

Letter to the Portland International Church of Christ

From Chris and Sonja Chloupek – October 10, 2005



In the early 1990s we were baptized into Christ through the effort of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ. Later, I was appointed an Evangelist and Sonja was appointed a Women's Ministry Leader in the "Orange County Region." We later served in these roles in the "AMS" Region. Sonja also was able to co-host KNN. Both of our lives were radically changed in becoming Christians. We loved the ministry and we had a great passion serving other disciples and helping them be fruitful and faithful.

In April 2002 we stepped out of the ministry and moved to Phoenix. While here in Phoenix our faith has been slowly ebbing away. We have been greatly saddened as countless friends in the congregation have either "walked away" to join mainline churches of Christ and even denominational churches or have "fallen away" from God altogether since the Phoenix Church has stagnated. For the past several months we too have strongly considered the option to attend other churches. Even before our visit to Portland, with our vision from the Bible and our earlier experience in Los Angeles, we felt the best option would be to start a new congregation of

only sold out disciples where the word is preached and people are called to live the righteous life of a disciple.

Though we did not really know Kip and Elena very well, we respected them for their love for God and people and their vision of faith to build churches around the world. Biblically, we are grateful for the instrumental way God used them in saving our souls. However, we heard more and more about their ministry in Portland -so much good, so much negative. When some of our best friends, Jeff and Debbie Thompson, moved there in August, they said to us, "You must see the church for yourselves!" Here, the Word is being preached without compromise and the leadership has striven to eliminate the sins and weaknesses of the past. It's the church we were converted in!"

On September 16th my wife and I took a trip up to visit the Portland Church. We attended a Saturday night devotional and then on Sunday the worship service and in the afternoon a Bible Talk Leaders Meeting, which was open to anyone who wanted to attend. Even a brother who was restored at the Saturday night devo was there! The services were so inspiring! The singing of the congregation convicted and encouraged us to no end. People came early and stayed late. The fellowship was rich in love and encouragement. The love and zeal for worshipping God was something we had not experienced in a long time. The Word was preached "not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction", [1 Thessalonians 1:5](#). We felt like the Scripture in [Ephesians 5:14](#) says; "Wake up, O Sleeper, rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you". Sonja and I were convicted of our lukewarmness and felt like God had lifted a veil from our hearts and eyes. Besides witnessing a restoration on Saturday we were also brought to tears seeing four baptisms on Sunday! The individual talks we had over the four days were with many disciples ranging from marrieds with kids to campus to singles. They all had different stories. Several couples had moved from former ICOC churches because they felt they were dying spiritually. Whatever the situation, the common theme was that they were being revived from their lukewarmness. The simple, but powerful principles for this revival were, doing church as a team, dedication to daily contact and love and obedience for God's Word. The leadership has an expectation for the church to obey the Bible and disciple one another in love. Thank you Portland Church for your hospitality and refreshment. [2 Thessalonians 1:3](#) is the Scripture that best reflects our feelings about you, "We ought always to thank God for you brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love everyone of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your

perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring."

Upon returning to Phoenix, on Thursday September 22, we met with the Phoenix lead couple, Gordon and Theresa Ferguson, and shared with them what we saw and experienced. We asked if they would go to Portland and observe the fellowship and be willing to learn from the leaders and members. Their response was, and I quote, "Absolutely not...we tried that 20 years ago and we are not going to do it again." (This statement was in reference to their move to Boston, then led by the McKeanes, to join the Boston Movement that became the ICOC.) Because of their answer and the lukewarm state the Phoenix Church has been in for years, we had no choice but to start a congregation that wants to learn from members in it that are thriving spiritually. They marked us and called us divisive. We are not divisive. We are not trying to build a congregation that draws people away from Christ; we are trying to help people draw closer to Christ.

Therefore, on Sunday, September 25 in our home, we believe the Holy Spirit initiated a new congregation, which we are calling the Phoenix International Christian Church. We are deeply saddened by the response of the Phoenix Valley leadership, as they have not marked anyone of the hundreds that have left who even invited others to the new situations they were in. Let us be clear, we consider everyone in the Phoenix Valley Church of Christ to be our brothers and sisters in Christ. Prayerfully this respect can be mutual.

Portland Church, please pray for us. We are excited as at our first service on September 25, we had eight non-Christian visitors in our home! Then this Sunday October 9, we had our first baptism, Trinity, our neighbor across the street! Keep setting the pace and we pray that someday there will be true unity in our worldwide fellowship and an evangelized world. That is still Jesus' vision.

With much love,

Chris & Sonja Chloupek