

A Gathering of Connections

The Oregon Christian Convention Historically and Personally

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Pioneer Christians in Oregon established a place and a time each year to gather and connect. They created a setting that reflects the simplicity of their faith as well as their own confidence in a bright future. The tabernacle they built in 1891 is huge and raw as if the builders just finished hanging the beams. Each year on the last Tuesday of June people begin to gather on the Turner historic memorial grounds. Familiar faces mingle with strangers and enter into an experience. It is like and unlike so many other “church” events yet it is unique and significant both historically and personally. The Oregon Christian Convention connects people in a week long experience that incorporates reunion, challenge, history, inspiration and unity.

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I stick my key into the padlock and push open the large wooden door. Virginia gave me the keys a week ago. I love having them.

“This one is to the tabernacle and this one opens the door back behind the stage.”

All the pews are covered with tarp so that the bird and bat droppings will not soil them. I turn right and enter the first room. It is cluttered with remnants. Three majestic chairs sit next to an old wooden folding chair. There is a weathered pedestal and an empty glass case marked “for the museum.”

I keep going, behind the stage there is a narrow passage. The frame of a window sits broken on the floor. The passage is lit by the windows still hanging. They allow the sun to filter in. The wooden planks lay silent as I make my way to the hall of memories. This was always a quiet place.

I unlock the padlock and enter into the memories. Once it was an organized room with photos and relics placed with pride into the glass cases. Most everything is in boxes

now. A grand old podium sits stacked with musty hymnals. A huge roll of insulation is stuffed into one corner. On a counter, antique photos lay staring up at the sagging ceiling. I start digging in a box. Inside there are papers from bygone days. There are words of encouragement, pleas for support, joyous announcements. There are small pieces of paper that capture a convention past and look forward to the next. Always they declare the roots and always they look forward with expectation of great things to come.

I recognize names and faces. Many are gone now. They thought this place was worthwhile. They came here because it had meaning for them. In their eyes I see a passion for the gospel. I see a desire to change their world for the better. I can hear their challenge to me. I want you to understand their heart. I want you to understand the hearts that built this place for me. Perhaps you will hear their challenge and see that they built it for you as well.



History

Out of the seed of a simple faith sprang an early church that flourished in the polytheistic world of first century Rome. Simplicity in doctrine and practice allowed the church to be portable as well as viable. The disciples were charged to go and “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” They were to teach the love they had learned from Jesus. He promised to be with them “always even to the end of the age,” (Holy Bible NKJ Matthew 28:19-20). The early church embraced this mission in a spirit of unity; living transformed lives they took the light of the gospel and reflected it into the world around them.

The church is the body of Christ: the hands and feet, eyes and ears of a living Savior. The early church was called to work together as *one* body. Paul implores the church at Ephesus to be “diligent to preserve the bond of unity in the spirit of peace. There is one body and one Spirit...but speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,” (Holy Bible NASB Ephesians 4:3-4; 15-16a). Unity in the early church demonstrated the loving power of God to draw all people to himself.

The power of unity began to fracture early in the history of Christianity. Personal agendas and individual interpretations began to overshadow Paul’s plea: “beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (Holy Bible NASB Colossians 3:14). By the 18th century the church had become a broken body. Sectarianism had created schools of thought that rejected each other with one hand as they embraced a Savior who had prayed for them to be one.

The Reformation Movement was birthed out of the desire to restore “primitive Christianity.” The division and strife among Protestant churches stirred some to look back to the beginning of the church. Their goal was not to create a new denomination but to “unify all professing believers in one church family” (Rushford 6). Sectarianism had created denominational dissention and strife yet it was a “stage between the enforced unity” of a church backed by political power and the “voluntary unity of a church which includes all Christians and leaves them free where Christ left them free,” (Garrison 40). The Restoration Movement became the next step toward a united church.

Frontier America was fertile soil for a movement that focused on simplicity, unity and “primitive Christianity” (Rushford 7). Restoration Christians brought with them a

desire to see the church planted in unity. The un-churched “wilds of Oregon” (12) provided a field of opportunity to further a cause that had the potential of creating one church family under the banner of Christian.

Another phenomenon that sprang up in frontier America was the camp meeting. This type of gathering was an innovative response to the needs of isolated settlers in new territory. It allowed them a time of gathering, a time to lay down the heavy work load of farm life and be refreshed. Camp meetings were a time of reunion, a time for making new friends, sharing meals, (Camp Meeting, wikipedia).

In 1852 Glen O. Burnett called the first camp meeting of the disciples in Oregon. The need to connect was great. There was also a need for “more brethren of teaching talent and Christian character,” (Dornhecker 15). In Doug Dornhecker’s thesis “A History of Annual Meetings of Disciples of Christ in Oregon to 1877” he suggests that a “conviction was growing that there was more work to be done than there were people to do it,” thus the annual meeting was birthed from a desire to “begin doing something about it” (15). The first meeting was “held in an oak grove near the present town of McCoy,” and “hailed as an inspiration” (Swander 48).

In 1885 the annual meeting was held on the grounds at Turner. David Truman Stanley published an eyewitness account of the event in the July 25, 1885 issue of the Christian Standard. Stanley reports that “The camp-ground is the gift of Sister Turner, and is located in a beautiful grove of oak, fir and pine, on the bank of Millcreek,” (Stanley 3). Through the eyes of David T. Stanley one can see the “tiny columns of smoke ascending near each camp” and hear the children’s “merry laugh in perfect accord with the other surroundings” (3). The evening session was held in a great arbor covered

with boughs and lighted with lanterns. Stanley reflects that the “light mingles with the twilight and gives everything a peculiar appearance. The services are impressive, and at the close all depart feeling that they are ‘a day’s march nearer home’” (8). He sums up the event by stating that all felt “refreshed and returned home with renewed zeal for the cause that is above all other causes” (8). In closing Stanley looks forward with enthusiasm and confidence to next years meeting “no doubt but everything will be so well arranged that the next meeting will far surpass this one in all respects” (8).

The history of the Oregon Christian Convention is filled with ups and downs. The vision of unity among all Christians under a single banner did not fully succeed. The high ideals of the Restoration movement gave hands and feet to the principle of unity yet as society changed so did the focus of the movement. Separations occurred that created division.

Pioneer Oregonians were linked with a commonality that is not present in modern culture. Most were farmers from small communities. They had “common duties, common problems, common pleasures” and from this sprung up a “kinship” that linked them together (Swander 47). Modern culture is diverse. People live in cities, towns, suburbs and small rural communities. The kinship of pioneer commonality is lost in a society rushing in different directions. Today different communities represent different issues, people groups and focus of ministry. Yet there is a commonality that cannot be dismissed. It continues to shine unity as the “polar star” (Busic) of a movement that began with the inception of Christianity. It is the bond of Christ. It is a kinship we cannot deny.



From the backroom of the tabernacle I take away a large plastic tub of slides. They are all jumbled together. An image from 1952 is wedged between a stack of slides from the seventies. I have this desire to sort them out.

Families keep photo albums. Looking into the faces of ancestors we often see ourselves. As I hold the images up to the light I see reunion. I see a family that loves each other gathering together to renew the bonds of kinship.



Reunion

Jubilee Lodge was built in 1967. It was a modern facility that gave the convention the ability to expand its scope of services. Today it continues to act as dinning hall, dormitory and meeting place. On a cement floor long wooden tables are surrounded by metal folding chairs. I met Lloyd Love at Jubilee to get his impressions of the Oregon Christian Convention. Lloyd has been attending OCC since childhood. Now in his early forties he continues to attend the convention as well as participate in the leadership of the event.

The culture of the camp meeting *is* ‘family reunion.’ It creates a culture of social interacting. Activities and people are all in one place so that instead of having to go several places to see all of these individuals, which would take weeks, I drop by a camp site and visit an elderly friend, sit in Jubilee and have coffee with a professor, really talk with a missionary on furlough, and then go down the river with the kids from my youth group (Love interview).

As people gather together there is a sense of renewal as well as reunion. Reunion activates our sense of belonging. It connects us to a broader church family; it connects us with our own personal history.

The early church had a family connectedness. Paul demonstrates this by taking the time to write personal greetings to:

Prisca and Aquila...the church that is in their house ...Epaenetus...

Mary...Acdrionicus and Junia ... Ampliatus ... Urbanus ...

Stachys...Apelles...those in the household of Aristobulus...Heridion...those of the household of Narcissus...Tryphaena and Tryphosa ... Persis ... Rufus ...

Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them ...

Philogogus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympias and all the saints who are with them, (Holy Bible NASB Romans 16:3-15).

He constantly refers to these men and women as “beloved.” It is a list of names; an album of faces that were connected by a commonality of purpose and faith.

Elissa and Eryn Gregory are in their twenties. They have been attending the convention since childhood:

“When you see people you’re excited. Some of them you only see once a year.

You feel comfortable talking with them. You haven’t seen them but you still

know them.” (Gregory E. interview)

Both young women stressed the feeling of being “safe” and of “being able to let your guard down.” The retreat from the outside world to a place and time set aside for spiritual renewal and fellowship produces an environment that encourages connections.

The sense of family and of “knowing” others who are only seen at this event works to establish a common bond. There is a sense that *we* are with the beloved.

Frank Musgrave loves the Oregon Christian Convention. For him it is a connection to his own family history as well as a connection to the history of the restoration movement. I chatted with Frank over the phone

I always enjoy visiting with the variety of people, colleagues, people I went to school with. It’s a more relaxed atmosphere. There is an extended time so that you get a chance to meet with people, eat pie and drink coffee it makes, for me, a good time.

Frank enjoys the reunion. He summed up the feeling of others by stating “something like this is going to go on in heaven” (Musgrave interview). Meaningful reunion happens because there is an abundance of time free from busy schedules thus participants have the ability enter into genuine conversation.

Reunion is not a new development at the annual meeting. In 1876 a participant noted “as a reunion, it was altogether a success,” (Rushford 329). Those who have camped and congregated at the Turner grounds in the past have left a mark that is tangible and deliberate. Inside the 1846-1946 granite memorial were the words:

Gathered here on the tabernacle grounds at Turner Oregon...we send greetings to you fellow pilgrims...When you, yet unborn, read this message, we, the senders, shall have all passed to the Land of the Dead. But will you not think of us mingling with you? (qtd. in Dornhecker 11).

One powerful element of reunion at Turner is the concrete visual images that remind the “pilgrim” that they are a part of a body, a community, a culture of Christianity. Frank

Musgrave touches on the heart of this type of connection, “one of the things that is poignant is coming and participating and looking around at all the people that aren’t there” (Musgrave interview). Thus reunion occurs on two levels. The first level connects people with each other in a rich fellowship of old and new friends. The other level is a reunion with our past, with those who met here as a family before us. What makes this a unique reunion is how it works to add expectation to a heavenly gathering.

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As I sit on the floor in the hall of memories I flip through programs from past conventions. The faces of the speakers, missionaries, song leaders, program staff, children and youth workers are familiar to me. I remember them, not actual words they spoke, but I remember the energy that they brought to the pulpit.

I remember hearing singing like nothing I had ever heard before. Penny Penhollow would expect us to sing four part harmony and fortunately most people could do that. The resulting sound had a note of heaven in it; an incredible element of unity, as the uniqueness of voices melded together in a powerful expression of faith and hope.

I remember evenings when missionaries were honored. Young and old, men and women would rise to their feet as thunderous applause filled the rafters.

I remember Ray Smith, who had the exceptional gift of genuinely caring for people. He always had time for me. Ray gave me the task of handing out the nightly newsletter at the evening session. I can still feel myself standing in one of the doorways of the tabernacle in the evening sunshine, wearing my rainbow striped dress, shyly offering the paper to those who entered.

I remember the year the Kansas City Choral Ensemble sang. They would line up in the back of the tabernacle and then stream down the isles singing and clapping as they came. I remember standing by them as they lined up, seeing their shiny choir robes reflecting the sunlight. Their skin was a different color than mine and I loved that they were part of my family.

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Worship and Words

One key element in the connections that occur at OCC is the way the music and speaking link the past with the present. The events, speakers, special music and congregational singing are remembered as well as anticipated. The anticipation that the coming year will “be so well arranged that the next meeting will far surpass this one in all respects” (Stanley 8) has given health and vitality to the annual meeting.

Anticipation creates an energy of expectation. In 1963 Doug Priest attended the annual meeting ready to listen. Mont Smith was speaking about the need for missionaries in Ethiopia.

Mont showed pictures, he is an excited sort of guy...a real spellbinder of a speaker. He brought back the challenge of what there *was* and what was *needed* then he encouraged people to go...it changed our whole life...I felt the pull to missions...God was speaking (Priest interview).

Doug and Marg Priest went to Ethiopia in 1966 and continued to work through health clinics, education, evangelism and radio ministry until 1993. For Doug the convention is a “chance to tap into your roots again,” roots for him that led to a life work filled with the fruits of love and service.

Frank Musgrave attended the convention as a young person. He would always sit “up front by the post on the second row.” In the early 60’s Mark Hatfield was slated as guest speaker for the afternoon session. He was unable to attend so Medford Jones spoke in his place. Jones gave a call to ministry. Frank accepted the challenge and stepped forward to commit his life to one of service through full time pastoral ministry (Musgrave interview). The words spoken on a summer afternoon changed a life.

It is refreshing to go on a journey that takes us to a destination outside our normal sphere of fellowship and worship. Dr. Kenneth Johnston notes that people “need to get out and hear the gospel preached from different angles, from someone other than the local pastor” (Johnston interview). In an article entitled “I Like Conventions” Joseph H. Dampier writes:

People who live in isolation let local problems and opinions become bigger and bigger until they think the problem at Smith’s Corner is the only thing that has ever happened since Adam and Eve left the garden...Getting together at a convention helps us keep our perspective (Dampier).

In the expectation of gathering outside the local body comes a newness. D. H. Shearer enjoys good preaching and as a pastor he “*hears* so little of it,” thus the event allows him to “consider old themes in new and fresh ways” (Shearer interview). The newness that comes from the gathering on the historic grounds at Turner is possible because each year the focus is on energizing, inspiring and refreshing those who attend.

The words spoken at a convention can impact individuals in personal ways. Roland Terrell attended his first convention in 2004. He states that “the speakers were exceptional...the teaching effected my fellowship with the Lord a lot more than anything

I'd done for a long time. I grew a lot" (Terrell interview). In reference to speakers several people noted that they love to "soak it up." Betty Gregory remembered the speaker Ting Champi who "held your attention...he was very quiet and gentle, intense but soft, like sunshine" (Gregory B. interview). The dynamic messages of Cynthia Hale inspired many as she moved among those assembled, speaking with confidence and humility. Dick Busic notes that the experience "sends you out...I'm ready to go out in the world and be a little more alive in my service" (Busic interview). Words have a powerful ability to move us, transform us and connect us.

Worship through music is another aspect of the convention that connects. From the 1846-1946 granite memorial these words work as a reminder: "And as your songs of praise ascend to the Father, may the echo of our voices, coming across the century, join the chorus" (qtd. in Dornhecker 11). The past does seem to "echo" through the rafters as hymns, songs of praise and spiritual songs are belted out with enthusiasm.

Music plays a vital role in the convention. Tastes differ and there are times when not everyone is pleased with the style of music used. Yet it still acts as a connecting tool, music brings a group together. Lynn Gregory remembers the 2003 convention when she led singing on the opening night "I did a block of songs and then started a verse of *God Bless America* and, spontaneously, everyone started standing...to see the faces of the people...it was a special moment" (Gregory L. interview). Gayle Dell loves to sing. As the voices fill the tabernacle in song she "feels God has come down and is in our midst" (Dell interview). The poignancy of memories that are stirred with music as well as the capacity it has to reach toward God and connect us as a body, make corporate worship that unites in love essential to the health of the body of Christ.

The Oregon Christian Convention has always been a preaching convention. The focus on singing, preaching and fellowship has given it the ability to connect churches throughout the region in a commonality of faith. The focus on the simplicity of the gospel as practiced by the early church gives the convention a root not only to the early Oregon pioneers but also to the early church as they met to continually to devote themselves to “the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Holy Bible NASB Acts 2:42). In the March 1978 newsletter Edith Parrish writes

Education, Inspiration, Fellowship and Service! These four words characterize the dimensions of the Oregon Christian Convention of the Christian Churches on the historic Turner Memorial Grounds (Parrish).

By uniting churches together on historic grounds the roots of the past support the fruits of the present. As Elissa Gregory put it the church is “growing...living, not stale” (Gregory E. interview). The power of hearing the gospel spoken by different voices as well as the uniting of voices in song connect the convention with the ancient disciples who met in “simplicity of heart” (Holy Bible NKJ Acts 2:46).

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I lock the door to the hall of memories and make my way around the back of the stage to the wooden double doors leading outside. I glance at the quiet, empty space inside of the tabernacle and it stops me. The rafters pull my eyes upward and I feel that I am inside an old friend.

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Tabernacle

The tabernacle was built in 1891. Originally it boasted twin towers with large metal spheres on each tower representing the east and west hemisphere. According to Ray Smith “they could be seen for miles” (qtd. in Rarick). When the tabernacle was first built it was “one of the finest conventional halls in the state” (qtd. in Dornhecker 10). The exterior dimensions are 110 x 160 feet with a “roof that soars to a breathtaking peak above twenty-foot high walls,” (Dornhecker 10). Michael Shelly a pioneer who attended the first meeting in the completed tabernacle noted:

I think there was the largest gathering I ever saw at a religious gathering... Saw a good many that I have been acquainted with, some that I crossed the plains with. It was a grand sight. There was acres of people. Father & Mother Turner gave (the) church a magnificent gift. It is the largest chapel I ever saw (Shelly kjvuser).

The gift of the tabernacle has become a symbol for those who attend the convention. The simplicity of design that has lasted over a hundred years continues to communicate the simplicity of faith that the Restoration Movement sought to restore.

First impressions of the tabernacle range from “I loved it!” “It looked like a big barn to me,” “overwhelmed by the size,” “we thought it was Noah’s Ark,” and “really cool.” The huge space is covered by a roof that in the past has been filled with holes allowing sunlight to peak in. The walls are unpainted. The platform has no permanent adornment. In 1912 the building was:

“electrified” in reality by the presentation from the people of Turner of equipment for lighting the building and grounds...before that time the only light available was coal oil lamps, which at best were dim and sputtering. Sputtering

from the platform may be expected and tolerated; but from the lights, never.

(Swander 87).

A carpeted floor, a sound system, bathrooms and other minor alterations have not diminished its original design or purpose. The height of the ceiling, the cross beams, the pillars, the clear lumber all act as reminders of the past yet they also serve to demonstrate our purpose in the present.

The tabernacle is unique in many ways. In the moist Willamette Valley the wooden structure has stood for over 110 years. D. H. Shearer notes it has “survived the test of time.” It stands as a reminder of the “continuity of faith” (Shearer interview). The visual reminder allows the viewer to recognize that they are not the first: we all have a “part to play” (Busic interview). For many there is a sense that we are “treading where the saints have trod” (Musgrave interview). The symbol is not just of something past, a grand event that is never going to happen again but of something ongoing. The tabernacle is a place that links the generations visually. It is “not just history, it’s like a battlefield,” my generation is “a little link in the chain” (Gregory L. interview).

When the tabernacle was built it was large and new; the finest meeting hall in the area. Now it is not the largest or the finest, yet it is able to point the eye upward, it is able to take the mind back. The sun shining through the shingles, the birds soaring over head, the creak of the floor, the massive wooden beams, the pegs, the foundation, the enormous room, all have something to say to us if we can quiet ourselves and listen. In its own silent, constant way the tabernacle communicates that God works through people who are willing to seek him in simplicity and sincerity of heart. Thus the tabernacle instructs and connects us as it houses us.



I slip the padlock together and it clinks shut. As I walk down the ramp I look up and see the old cabins lining the gravel drive. I see the oak trees growing and alive. I cannot see the roots of the oak trees yet I know that those roots support the green growth.

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Unity

Modern conveniences, transportation, communication and lifestyles have all transformed contemporary culture into a something very different from the one reflected in the simplicity of the tabernacle and the rustic cabins that dot the grounds. The church also continues to change.

It is impossible to deny history. As Dr. Kenneth Johnston puts it “we have come out of history, our roots are in history. We are a result of what’s been done yesterday and has been brought over to today,” (Johnston interview). The seeds planted in the past have grown into the church as it stands today. In 1928 C.F. Swander wrote “We are reaping the fruitage now of seed sown then; tomorrow some one else will be reaping the fruitage of the seed we are sowing today. It is ever thus!” (Swander 84). The seeds of unity planted at the Oregon Christian Convention continue to grow. The need for that unity continues to be a relevant fruit worth realizing.

As the church has changed so to the Oregon Christian Convention has had to weather the storms of discord, dissention and departure yet it continues to work towards a unity of believers and a connecting of Restoration churches in the Northwest. Issues about biblical interpretation, church organization and politics have caused division. Three major groups have formed: Disciples of Christ, Independent Christian Churches and Non-Instrumental Churches of Christ.

One of the unique characteristics of the Convention over the years has been its effort to bring together “all expressions of our Christian Church life in a common spirit of love and concern in Christ” (Parrish). As Dr. Richardson expressed: it is a “fellowship that transcended preferences people had” (Richardson interview). An early motto of the restoration movement that expressed this sentiment reads “in essentials unity, in opinion liberty, in all things charity” (qtd. in Russell 11). The representation at the convention of disciple, independent and non-instrumental churches in Oregon has been celebrated as a victory for the body of Christ. George Knox commented that “it was a place where both disciples and independents could come and have fellowship. It was a unique thing in the whole U.S.” (Knox G. interview). This unity acted to connect people of different opinions in a spirit of freedom and love.

At the 1919 convention war and the issue of unity prompted a written resolution which was read by H.E. Rossell. C.F. Swander called it a “classic” that “deserves to live on the pages of our history in Oregon. It is as follows:

That we look with favor upon any movement for the union of God’s people and the answer of our Saviour’s prayer that is consistent with the divine authority as plainly revealed in the Gospel of His grace, and that we pledge ourselves anew to the great plea for the restoration of the church of the New Testament; and that in these days of unrest we plead more earnestly for the basic condition of membership in His church as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, confession of that worthy name before men, repentance from the heart of all sin and baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, followed by a holy life; and that we

reassert our blood bought liberty in Christ to go anywhere and everywhere without hindrance to proclaim the gospel of His love. (Swander 89).

This proclamation was prompted by World War One. Over the years world events and global issues have been reflected in the spirit of the conventions. At the 1938 convention “theological hairsplitting was not popular” (Torgerson 801). As World War II loomed S. Earl Childers “pleaded that we make all of life Christian, saying ‘When we enthrone Jesus in business we will not sell a million dollars’ worth of deadly warplanes to Russia one week and condemn them for their atheism the next,’” (qtd. in Torgerson 801). That same year the issue of prejudice prompted Alexander Paul to declare “After war, the curse of race prejudice is the greatest curse in the world. The domination of the white man is coming to an end and the combined forces of the black, brown and yellow races will predominate” (qtd. in Torgerson 801). Not everyone has always agreed on all issues. Yet, focusing on the common bond of faith and purpose promotes an atmosphere of unity that endeavors to face the challenges of the church in the modern world.

Families do not always get along well. They often have different opinions and different ways of doing things. Yet as Dick Basic suggests “we can learn so much from each other if we have a spirit of listening” (Basic interview). Connecting in this spirit allows for a “broadening...there is a sense of being involved in something bigger than the local church...a connection with people all over the state and beyond” (Shearer interview). The convention pulls people out of the local church family and gives them a place to hear and communicate with the larger family. Bob Gregory puts it well with these words: “churches get ingrown, they become isolated. It is important to know what is happening with the family at large” (Gregory B. interview). Thus by meeting with

brothers and sisters, face to face in a spirit of listening, the family is “joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, caus(ing) growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Holy Bible NKJ Ephesians 4:16).

In an age of instant communication and easy access to information it is possible to consider a week-long camp meeting tucked away in a little rural town as unnecessary and irrelevant. But the very fact that it forces a move away from the busy, often fragmented, schedule of everyday life allows it to function as a lens. Through that lens it is possible for the participant to hear and see individual people, preaching and music from a different perspective. It is a place and time that is available to *be present*, to be *in community* with the broader church in a spirit of unity. It works to connect the contemporary church in a unique culture that offers time and space to reflect and communicate.

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As I drive away from the convention grounds I am struck anew by its sense of place and purpose. The echo from the past challenges me. I am reminded of the sacrifices, hopes and faith of that “great cloud of witnesses” (Holy Bible NKJ Hebrews). I drive back into my modern conveniences, back into the 21st century with the knowledge that others have claimed their place in history and worked to shine the love of Christ to the world around them. I understand my place in the story a little better. I add my voice to the echo.

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In the technological world of the 21st century a new frontier separates us. In the place of mountain ranges, acres and acres of crops, rivers and forests there is a motion of

activity that sweeps us along beside each other yet isolated. Cell phones chime the importance of staying connected, emails hurtle messages through cyberspace linking homes in a virtual reality of being connected yet some vital element is absent. The gathering on the historic grounds at Turner provides a genuine connection that brings the beloved together in a sense of family that unites as it inspires. The Oregon Christian Convention is a place carved out in time by men and women eager to plant a restoration gospel in the “wilds of Oregon.” It is a place that links the contemporary church with the richness of its past as it informs and inspires the church to meet the challenges of its time.

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Interviews

Busic, Dr. Dick. Personal Interview. 17 May 2005.

Dr. Busic is the Vice President for Advancement at Northwest Christian College. He has been involved in the convention in different capacities such as program committees and registrar. Dr. Busic was the president of the convention in 1990.

Dell, Gayle. Personal Interview. 14 April 2005.

Gayle works at the Turner Retirement Home as a home health aide. She has attended the convention since the forties. She enjoys music and the color blue.

Fuller, Altie. Personal Interview. 20 May 2005.

Altie recently graduated from high school. She has been attending OCC since she was two years old. She wants it to continue. Her grandparents are long time attendees. They make it an annual event for all of their grandchildren to gather at OCC.

Gregory, Betty. Personal Interview. 10 May 2005.

Betty is the librarian at Garden Way Christian Church. She also teaches children's church. Betty has helped with the children's program several years at OCC. She has been attending since the fifties.

Gregory, Elissa and Eryn. Personal interview. 11 April 2005

Elissa is a Respiratory Therapist at Sacred Heart Hospital in Eugene. Eryn is an EKG Technician. They are sisters and have been attending OCC since early childhood in the eighties. Both have helped with the youth program.

Gregory, Lynn. Personal Interview. 9 May 2005.

Lynn is the committee chair for the Christian Education department at Thurston Christian Church in Springfield. She has been attending OCC since the seventies. She led the children's program at the convention for seven years and has participated in song leading as well as work with the youth in recent years.

Gregory, Robert. Personal Interview. 10 May 2005.

Bob is a retired minister. He currently attends Garden Way Christian Church in Eugene. He teaches a Sunday School class and is involved in visitation ministry. Bob started attending OCC in the fifties.

Johnston, Dr. Kenneth and Barbara. Personal interview.

Dr. Johnston was pastor of the Kern Park Christian Church in Portland for 19 years. He held the position of Director of Church Relations for ten years at Milligan College. Barbara is an accomplished pianist and vocalist. Dr. Johnston also spoke at the convention several times.

Keefe, Jim.

Jim is senior pastor at Hillsborough Christian Church. Jim first attended OCC in 1972. He has been actively involved in OCC for several years. He was convention president in 2002 and 2005.

Knox, George and Frances. Personal Interview. 9 May 2005.

George is a retired professor from Northwest Christian College where he taught New Testament and Homiletics. Frances is an accomplished vocalist. As a child, George attended boy's camp on the grounds. In 1951 he and Frances began attending and encouraging others to join them. He has been involved in the convention for many years. George was convention president in 1969.

Love, Lloyd. Personal interview. 14 April 2005

Lloyd is a youth pastor at Thurston Christian Church in Springfield. He has attended OCC since childhood. He has led the youth program for several years and was convention president in 2003.

McIndoo, Ed. Personal Interview. 9 May 2005.

Ed is a retired professor. He taught speech at Northwest Christian College since the early eighties. He was also the chaplain. Currently he is working for hospice as a chaplain. Mr. McIndoo was my college advisor when I first attended college at NCC. He has attended OCC since the late fifties. He was convention president in 1977.

Musgrave Frank. Personal interview. 22 April 2005

Frank is the pastor of Pomeroy Church of Christ in Pomeroy Washington. He has been attending OCC since childhood. His mother, Rita Musgrave, was an outstanding registrar who inspired record years in registration and attendance. As a child Frank participated in the work of mailings and follow-ups thus he was aware of the connections that occur at OCC.

Priest, Doug and Marj. Personal Interview. 6 April 2005

Doug and his wife Marj are retired missionaries. They worked in Ethiopia from 1966-1993. Currently they are serving at Noti Church of Christ. Doug has been the missionary speaker at the convention several times. Doug went to boy's camp at the convention grounds. He has many stories from camp that are worth asking about.

Shearer, D. H. Personal Interview. 21 April 2005.

D.H. is the pastor of Turner Christian Church. He has attended the convention since the seventies and been involved in the program in many ways. He is also on committees for Northwest Christian College and is involved in OCEF. He was convention president in 2000.

Terrell, Roland and Barbara. Personal Interview. 6 April 2005

Roland worked for the City of Eugene. Barbara is a retired bookkeeper. Barbara and Roland attended their first convention in 2004. They loved it! They spent eight weeks in May and June of 2005 working on the grounds in an effort to “do their part.”

Richardson, Dr. William. Personal Interview. 21 April 2005.

Dr. Richardson is a retired professor. He taught Bible and history at Northwest Christian College from 1947 to 1978. He then served at Emanuel School of Religion in Tennessee for ten years. Dr. Richardson first attended OCC in 1940 as part of a male quartet. He was the featured Bible Lecturer several times at the convention.

