?

Joanna Meyer:

Can we say what's behind the cape?

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yes, exactly.

Stephanie Summers:

Yeah, I think not being alone in this work is part of what has been very sustaining. I think if it was a Stephanie Summers project and I believed I was the hero of the story, there would not be any peace here. But instead, it has been deeply shared work. I think I have a really robust belief in the theological principle of common grace. And I think the fact that we have been treated with kindness and respect throughout this process has been a gift and has also pointed to God's goodness and grace in superintending over this whole process.

So whatever that counts as, I guess, in the bucket of practice it's theological reflection, being reminded about whose story we're in. And in order to do that, we have to be people who sit in places where we're being told that story again and again. And so part of the work of the Center for Public Justice within the context of the community that we have is to continue to hold up that story. That's also true within the context of the coalition's work. And it's also true within individual spiritual practice, right? I spend time dwelling with teachers who are going to remind me of that truth. So that's a good thing.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Right.



Joanna Meyer:

I'm thinking about our listeners, Stephanie, and I can think of conversations that I've had with a couple of friends recently about challenges they've faced in their daily life and work. A couple situations would be in education. I know here in the Denver public school system conversations around gender have become very hot even at a very young age. It's a conversation kids are getting exposed to in elementary school. Another scenario would be friends who are in the corporate sector whose organizations are asking individual employees to affirm particular political views or political certain social views, and that employee might feel pushed if they don't have that same view or are afraid of being canceled. Do you have any thoughts practically about what it looks like for a person who may experience some fear or concern in situations like that practically? How do they engage in a thoughtful way?

Stephanie Summers:

Yeah, it's a great question. I would encourage some of the things that I mentioned before, and particularly that piece of, are there other people who can be part of that journey with a person who feels maybe that they're alone in that, I think is really key. That you're not just trying to wing this yourself, but be able to talk through with others your approach, I think, can be really helpful, with wise, trusted counselors, right?

Another piece that I've seen where it maybe makes a big difference is being clear what conversation you're in and the goals of that conversation. So I can explain this. In the case of something like Fairness for All or the Respect for Marriage Act, our goal is legislation that protects both LGBTQ civil rights alongside religious freedom and civil rights. Not every situation is about legislation. For example, most of the things you just described, not about legislation at all. So just to give you an example that's practical, I'm on the class committee for my 25th college reunion this year. And my goal in joining the committee and my goal in being part of the conversation that shapes what our reunion will look like was to help shape the way we allocated the funding for the event. So it took into consideration that many of the attendees from my class, for a variety of reasons, would not want to be involved in the reunion if every event was focused around alcohol.

That involves zero legislation.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Right.

Stephanie Summers:

There's no legislation involved there, right? We're on a committee to plan how to spend some money within our school's budget.



Joanna Meyer:

You didn't [inaudible 00:36:50].

Stephanie Summers:

But it did involve me making a persuasive case for my peers that highlighted the variety of reasons one might not want to participate in events centered around alcohol, such that there was easy agreement actually and affirmation of this position in how we chose then to allocate our resources.

So part of the clarity is, what am I trying to accomplish here, right? And what's my position in this? But also some wisdom about, what am I trying to help people understand? So for example, in that conversation it was easy for people to understand, "Hey, lots of people in our 25th year reunion class are coming with their kids, who are minors, and they want to be able to be with their kids and show them this awesome college experience. They don't want to show them our classmates getting wasted," right? Or, "Lots of our folks are in drug and alcohol recovery, and I know that. And lots of our folks..." And we could go on and on about the sort of things that I was able to help amplify.

So in some ways, it's naming what the landscape is within an institution. That might be something important as folks are considering these questions in their workplace or in the school where they are a parent or maybe have a different role within the context of that school, how are we as whatever this body is that's deliberating, or, how am I as an employee relative to this institution being asked to do something or affirm something I may have a different view on? And are there other people here who may?

And with the LGBTQ set of questions, one of the ways that I encourage groups to actually navigate this question is to draw a little chart to help remind people what conversation we're in, because these experiences are often deeply personal, right? So in a little quad chart, you've got kind of like my personal experience, but say we're the trustees of a university trying to make a decision about our university's hiring policies. My personal experience isn't irrelevant, but that's not the decision or the conversation we're in as a body of trustees trying to make a decision for this institution, as an example.

So I guess I would add just two more things. The other piece is seeking to understand first. So in the case of an employee and an institution, asking to say, "Can you help me understand the genesis of this policy so I'm clear?" And the opportunity to then say, "Can I share with you my concerns or how this policy seems to me to not be exactly aligned with everyone who works here?" For example. But that's seeking understanding first, making sure that what's being said and what's being perceived are kind of tracking, I think, can be really important. And then asking permission, really, to share a point of view. And if a person says, "No," say, "Okay, but I would like to do this another day. Can we set another time?" Because in this case, someone's employment may be on the line, something like that. You can't really wait until they feel like it. So being a little bit more forthright or forceful and saying, "Okay, can we pick another



time to talk about that?" And then keep that appointment and be ready to talk about the perspective there.

And then I guess the last piece is just doing one's best work to honor God and explain one's case. Providing truthful, non-hyperbolic examples, really helpful, right? I was asked to speak to a summit of LGBTQ rights groups about faith-based social services, and it was really helpful for me to be able to explain the landscape of faith-based social services and explain who would be impacted if faith-based organizations lost access to federal funding. So, to say, "The school lunch program goes away, this is the number of kids who would be impacted by this who are currently at religious institutions." It's helpful to be specific and truthful, not hyperbolic, in talking about those things. So those may be some practical ways that people can enter into those trickier conversations.

Joanna Meyer:

So Stephanie, I would love to give you the final word. We like to give our guests an opportunity to encourage or give a charge to our listeners to press into the theme that we've discussed that day. And so I'd love to just give you the chance to have a final word. How would you invite or exhort our listeners to learn or potentially step into principled pluralism?

Stephanie Summers:

I love that you do this kind of exhortation piece here. I would just say, you may think you're one of the only people who's living with distinctiveness, or you may think that people who live with distinctiveness are not very winsome. So trust me, there are more distinctive witnesses who are winsome out there than you think. And often, we get presented with false choices between two postures, one of which seems loving, the other which seems unkind, but there's usually another way, loving and kind without losing Christian distinctiveness. So I would encourage us to continue to walk in that way.

Joanna Meyer:

Gosh, Stephanie Summers' insight and political savvy continues to amaze me. I hope you were encouraged by today's conversation. If you'd like to keep learning, I would point you to three resources that are listed in today's show notes. The first is a link to a primer that the Center for Public Justice produced to better help houses of worship, faith-based organizations, and just individual Christians better understand the Respect for Marriage Act and its implications.

We also will link to a free download to an e-book called *Politics at Twilight: Faithful Political Engagement in an Age of Ideology*. That was produced by Ryan Tafilowski, our theologian-in-residence, and offers helpful insight into navigating the complexities of this cultural and political moment.



And finally, Business for the Common Good is coming up. We're just three weeks away. I'm excited for you to be able to participate in that, whether you are here in the Denver area or you want to join us online, that's totally an option. It's Friday, March 3rd. I've been working with our speakers and panelists and I've been amazed at both their business savvy, their passion for living their faith through their work, and also, just, they're a ton of fun. It's going to be an amazing day so I hope you'll join us.

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