

Professor Christopher Hendricks

- 11:14:35:05 [Eric Darling]: And cameras are rolling. And just a little higher. That's good. Got it? Got it. Thank you sir. And just let Mickey settle, Tom.
- 11:14:51:16 [Mickey Youmans]: My headphones. Thank you.
- 11:14:58:17 [Eric Darling]: Anytime you're ready, sir.
- 11:15:01:00 [Tom Kohler]: Good morning.
- 11:15:01:19 [Christopher Hendricks]: Good morning.
- 11:15:02:13 [Tom Kohler]: How are you?
- 11:15:03:07 [Christopher Hendricks]: I'm very well, thank you.
- 11:15:04:14 [Tom Kohler]: That's great. I'm gonna ask you two easy questions and I'm gonna ask you three harder questions.
- 11:15:08:02 [Christopher Hendricks]: Alright.
- 11:15:08:18 [Tom Kohler]: The first question is, if you give us your name and also spell it, please.
- 11:15:12:01 [Christopher Hendricks]: My name is Christopher E. Hendricks, H-E-N-D-R-I-C-K-S.
- 11:15:18:23 [Tom Kohler]: And your preferred pronoun?
- 11:15:21:12 [Christopher Hendricks]: He.
- 11:15:22:15 [Tom Kohler]: And what do you do for a living?
- 11:15:24:21 [Christopher Hendricks]: I am a professor of history at the Armstrong Campus of Georgia Southern University.
- 11:15:31:11 [Tom Kohler]: And how long have you been there?
- 11:15:32:01 [Christopher Hendricks]: I have been teaching in Savannah for 30 years.
- 11:15:35:11 [Tom Kohler]: You, you're practically history yourself?
- 11:15:37:18 [Christopher Hendricks]: Two more generations, and I can be a native.
- 11:15:40:13 [Tom Kohler]: Well said. And do you have a particular area of expertise?
- 11:15:44:22 [Christopher Hendricks]: My specialty is Colonial America.

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- 11:15:47:08 [Tom Kohler]: Well, that's great because we want to learn some things from you about this community in that era. And in broad terms, what we're gonna ask you is thinking about faith, people's religious identities, who was here, why did they come? And then what did they do when they got here?
- 11:16:10:08 [Christopher Hendricks]: Well, when the Colony of Georgia was initially planned, the Charter of 1732, basically there was a twofold idea that this colony would be a place for people who were the worthy poor. They would be able to come and get a new start in life. Secondly, it would be a military colony to defend against the Spanish and Florida and protect the other 12 colonies to the north. Because Georgia was the last of the 13
- 11:16:45:13 colonies to be founded. The trustees who were in charge for the first 20 years had difficulty in finding colonists to come. The original idea of bringing the impoverished over here didn't work financially because they didn't have the money to get here. So there were, there were difficulties there. That vision for the colony faded fairly quickly. But as a result,
- 11:17:14:19 the Trustees searched far and wide to find a variety of different people to come to Georgia. And as a result, you've got a lot of different nationalities and religious groups who arrive here and really create a unique amalgam, a new society that was different from all of the other colonies.
- 11:17:41:01 [Tom Kohler]: I, I am a Savannahian. You know, I grew up here and I don't think I've ever heard it put so well or so clearly.
- 11:17:48:06 [Christopher Hendricks]: Oh. Thank you.
- 11:17:48:20 [Tom Kohler]: You. About where we started. And do you mind talking a little bit about back in that day, I mean, literally who were some of these groups and how did they show up? And maybe even a little bit about how they continue to show up.
- 11:18:03:05 [Christopher Hendricks]: Sure. Well, one of the early examples of a religious community developing here would be John Wesley and Methodism. On one of his trips back to England, General Oglethorpe was looking for a minister for Christ Church. There had been two ministers. He was looking for the third, and he recruited a young evangelical Oxford graduate, John
- 11:18:36:02 Wesley, who while he had been at the university, had gotten involved in a club known as the, the Holy Club. It was an evangelical group. This was a young guy who was really trying to find his way through life. He was religious, he was seeking a, a, he became a, an Anglican priest. And yet he was not personally sure that he had, had, had a genuine conversion
- 11:19:07:05 experience. And I think one of the reasons he was interested in coming to Georgia was to find himself. Well, he recruited his other younger brother, Charles to come

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as well. Charles was coming to work as Oglethorpe's secretary, and he spent most of his time down on St. Simon's Island at Fort Frederica. John meanwhile is going to be stationed here. Now. The brothers travel with a group of

- 11:19:35:06 colonists that are coming over. They're on a ship called the Simmons. And on board ship were a group of 26 German Protestants known as Moravians. They were also an evangelical church, a predating Martin Luther... Protestants. But John was really intrigued by them. And while the boat was just kind of sitting offshore for a month, even before the voyage began, he
- 11:20:07:08 started learning German so that he could communicate with them. He became very, very close, and their interrelationship was vital in, in shaping Wesley's ultimate theology and way of teaching religion.
- 11:20:27:08 [Christopher Hendricks]: For example, the Simmons, which by the way is probably the best documented voyage to colonial America. There were three different people keeping diary accounts of the voyage. Wesley had one, a Moravian bishop by the name of David Nitschmann kept one. Another Moravian, Johann Dober kept one. And so it's fun to put these three diaries against each other and hear about their different visions of, of events as
- 11:21:00:03 they unfold. But one thing that they do agree on is there was a number of storms during the voyage here, one that was particularly frightening. The Moravians were below deck having a hymn service, a "songschtud" in German. And the storm broke. The other passengers are panicking. One of the main
- 11:21:28:06 sails is, is brought down to the deck. There's water coming into below decks. It's really terrifying. And the Moravians just kept singing. And Wesley was really impressed by this and basically said, I, I really want to know more about these people and their faith. Well, they arrived in Georgia and Wesley didn't really have a very
- 11:21:57:20 successful time here. He was very enthusiastic. He was very earnest. And I don't think the average person in Savannah was really ready for that. And people kind of looked at him askance. And then he got involved in a relationship with one young woman by the name of Sophie Hopkey. She was the niece of Thomas Causton, who was a very prominent citizen in Georgia,
- 11:22:33:13 Causton Bluff. And the two of them hit it off. They were obviously attracted to each other, but John is going through these internal struggles. He isn't even sure that he wants to marry at all. Sophie is obviously very interested, but she's also a, an eligible woman and has
- 11:22:57:04 other suitors.
- 11:23:01:23 [Christopher Hendricks]: The Moravians had two residences on Broughton Street where the SCAD library is located now, JEN Library. And the Wesley spent a lot

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of time with them, soul searching, discussing theology, et cetera. And they essentially gave him some good advice. If you are not absolutely convinced that you should marry this person, then you shouldn't do it. And so the relationship quieted. Sophie chose one of her

11:23:36:18 other suitors. She married a man named William Williamson. And then the Williamsons showed up in church one Sunday at Christ Church. And John, who may have been a little bit jealous, caused a firestorm when he refused to serve them communion. Now, his excuse was that he didn't know about the legitimacy of their marriage, had they found a licensed priest to marry

11:24:05:19 them. But Thomas Causton was not pleased because basically by doing this, he is bringing Sophie's virtue into question. And he swore out a warrant against Wesley, there are legal ramifications here. Wesley ended up leaving the colony something under a cloud and still not having found himself. He spent another two years in England, but kept

11:24:37:22 up his relationship with the Moravian community in Britain. And after a deep soul searching conversation with a Moravian by the name of Peter Bowler finally had what he felt was his religious experience and went full throttle from then on. But as he developed his personal theology, he began

11:25:03:06 to incorporate a lot of the discussions and the ideas that he had gotten from his Moravian friends. The use of hymn singing as a teaching tool. For example, Wesley himself penned several hundred hymns, his brother Charles, I think more than 5,000. And they began to use these various methods of teaching religion until the people who followed him eventually left the

11:25:37:17 Anglican Church and created Methodism. And it might not have happened the same way if Wesley had not spent those 13 months here in Savannah.

11:25:51:23 [Tom Kohler]: That's, well, that's amazing. And it's a great example of, you know, I mean right off the bat with this idea of interfaith,

11:26:00:22 [Christopher Hendricks]: Right? Right.

11:26:01:22 [Tom Kohler]: I mean, this is right

11:26:02:16 [Christopher Hendricks]: There. Yeah. Interestingly, to finish up with the Moravians, they had some difficulties of their own. We'll be talking about the Salzburger in a few minutes. They were Lutheran, also German, and somewhat suspicious of the Moravians. And were not really very happy with them, with the Moravians being here, the Jewish population, on the other hand, once the Moravians showed up, they actually set up

11:26:34:14 delegations, provided food. And so there again, you've got this interfaith cooperation that's, that can be possible. But the Moravians only spent 10 years

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here. They ended up leaving in 1745 and relocating in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and other communities there. They returned in the 1780s with a mission, which didn't really go anywhere. But in 2023, the Moravians

11:27:03:13 started a mission church here. And there is a group that is currently active and reforming a Moravian congregation. So

11:27:12:04 [Tom Kohler]: Where is that located?

11:27:12:18 [Christopher Hendricks]: Right now? They are worshipping at a Lutheran church on Wilmington Island.

11:27:18:02 [Tom Kohler]: That's amazing. Wow. You mentioned that Jewish community. Yes, yes. Let's talk about that. If, if, if, if we could please?

11:27:26:00 [Christopher Hendricks]: Sure. There's a lot of mythology about the Jews and Savannah. Frequently tour guides will tell you that it was illegal for Jews to settle in Georgia, but that there was an epidemic raging. And when the boat showed up, there happened to be a doctor on board. And out of the kindness of his heart, daddy Oglethorpe said, y'all can stay. It didn't actually occur that way. The group of people who

11:27:57:03 arrived aboard the William and Sarah in 1733, there were 41 or 42. There are two different numbers of Jews, two German families, I believe there were eight who came out of one Jewish tradition. And then the rest were Portuguese crypto Jews who were basically forced to hide their religion.

11:28:26:14 They had to essentially pretend to be Catholic. They had a difficult voyage. Their boat ran aground off the coast of North Carolina, but they showed up in July of 1733.

11:28:40:06 [Christopher Hendricks]: The colony had been established just a few months before, and there was sickness in the colony. In fact, George's doctor had died by that point. They did have a doctor on board, Dr. Samuel Nunez, who had actually been a physician for the Portuguese Royal family. And they arrive, he does help with the epidemic, but the Trustees had never outlawed Jews. There were only three groups specifically

11:29:11:17 prohibited. There would be no slaves in the colony. There would be no Catholics because of the conflict and the history of the English Civil War and the glorious revolution. And there would be no lawyers in town. But one of the trustees did later send a packet saying, no, we should not allow these people to settle here. But by that point, Oglethorpe had welcomed

11:29:40:11 them with open arms. They basically tripled the population of the city. So there was no way he was going to turn them aside. And that eventually is how we ended up with the third oldest Jewish congregation in the British colonies. The

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oldest, I believe, being in New York, the second in Newport, Rhode Island. It took them a few years to meld the two different traditions, the Sephardic and the Ashkenazic. But they do, and they form

11:30:12:20 Congregation Mickve Israel,

11:30:15:02 [Tom Kohler]: Which stands today...

11:30:16:08 [Christopher Hendricks]: Which stands today on Monterrey Square. And one of the fun things about Savannah is the current building in which they worship was constructed in the 1860s. And it startles some people. As far as I know, this is the only purpose-built cruciform shape Jewish synagogue. And that was because they hired a local architect who said, you know, I really don't know how to do a synagogue. And they said, well, we

11:30:48:08 just want something that is stylish, fashionable. We need a place to put the Torah, the ark, other than that, go at it. And it's just wonderful, a blending of, again, religious traditions in Savannah.

11:31:05:20 [Tom Kohler]: So now we have Christ Church downtown on

11:31:09:18 [Christopher Hendricks]: Johnson Square.

11:31:10:16 [Tom Kohler]: Johnson Square, And we have Mickve Israel on Monte...

11:31:15:03 [Christopher Hendricks]: Monterey Square.

11:31:17:00 [Tom Kohler]: But now we get to the Salzburgers.

11:31:19:05 [Christopher Hendricks]: All right. Now I need to look at my notes for a second so I can get some names straight.

11:31:24:14 [Eric Darling]: Would you like for us to cut so that we can...

11:31:26:09 [Christopher Hendricks]: Well, we'll see how fast I can look at these notes. And

11:31:29:21 [Tom Kohler]: One of the reasons I'm, I'm taking some Salzburger is, 'cause my assumption is they do not have a congregational home downtown?

11:31:39:16 [Christopher Hendricks]: Not until, yeah, not until Lutheran Church of the Ascension.

11:31:44:04 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah.

11:31:45:07 [Christopher Hendricks]: But they're gonna have ties. All right, here we go. So the story of the Salzburgers, the Salzburgers come from Salzburg, this province in the German states. And in 1731, their ruling count, Count Leopold, banished all

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non-Catholics. And that meant that 30,000 Lutherans were suddenly displaced. Most of them settled in East

- 11:32:19:01 Prussia. A large contingent with went to the Netherlands. And then another group landed in Britain. During this time, there was a lot of concern about that. And various German rulers are contacting, among other things, King George II, who himself was a German, and said, is there some place, some colony, that you might be able to place these people? And George said, yes,
- 11:32:50:09 Georgia. And that was the, the entry. Now a, a special foundation in Halle. In Saxony-Anhalt in the eastern part of the German states was established by a man who created an academy and orphanage.
- 11:33:11:05 [Christopher Hendricks]: It's very evangelical, and they are going to help sponsor this. And the Franco Foundation is providing a couple of ministers, including Martin Boltzius, who is going to be the lead minister for the group. And a group of, I think between 200 and 300 Salzburgers travel to Georgia. Now, they are not going to live in Savannah. They want to maintain a separate community. And so Oglethorpe designates a
- 11:33:45:14 piece of property on Ebenezer Creek, which is on a, an important road from Savannah up into South Carolina. And there in 1734, they establish the community of Ebenezer. It turns out not to be the best place. The topsoil is very thin there. There are other problems. And so two years later, Boltzius asked if they could remove the community to the river on a bluff.
- 11:34:16:18 And Oglethorpe agreed. And so they literally disassembled their buildings and relocated on the bluff. And un-originally named their new community New Ebenezer in 1736. But here is an example of the Lutheran tradition coming in. Ultimately, descendants will spread out across coastal Georgia. There
- 11:34:42:20 are many Salzburger families whose names are, are prevalent here. And once they do start coming into Savannah, they form Lutheran Church of the Ascension.
- 11:34:55:11 [Tom Kohler]: And that would be on...
- 11:34:57:04 [Christopher Hendricks]: It is on Wright Square.
- 11:34:58:11 [Tom Kohler]: Wright Square. Right. Okay. And then what about the African American faith experience?
- 11:35:04:07 [Christopher Hendricks]: Alright.
- 11:35:04:22 [Tom Kohler]: How does that work?
- 11:35:05:13 [Christopher Hendricks]: Once again, I need to consult some notes here. Andrew Bryant. Alright, now, the African American experience... During the Great

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Awakening, you are going to see some push to evangelize in the African American community. And one of the examples of that is a very

- 11:35:37:08 charismatic, enslaved man who is living in Burke County. His name is George Liele. Liele is owned by a Baptist deacon by the name of Sharp. And Sharp trains Liele Liele has a, a religious conversion. He becomes a member of the Baptist Church. And he is so charismatic and so knowledgeable that in
- 11:36:10:11 1773, the Baptists license him to start preaching. And so here is this enslaved man who is preaching to various African American communities. Even there are records of, of White congregants really being enthralled with this man. Eventually, Deacon Sharp frees him. They come to Savannah. Sharp
- 11:36:39:04 is a loyalist. And once the British take Savannah, they are going to relocate here.
- 11:36:48:02 [Christopher Hendricks]: Liele meanwhile is training some others who are and building up a following to other very charismatic people. David George, another African American, and Andrew Bryan. And those two men are going to be responsible for ultimately the creation of three African American congregations here in town. They organized as a community in 1788.
- 11:37:26:19 By this point, Liele has left, he had been freed, but was concerned that he might be re-enslaved. So he moves to Jamaica when the British evacuate, George leaves and goes to Nova Scotia. So it's going to be Andrew Bryan, who is really pushing the, the formation of the church. He starts out with
- 11:37:52:19 67 congregants in 1788, and the church thrives by 1800. There are several hundred. And by 18-two, they decide to divide the congregation. One congregation takes the name of First African Baptist Church, which is on
- 11:38:18:17 today, worshiping on Franklin Square. There is the second African Baptist Church, which I believe is on Green Square. And then you have Bryan Baptist Church, which is outside of the historic district. But these three congregations share a common core. And the congregation of First African Baptist, they ended up on Franklin Square. When First Baptist Church built its current sanctuary and moved to Chippewa
- 11:38:54:19 Square in 1834. The building they were using on Franklin Square, they sold to First African Baptist. So you have enslaved people who are raising the money and buy this building. Later the building needs to be replaced. And so in the 1850s, they begin to construct the current structure, sanctuary,
- 11:39:20:21 which is there. And it has a very, very important role in the Underground Railroad. So you have escaping people who are taking sanctuary, literally in the building until it is safe for them to board a ship that is leaving and moving to a free state. But once again, you have this wonderful

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- 11:39:48:22 inter-reaction between races, between Black Baptists and White Baptist and the larger religious community.
- 11:39:59:11 [Tom Kohler]: As we talk about this, as we talk about this, I'm gonna close my eyes, see the different churches, different physical spaces on the squares. And that's what it really, it just kind of brings Savannah alive in a, in a certain way that I've never really seen it before. And I, I wonder, are there, are there institutions, are there, are there other physical spaces that if you go back to their history, you realize, well,
- 11:40:31:06 this was really started by a, a religious organization and may may not be that today, or maybe it started so far back that we don't even think about it as being started by a religious organization where there'd be examples like that, that we might share?
- 11:40:48:02 [Christopher Hendricks]: Sure. You have buildings throughout town tied to different periods of the religious history. For example, there is a second Jewish congregation, which is located in a Moorish revival building over near the, the Telfair Academy, just around the corner. I believe today it is a building for the Savannah College of Art and Design. There was a
- 11:41:18:03 Jewish community center that is located on Pulaski Square, which is a dormitory today. You can look all around the city. And there are all kinds of institutions that were founded with religious ideas in mind at the beginning.
- 11:41:40:22 [Tom Kohler]: And help me with, when, with Bethesda, how does Bethesda come into this story?
- 11:41:44:18 [Christopher Hendricks]: The story of Bethesda. After John Wesley returned to Britain, another charismatic person coming out of the Oxford Holy Club is an evangelist by the name of George Whitfield. Whitfield was kind of the Billy Graham of the 18th century. And actually there's a record of him speaking to a group outside of London that had purportedly 10,000 people. And he was so good at projecting that in theory, everyone in that
- 11:42:20:16 community could hear him while he preached. Well, when he got to Georgia to take the reigns at Christ Church, he was very concerned about the plight of orphans here. People who had lost their parents essentially were being farmed out to different households. And he really didn't think that this was a, a good idea. And so he made it his life's mission to establish an
- 11:42:48:10 orphan asylum. He ended up purchasing some land in Pennsylvania. He made several trips back and forth raising money.
- 11:42:58:03 [Christopher Hendricks]: Benjamin Franklin heard him speak once when he was in Pennsylvania and actually wrote about the sermon in his autobiography. And it's great because Franklin says, at first he thought, well, this is ridiculous. We, it

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would be cheaper and probably more civilized to send the orphans up here to Pennsylvania. But he said, as Whitefield continued to speak, he decided to give all of the copper money that he had in his pocket to the cause. A little while later, he was giving

11:43:32:08 his copper and silver coins. And then by the time Whitefield had finished, he was give, emptying his pockets and actually borrowing money to give to this project. Whitefield's dream came true, I believe in 1740, they established the Bethesda Orphan Asylum. It's an institution which has had gone through several incarnations over the years. Currently it operates as

11:44:02:23 a men's day school, but it is this descendant of Whitefield's vision. So that's another example of showing an institution that had a religious origin that has shifted over the, over the centuries. By the way, Whitefield was in Pennsylvania when he died, the day he died, lightning

11:44:27:19 struck the building at, at Bethesda

11:44:33:00 [Tom Kohler]: Makes you a believer.

11:44:36:12 [Christopher Hendricks]: (laughs)

11:44:38:02 [Tom Kohler]: What about in the, in the medical world, would there be connection between what we now see as, as our medical institutions and the faith community?

11:44:46:08 [Christopher Hendricks]: You, two of the three major hospitals in Savannah are going to have religious roots. St. Joseph's is going to be established by Catholics. And then you have Candler, which is going to be started by the Methodists. But those are well outside of the colonial period.

11:45:09:01 [Eric Darling]: Rolling. Standby and go ahead. Got it. Wait for Mickey to sit. Sorry, Tom. We're gonna hear a, we're gonna hear Mickey sitting.

11:45:24:12 [Mickey Youmans]: I'm gonna sit right over here so I can see the, see the, the mixer. Okay, I'm ready.

11:45:30:12 [Eric Darling]: Ready when you are.

11:45:32:16 [Tom Kohler]: Go.

11:45:33:09 [Christopher Hendricks]: Well. discussing interfaith relationships and the different ties between different communities. In Savannah, one particular story is extremely important. There was a hurricane here in 1804. It was the worst storm that had hit the city in 50 years and was absolutely devastating. Ship was wrecked off Tybee. Fort Green on Cockspur island was completely obliterated. In town. There was all

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- 11:46:08:23 kinds of devastation. The steeple on the Presbyterian meeting house collapsed. A wall of Christ Church's sanctuary caved in. Hutchinson Island was overwhelmed with water. More than a hundred enslaved people drowned. Just the devastation was, was tremendous. It's estimated that in 2024
- 11:46:34:20 dollars, there was more than \$13 million in damage. Two years later, the mayor of Savannah, John Noel, decided that the city had been rebuilt to the point where they needed to commemorate this. And so in 1806, he sent out letters to the houses of worship throughout the city, inviting them to
- 11:47:05:12 dedicate December 10th of that year as a day of supplication and prayer to Almighty God. And one of the reasons that this is particularly significant was that he specifically penned a letter to the leaders of congregation Mickve Israel. He wrote, "though you differ with other societies in many important points, yet with them you worship the only true God. And with them you acknowledge
- 11:47:38:14 his supreme power as well as his providential dispensation. I therefore flatter myself. Your congregation will unite with us in the solemn duty required by the resolution." Now Arnold Belzer, the former rabbi at Mickve Israel, who has done a great deal of research on this, believes that this
- 11:48:04:19 is not only the first example of interfaith worship in Savannah, but possibly in the United States. And it really kind of foreshadows a movement, which continues to this day. After World War II, all of the houses of worship downtown began to cooperate in a yearly, an annual Thanksgiving service where one house of worship would serve as the location
- 11:48:38:21 that year clergy from other denominations would join. And from the beginning, the Jewish community has been involved. And this continues to this day. One of my favorite services was located, it was hosted by First Baptist Church on Chippewa Square. I don't remember who gave the prayer,
- 11:49:04:06 but the sermon was delivered by the Imam from the, the mosque. And that, examples of interfaith cooperation such as the interfaith action groups that take place every year. It really makes Savannah a unique and wonderful place.
- 11:49:32:16 [Eric Darling]: Cut. Okay,.
- 11:49:34:01 [Tom Kohler]: Good.
- 11:49:34:18 [Eric Darling]: Excellent.
- 11:49:34:22 [Christopher Hendricks]: Thank you. Except I couldn't remember interfaith. What's it called?
- 11:49:41:03 [Eric Darling]: Interfaith Action Network?
- 11:49:41:13 [Christopher Hendricks]: There's something like that. Yeah, yeah. But it's great...

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11:49:44:16 [Tom Kohler]: There's the Interfaith Hospitality Network.

11:49:45:16 [Eric Darling]: There's that...

11:49:46:04 [Christopher Hendricks]: Yeah. No, this is a, this is, oh, Congregations In Service.

11:49:49:15 [Tom Kohler]: There you go.

11:49:50:15 [Christopher Hendricks]: Is the group. Is the group. So, alright.

11:49:53:19 [Eric Darling]: Alright. Thank you sir.