

“Concern For All The Churches”

by: The Portland Church Leadership

Besides everything else, [we] face daily the pressure of [our] concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and [we] do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and [we] do not inwardly burn? 2 Corinthians 11:28-29

To our beloved brothers and sisters around the world:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and Jesus our Lord and Savior. Since the 2005 Portland World Missions Jubilee, there have been numerous letters of warnings and markings for divisiveness from former International Churches of Christ (ICOC) leaderships against the McKean and the Portland Church. On October 3, 2005, Kip McKean received a letter signed by over sixty evangelists and elders which had grave concerns and accusations about his character, his motives and his ministry building skills. Once again divisiveness was a central issue. **Depending on the situation, Biblically, divisiveness or division can be either sinful (Romans 16:17-18) or simply the godly effect of preaching the Word.** The Apostle John witnessed this during Jesus' ministry, "At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, 'He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?' But others said, 'These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" (John 10:19-21) This open letter is written in honor of God, in "concern for all the churches," and in defense of the ministry of the Portland International Church of Christ, and our dear friends, Kip and Elena McKean.

A Historical Perspective

"Where there is no vision the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18 KJV) Leadership is a crucial and necessary part of God's plan to evangelize the nations. *During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the quintessential issue of our day*, how do we know "which men" to follow? Jesus says, "A good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit... By their fruit you will recognize a [true or false prophet]." (Matthew 7:17-20) Jesus' response was not complicated, he simply told the disciples to look at the fruit! It is obvious how God has dynamically used the McKean to advance His Kingdom. The account of the "30 would be disciples" in the Gempels living room in Boston, Massachusetts in June of 1979 is well known. As God's Spirit moved with the restoration of the holy Scriptures, this "ragged band" of 30 Christians began a historically unprecedented "church growth movement." By July 2000, God multiplied these few into a brotherhood impacting the globe with churches in over 170 nations. This group of churches, formerly known as the Boston Movement, adopted the name of International Churches of Christ in 1994. In an effort to make sure the churches were meeting the needs of the poor, HOPE worldwide was founded in 1991. Kip served as the first Chairman of the Board, sitting in that capacity for 10 years. He enabled the Gempels and their staff to mobilize the disciples from the ICOC churches as a unique resource in all HOPE worldwide projects.

In October 2001, Kip and Elena addressed the 10,000 disciples of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ confessing in tears their sins of arrogance, pride and lack of concern for the weak that had hurt their family and their ministry. To work through their repentance, they humbly went on a sabbatical. By November 2002 at the Los Angeles Unity Meeting, Kip officially resigned as the World Missions Evangelist, not because he felt he was disqualified for his role, but in an effort to preserve unity between the leaders and the churches. As Kip and others have testified before, the "irony" of the LA Unity Meeting was that a gathering that was supposed to bring unity, in the end produced widespread disunity. Sadly, all the World Sector Leaders were called to resign. This resulted in the visionary central leadership of the International Churches of Christ being dissolved.

It must be noted at this point in time, the ICOC as we once knew it ceased to exist.

Almost immediately, what used to be known as the ICOC in the United States, fragmented into autonomous churches. No longer were there overseeing evangelists to unify groups of churches. Division was deep among the leaders. Many of them questioned or opposed the Scriptural principles the World Sector Leaders built the movement on, such as: churches being composed of only sold-out disciples; every disciple is called to be evangelistic; every disciple having a one-on-one discipling relationship; every disciple being involved in an evangelistic small group - Bible Talk; baptizing only disciples; dating and marrying only disciples; overseeing evangelists serving as ligaments for a unified brotherhood; a

strong Women's Ministry; and the compelling vision to make disciples of all nations. As autonomy spread, numerous churches began to go in different directions. In many cases this resulted in the compromising of core Biblical principles, as well as weakening the call from the pulpit to obey the Word through righteous living. Many who visit us in Portland report their churches preach a "different Jesus, a different gospel with a different spirit." (2 Corinthians 11:3-6)

Repentance Brings Refreshment

As the leaders of the Portland Church who are day-to-day partners in the gospel with the McKeans, we testify there is true repentance in their lives from the sins of the past. We appreciate the openness that we enjoy with them. They genuinely listen to our concerns and respect our input into both ministry decisions, as well as life issues. God has been able to develop and forge a unified team ministry here in Portland.

We find it interesting that many who signed the October 3, 2005 letter against the McKeans have not visited Portland or even had a meal in the past two years with the McKeans.

As we all know, Kip is now in his 50's. He is a seasoned man, humbled by God with a special appreciation for the weak. The harshness, insensitivity and lack of patience that peppered his character in the past, has largely faded. **Like Peter, Kip sinned deeply but he has repented, and has been changed for the better.** Obviously, those of us who are close to Kip realize the need for discipling, because of our flesh. We are working with Kip on being easier to challenge. This is so important for all of us. Kip acknowledges that there have been reckless words he has written in our bulletins that have hurt others. In particular he regrets and is sorry for not contacting the New York leaders to hear the "other side" before he released the article on the New York City Church. (Proverbs 18:17) Now, before a bulletin is sent out we review it. It is also sent out to others outside Portland to edit. We are discipling Kip to give recognition to deserving individuals and churches "outside" of Portland's direct influence. From our experience, he is gaining a heartfelt appreciation and respect for those with a different point of view.

Something to consider in regards to the present condition of the churches is that since October 2001 - when the McKeans went on their sabbatical - all leadership decisions regarding the direction of our family of churches have been made with little input or involvement from Kip. It also must be noted that because of waning trust and independence in the local leaderships, Kip has been prevented and not invited to preach and thus help several of the congregations God allowed him to build, such as Boston and LA. Kip's experience is not unique. Other evangelists who gave their "blood, sweat and tears" to build churches are likewise blocked and disconnected from their "spiritual children." Close relationships once treasured have been severed by the walls of church autonomy and a sinful lack of forgiveness.

One must pause and ponder as to what has happened to our fellowship of churches during these past four years in the absence of Kip's influence and a central leadership? In contrast to a spreading of the Word of God, many churches have drastically shrunk and lukewarmness reigns. For example, the Los Angeles Church now has less than 6000 members; the Boston Church has decreased from 5000 to 2000; Phoenix has decreased from 1000 members to 600; London has decreased from 2000 members to around 1000 in eight separate autonomous churches.[¹] The state of many of the former ICOC churches today should not fall solely on his shoulders, as some of these hurtful letters have stated. **Continually blaming the McKeans for the lukewarmness in congregations where they have had no influence for four years must be stopped and personal responsibility acknowledged.** Jesus in love is calling for the repentance of leaders who are guilty of allowing their churches to remain lukewarm. (Revelation 3:15-20)

We have personally been refreshed by the way Kip humbly leads our congregation in Portland. In July 2003, the McKeans came to Portland after we had endured the aftermath of a destructive meltdown following the Kriete letter. **Many of our congregations around the world, especially in the US, experienced a similar fate. We were left with less than 100 members. God has powerfully advanced His gospel during the two short years they have been in Portland. This "evidence of the grace of God" can be seen in the multiplying of disciples in the Portland Church to over 300 "sold out baptized disciples" and 450 on Sundays, a membership and attendance never attained before in the 14 year history of the Portland Church. (Acts 11:21-24)** Weekly, the lost are being baptized, the fallen away are restored, the retention rate is very high, marriages are being saved through discipling, "kingdom kids" and "gentile" teens are being baptized and are staying faithful, those with chemical addictions are being healed, and we are caring for the needs of the poor inside and outside of the congregation.

Additionally, in an effort to spread the Word everywhere, two churches in Oregon have recently been planted in Eugene

and Corvallis, homes of the University of Oregon and Oregon State University respectively. To reiterate, this is to God's glory! 1 Corinthians 3:7 teaches, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

Furthermore, Kip and Elena and the Portland Church have been asked by a number of churches for help, support, guidance, and training through godly discipling. These churches include Salt Lake City, Utah; Savannah, Georgia; Syracuse, New York; Montreal, Canada and Santiago, Chile and it's first church planting, Vina Del Mar, Chile. Prior to the McKean's discipling many of these churches, these congregations were losing members and having minimal impact in their cities. Today, God is being glorified through the model and imitation of the Portland Church in baptisms, restorations and a zeal in the fellowship that God desires. (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10)

Charges Against Kip and Portland

When all the numerous letters of warning are distilled, there are four distinct charges of divisiveness against Kip and the Portland Church:

- 1. Recruiting disciples to Portland**
- 2. Unwholesome talk against other congregations**
- 3. Discipling churches not in Portland's geographic area**
- 4. Discipling newly formed congregations of disciples that leave former ICOC churches**

1. The Charge of Recruiting

In regard to the charge of recruiting, it has been implied that often it is the strongest and most fruitful disciples that have been "pulled" to Portland. The other accusation coinciding with this charge is that many of those that leave are "crippling" the recovery of their home congregations. We appeal for all to understand that most of those who have come to Portland moved here because they were hurting spiritually or afraid for their children's spiritual well being. We believe God touches the hearts of the disciples to move here at whatever price to be in a "sold-out fellowship." In the last 20 months, disciples have moved to Portland from Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, California, Idaho, New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Hawaii, Alaska, Utah, Nevada, Ohio, Missouri and Kansas. It must be asked, why have so many from throughout the United States made, what is considered today, a daring and controversial decision just to come to visit the Portland Church? Simply answered, they came in hopes of personal revival. Did they see a church that is perfect? No! Yet, all of us agree that God has formed a "new heart" in the congregation as we have learned from the sins and mistakes of the past. A Biblical promise that illustrates what Portland is experiencing can be found in Ezekiel 36:24-28, "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh...you will be my people, and I will be your God."

2. Unwholesome Talk About Other Congregations

This accusation is a matter of point of view as many disciples are asking, "Why is Kip through the Portland Church Bulletin and the UpSideDown21 website being accused of division? We find these messages refreshing!" A primary reason for the negative reaction to Portland's message, which some consider "unwholesome talk," is that many of our precious sister churches in America are lukewarm or dying and find the message convicting. Praise God a few have done well, such as Mexico City led by Josue Ortega, Hampton Roads Church of Christ in Virginia led by Mike Fontenot, Singapore led by John Louis, Jakarta, Indonesia led by Harliem Salim and Dehli, India led by Dinesh George. Other churches making major strides in revival include: San Antonio, Baltimore, Gainesville and Charlotte. Yet, as seen in the Bible when the message stings and the sword cuts, the sinful reaction is to silence or kill the messenger. In Genesis 37, motivated by jealousy, the sons of Jacob "hated Joseph...because of his dreams...They said, 'Come now, let's kill him.'" (Genesis 37:8,19). Not only do we see this principle in the Old Testament, but Jesus himself was "disowned" and killed because of His message. (Acts 3:14) Currently the Portland Church website and UpSideDown21 combined have over 10,000 individual computers logging on each month, with over a million "hits." Many Christians and small groups of disciples around the world report through email they are spiritually sustained by the messages posted every week.

3. Discipling Churches Outside of Our Geographic Area

The third reason the Portland Ministry is being charged with division is due to the discipling of churches outside of our geographic area, the state of Oregon. In 1982, God put on Kip's and the Boston leaders' hearts a plan to evangelize the world. First, they built "pillar churches" in the most influential mega-cities of the world. From here, they planted churches in the surrounding capitals of the nations. Next, mission teams were planted in the mid-sized cities of those nations. Finally, the disciples were to spread to the small towns and villages, thus evangelizing the nations. Using the former ICOC plan, most who oppose Kip believe there are evangelists located in each geographic sphere of influence that can rebuild all the churches in their whole region. However, we do not see this occurring. An exception is the outstanding effort of Josue Ortega who lives in Mexico City. Not only does Josue oversee the present churches in Mexico and Central America, but he helps coordinate the expansion of the gospel into untouched areas of this geographic field. (2 Corinthians 10:13) To aid in South America's recovery, we disciple Santiago, Chile. Some say, "Why aren't the Florida churches doing this, since historically this was their charge?" Yes, they have continued to be an upward call in their generous financial sacrifice for third world missions, but Santiago's leadership felt that the faith they witnessed in the Portland Church made Portland the model church they wanted to imitate. A similar situation is true of Montreal in Canada. Be reminded, out of desperation, both of these church leaderships initiated contact with Portland. They visited and were inspired by what they saw. At that point they asked the McKeanes to disciple them. Interestingly, "violating" a sense of geographic influence is Sacramento asking Scott Green to disciple them and join Seattle's "Northwest family of churches." Yet historically, Sacramento was San Francisco's charge. (Sacramento is only 70 miles away from San Francisco, yet 750 miles from Seattle.) Is our brother Scott divisive by helping churches not in his geographic region in the United States? No! Therefore, is it "divisive" or "disrespectful" for us to disciple Santiago or Montreal, which are in different geographical regions of the world? Compelled by the love of Christ, should we ignore their cries for help? (2 Corinthians 5:14)

4. Discipling Newly Formed Congregations of Disciples That Leave Former ICOC Churches

In 2003, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Unity meeting and the Kreite letter, a new group of leaders emerged, most with "mainline Church of Christ" backgrounds. They denounced "the past" and rarely spoke with the McKeanes. This became extremely noticeable when the ICOC central leadership, which the mainline Churches of Christ believe to be unscriptural, dissolved. Changing the identity of almost every former ICOC congregation in America to simply "Church of Christ" from "International Church of Christ" further evidences this mainline Church of Christ influence. Kip opposed this and wrote of his concerns in *Revolution Through Restoration III*.

Since these churches are now built on autonomy, these false theological walls prevent any outside call to repentance and unity by an overseeing evangelist, such as Paul gave the Corinthians Church in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17.. "I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church." God built unity through overseeing evangelists that taught the same message "everywhere in every church." Paul also sent Titus into Crete as an overseeing evangelist to "straighten out" the churches. "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." (Titus 1:5) Local congregations should develop mature leadership for day to day decisions. (1 Timothy 5:17) However, during difficult times, local congregations need a recognized outside authority, as Paul in Corinth, to help resolve problems and conflicts to preserve unity and grow in the faith.

The heart of the Portland Church's leadership is to see the world evangelized in the twenty-first century. Therefore, we will pray for and aid in any way any group of "sold-out" disciples in any city. Let us sadly reiterate, the formal "structure" of the International Churches of Christ has vanished. Therefore, the idealistic concept of "one church, one city" is also gone. To illustrate, in the Atlanta area, there are now essentially seven separate former ICOC Churches. To our knowledge, everyone feels great about our brother Tom Brown of Los Angeles being commended to serve and help the recently split off group of disciples of the North River Church in Atlanta. Is he divisive? Immediately before our brother Sam Laing's arrival in Athens, the Athens group split off from the Atlanta Church. Is Sam divisive by helping and ministering to this group?

Recently a sold out group of disciples, seeing no change for years in the former ICOC church in Phoenix, left the Phoenix Valley Church of Christ to begin a new congregation. Initiators and leaders of this new congregation are Chris and Sonja Chloupek. With the hope of building a congregation of sold out disciples, they have turned to Portland for support and asked the McKeanes to disciple them. (Their letter to the Portland Church) Likewise, there is a similar occurrence in

Stockholm, Sweden, led by Argo Lips. Should we not help those we cherish as family? In Phoenix alone, there are 29 other “Churches of Christ” besides the Phoenix Valley Church of Christ (formerly the Phoenix Valley International Church of Christ). As the Phoenix Valley Church of Christ embraced in fellowship the other “Churches of Christ”, cannot we in Portland embrace a sold out congregation of disciples that still holds to the practice of discipling, without being charged as divisive?

Recently, Kip shared this email he received from one of our sisters in the Eugene Church. She said,

“I thought your speech at the Portland Jubilee was very good, but I did not understand fully why you were calling out a remnant in the dying former ICOC churches. Now I do. I went down this past weekend to the church my husband and I were converted in and attended the Sunday morning Regional church service. When my husband and I moved from this church 2 years ago, this Region of over 300 disciples met in one of the largest facilities available on that side of the city. At the Sunday morning service I attended, there were now less than eighty people gathered in a small rented room. At the service, a ministry couple who had served for 20 years in the ministry resigned. We had known them forever and it broke my heart to watch them give up their dreams, yet there were no tears from the disciples there, just numbness. Kip, after this trip I now understand your concerns. I was deeply saddened by what I saw and heard from many of my friends still there. They shared with me that hundreds have left the church in the past two years, one of the now autonomous regions has already closed their doors. Throughout the congregation, there are hardly any baptisms or growth and few are even actively sharing their faith! Kip, there are many who still remember their Kingdom dreams and desires, but they are very confused and misguided as to what is really going on in Portland and Eugene. We love them very much, but how long do we wait until something is done to help those in the church that really want the help?”

Our Affection For You

Though many of us feel wounded by church leaderships who differ with our approach and want to mark or separate from us, we refuse to retaliate. Fellowship is defined by God as all faithful, baptized disciples. Many want to rebuild a movement to evangelize the world. We share this dream. Albeit painful to be attacked and ostracized unjustly, we know that is the path Jesus walked. (1 Peter 2:21-23) Therefore, we beg you, our brothers and sisters around the world, not to consider our efforts as a division in the former ICOC fellowship, but as in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas going their separate directions. Perhaps Kip is Paul who will build more churches, and the leaders that oppose him are Barnabas. Perhaps Kip is Barnabas who strengthened the weak like John Mark making him useful again, and the other leaders are like Paul. It matters not. Both are in heaven and there are many with thankful souls with them.

We believe many people are confused and scared at this hour. We beg you, if you do not understand what we are doing, please contact us directly and we will share our hearts from the Scriptures. We invite you to visit us and see for yourselves the fruit of the Spirit – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23) Kip continues to preach the Word like a “true prophet” calling us back to God. We stand by Elena and him and will follow them as they follow Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1) We are grateful to God for choosing all of us to be His children, for we are merely unworthy servants. We are so thankful to God for using us when we really are nothing. (John 15:5)

We will continue our efforts to open wide our hearts and build bridges with other congregations, inviting preachers from other churches to preach here in Portland. We beg you to consider Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 6:11-13, “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange...open wide your hearts also.” We are praying that all of us can come together to glorify God by evangelizing the world in the twenty-first century.

And to God be all the glory.