

## Remembering our Roots...

The birth of the Full Gospel Fellowship of Churches and Ministers International of Oregon was not an accident. It was brought into existence by divine prayer and obedience to that prayer. Jesus prayed just before He suffered and rose from the dead, having died our death on the cross, in order to give birth to a new creation-- a people who would grow into stature and who would have His divine nature. "That they may be one, even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me," fervently prayed Jesus to His Father who had given Him charge over all who would believe in Him.

T. H. Welch, affectionately called "Brother Tom" by those who knew him, registered the Full Gospel Fellowship in Oregon, February 1967, but not without a ministry of struggle and triumph. Having cultivated the grounds of revival during the 1930's with his companion Gordon Lindsay (Christ for the Nations), and then being an active part in its fruition during the 1940's and 50's, Brother Welch found it very difficult to follow his vision and yet be in good standing with his religious affiliation. Not only was he having difficulty with his denominational affiliation, but many of his ministerial friends were as well. Many of them wanted to pursue their unique visions, but were opposed by denominationally minded brethren.

A flickering solution to this dilemma was sparked by a successful California Dairy Farmer, Demos Shakarian, who founded the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International in 1951, that targeted lay business men. Oral Roberts attended their first meeting and prayed an anointed prayer that called for this group to be a mighty force for the spread of the gospel. This has truly been the case, however besides becoming a force in spreading the gospel, this innovative approach in organizing people into an effective force, 1) not forcing anyone away from their previous religious affiliation, 2) and accepting members from various religious organizations, opened the door for others to follow.

Led by Gordon Lindsay, W. A. Raiford, J. C. Hibbard, and John Meares, T.H. Welch being one of the original charter members, formed the Full Gospel Fellowship of Churches and Ministers International in 1962 at a convention in Dallas, Texas.

Its aim was to organize independent churches and ministers into a "loosely knit" fellowship, and yet could have all the Federal government privileges of a non-profit tax exempt religious organization. T. H. Welch felt it was important, not only to register with the Federal government, but in the state as well, however he could not gain the leadership's support. Eventually, he was granted permission to register independently in the state of Oregon as a sister fellowship. This was done in 1967.

This concept of "Unity" among the churches and ministers began to spread rapidly. After hearing the inspirational testimony of T. H. Welch, Leon Willis, a young pastor in Harrisburg, Oregon, joined with him in 1968. Even though their doctrinal backgrounds differed dramatically, one from the so called "Trinity camp" and the other from the "Oneness Camp," they agreed to work together. After Brother Welch appointed Leon Willis to the Board of Directors, Gordon Lindsay in dismay asked Brother Welch, "How could two walk together except they be agreed?" Brother Welch simply replied, "We have agreed to walk together." Like a man setting brush fires in a newly clear field, they set fires throughout the Western states and Canada. In the fall of 1981 T. H. Welch suddenly went home to be with the Lord.

At a meeting in Salem, Oregon in January of 1982, Leon Willis was elected as the president of the Full Gospel Fellowship of Churches and Ministers International of Oregon. For the last 18 years he has served as president, traveling extensively in the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world, declaring the truth of the unity of believers and the gospel of the kingdom of God. Sister fellowships have been established in the Philippines and Ghana, West Africa and missionaries have been sent out to many countries of the world. He has been supported faithfully by his wife, Latena, who has ministered with him, teaching and encouraging the body of Christ. Among their best supporters are two children: Richard, who lives in Baker City, Oregon and Carla, who serves as the office manager.

The Full Gospel Fellowship is not a denomination, a physical division of the church, but rather a fellowship of churches and ministers carrying the same vision and purpose. It does not work independently or outside the body of Christ, but within it, to strengthen and consolidate its resources to reach the world. Its constitution recognizes the sovereignty of local churches in or out of denominations, fellowships, organizations, chapters, and respects them as brothers and sisters of the same family, the church of the living God.

The Full Gospel Fellowship acceptance of others as a part of the kingdom of God is based on their acceptance of confessing Jesus Christ with their mouth and believing in their heart that God raised Him up from the dead (Rom.

10:9, 10). Behind their "acceptance of others" is this cardinal principle: "If God has accepted them, what right do we have to reject them." (Ro. 14:3).

Our root system as a unique Fellowship goes deep into the dedication and faithful service of others, who went beyond the call of duty and distinguished themselves as pioneers of the modern Pentecostal experience. Even as the roots of the Apostles and believers of the New Testament were vitally located in the Old Testament, so our roots today are being nourished by the great Pentecostal leaders of the 20th Century. Strengthened by our heritage, inspired by the prayer of Jesus in St. John 17, motivated by the great commission of Matthew 28:19, propelled by the purpose of God in Christ Jesus to sum up all things in Him, we journey into the uncharted territory of the 21st Century. Enhanced by the growing unity among believers, Enlightened by the fivefold ministry, Encouraged by the Holy Spirit who speaks what He hears, Endued with the power of the Holy Spirit, we as a Fellowship press into our destiny. Undaunted by the fight and unlimited in our resources, we cry out, "If God is for us who can be against us!"

Leon C Willis