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The Portland Story

by: Kip McKean

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God." [2 Corinthians 2:14-17](#)



Portland

Part One - TRIUMPHANT INITIATION

The Portland International Church of Christ was planted in 1991. There were already twenty disciples "waiting" in Portland. Another twenty-five were sent combined from the San Francisco and Seattle Churches to complete "the team." Rob and Pam Skinner of San Francisco heroically led the church planting for the first seven months! "Many were baptized into Christ," according to Angie Hernandez, one of the mission team members. Then the Skinners were sent to Seattle to help with a leadership crisis in that congregation. In the ensuing years, the Portland Church was led by a series of young ministry couples, whom the Lord used in powerful ways.

However, in 1996 the Portland Church began to "flatline" in its growth. At its zenith, there were approximately 275 disciples with 375 on Sundays. Almost undetectable over the next several years, a "relationship chasm" began to grow between the older brothers and the young evangelists. The young evangelists' mistakes and sins of harshness and arrogance began to produce a bitterness, anger and rebellion in the "mature" brothers. Also, among the Portland members, there was increasing resentment against the leadership in San Francisco because they gave direction, without consulting the local Portland leaders. (I made similar mistakes in Los Angeles.)

In 2001, one of my children fell away. This, along with my leadership sins of arrogance, and not protecting the weak caused uncertainty in my leadership among some of the World Sector Leaders. To try and keep unity I decided to step down from my role as Leader of the World Sector Leaders. Yet, unknown to the World Sector Leaders there was a similar silent rebellion and anger against each of them for their sins of leadership. Sadly, many of those that rebelled against the World Sector Leaders likewise faced the same lack of confidence and rebellion from those preachers they led. Indeed bitterness breeds bitterness. Ironically in 2002, the central leadership of the International Churches of Christ was officially dissolved at the "Los Angeles Unity Meeting." The World Sector Leaders were forced to resign as a reactionary, "new vision" of independent congregations (autonomy), consensus leadership with no lead evangelists, the elimination of structured outreach and relationships (Bible Talks and Discipleship partners), and a message of "cheap grace" with no expectations was proclaimed. The motivating dream of "evangelizing the world in a generation" was called "a good idea" yet impossible. Also proclaimed was the dissolving of the "exclusiveness" of our fellowship, the International Churches of Christ - "ICOC." (Most congregations of the ICOC "dropped" the "international" from their name.) Though I commend the reopening of the door to the mainline Churches of Christ, the destruction of the distinctive concept of having "disciples only" in a congregation produced tremendous confusion. Yes, there are some disciples in the mainline Churches of Christ as I have always taught. (See Revolution through Restoration I - written in 1992.) But we were building a movement of churches

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composed of only disciples, so by multiplying disciples and multiplying churches we could evangelize the world. As this "new vision" was offered, each church went in a different direction, because there were no overseeing evangelists, like Paul, to teach a common message **"everywhere in every church."** ([1 Corinthians 4:17](#)). It is into this highly charged atmosphere that the Kriete letter "Honest to God" is released in February 2003. Henry Kriete, sitting in judgment of all the sins of the past twenty-four years of the Boston Movement (ICOC) advocated "a time for anger and the overthrowing of temples: I believe the time is now." He urged open forums, which further poisoned the members toward the leaders. With no central leadership to answer further charges such as the misuse of money, few asked, "What happened to the church where Henry served?" Did not his letter call the London Church to be the "epicenter of a 'new movement' of God?" Three months after the letter the London lead evangelist was forced to resign and 90% of the staff was laid off! Presently only a couple hundred disciples are left from a congregation of 2000 disciples. The Scriptures are true that say bitterness can cause many to miss the grace of God. ([Hebrews 12:15](#)) Today Henry Kreite ministers to a tiny mainline Church of Christ.

The collective unfaithfulness to God of ALL of us leaders and ALL of the people caused God to send our churches to spiritual Babylon. (See Revolution Through Restoration III) Portland was hit extremely hard. The "Kriete letter" comes out in February. In March after being viciously criticized by many in the congregation, the Portland lead evangelist cancels all discipleship partners, Bible Talks, and all "structure". In April, he resigns and later in the summer stops attending a discipling church.

Also in April, the Portland Church by law was to elect a Board to oversee legalities in the congregation. Many of the people saw the Board as their "elected" new leadership and not the two remaining evangelists. In May the church implodes and explodes over "the aforementioned brotherhood issues." Scores leave to mainline churches, denominational churches and many, their faith shipwrecked, stop attending church of any kind. Less than 100 remain members. The undermining of the leadership was so extensive, even the collecting of a weekly contribution was discontinued.

In June, after the explosion of the congregation, Elena and I received a phone call from Russ Ewell, representing the San Francisco Church to try to help the Portland Church. Russ also said it might be a place to begin a new ministry as our monetary support in Los Angeles was ending and there was no offer for us to serve in the Los Angeles leadership. In mid-June, we came for our first visit and our hearts went out to the faithful remnant who still wanted to have a church of only "sold-out" disciples. After reading my letter "Revolution Through Restoration III," the House Church Leaders unanimously asked Elena and I to serve as Women's Ministry Leader and Lead Evangelist of the Portland Church.



Part Two - TRIUMPHANT RESTORATION



Our official "first day on the job" was July 11, 2003. At the Friday night devotional of only about 60-70 disciples, I vowed before God that I would "Preach the Word" without compromise. Also, Elena and I expressed our gratitude to the Portland Church for extending forgiveness to us for our past leadership sins and mercy to allow us to lead again! During the next month I focused my preaching on loving God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength and obeying His Word.

I believe God sent Elena and me to be into a "satellite church" where all the sins and mistakes of the movement were exaggerated so we could learn and understand how to rebuild the movement. With confidence from God, I set about to get with every member of the Portland Church both those who stayed and those who left and asked three questions: 1. What was awesome about the Portland Church? (Many could not remember anything positive, even their salvation.) 2. What needs to change in the Portland Church? 3. What Biblical books or themes should be preached? From these discussions, I quickly saw that there was so much bitterness, anger and misunderstanding. Perhaps the uniqueness of Portland's restoration was the call from the pulpit for not only leaders to repent of arrogance, harshness, binding opinions, and hurting the weak, but there was an equally strong call from the Word for the "followership" to repent of bitterness, anger, factions and lack of forgiveness. Wednesday, August 13, 2003 was our Evening of Atonement. I preached that forgiveness was as much a part of salvation as baptism! Disciple after disciple, both leader and follower alike, publicly confessed their sins in tears! More wanted to share, but we ended the session after two and a half hours! The Spirit's love and joy filled the room! With the congregation refreshed from repentance, I spent the next three weeks preaching about God's plan of discipleship and small groups being Jesus' method.

The leadership of the Portland Church was defined to be the House Church Leaders with me leading them! By September the leadership called every person that desired to be a member of the Portland Church to attend all the services, attend an evangelistic small group (Bible Talk) and

to have a discipleship partner. Discipleship partners could be either teacher/student relationships (parent/child) or adult/adult relationships. To avoid some of the bitterness of the past, the leadership called for each member to choose their Bible Talk and their discipleship partners.

In September, the Portland congregation was in awe of God as He once more blessed us with miracles of baptisms. In the fall, we averaged a baptism a week and yet every week someone would walk away from the congregation not wanting to be a "sold-out" disciple. Also through the fall, First Principles was taught to everyone as some were confused about who is saved, who is a true Christian.

By January 2004, the foundation of the Portland Church was rebuilt – exactly 120 sold-out disciples! From my questions to the disciples in the summer of 2003, I realized that their faith had waned long before the destruction of 2003. Faith was lost through broken dreams and promises. Foremost were the promise of elders and deacons, the promise of a Eugene, Oregon church planting (the home of the University of Oregon), the promise of a Latin (Spanish-speaking) Ministry, a Chemical Recovery ministry and a strong Teen Ministry.

In January 2004, we appointed 11 deacon couples and selected two elder-in-training couples – the Untalans and Bertalots (now our best friends!) In mid-January the Holy Spirit sent out from Portland it's first church planting ever to Eugene, Oregon led by the Ciaramellas! Since January 2004 to the present, Eugene has doubled in number! In March the Latin Ministry was initiated when the Victor Gonzalez family and their ten kids moved to Portland. Beginning with just nine disciples, God has increased them to over 50 disciples! In April the Chemical Recovery Ministry was begun with the arrival of the Prestons. (In November, 18 disciples composed the first graduating class!) June 2004 was our first Jubilee and many came to learn what God was doing in a church that had been so quickly restored from such Satanic devastation. At the Jubilee, the two words that many who visited used to describe the Portland Church were "heart" and "family."

Now it is August 2005 and we are celebrating our second World Missions Jubilee! In the 20 months since January 2004, the Holy Spirit has multiplied the 120 disciples of Portland to almost 300! Our weekly attendance averages about 425! In particular the Teen Ministry had only one baptized teen in January 2004, Coleen Untalan. Today the Teen Ministry numbers 33 disciples, comprised equally of "kingdom kids" and "gentile converts." All of this and only one teen fall away in 20 months! The weak are truly being made strong by God and loving discipling!



Part Three - TRIUMPHANT FUTURE PROCLAMATION



The vision of the Portland Church Leadership is the evangelization of all nations in the 21st Century. Thus the 2005 World Missions Jubilee theme: UPSIDEDOWN21! We believe in the sovereignty of God, which means everything that happens to an individual, a congregation or our family of churches either God makes happen or He allows it. The painful events before and after the "Great Tribulation" of the Kriete letter was allowed by God to discipline us leaders and the disciples to once again stand in awe of God. Our hearts drifted from God and our appreciation of our great salvation waned. ([Hebrews 2:1-3](#)) Now in deep appreciation of God's grace, the Portland leadership is taking the initiative to help rebuild any congregation that asks our help thereby aiding in rebuilding a global movement of "sold-out" disciples that will reach this lost world.

As the **"aroma of Christ"** some will regard our efforts as **"the smell of death"** and others the **"fragrance of life."** ([2 Corinthians 2:15-16](#)) Let it be stated clearly, we are not trying to build a "new movement." Yet since many "teachers" have chosen to preach **"a different Jesus, a different gospel with a different spirit"** ([2 Corinthians 11:4](#)), we realize like Paul our vision, efforts and plans will short term cause division. Most view division always as sin, yet Paul says, **"No doubt there have to be divisions (differences) among you to show which of you have God's approval."** ([1 Corinthians 11:19](#))

Our first efforts for "future proclamation" are new church plantings. ([Romans 15:20](#)) Eugene, Oregon has multiplied disciples steadily since January 2004, and Corvallis, Oregon will be planted today at the Jubilee! Secondly, if a leadership turns to us and asks for help, we are willing to disciple them to rebuild the foundation. Raul and Lynda Moreno, gratefully supported by the Florida churches, followed the Portland website for months listening to the sermons and reading the editorials. In January 2005 after the Morenos visited the Portland family, they asked Elena and I to disciple them. Now the Santiago Chile Church is once again multiplying disciples. Excitingly, the Holy Spirit is sending Santiago's first church planting to Vina Del Mar, Chile in September! Encouraging news from South America, Raul and Josué Ortega report that Ecuador, like Chile, has discipling within their churches from "top to bottom." (Josué Ortega of Mexico City, financially supported by the Los Angeles Church, has continued to build dynamic, unified,

discipling churches in Mexico and Central America, as he serves as the overseeing evangelist for these countries.) Likewise the small church in Curacao in the Caribbean has steadily increased disciples since its leader, Michael Hart, visited Portland. Montreal was unique in that a non-full time couple, the Kernans, returned from the 2004 Jubilee so full of faith, they started baptizing through their Bible Talk! They captured the imagination of the lead couple, Danny and Gillianne Brisebois, who came to Portland to **“hear and see”** for themselves. ([Matthew 11:2-6](#)) The Brisebois' asked us to disciple them during their visit to Portland. Since our visit to Montreal to complete the restoring of the foundation of sold-out disciples, several have been baptized in this French-speaking congregation as well as in their newly created English Ministry!

During these efforts God restored my closest Paul -Timothy relationships. Steve Johnson in Savannah and Doug Arthur in Baltimore have been so encouraging now as adult/adult discipling relationships. Elena and I also appreciate our ongoing relationships with the Bairds and Gempels. Especially encouraging has been Chris and Theresa Broom in Syracuse, New York. Discipling them is amazing as their efforts in planting churches is calling us higher!

At the 2004 Jubilee I preached that some churches need to be restored/replanted. Many evangelists in the audience were extremely upset. Yet, this is precisely what God has done in Salt Lake City. A remnant of 25 disciples remained from the “Great Tribulation” and Portland sent Jay and Angie Hernandez with a small mission team to revive Salt Lake City. In the two-and-a-half years before the mission team’s July 2005 arrival there were no baptisms! Already in a little more than a month three have been baptized! Let me suggest, this is a great model for many church leaderships to imitate.

However, as of this Jubilee the Portland leadership believes it is time for a progressive “calling-out of the remnant of disciples” from dying, former ICOC Churches. For years, I have preached “one church-one city;” in other words, each city should have only one church of disciples, because if they are faithful to God, He will multiply them to evangelize not only their city but the whole region. ([Acts 19:8-10](#)) I still believe in this same principle. Sadly, it has become the practice of some former ICOC churches to break-up into geographic groups or groups of various convictions about commitment to Christ, discipling and church government. If a group asks for help to restore the foundation of sold-out disciples, we will help in any way we can. Biblically, disciples can never rebel against authority, yet as seen with David who “chose” to transfer his allegiance from the ungodly Saul to the uncircumcised Achish ([1 Samuel 27:1-4](#)) one is “free to choose” whom to submit to!

In the fall the Portland leadership will begin to seek out church leaderships in congregations that are struggling to ask if we can help them build a foundation of sold-out disciples. If they are not inclined to receive help, then we will offer help to any group that would prefer to be in a new congregation composed of only sold-out disciples. To the casual observer, this may look like “two churches in one city.” Yet, in time it will be obvious who has God’s approval.

Our two last projects to aid in our proclamation to all nations is the Portland School of World Missions and UPSIDEDOWN21 – the global internet ministry of the Portland Church. We still believe, that to become an evangelist one needs to be disciplined by an evangelist. ([Acts 4:13](#)) The Portland School of World Missions is not a seminary, yet some further Biblical studies are necessary to build awesome churches. Presently we have over twenty-five disciples desiring to be in the full-time ministry!

Of historic importance, UPSIDEDOWN21 will begin today in six languages – English, French, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Estonian. Each “page” will have access to that week’s Portland Bulletin editorial, as well as the video of my most recent Sunday Sermon in Portland. I will be assembling a team of evangelists worldwide to video their sermons for USD21, as I only speak English. The USD21 website will be similar to “Radio Free Europe” in the 1960s. The communist leaders built an “Iron Curtain” to block the message of freedom from America and the rest of the West in their press. Yet over the radio, broadcasts of messages of hope and freedom served to guide those oppressed by communism. Eventually many listeners found freedom as seen in the early 1990s when the “Iron Curtain” crumbled. Today, with church leaderships isolated by the walls of autonomy, the good news of the revolution of restoration occurring in the radical discipling churches needs to be “beamed-in” to hurting disciples. Our goal is to someday broadcast in all the languages of the world, thus helping to unite the true discipling churches.

As [2 Corinthians 2](#) teaches, God has truly led us in triumph through the years. In 2000, after 21 years since the beginning of Boston, I quoted Winston Churchill concerning where the Boston Movement (ICOC) churches were at: “This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But perhaps it is the end of the beginning.” In 2001 the “Great Tribulation” began to occur. August 2005 is not a new beginning but an exciting Episode 2! I believe with all my heart, God will someday use some of the “valiant but wiser,” past leaders of His movement to meld with young

Spirit-filled leaders to forge a new brotherhood leadership to spearhead the evangelization of the world in the 21st century. And this time, to God be all the glory!

Kip McKean
August 21, 2005

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