

Engage360 Ep 103 | Confronting Injustice with Proximity, Michelle Ferrigno Warren

Intro [00:00:04] Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's Podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the Gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

Don Payne [00:00:16] Hello, friends. This is Engage360 from Denver Seminary. Welcome to this conversation. My name is Don Payne, your host. Our senses can easily get overwhelmed by the brokenness of our world, as that brokenness is exhibited in poverty, injustice, needs that are so chronic and complex that it kind of prompts a sense of hopelessness at times, maybe even despair. Now we all have plenty of problems and struggles, right? We all know that. But lots of us don't live with our lives constantly leveraged by broken systems and poverty and injustice. And at the same time, especially for those with a Christian conscience, we want things to be better. We want things to be different. And the easy thing to do is simply opine about issues and maybe offer some financial support to persons and causes aimed at helping. But beyond that, many of us sometimes feel pretty helpless or we don't know what to do. And so, in this episode, we're really privileged to have as our guest, Michelle Ferrigno Warren. Michelle, welcome.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:01:23] Thank you so much for having me, Don.

Don Payne [00:01:25] Yeah, so glad you're here. Michelle has been addressing the situation I described for a very long time and we're really grateful she can join us for a conversation today. And my colleague, Professor Patty Pell, is also here. Patty is going to be co-host for this conversation with Michelle. Patty directs our M.A. program in Cultural Engagement and has worked closely with Michelle, I think, for some time. Patty, welcome.

Patty Pell [00:01:51] True. Thank you.

Don Payne [00:01:51] Yeah, I think you've been on the podcast before, haven't you?

Patty Pell [00:01:56] I have. Yes, a while ago.

Don Payne [00:01:58] Yeah, as the premiere guest. Now you get to host.

Patty Pell [00:02:01] That's right. The other side of the microphone.

Don Payne [00:02:02] The other side of the mic. Or the other side of the table, as the case may be. Michelle began her work. I'm going to tell you a little bit about her, but she can correct me or fill in blanks. I think you began your work as a high school math teacher, is that correct?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:02:16] Yes, except I should say it was a seventh-grade math teacher. And that's a very important difference.

Don Payne [00:02:22] I don't know if that's better or worse.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:02:24] For me, that was a lot of fun. I usually describe seventh graders as hormones on feet and it's just a lot easier to manage energy than drum it up. So yes.

Don Payne [00:02:34] Okay, and that was in an inner-city environment?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:02:37] Yeah. Dallas Independent School District.

Don Payne [00:02:38] Okay. All right. Well, Michelle and her husband, David, founded Open Door Ministries here in the Denver area 25 years ago.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:02:49] Yeah, we came 26 years ago to start a home for homeless teen girls. And the next year, that home went under this new entity called Open Door Ministries. And we are so excited to be celebrating our 25th anniversary here.

Don Payne [00:03:03] Yeah. You also have a master's degree in public administration? Is that correct?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:03:06] I do, yeah. A specialty with multisector collaboration and public policy formation.

Don Payne [00:03:14] I've never heard those words before in the same sentence.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:03:15] That's fine. It's all right. So just let me say this. The MPA, the Master's in public administration, is an MBA for the public and nonprofit sector.

Don Payne [00:03:23] Oh, okay. That makes sense.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:03:26] And my specialty with public policy formation and multisector collaborations comes from this idealist mentality, from seeing the pain and injustice of the world, that if we all were just to come together, multisector collaboration, and sit at a table and dream with people who are directly impacted, as well as the people who have the power to make change, that we could form policy that worked with justice and liberty for everyone. Very beautiful pie in the sky and I'm so grateful for my degree. Doesn't always work that way. It gives me a framework.

Don Payne [00:03:58] It certainly gives you resources and it gives you a conceptual framework for that work. Yeah. Now, you've worked at the state capitol on staff for a senator, I believe.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:04:05] Senator Angela Herron. So, I had been working on the community side, trying to get in-state education opportunities. So, in-state tuition for undocumented students who had been here since they were two, five. When you are of undocumented status, you can't pay in-state tuition prices. And so, I had worked with that on the outside. And then there was a new senator, Angela Herron. She had been like the president of the Girls and Boys Club in Pueblo. And I wanted to help her out and help from the inside. So, I did for two years. I ran her office in 2011 and 2012, I think.

Don Payne [00:04:41] Okay. Now, you have also spent some years working with the Christian Community Development Association as their policy expert. Was that the role?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:04:49] You know, it's nonprofit. So let me tell you, my whole career has been nonprofit. So that just means you do everything.

Don Payne [00:04:54] It means you do a lot of things, and you're still broke.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:04:57] Yeah, you come up with degrees that say, I mean, my title was Advocacy and Strategic Engagement Director, and I laughed because I was like, oh, now we have a word that fits everything that's not advocacy. Strategic engagement means literally you have to do everything else that you're asked, which is no problem. No problem. Open door taught me that.

Patty Pell [00:05:13] Don't start using that, Don.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:05:15] Yeah, don't give that to Patty.

Don Payne [00:05:16] Oh, it's too late. That train has left the station.

Patty Pell [00:05:19] Thanks, Michelle.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:05:19] Yeah, no problem. No problem. Always happy to help give people more work. So just to say, the Christian Community Development Association is a group of practitioners like David and myself, other open door ministry type people all around the country. And it's a philosophy of ministry to the poor. It's not the only philosophy, but it's a shared philosophy of ministry to the poor. So, I've been a part of living out that philosophy since 1993 and then was doing workshops, doing some speaking, and then finally got convinced to leave my neighborhood, which almost broke my heart. You know, I really wanted to stay rooted in my neighborhood, but there was some really beautiful opportunities and needs at the national level on policy and advocacy to support people like me in communities around the country. So, I worked for the CCDA as the advocacy director. I got to build that arm and then help sustain it for nine years.

Don Payne [00:06:09] Okay. I feel like we could spend about half this podcast going down my list of stuff you've done.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:06:16] Yeah, and I keep interrupting to tell you a little bit more because I don't want to just be some bio. I'm a real person.

Don Payne [00:06:23] Yeah, I'm glad you're chiming in and developing some of these thoughts for us. You ran for the U.S. Senate in the last election.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:06:30] Best boldest decision I've ever made.

Don Payne [00:06:32] The best, boldest decision.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:06:34] Best boldest decision I ever made.

Don Payne [00:06:36] Okay. What was the best thing about that?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:06:38] The best is you have an incredible platform to talk about all of those injustices and oppressions and problems that you see in my community. And it would not have come to the race if that had not been the case. So, I'm going to try to tell you a story that's super, super quick. I thought I would last in that race about five weeks. You know, I was like, I think I can get enough money from, you know, beg, borrow, and steal enough money for five weeks.

And I ended up getting enough money and support that I was there for nine months until the Colorado Supreme Court kicked me off the ballot. That was a COVID thing. Too bad. So, I was running in the year of the 100-year anniversary of women's suffrage. So, we have never had a woman U.S. senator and I was upset at women for not running and thought, well, Michelle, you like literally do federal policy. Like, who are you waiting for? You know, so I thought, well, I want to at least test that out. Let's see if we can get a woman on the ballot. Let's see, you know, if we can get a U.S. senator as a woman in the state of Colorado, consequently first state to allow women the right to vote 27 years before the federal government. So, I just wanted to lean into that. So that was one thing, but also, I really wanted to bring what I was seeing. So let me just fast forward. I'm in Durango. It's the very first debate forum I'm a part of, and it's also the very first one that the current U.S. Senator, John Hickenlooper, goes to. So, it's a packed room, standing room only, fire men are kicking people out. It's like 300 people. We have national and state and local press in the room. And so, we have two and a half hours and I'm talking about everything I meant to talk about. So, after the time is over, we've had two and a half hours, there's lines and there's people just talking to me over and over again. And there is a woman at the very end, and she seems a little restless and wanting to wait, but it's like this is taking a long time. So, she gets to me, and she said, you know, I have been waiting to talk to you. I was like, well, I'm really glad to be here. You know, I want to talk to you as well. And she goes, I need you to listen to me. I was like, I'm all yours. And she goes, no, I need you to hear me. And she locked her eyes with mine. And sometimes I feel like it's an angel, like to remind me of why I was running. Because it's a crazy thing to run for United States Senate in a nationally watched election because Colorado had some opportunity to change some parties. She said, you know, after two and a half hours of listening to all of you and there were 12 of us in the race at the time, she said, you're the only person who even used the word poverty. You're the only one who had the courage to talk about immigration. And then we talked on and then continued to list the things I talked about. And I was like, That's right. If I don't talk about it, it's not going to be present. Now, that's not because I'm so great, but just like I had intention and purpose and I wanted to talk about what I was really seeing and bring that to the race. And I had the opportunity to do that for nine months. It's scary to run for U.S. Senate. Okay, I did 43 forums and debates nonstop. And you have 60 or 90 seconds to be all heart, but also all brain. And I do talk quickly, but I'm not that fast, you know. So, all to say, that it was a great opportunity. I really got very strong in my convictions, in my ability to represent my own personal beliefs as well as what I was seeing in my community. I truly believe, and this is the part of biblical justice, that the way I would communicate and to a secular audience, that the well-being of others makes us well, too.

Don Payne [00:09:47] Hmm. I like the way you put that.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:09:48] Yeah. And if we get the churches, we get the communities, we get the government, we invest in. And civic and public engagement is not a spectator sport. And so, if we don't like what's going on, we have to step in and do the work. No more commentating needed.

Don Payne [00:10:04] So even running for Senate, apart from the outcome of elections, running for Senate gave you a platform to really make a difference.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:10:11] It gave everybody that I care about and wanted to have their story told. Absolutely. 104,000 square miles the state is, and I ran around. So those are just the debates and forums. That doesn't mean all the meetings and events. It was a wild and crazy time until COVID. There was some things that happened with the signatures. And so I was on the ballot,

but then I got kicked off the ballot. We could have almost voted for a woman. It would have been amazing.

Don Payne [00:10:36] Yeah, well, maybe you're going to try again?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:10:38] You know what? I'm definitely open. Political windows open at times, and sometimes it's the right time to jump through. I'm Highly strategic. So, I'm not jumping for nothing.

Don Payne [00:10:48] Well, we're going to talk in a little bit about your books.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:10:51] Thank you.

Don Payne [00:10:52] Because one's been out for a while and one just coming out, I believe. And I think Patty will probably guide us through some conversation with you about that. But Patty, what are some of the other things you know Michelle has done, that you would want listeners to hear about?

Patty Pell [00:11:09] Yeah, well, I think she's been explaining her expertise in advocacy and then helping equip others in the role of advocate and in the process of advocacy. So, Michelle, maybe you can talk a little bit about how both of those books speak to advocacy, but I know that they speak kind of differently. One is more how two. One is a bit more of the framework and vision. So maybe you could describe kind of your process of outlining both those books and then how they individually speak to the church and those of us who want to be involved in in social action.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:11:45] Yeah, well, thank you for those questions because you don't walk down the street getting those questions. I wish you did. I mean, they're fantastic. I mean, that would make my life a lot easier, and I think we'd have a little bit more equity in the world. So, I wrote a book in 2017 and it had been kind of a message I was stewarding in speaking a lot at conferences and individual opportunities, sometimes some articles. And as a woman who was working and traveling, doing ministry, leading worship every Sunday and having three teenagers, like the last thing I needed to do was another thing. But who became my editor at InterVarsity Press, she assured me that if I wrote a book, I'd actually have more rest. She's like, you're too tired not to write this book because you're giving this message, you know, one on one. And I just want you to know that you don't write a book to get more rest. She was a liar. I love her dearly, but that was a lie. But the message of that book was one that was hard for me to write. I wanted to write the second book then. But I think just one of my passions is leadership development. And a lot of my advocacy work, known not just around Colorado but around the country, is organizing pastors. And the theological grounding for justice and for raising your voice like the prophets of old. And so, I needed to really understand how best to communicate that we don't advocate for issues. That we care about people and our neighbors. So, the first book, I would say the best way to describe the power of proximity. Moving beyond awareness about poverty, injustice, to some type of action, that isn't within solidarity, is you cannot fix problems you don't understand. And so sometimes that's the reason we get overwhelmed to look at another problem, another problem. But we don't know people who are directly impacted. And often we will give money. And let me tell you, give money. Give money freely, give more money, because good work is happening, and we need resources and people should be paid to do that work. But from afar off, it's a whole different conversation. So, if you can't fix a problem that you don't understand, how are you going to understand it? Well, you're going to become proximate to it. And as the people of God, we

should not have this cursory idea that poverty exists and, you know, brokenness exists, because we know that we're supposed to, in order to love God, we need to love neighbors. And so, whether we physically are seeing brokenness or not, we don't want to be the Levite or the priest when we pass a half dead, beaten up person on the side of the road. We have a responsibility to be that Good Samaritan, to cross over, not to have too big of an agenda, not to have too many fears that we're going to get hurt ourselves or that the works that we are going to do are too small to impact it. We need to become as proximate to it as possible. And I encourage pastors, of course, when I taught the political advocacy class, I'm like, you're literally taking a class to advocate. And I would ask, what do you care about? And they would write it down very eagerly. How long do you plan on working on it? And I knew 3 to 5 years was being written on that paper, which, by the way, it's a little longer. And then the third was, do you know anybody who's directly impacted? And so that book really teaches you the importance and why. And so, I talk about a lot of different things in that book, but it's really how proximity is what compels a response, because you cannot see at such a deep level and merely talk. In order to follow Christ, who literally showed us what proximity looks like. He could have fixed everything from heaven, but he didn't. He became proximate and he walked along in solidarity with humanity. We too need to join him. So that was that first book. And honestly, this book is the continuation of that book.

Don Payne [00:15:33] Okay, let me ask you a question about that first book about the principle that is kind of the title, the power of proximity. Is it fair to say that proximity is kind of an antidote to paralysis? I'm not trying to alliterate there on purpose. But, you know, when we got started, I mentioned the overwhelming sense that can paralyze people when we get in despair from the scale of the needs and our feeling of helplessness. Does proximity kind of mitigate some of that paralysis?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:16:04] 100%. 100%. Because, you know, we naturally. Let me just say this. It should if we are responding with Christian love and concern. So, I talked about that parable of the Good Samaritan. You know, that parable was taught by Jesus because of that rich, young ruler, lawyer guy who was trying to stump Jesus with what is the greatest commandment. And how do you share it? So, to love God is to love neighbor. And when we love people who look like us and we love people who don't require a sacrifice, the reason Jesus spun that parable is he wanted to broaden the definition of neighbor and the sacrifice of our response. And here's the thing. When we respond to pain and brokenness with the love of Christ, how could we, if we truly believe Christ is who He is and that He has come to restore and reconcile all things to himself? We literally are his hands and feet and joining him in that restoration process. How can it be nothing but life giving?

Don Payne [00:17:03] Okay.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:17:04] So in that book I actually talk about that is our role as Christians, to not just talk, not to avoid, but literally follow the example of Christ and do the work. This is something that I've been saying more recently. No more sympathy needed. Solidarity is what we want.

Don Payne [00:17:22] Okay. Well put.

Patty Pell [00:17:24] How would you define the difference of that as you're moving from sympathy and to solidarity? How would you equip people to see the difference, or maybe the interrelatedness of those two things? But the distinction.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:17:37] Yes. Sympathy is, I feel sorry for. And sometimes when you don't understand and you're trying to give this sympathetic, you sometimes just feel guilty. I've watched and I understand these what seems like sincere tears of guilt for what I have and what other people don't have. And it's just like, I understand, but dry your tears and get up and join us in solidarity, because this is the body of Christ. And that is the second part, which is what are we as Christians going to do in the face of injustice? Injustice doesn't just happen, and it doesn't repair itself. We're literally not going to fall into the work of repair. We have to intentionally step into it. And that's why that second part of that. So my book is called *Join the Resistance, Step into the Good Work of Kingdom Justice*, that that's an intentional pivot and decision to say that injustice will not continue to be perpetuated on my watch, our collective watch, that Christ literally gave us the tools to be a part of His restoration of all things in the world, including, before I say, including, I'll just say individual restoration, social restoration, and systemic registration.

Patty Pell [00:18:55] I love in the book where you distinguish joining the resistance, not taking over. And the tendency of, you know, some of us and some communities, to not just join or share solidarity, but to take over or to want to lead. So maybe you can talk a little bit about how you get at that in the book and some of the challenges for the church in terms of being careful of those things.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:19:21] Yeah, I'm smiling as you say that, because it's not a hint or a subtle reference. It is right through the front door to continue to remind us our place in the work. So, I truly believe, and this is a very common phrase among community development practitioners, both secular or sacred leaders, I would say that people who are the closest to the pain are closest to the solution. And those of us who have resources, and we're seeing it sometimes our response is out of our own panic and insufficiency. So, we want to jump in, and you may or may not have heard, in my world you hear this a lot, but I also know my world is very small and a little strange. But that's where that pushback of what we call a white savior or even a privileged savior. Like you don't think we know what's going on in the community? We just don't have the resources like you. Thank you for coming in. But please, you know, we would love your money. We would love your actual body to be here. But for you to come and say, well, the reason that this is happening is because you are not smart enough. You are not capable enough. You need me to come in and tell you how to do it. That is very problematic. And this is my 30th year living in a community impacted by economic and racial injustice. This is not my first decade, not my second decade. Literally, I'm getting ready to start my fourth decade. And the community that I live in is tremendously resilient. They have two and three jobs. They own business. I mean it is something to watch the stewarding of what they have. But when you don't have access to the same opportunities like that literally I rolled out of bed into, I just couldn't squander the resources that was given. But I had at a certain level, you have to be very careful that you don't. Well, first of all, we look down on the poor. We just do. And Christians are not different. That's why actually Jesus says, make sure you know as far as that banquet. You know, don't favor different. We serve a god that says I have no partiality as though we need that message. We should instinctively know that because we believe that people have been created in the image of God, that we've all been created equal, you know, that we have even Paul saying there's no difference. Like get your mind straight. And then we've got even towards the end of the New Testament, just talking about where we're going to place people of wealth in our congregation. Like this is a human problem that is completely infiltrated in the church. And so, we do ministry with that mindset. I have resources, so I'm going to go in and insist that you need to do it my way. Because apparently the reason you're poor and uneducated is because you aren't as good as me. And so that's just the

part of what I would say is kingdom justice or social justice is, work and direct services. But a lot of my book speaks to the work around systemic injustice, because I think that while we haven't done as much as we should with poverty in direct services and community development and joining, we still have a systems problem, and we have to be honest about that. And if you really aren't sure, before you start defending a system that you think is good because it works for you, get some more information.

Don Payne [00:22:38] Yeah. And see how it works for others.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:22:43] Yeah. It's interesting. The very first line in my first book, this is the first sentence in the introduction, if you wake up in the morning and the system works for you, you think it is a good system. And that's what 30 years of waking up every morning in a community that doesn't work, I begin to see the systems and that's one of the reasons, I mean, there's a lot of things we can do with our time. And, you know, I don't really love being considered this rabble rouser. I don't know if anybody is listening, knows the Enneagram, but I'm a one like I don't disobey any rules. Okay? I follow rules. I actually believe rules are going to make us all happy and well, but I think bad rules are going to make us miserable. And so, I just want to get those right rules. But that's really important because I just feel like there's not enough Christians who are staying in the work of systemic restoration, at least people who look like me and who come from my tradition of faith. And so, I want to keep joining in that and continue to invite people in. And so, in my book, *Join the Resistance*, you know, I talk about the shoulders that we stand on because a movement and the work of movements don't begin when we become aware of them. I'm glad when we become aware, and our eyes are opened, and we have this compelling sense of responsibility. But people have been doing this not even for generations, but since the beginning of time. So, I talk about in this book, every chapter is there's a prophet. I mean, we stand on the shoulders of the prophets who came before us, who stood in, you know, the center squares against the religious leaders or against the civic leaders of their days, talking and forthtelling the truth of God and how we were missing it. And I want to shake up this prophetic piece of our pulpits. Prophetic piece of our Christian identity and witness in the world is to make sure that we don't stay silent in the face of injustice just because it bothers us.

Don Payne [00:24:30] That's why you say join it. You do not say start the resistance.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:24:33] Join it. Absolutely. Please don't. Because you can't fix problems you don't understand. You should not be leading.

Don Payne [00:24:39] It kind of leads me to this. I had wanted to ask you this anyway, Michelle, I assume that you have seen lots of well-intended efforts that are either ineffective or maybe they actually make matters worse. The net effect of which is that it often just leaves people jaded and less likely to do anything in the future. Does that ring true?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:25:01] Of course, resilience is not something you're born with. Resilience is something you get up after being beaten down. Of course, I've seen it. I've seen it in my own life first. You know, I didn't arrive on the scene 30 years ago knowing what I was going to do.

Don Payne [00:25:17] What are some of those? Tell us about what are the things that maybe we're, and when I say we, of course, I'm thinking about people like myself, maybe people like you,

we might naturally be inclined to do that really are not effective or are going to be counterproductive or going to leave situations worse than when we started.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:25:37] There's just too many really, honestly, to list in a very practical way. But I'll go back to Micah 6:8 because this is the number one problem. I'll hopefully get to talk to Micah at some point and thank him for all of his trumpeting of the work of justice and how he led with doing justice because honestly, it's going to need that front end charge. It's that hard to reverse the injustice of the world. But for people like me, and you, Don, and you, Patty, I wish it had started with walking humbly because the number one problem that I've seen in my own life, that I've seen in the people in my community, or not in my community, but those of us who've joined in our community, people that continue to join, we just don't come in humbly. We come in with an agenda and ego. And even when we say we're coming humbly, there's literally a posture of ego and like, I'm going to accomplish things, I'm going to solve things, I'm going to fix things. I've got money from the privileged church. I better get results. I better get numbers, instead of understanding that one of the most important elements of being a good neighbor, which is the second commandment, right, love God, love neighbor, is to be a student of a community. To sit at the feet and listen and to learn and understand how amazing they are. That in the midst of incredible odds, life continues to move on, and birthdays are celebrated. And I mean, my neighborhood just a couple of summers ago, you know, we had two shootings within a week on one end of my block in the other, and three people died just because of gang violence. And you might think, oh, well, that's the reason I would never want to live in that neighborhood. That's horrible. You know, it is horrible. But that's where we live and the resilience of that community coming together and the things that we did. And you know what? Everybody kept doing their laundry. Everybody kept going to work. We mourn together. We live life together. And you know what? There's even celebration and joy in the midst of struggle. And so just this idea of humility that this community, my community has and continues to have so much to teach me that the number one problem is that we don't walk in humbly. And then the number two is that we get tired of mercy. Not only do we not love mercy, but we get tired of it. Let me just say this Mercy is a response to a problem. I see a problem. I respond. So, if you chronically see the same problem over and over again, first of all, there's two things. One, you can get tired of it, but we're supposed to keep loving it. The second thing is, is that, and this is kind of the element of justice, justice wants to know how did we get into the problem in the first place? And so, it asks those deeper questions. And so those are the two things that we should be doing is, one, don't ever get tired of mercy, but ask the questions, why is this continuing to be perpetuated and learn from your neighbors, not declare it, like from the outside I'm going to declare, but really, as a student of the neighborhood, as a student of the community, with respect for the people who are there, how do you see injustice? How are you and community members being dehumanized? I mean, Christ literally came to re humanize the dehumanized. And so, if we're walking humbly and we're seeing the humanity and the resilience and the contribution of the community, then we will want to run to their feet, to listen, to learn and to join them in the solution. That's not to say the outside doesn't have anything to offer. We do, but it should be at the community's discretion.

Don Payne [00:29:16] What really grabs me about that, Michelle, is, related to what you said a little bit earlier about the tendency to go in assuming that we know what is wrong and know how to fix it, because if people had what we already know, clearly, they wouldn't be in the situation we're in. So that listening, that humble posture, is perhaps the most counterintuitive thing that many of us would have to get over.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:29:45] Exactly. I think also, we just really love quick results. I mean, who wouldn't? And when you have resources, you actually can get quick results. That's probably the most frustrating thing, you know, I'm not saying community versus community. It's just like you have resources, you want to get action, you want to have the results that you need. You're used to things working for you. You're used to kind of getting what you hoped for. You don't have to cast this huge vision of what can be and live so tenaciously by faith, because you kind of have what you hope for, and you just assume that that will work. And let me just say, I continue to be a student of my neighbors and I continue to, I should say this, I try to continue to be a good student of my neighbors. And I think the resilience has been one of the most amazing gifts from them to me, is just to not only witness it, but join them in it. And resilience. I remember telling my high school son, I think it was just a normal teenage dialogue, and just the idea of getting up and trying again for it with another day. And I said, you know what? Nobody hands you resilience. Resilience is something you earn after you get up being knocked down over and over again.

Don Payne [00:31:08] You're not, like, born with it.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:31:09] You're not born with resilience. And what I have noticed is when you get what you pretty much hope for, you actually don't have very much resilience. You're a bit more fragile and you're a bit more frustrated. And I don't mean that in a condemning or accusatory way. I think it's just we have to recognize that.

Don Payne [00:31:30] It's just an accurate description.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:31:30] It's an accurate description. And just the resiliency that I have seen and witnessed and borne witness to. It's just really a marker and a distinction that I just need to bring up.

Don Payne [00:31:47] Patty, how did the two of you connect? Talk about the work you've done together.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:31:53] You can tell the story, but I might retell it. It's. It's like a couple, you know, like the husband and wife. You tell the story, and I'll let you know if you said it correctly.

Don Payne [00:32:00] You're reminding me of my favorite theologian, Winnie the Pooh, who says, it's a long story and even longer when I tell it.

Patty Pell [00:32:10] Well, I'll give you the short version, and Michelle can fill in whatever details she wants. We initially met when I was pastoring, and we met over some immigration reform work. So, we were involved in gathering some pastors in the community together to talk about immigration reform and what scripture has to say about loving the foreigner and caring and protecting and providing for the foreigner. And so, it was around trying to stir the conversation about immigration in the pastors in the community and then immigration reform. And then we did some other things outside of that related to some reform efforts that were happening in Congress, the U.S. Congress at the time. And unfortunately, it didn't go any further.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:32:56] We were so close.

Patty Pell [00:32:58] So that's how we initially met.

Don Payne [00:33:00] So how did it really happen, Michelle?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:33:01] No, actually, that really is kind of how it happened, except it started with. So, Danny Carol, and I had been working with a number of Denver leaders. There was like five of us. I called them my band of brothers because I was the only girl, and we would meet and try to figure out how can we talk to pastors and business leaders about God's heart for the immigrants and how they're good for our economy? So, we were kind of working through that and I said, I really want to go to Greeley next, because pretty much everybody knew Danny and I in the area. So, it's like, okay, we got to find some new fresh blood. He said, I had a student, and she wrote a devotional and so there was the name of Patty Pell, and I was like, okay, great. And so, it was really through that. And Patty helped bring like literally all the pastors in Greeley, maybe not all of them, but a lot of them, mostly all evangelical pastors of the churches there. And we, it was Danny, myself, and then Patty who did a presentation on God's heart for the Immigrant. And I will just say this, and this is probably, you know, different for sure at Denver Seminary and different nowadays, but at that time, a little bit, maybe ten years ago, we were like the only women in the room. And so, I'm going to automatically be friends with you, like I can't find you. And so, it's great to see another woman theologian and passionate person. So that was just easy friendship. But I do want to add this. So, I had been on the Vernon Grounds Institute of Public Ethics for a number of years, I think almost since its inception. And then Gary Vanderpoel, who started the program for Justice and Mission, I was the political advocacy adjunct, and I was on the hiring committee for Gary's replacement. And so, I just said from the very first one, I'm like, you want Patty Pell. So, we went through this whole process and the person that we thought we were going to get was not there. And so, they're like, we have to rebound. And I just want, you know, a hiring committee at a seminary takes a lot of time. Like, I don't think the regular world knows how long. Yeah, you know, but I'm telling your listeners.

Don Payne [00:34:57] Things in academia move even more slowly than they do in the church, if that's conceivable.

Patty Pell [00:35:02] Yeah, if that's even possible.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:35:04] So, the exhaustion of trying to do this again, and I was super busy, and I think I might have been the only non-Denver seminary person on the campus, and they called me, I think it was Brad Widstrom called me and I'm like, oh, we have to do this again. So, I said, okay, I'll give you one meeting. And I walked in, and I said, Listen, I already told you the first meeting, the last time you needed Patty Pell. That's who I recommend. I'm not coming to another meeting.

Don Payne [00:35:28] Well, it worked, I guess, and I'm glad it did. Yeah, because you still teach as an adjunct.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:35:36] I do. It's just so wonderful to teach people who are eager to learn. I think it's wonderful to shape leaders of and for the church. And I think the Lord has a lot to say about social concerns and community development.

Don Payne [00:35:50] So what would you in addition to what you said or maybe summarizing anything you said, what would you leave listeners with as a couple of first steps or constructive

action points? If they're thinking, yeah, I do need proximity, I can be instrumental in the Lord's hands. I'm going to give it another try.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:36:13] The two words that come to me over and over again is fear not. Don't be afraid to engage. And don't be afraid that the investment isn't going to have a good return just because you don't see it. If we truly believe Christ is everything, He said He is, then we're not doing the work. We're joining him in the work that he's already doing in the world.

Don Payne [00:36:38] A lot of freedom and relaxation in that.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:36:41] There should be.

Don Payne [00:36:42] Relaxation may not be the right word, but there's a lot of freedom, breathing space in that word.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:36:47] You know, I tell, usually even a little more passionately than on a podcast, don't be afraid to see the evil, hear the evil and speak the evil. Be honest about what's happening. Stay present and work towards its restoration.

Don Payne [00:37:04] Right. Okay. Great words. So, your two books, The Power of Proximity, and the recent one, Join the Resistance.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:37:12] Yup. You can get that at InterVarsity Press. You can get it on Amazon, anywhere you can get books, you can get that. And then, of course, if you want to reach out to me, you can find me on my website, michelleferrignowarren.com

Don Payne [00:37:27] Okay. And for listeners who may not be in Colorado but other places in the world but want to learn from what you're doing, open door ministries, I guess, would be a good example. You have a website. How can we access the resources and the example of what you're doing?

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:37:41] Yeah, sure. odmdenver.org is a great place and then of course that's Denver based, but the Christian Community Development Association is a wonderful place to, I would say huddle. ccda.org

Don Payne [00:37:54] Good.

Patty Pell [00:37:55] This has been great. Michelle, thank you so much.

Don Payne [00:37:57] Well, friends, thanks for spending a little time with us. Michelle Ferrigno Warren has been our guest. And what a treat and what an encouragement to see what you and your husband and so many others have been doing and continue to do in such a hopeful, theologically informed way that really sets it apart from so many efforts. Really grateful for that.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren [00:38:21] Thank you. It's great to be here.

Don Payne [00:38:24] Yeah. Thanks to all of our friends, Matt and Krista, who so faithfully record and edit these podcasts. We're grateful for their service. Grateful for you friends. Again, those of you who are alumni or donors or current students, whatever your relationship to Denver Seminary

is, thank you for spending some time with us. And we hope these conversations are an encouragement or resource to you. This Engage360 and we look forward to having another conversation with you really soon. Take care.