



The Journey Continues

A History of the Oregon City Church of
Christ

2013

Celebrating 70 years of continuous faith

By **Ron Murphy**

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The church of Jesus Christ was established by Jesus himself on the day of Pentecost 33 A.D. (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2). In doctrine the Word of God was taught with no human creeds. In organization there were elders, deacons, teachers, and saints in each congregation. In unity, the church was one. What the Word of God did in the first century it will do today! We have the same Lord, the same Bible, the same hope of heaven. We must be members of the same church as those in the beginning, to which all the saved were added by the Lord (Acts 2:47). Our desire has been a return to the simplicity of New Testament Christianity. This desire to be no more than just Christians, without denominational creeds or doctrines, is the heritage handed down to us by those disciples who came before us. This is the story of those disciples who came to Oregon City to preach the gospel and establish His church.

Before the Europeans arrived, Native Americans fished and traded in the area surrounding Willamette Falls and several tribes lived in the area.



Dr. John McLoughlin

In **1829**, Dr. John McLoughlin of the Hudson Bay Company arrived and staked a 2 square mile land claim at Willamette Falls and began to build. These buildings became the first white settlement in the Willamette Valley. The settlement that would become Oregon City was first known as Willamette Falls.

One who would set the course for thousands who would follow was Jason Lee, a Methodist missionary who came overland and built a mission near Salem in **1834**. He sent back

marvelous reports that would soon encourage other settlers to come to Oregon¹.

In **1835**, Presbyterian missionaries followed. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman along with Henry and Eliza Spalding were the first to come to the northwest by covered wagon. These were the first white women to make this difficult 5-month overland journey. Encouraged by their success, others would soon follow.

1842 was a crucial year. As of yet there wasn't even an Oregon Trail, but that all changed. The first wagon train, with men, women and children, made the journey. The following year, "The Great Migration" begins.

1843



There were members of the church of Christ on those first wagon trains immigrating to Oregon. One story that comes down is about Reuben Lewis who arrived in **1842** and his Christian friend, William H. Wilson who immigrated in **1843**. These two

friends worked together in a sawmill in Oregon City. At that time there was a Molalla Indian named Cockstock who had become known as an aggressive desperado. He was the leader of a few young, hot-headed Indians who developed bad relationships with the settlers. In the spring of **1844**, he and his band came into Oregon City fully armed, with war paint, and were displaying hostile aggressions. There was an attempt to apprehend Cockstock, but he resisted and fired his gun into the crowd. In the melee Cockstock and two settlers were killed. William Wilson who was working at the sawmill when the shooting started came to assist in the

action. When he had fired his gun, he was hit in the hip with an arrow. Without thinking, he grabbed hold of the arrow and tried to yank it out. Unfortunately, the arrowhead was left imbedded in his hip. One of the times when he had

¹ Each state is allowed to contribute two statutes to the U.S. Capital building in Washington D.C. These are to be representatives of those who contributed most to their history. A statue of Jason Lee, along with a statue of Dr. John McLoughlin were donated by Oregon as their two choices

recited this story he stated that he had carried that arrowhead in his hip for fifty-six years²

Andrew and Ann Hood was another early pioneer Christian family who settled in Oregon City. On their way to Oregon they showed their love of Christ by sharing their scanty supply of food and supplies with two families who had lost everything.

Fewer migrated to Oregon in **1846** than in the previous year. However, two very able preachers for the restoration of New Testament Christianity were among them. Dr. James McBride and Glen Owen Burnett were best friends and had been powerful preachers in Missouri. They would have a tremendous impact on the church in Oregon³.

The church was already meeting in Oregon City as early as **1847**. Andrew and Ann Hood invited Glen Owen Burnett to preach the gospel of Christ to a large audience in their Oregon City home. For Sunday, June 13, 1847, the Methodist minister in Oregon City, George Gary made this entry in his diary: "There is a great meeting today, judging from appearances, at the city hotel, as it is called. The Campbellites are holding their first great meeting in this place. They have the multitude with them."⁴ In **1847**, Samuel and Elizabeth Markham would travel from Michigan. They settled in Oregon City and built a log cabin with a store attached on the front⁵.

Evangelist H. M. "Mac" Waller left for Oregon with a wagon train made up mostly of members of the church of Christ on April 5, **1847**. His biography states:

² he would later marry and settle in Douglas County

³ Abraham Lincoln would appoint Dr. James McBride as the U.S. Minister to the Sandwich Islands (later known as the Hawaiian Islands). During that time, McBride became friends with Admiral Enquits, the commander of the Russian Navy that was stationed in Honolulu. In conversations with the commander he learned that the Russians would be willing to sell the Alaskan Territory. McBride then began to send a series of letters trying to persuade William Seward, the Secretary of State, to make the acquisition. So there is a strong connection between the acquisition of Alaska and an outstanding preacher of the church.

⁴ "Campbellite" was a derisive term used to describe disciples in the 19th century. Alexander Campbell was a leader in the Restoration Movement. It should be noted that Campbell insisted that followers of Christ should be known as "Christians" (Acts 11:26).

⁵ Their son, Edwin Markham, was born in this cabin in 1852. He did some preaching, but he would become known as the "Dean of American Poets." The Saturday Evening Post called him, "the most talked-of literary man in America" and *The New York Globe* called him "America's greatest poet"

“(He) landed at Oregon City, Oregon on the ninth of September, 1847, with fairly good health. Before he arrived in Willamette Valley he received messages from Brethren James McBride..., of Yamhill county, Glen O. Burnett, of Polk county, and Foster, living up on the Clackamas, asking him to come to their places and aid them in meetings. Not having any shelter for the winter, he could not accept their courtesy till he had cast about for a home. He left his mother and brother at Oregon City while he and others took a journey up the river as far as Salem and Corvallis. On returning to Oregon City, he preached a few times for the brethren there.”⁶

Another meeting with Glen Owen Burnett was held in December of **1847**. The time was chosen because the legislature would be in session. At least two of the legislators, Marcus Ford and Absalom Hembree were fellow Christians. Wilson Blaine, the Presbyterian minister, invited Burnett to preach in the Presbyterian building the first night. There was a large gathering including, Mr. Blaine and Dr. John McLoughlin who was a committed Roman Catholic. For the remainder of the week, Burnett was offered the use of the Legislative Hall where the legislature met during the day. On Sunday morning he preached on Christ being the foundation upon which the church was built (Mt. 16). Following the service, he received an invitation to attend the Catholic service at 2 in the afternoon. The priest preached from the same text, but tried to make Peter the foundation. When the service was over Burnett went to the Hood’s house. While he was there, to his surprise, the Catholic priest and Dr. McLoughlin dropped by for a visit. That evening there was a full house. One woman came forward wishing to be baptized into Christ. Burnett said, “About the hour of 10 o’clock that dark and cloudy night, could be seen a long and silent procession, with torches in the hands of those who went before, winding their way to the landing below the falls on the river. This strange spectacle excited some of the people on the opposite side of the river who came over in boats and lanterns. What does all this mean? And how is it we hear this beautiful singing? ... The place was below the falls of the river, and as the water rushed in fury with one long leap to the bottom below, and the mountains returning the confused echo, we led the lady down into the water, and gently laid her beneath its yielding waves.”

⁶ “Reminiscences of H.M. Waller, the Oldest Evangelist of the Church of Christ on the Pacific Slope,” Christian Standard, (February 4 - July 15, 1893).

Things changed radically in **1848** when gold was discovered in California. The gold rush nearly emptied the Oregon Territory. One account reported that “only five men were left in Salem” and Oregon City was reduced to “only a few women and children and some Indians.”

It was very difficult for the church to remain established in Oregon City. Church historian Clarence Swander says of Oregon City, “*This was one of the hard places in the state to get a foothold. Time and time again the effort was made only to be defeated*” (1928).

The historical records refer to the saints meeting in Oregon City in **1847**. Jerry Rushford counts ten churches meeting in Oregon including one in Oregon City. This is a puzzle to historians. Even though there were Christians living in Oregon City there is no record of a church actually being established.

John M. Harris arrived in Oregon at the beginning of 1866. In **1868**, he preached five sermons and organized a congregation of sixteen members in Oregon City. Harris says, “*The prospect for the cause in this place is good. Oregon City is one of the most romantic places I ever saw. It is situated at the great falls of the Willamette River, and is surrounded with the most beautiful mountain scenery on both sides of that great river.*” There is no mention of a congregation having ever met in Oregon City when he arrives. In **1871**, they report having 14 members.

This church apparently doesn't survive. In **1852**, Glen O. Burnett wrote to the *Millennial Harbinger*, “We have in Oregon about 1,200 disciples, but in a most disorganized conditioned.” The mid-1850s were tumultuous times. Polarizing political issues would affect the brethren. William Lysander Adams immigrated to Oregon with the pioneers of 1848. He was the founder of Yamhill University. In **1855** he moved to Oregon City and established the *Oregon Argus*, a weekly paper which became the mouthpiece for the emerging Republican Party. He is known as the “Father of the Republican Party in Oregon.” His editorials could be quite fiery as he opposed the “slavocrats.” There were outstanding brethren affiliated with the Democratic Party as well. The slavery issue was still being hotly debated. In **1857** slavery was prohibited by the new state constitution. However, at the same time, Negroes were prohibited from settling in Oregon.

Another disturbing trend at this time was the loss of many talented preachers who would leave Oregon for California and Washington.

Oregon achieved statehood in **1859**.



Many Christians were pursuing community service through politics. Christians were members of the legislature.

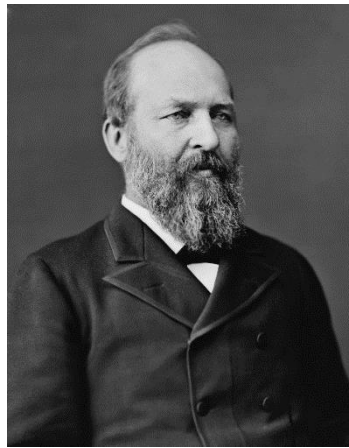
After the Civil War there was a member of the church,



George Woods

preacher in the Restoration Movement. He was an educator, general in the Civil War, and a politician.

George L. Woods, in the Governor's Mansion (1866-1870). In **1881**, James A. Garfield became president of the United States. In his younger years, he had been a



James A. Garfield

It will be a long time before we read of the church meeting in Oregon City. One of the older Christians said that the church once met at Holcomb on the site where the school now stands. Later it moved to the city of Stone (now Carver). There are records of disciples living in Oregon City around the turn of the century traveling to Stone to worship. Their evangelist, George P. Rich, was said to have converted nearly the entire community before his death in 1908, just one week after he had preached his last sermon. Like many churches in Oregon, that congregation no longer exists. By **1939**, there were only six churches still meeting in the entire state of Oregon.

Then World War II brought the third great immigration to Oregon and the number of congregations began to grow once again, reaching about 60 congregations by 1960

1943

In the early fall of **1943** a couple of families rented a building belonging to the Salvation Army and the present Oregon City congregation had its beginning. Lyle and Pearl Leach⁷ are due much of the credit for the beginning and early progress of the church. N.C. Martin along with his wife and 11 year old son were also part of this effort though they didn't remain long. Soon after the church began the Homer Quint family started attending and they have remained faithful to this day. Crawford Gilliam, along with his family came. He helped with preaching and later served as song leader. The Chet Haven family and Heston Havens family were also persuaded to help out.

The Central congregation on Division Street in Portland assisted the new work and within a year they had bought a building on the corner of 5th and Center Street in Oregon City.



Crawford Gilliam contributed much to the building up of the church and the remodeling of the building. He worked at a secular job through the week and preached on Sundays after Lyle Leach left to attend Freed-Hardeman College. Joe Lewis also assisted in the teaching and preaching as much as his army duties would permit. Melvin and Blanche Leach, parents of Lyle, also supported the work beginning in early **1944**. Their daughter, Dorothy Leach Linscott joined them. She was young, married with a small child and her husband, Merle, was away in WWII.⁸ About this time Reginald Rogers came and took over the preaching.

⁷ They would later become missionaries to Ethiopia. He and his wife were killed in an automobile accident in 1975 while on furlough from their work in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

⁸ Later Merle and Dorothy would become missionaries in San Juan, Puerto Rico for more than 10 years. He would also have a long preaching stent in Buellton, California

Jack Nadeau followed about **19451946**.⁹ Virgil Leach, another son of Melvin and Blanche Leach, preached some summers while home from Abilene Christian College.¹⁰ In January **1947** Frank and Jessie Blair moved into the area with their boys. Along with those already mentioned, the Andersons, the Pooles, the Mowreys, the Winslows, the Grays, the Wheelers, The Shrumps, the Hannis and the Brattains came along to work with this new church.

In **1948** the men blasted solid rock to put in a basement. L. Duane Canby¹¹, the preacher then says



“I remember well blasting rock for that new basement in 1948. My car received a dent from one of the flying pieces.”

They built a new building on top of the basement that

⁹ He and his wife Catherine later became missionaries to Germany.

¹⁰ He would become a preacher and along with his wife, Wilma, work with churches mostly in California.

¹¹ He returned in 2003 to speak at the church’s 60th anniversary.



would seat 200 and then several years later moved



the older building to form a wing on the new building for classrooms.

Linus and Leona Linscott, parents of Merle Linscott (who returned from the war in 1946), came to the church in **1948**.¹²

Leonard Woods came to preach in **1949**. He would leave the next year to go to the mission fields of Utah. He returned and preached from **1959 to 1961**.¹³

The first eldership was installed on December 18, **1955** with Forrest Anderson, Homer Quint, and Frank Blair.

By January **1960**, the church had 65 members and an attendance of around 100 each Lord's Day.

On September 9, **1968**, the church worshipped for the first time in their present building on Warner Milne Road.¹⁴

¹² They would be members here until 1973

¹³ Leonard died March 20, 1998. For the church's 50th anniversary, two of his sons came to help celebrate. Kevin taught the morning class and Greg led songs.

¹⁴ Over the years improvements have been made to the building and grounds. A fence was put around the entire property in 1995. A new porch was added to the building in 2000 after a Trimet bus hit the old one and destroyed it. In 2007, the pews were removed and individual seats were added. Also in 2007, a projector was added for the use of PowerPoint. In 2013 the projector was upgraded. The bathrooms were upgraded in 2011 and 2013. A playground for children was added in 2013.



This acreage with the house was purchased from the estate of the Honorable Judge Noble. The house originally was located near the road and had to be moved to its present site.

Bobby Brown¹⁵ came to preach in **1977**. There had been a terrible split within the church in 1976. Brother Brown came to help provide stability and leadership. These were very difficult and trying times, but by their faith the church was able to press forward.



On January 9, **1977**, the JOY Bus ministry began, not only to provide transportation, but to be a fun time of creative Bible learning in itself.¹⁶

¹⁵ Bobby Brown was well known by the brethren in Oregon City since he had preached here previously (1964-1970). Bobby was still preaching here when he died in the fall of 1986.

¹⁶ The JOY Bus continued until 1996.



Our current
Murphy, came in
first task was to
elders
to try to empower
to find a place of
the church. This resulted in the
additional deacons in November
these deacons were given
roles of ministry.



preacher, Ron
March **1987**. His
work with the

each member
ministry within
installation of
1987. Each of
responsible

Every year Ron has conducted a spring series on marriage or the home. He also began a monthly question and answer night. Over the years over 500 Bible questions have been answered. He has also presented around 50 special sermon series. For many years he directed the annual Vacation Bible School.

Then beginning in 1997, VBS evolved into the All Summer Bible Adventure (ASBA) which he continues to direct. The same year, Bible Busters began as a way to teach our children Bible basics.¹⁷ In **1999** he was asked by the previous eldership to serve as one of the elders of the church.

In **1998**, Ben Cook came right out of college to serve as an associate minister, mostly working with teens. While here, he organized several mission trips for the teens. There were also regular Purity Retreats, outings, Lock-ins, devotions, and things that accompany a well rounded youth program.

In **2006**, Ron had a discussion with Ken Hines about starting an outreach ministry to the Hispanic people of Portland. Ken was joined by Rudy Wray¹⁸ and on June 11, 2006 a Hispanic ministry began. John Jones, who was a deacon at the time worked with this ministry. When it became time to get a full time Spanish-speaking preacher, Raul Solis, evangelist at the Toluca, Mexico church agreed to come and help. After the Solis family arrived in **2007** a Sunday morning bilingual worship began. At about the same time English as Second Language classes began and have continued under the direction of Dale Reynolds. The following year the Solis family moved back to Mexico and at

¹⁷ This ministry began with Ron leading the classes. Then Ben Cook took a turn and finally, Cheryl Ruhl led the sessions for many years.

¹⁸ At the time Brother Wray was the director of Pan American Studies for Sunset School of Biblical Studies



the end of **2008** Eduardo Gandara, who had been working with a Hispanic ministry in Keizer agreed to come and work with us as he continued to work in Keizer. In **2009** the Gandara family relocated to Oregon City, but he continues to preach each Sunday in both Oregon City and Keizer.

The work that began in 1943, of which we are part, appears to be the only church of Christ in Oregon City that has survived for any period of time. It hasn't always been easy, but the church has thrived now for 70 years in this city.

We are thankful for the countless brethren who came before us and laid such a strong foundation on which we can build. We are thankful for the past 70 years and pray that the church will still be faithful in Oregon City when Jesus returns to take us home.

EVANGELISTS (years preached)

- Lyle Leach (43)
- N.C. Martin (43)
- Crawford Gilliam (44)
- Joe Lewis (44)
- Reginald Rogers (44)
- Jack Nadeau (44-46)
- L. Duane Canby (46-49)
- Leonard Woods (49-50)
- W.M. Speck (52)

- Arly Moore (53-55)
- Dennis Moss
- Holland Boring (57-58)
- Leonard Woods (July 59-61)
- Forrest Moyer (62-64)
- Bobby Brown (64-70)
- Karl Love (70-74)
- Ron Enos (75-76)
- Bobby Brown (76-86)
- Jeff Hicks (78-79, 81-83)
- **Ron Murphy** (March 1987 - Present)
- Ben Cook (1998 - 2011)
- Raúl Solís (2007 - 2008)
- **Eduardo Gándara** (2008 - Present)
- Steve Haney (Intern, 2008-2009)

Virgil Leach, Tom Grey, Arthur Graham, Dwight Holland, Marvin Towell as well as many others preached during summers or filled in between preachers.

ELDERS (years served)

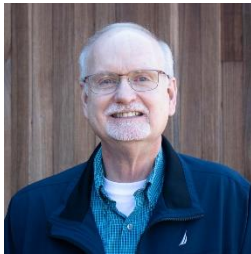
- Forrest H. Anderson
- Homer Quint
- Frank Blair
- Warren “Red” Higginbotham
- Tom Gray
- Phil Rabick
- Gene Davis
- Sam Lovelace
- Herman Speck
- Derrell Quint (1983 – 1990)
- Thurber Bilberry (1964 - 1999)
- Norman Hicks (1964 - 1999)
- Mike Powers (1990 - 2000)



Ron Murphy
(1999-Present)



Steve Partlow
(1999- Present)



John Jones
(2007 - Present)

DEACONS (years served)

- Phil Rabick
- M. L. Mowery
- Jim Vickerman
- Ernie Clark
- Sam Lovelace
- Bob Reynolds
- Ron Hicks
- Bud King (1987 - ?)
- Mike Powers (1987 - 1990)
- Howard Sackett (1987 - 1999)
- Steve Partlow (1987 - 1999)

- Bob Haltiner (1987 - ?)
- Steve Swalwell (2001 - ?)
- David Partlow (1999 - ?)
- Lyndon Jones
- Tim Ruhl (1998 - 2011)
- John Jones (2005 - 2007)
- David Reynolds (1987- ?)
- Jim Bradshaw (1999 – 2020)
- Jacob Moran (2007 - ?)
- Ryan Murphy (2007 – 2022)



Dale Reynolds
(1999- Present)



Allen Berreth
(2007 - Present)



Scott Swalwell
(2011 - Present)

SOME ACTIVITIES & MINISTRIES

- Sweetheart Banquets
- Skating Parties
- Friendship Sundays
- Pictorial Directories
- Parents Nights Out
- Rafting on the Deschutes River
- Bible (Olympics) Challenge
- Ladies Retreats at Camp Yamhill
- Men's Retreats at Camp Yamhill
- Elders, deacons, and preachers retreats
- Tweens
- Web page was begun in 2002
- On the Hilltop logo developed – 2002 (artwork by Ben Cook)
- Weekly Bible studies □ ESL classes □ Teacher's Workshops
- Hobo Parties
- Harvest Parties
- TNTs
- VBS / ASBA
- Gospel Meetings (the last was with Curtis McCullum in 1995)
- Funerals & Weddings
- Baptisms
- Potlucks
- Annual Memorial Day Picnic
- Teacher supply room
- Library
- Several house remodels
- Ladies Fellowships
- Congregational meetings
- Camp Yamhill
- Columbia Christian College
- Women for Columbia
- Bible Call
- Sermon Series
- Question/Answer Nights (over 500 questions)
- Second Service Begins (2003)
- TWO42 Groups (began 2010)
- Bike Camp
- Clothing Give-aways
- Back-pack Buddies
- And many, many more

MISSIONS

- Cedar City, Utah
- Northern Rhodesia, Africa
- Brazil
- Taiwan
- Herald of Truth

- Tillamook, Oregon
- Baker City, Oregon
- World English Institute (Dick Ady)
- Toledo, Oregon (John Lemarr, 2001 – present)
- Zimbabwe, Africa (Simbarashe Gondo),
- Chilakaluripet, Andhra Pradesh, India

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