

Kip McKean & the Portland International Church of Christ

How Kip Got the Leadership Position in Portland

Written February 2006 by the following former members who held their respective positions at the time the events related herein occurred:

Jenny Lynch

12 year member, staff member
San Francisco Church of Christ

Renie McGale

17 year member, wife of board member & house church leader
Portland Church of Christ

Gloria Keeney

20 year member
Sacramento Metro Church of Christ

To understand how the events of 2002-2003 affected the leadership of the Portland Church, it is important to understand the organization of leadership in the International Churches of Christ (ICOC). Although this has recently changed in some congregations, at the time of the events related herein, leadership was structured around a Lead Evangelist in each church. The other evangelists and the elders, if any, answered to this Lead Evangelist. Lead Evangelists answered to the World Sector Leaders, who in turn answered to Kip McKean, the World Evangelist.

In November 2002, the World Sector Leaders came together in Los Angeles, California; to discuss what direction the ICOC should take, since Kip McKean was still on sabbatical from his World Evangelist position. The World Sector Leaders reached consensus that each one of them should decide the direction of their own World Sector, rather than look to Kip McKean for direction as they had done in the past.

Shortly after this, in February 2003, an evangelist from the London Church of Christ, Henry Kriete, wrote a letter, *Honest to God*, enumerating a number of *evils*, abuses that were being glossed over by the leaders of the ICOC. His letter was a lengthy one, and was intended for the eyes of the world leaders only, for in the ICOC, only leaders could correct leaders. Leaders were also supposed to protect their people, not to alarm them. Thus, the letter initially went out to the leaders only, but a wise member of the London Church decided that for the good of the church, the letter should be available to all, and he posted the letter on the Internet for virtually unlimited distribution.

What followed caused a shake-up in the ICOC worldwide. Following are the events in three churches, which ultimately led to Kip McKean's return to a leadership position in September 2003.

These are firsthand accounts of members from the San Francisco Church of Christ (SFCOC) now known as Bay Area Christian Church, Portland Church of Christ (PCOC) and Sacramento Metro Church of Christ (SMCOC). It is important to note that as the seat of the NET World Sector, the SFCOC had authority over the PCOC and the SMCOC during this time.

* * * *

Moved by Henry Kriete's letter, *Honest to God*, the Sacramento and Portland churches felt the need to heed the letter and make changes accordingly. Many in both churches initially felt a great sense of relief and felt that these changes would bring much-needed repentance from the old way of doing things and would lead to happier, healthier churches.

Henry Kriete's letter spread like wildfire through the Sacramento Church. Everyone was talking about it, wanting to see change happen; forums were called for and planned. Some of the members were aware that the Portland Church was going through similar changes at the same time.

But when these forums in Sacramento did take place, Lead Evangelist John Hafer and Evangelist Mike Gambeski refused to acknowledge that the letter had anything to do with meeting in forums. They decided to ignore the call to repentance, trying to sweep it under the rug. They began the forums by asking the members what they felt needed to change. The SMCOC members insisted that Henry Kreite's letter be addressed. Anger, confusion and years of pent-up frustration came to a head. The congregation as a whole refused to allow the letter to be ignored.

In some forums, the evangelist received hours upon hours of the members recounting the abuses they had suffered under the evangelist's leadership. The people wanted solid answers and real change. This shook the established leadership significantly. In just a few short weeks, a new board was formed; leadership went from leading the church to dodging the members to resigning their positions. Sacramento then began the task of redefining itself. Wanting to make changes and wanting to establish new leadership, discussions as a church were held as how to accomplish this.

Change in the Portland Church took a different form. It is important to note that in the very beginning of 2003, Russ Ewell, Lead Evangelist of the SFCOC, came in with several of his staff from San Francisco to convince the Portland Church that there was sin in the church that certainly would destroy it if not dealt with. Hours upon hours of self-examination under the scrutiny of SFCOC staff led to leaders being hand-picked by the SFCOC staff to oversee a change in the direction of the church and changes in the dynamics of membership. As a result, the Portland church was left in a vulnerable position; with a consensus group appointed by the SFCOC staff, certain *problem* relationships identified, and the effectiveness of its Lead Evangelist, John Di Giorgio, officially in question.

The San Francisco Church, exerting its authority over the Portland Church, made the decision that Rick and Kerry Anderson would come to Portland to oversee finances for San Francisco,

in February 2003. Their oversight area included the outlying churches which answered to San Francisco, namely Sacramento, Fresno, Anchorage and Portland. The Andersons had no loyalties, nor deep ties to Portland; they were there simply to execute directions given to them by the San Francisco church.

In Portland, not long after this, Henry Kriete's letter was circulated among the house church/zone leaders and longtime members. Those in Portland who read it were initially encouraged that the changes they knew needed to happen were now out in the open. There was a great sigh of relief. Always before, changes were only preached from the pulpit. Suddenly change was being preached towards the pulpit from a fellow evangelist, Henry Kriete. But almost as quickly as relief was felt, it was replaced by confusion, as the Lead Evangelist and his wife, the Di Giorgios, had decided to resign.

For the first time in the history of the PCOC, the founding members and those who had served for years did not want to allow the SFCOC to appoint new leadership. Among the house church/zone leaders and board members, talk began of rising up and appointing a selection committee from among the members to hire new leadership. With so many ICOC leaders around the world finding themselves without staff positions, (as a result of upheavals in the wake of *Honest to God*), it was thought that an evangelist could be hired who could help make the needed corrections in the course of the church. This was a possibility since the Portland Church had \$80,000 in the bank.

This thinking was a radical departure from the way things had been done in the past. So as not to alarm the congregation, these conversations were held in secret. Questioning the authority of the SFCOC had never been allowed. In order to protect Portland's members, the board was planning to present this idea to the church. But plans for the meeting were leaked to the Andersons, who had temporarily taken over leadership of the church, even though they were only financial advisors.

In San Francisco it became apparent to Lead Evangelist Russ Ewell and his staff that San Francisco was losing Portland, in addition to having problems with Sacramento. The staff in SFCOC felt at that time that the Andersons were not going to make it as the leaders for Portland. The main goal of Russ Ewell and his wife, Gail, was to keep Portland, Alaska and Sacramento under the authority of the San Francisco Church, so as to maintain control over the money in those churches' bank accounts.

The San Francisco staff decided to send Rich and Antonette Hua to Portland. A team of people from SFCOC staff decided that the best course of action was for them to get the Portland board members who would be opposed to hiring the Huas to step down through intimidation, humiliation and abusive disciplining practices.

Basically, the Huas were going to be forced into leadership in Portland and the staff in SFCOC did not care how many of the Portland congregation left. SFCOC staff wanted control of the bank account.

When the Huas were sent to Portland, they went under the guise of checking up on Portland and how the members were doing. Later, the Huas announced at a Sunday service how happy they were that they were now leading the PCOC. No mention had been made to anyone prior to this, that Rich and Antonette Hua were even being considered as leaders for the Portland church.

The Huas took over the leadership of the Portland church as the Portland Board members were planning to go before the congregation with the proposal to seek out and hire a new evangelist for the Portland church, apart from SFCOC. The Huas knew about the plans for this meeting. As planned ahead of time by SFCOC leadership, the Huas set about maligning the members of the Board who were part of this so-called division. They talked about these Board members publicly, discussing their weekly giving habits, and otherwise instilling doubt about them to their friends to the point where it was decided to ask all members to resign from the Board or be disfellowshipped. Only one brother stood up and called the slander of the Board members wrong and shameful. All the men and women who did not want the SFCOC to retain authority over the Portland Church were pressured to resign from the Board. Rich Hua and Rick Anderson then placed themselves on the Board and set about to control it.

While Portland's plans were being thwarted, Sacramento had stayed its course in seeking out change for itself. The San Francisco leadership, Russ Ewell and his staff, had come to Sacramento on several occasions. Initially, they had given Sacramento the blessing to go ahead and break away from being under San Francisco's rule if the members chose to. Russ Ewell stated,

"I understand how you must feel. I'm tired of taking orders from other people all the time myself. When we had the members in the city of Davis leave Sacramento to commute two hours to San Francisco, it wasn't my idea. I thought the whole idea was stupid. But I didn't want to be told to 'fly half way across the world and let's talk about it;' just to be told as to why I should agree with an idea that I thought was stupid. So, I had Davis switched to San Francisco. Now, as a sign of my repentance I had Davis return to Sacramento this past December [2002]. I like making decisions for San Francisco, so I understand why you wish to be on your own. If this is what you choose to do, then fine, you have my blessing."

Shortly thereafter, Sacramento decided to do just that, to make its own choices and decide its own course. San Francisco staff, upon hearing this news, returned to Sacramento, in an attempt to reassert control. At this meeting, Scott Colvin from SFCOC was sharing how Portland had been in the same dilemma as Sacramento. They had been leaderless just as Sacramento now was, but how happy Portland was now, for they had new leadership in place sent to them by San Francisco. Seeing as how Portland was so much better off now, San Francisco offered to do the same for Sacramento. San Francisco would be more than happy to send new leadership for Sacramento as they had done for Portland, in order to help in time of need.

Some in Sacramento knew better, having heard of how Portland's Board was trying to decide for themselves how to run the church and who should lead it. After this announcement, Scott

Colvin was approached and asked why he had lied about Portland. Sacramento knew that Portland did not want the leadership sent to them, and in fact, Portland had not even been told that San Francisco was sending leadership; they only found out when Rich Hua stated one Sunday morning from the pulpit how happy he was to be able to be leading the Portland Church. Not a word had been mentioned to Portland leadership about the installation of the Huas as leaders prior to this extraordinary statement. Contrary to Scott Colvin's representation, the Portland Church had found out about the supposed leadership change at a Sunday Service. Scott Colvin stood speechless, dumbfounded, and unable to respond. He took the first opportunity to find the exit without ever answering the question.

* * * *

After the Unity Meeting in 2002, legal documents, which were supposed to bind Sacramento under the authority of San Francisco, had been improperly signed. This was made known to the congregation, and this fact combined with the knowledge that the Sacramento church had \$300,000 in its bank account, fueled the desire to be independent from San Francisco all the more. Sacramento had always been told how the church had been a drain on SFCOC financially, was indebted to them, and that SMCOC was continually in debt to SFCOC. That was not true; members now knew that Sacramento had \$300,000 in the bank and was not legally bound to San Francisco.

While Sacramento was breaking free, Portland remained in turmoil. Portland members were told to "unconditionally support whoever the San Francisco Church decided to send to the church to lead or they would no longer be considered a member of the Portland Church of Christ." The question was asked as to why, under what or whose authority were these actions being taken? Portland was told that San Francisco's authority was based on two main concepts:

- 1) Ecclesiastical Control – meaning whoever plants the church owns the church.
- 2) Apostolic Succession – meaning that since the time of the apostles, whoever is sitting in the seat of leadership has the authority of the apostles themselves, as though the apostles had laid their hands on them and transferred their power.

These were the justifications given to Portland for taking the control away from the members of the PCOC and giving it to the Huas. It was ludicrous. Portland saw their hopes and dreams fueled by decades of faithful service going up in smoke.

A short time later, the new house church/zone leaders, as directed by San Francisco, met and devised a plan to weed out those in the church who were opposed to the authority of the SFCOC. People were individually given the ultimatum to "unconditionally support whoever San Francisco Church decided to send to the church to lead or they would no longer be considered a member of the Portland Church of Christ."

During this time San Francisco was having some problems as well. It became obvious that San Francisco could not afford to lose the Huas who were very loyal to the Ewells. Keeping

Portland required more than ecclesiastical control. It required having a Lead Evangelist who was loyal to Russ and Gail Ewell AND having ecclesiastical control. At this point, spirituality was equated with loyalty to the Ewells, rather than with anything having to do with the Bible. SFCOC needed to bring the Hua's back to San Francisco and find someone to replace them in Portland.

It so happened that Kip McKean was out of a job and was coming off of the time frame during which the Los Angeles Church of Christ had agreed to pay him for his sabbatical. No one wanted him in their church. No one wanted to hire him. Obviously, at this point, there was much turmoil and many people openly did not like Kip or want him anywhere near their ministry.

There was a meeting for the San Francisco staff at a restaurant called *Scores* in San Mateo, California. The staff was discussing the problems they were having in San Francisco, Sacramento and Portland. With Kip McKean seeking to lead a church, there was talk about sending him to Sacramento, but the idea was shot down rather quickly because at this point Sacramento was considered a lost cause and it did not seem possible that it would work. Then Russ brought up the idea of Kip and Elena McKean taking over the Portland Church. Initially many of the staff balked, because Russ and Gail Ewell themselves had been telling the staff that Kip was still not seeing the things that he had done and not taking responsibility. But now Russ wanted Kip to lead Portland.

It was decided to send Kip to Portland. San Francisco was very concerned about the money in the bank in Portland. San Francisco hired Kip and after Kip took over the Portland Church, Russ Ewell seemed to pretty much let go of Portland.

After this decision was made, it was announced to the Portland Church that Kip McKean was going to come to PCOC and see if he wanted the leadership post of the church. This was such a random shift for the Portland church after the dramatics that had taken place in recent weeks. Many leaders and members of the Portland Church went to Kip and tried to persuade him that the leadership methods of the past were simply destructive and should not continue. It was futile. Kip refused to engage in reasoning together, and responded with one trite answer after another. Kip said, "**Of course a mature disciple should always get behind their leaders, no matter what.**" That was the final straw for many. Couple after couple went to Kip and confronted the same stubborn refusal to listen. Over the next month or so, 200 of the 300 members left the Portland Church.

Many returned for an Apology Night held two months later in Portland. Nothing was resolved and no one took responsibility for what had been done. There was no admission of wrongdoing nor of wrong methods. No one who had left returned to the Portland Church because of that night. In fact, many more made the decision to leave.

By the time Kip was sent to Portland from San Francisco, the Huas and the Andersons had already taken control, seen a new board elected that was on their side, and pretty much weeded out the main dissenters. The house church/zone leaders that remained were supportive of San Francisco. The ones who were not supportive were no longer house church/zone leaders.

There was a house church/zone leaders' meeting where Kip spoke. At this meeting, all present agreed that they wanted to hire him. There was no one who would have said no, for all those opposed had been removed in advance. That is how it can be said that officially, the Portland church decided to hire Kip.

This is how Kip got leadership of the Portland Church. The San Francisco Church of Christ thwarted all efforts on Portland's part to become independent and choose their own direction. The SFCOC staff then proceeded to manipulate the board and the congregation, finally placing Kip McKean in the Lead Evangelist role to maintain control. San Francisco wanted to make sure that Portland's money stayed under SFCOC control. After all, they had lost Sacramento; they had to make sure that they didn't lose Portland too.

* * * *

Postscript from Gloria: There has been talk of how Kip came to Portland and said that he was deciding between Portland and Sacramento as far as which church he would like to lead. This statement is false, as Sacramento had already broken away from San Francisco. Sacramento was not a choice at that time; the only choice left of the two was Portland.

Postscript from Jenny: I have no financial records to prove it, but I believe that there was some sort of monetary agreement that took place, along the lines of Russ gives Kip a new church and Kip pays Russ off. I was in the upper leadership, but Russ did not even let upper leadership see the books or know where all the money went. He kept everyone in the dark to one degree or another except maybe one or two people in administration who knew it all.

Postscript from Renie: One of the most frustrating and shocking things that happened after Kip came to Portland was the lack of response from other evangelists and elders nationwide. We had desperately sought help from other leaders in various congregations across the United States only to be brushed off and ignored. We wanted help to overcome Kip's stubborn refusal to see the need for change; our cries fell on deaf ears.