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**Mainstream American Culture in Portland Oregon**

I chose to do a research on the mainstream American Culture in Portland Oregon because this is the cultural background of my intercultural contact for my intercultural relationship assignment. Besides, our church is the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Portland located in the S.E. Woodstock of Portland. All along we have been ministering to the spiritual needs of Chinese immigrants in Portland only. However, we are aware of the fact that many mainstream American citizens living in our neighborhood are ‘unchurched’. We do feel that it is not reasonable that we continue to turn a blind eye to their needs when we truly believe that God has commanded us to love our neighbors.

**The Need is Huge**

According to the U.S. Decennial Census 2012 estimate, the population of the city of population of the city of Portland was estimated at 603,016. It has increased 10.3 % between 2000 and 2010. The growth has outpaced the national average during the last decade and this is expected to continue over the next 50 years.

This is quite a big city with 21.1% of the citizens under the age of 18. So there about 120,000 of them. (This reminded me of the city of Nineveh where there were 120,000 children who could not differentiate the right from the left hand. May God’s mercy on us!) The census reported that 76.1% are White people while only 1.7% are Chinese descents.

So, we can see that if we continue to minister only to the Chinese immigrants, our ‘field for harvest’ is very much limited. We need to extend our ‘catchment area’ to include the White. At least we need to learn how to minister to the White that belong the age group of 25-44 (34.7% of the whole population) from middle-lower income families because the median age is 35 years and the per capita yearly income is $ 22,643.

**Their Spiritual Need Even Bigger**

The strange phenomenon here in Portland is that we have the highest percentage of religiously unaffiliated adults in the entire nation, despite a higher average of professed evangelical Christians than the national average.

In a 2009 Gallup poll, Oregon ranked #1 of US states with the highest percentage of residents who were unaffiliated with any religion, at 24.6%. Although 46% of Oregonians identify religion as being ‘very important’, a full 40% of Oregonians (including those affiliated with a religion) seldom attend services. In a different 2009 Gallop poll, Oregon was ranked as the seventh least religious state. In response to the question, ‘Is religion an important part of your life?’, 53% of Oregonians responded ‘yes’.

The Study indicated that some of the disparity, however, may be attributed to the popularity of less traditional religions (ones not included as an option in the study) in the Pacific Northwest. Personally I believe the popularity of the New Age Beliefs may account partly (not all) for the above-mentioned disparity, taking into consideration that many can now watch New-Age preaching online without ‘going to church’.

So, somehow we can conclude that many Oregonians are interested in the spiritual dimension of life but going to a regular evangelical church may not satisfy their needs.

**Questing for Religious Experiences More Than Concepts**

It is interesting to note that the first Christians arriving in the West Coast in 1840’s were the members from the Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Oregon. The Methodist Christians as well as the Roman Catholic Christians were normally more interested in religious experiences more than head knowledge. The ‘Power Through Prayer’ written by E.M. Bounds in the times of the Civil War in America described the Methodist preachers as ‘the only preachers who could preach with unction’. As regards the Catholic faith, we all know that they believe in things like trans-substantiation and different sacraments.

A Pew Research Center study reported on The Oregonian in February 2008, found that Oregon's largest religious group was Catholics, at 14%. ‘All denominations’ of Protestant accounted for 30%, Mormons for 5%, and unaffiliated for 27%, all higher than the national average. A 2009 Gallup poll found that 69% Oregonians identified themselves with a Christian religion.

The largest denomination by number of adherents in 2000 was the Roman Catholic Church with 348,239, which was reasonable. However, the second and the third places go to: The Church of Mormons with 104,312 and the Assemblies of God with 49,357. Obviously these two groups, compared with other protestant denominations, put more emphasis on religious experiences more than concepts.

So we can see that almost 70% Oregonians say they are Christians but most of them do not go to church. Among those who are church going, it seems that they are more interested in experiential knowledge more than religious concepts.

**A Strong Camp for Post Modernism**

I believe evidence shows that Portland is a strong camp for Post Modernism if we define it as ‘a general trend of skeptical interpretations of thoughts and behaviors of the previous era and an embracement of deconstruction and post-structuralism’. For instance, as of 2012 Portland was the largest city in the United States that did not add fluoride to its public water supply (against the advice of medical doctors), and fluoridation has historically been a subject of controversy in the city. Portland voters have four times voted against fluoridation. Recently in 2012 the city council, responding to advocacy from public health organizations and others, voted unanimously to begin fluoridation by 2014. Fluoridation opponents forced a public vote on the issue, and on May 21 2013 city voters again rejected fluoridation.

Another alarming fact is that though the population of the city is increasing, a 2005 study found that Portland was educating fewer children in that year than it was in 1925, despite the population having almost doubled since then. One of the reasons is that the increase in the percentage of families choosing to homeschool their children. From 1989 to 1998, there had been an annual growth of 14% of homeschooling families in Oregon.

**Green City Activists**

Popular Science awarded Portland the title of the Greenest City in America in 2008 and Gristmagazine listed it in 2007 as the second greenest (or most eco-friendly) city in the world trailing only Reykjavik of Iceland. In 2008, 12.6 % of all commuters in Portland were on public transit. For a long time all transit service within downtown Portland was free, with the area being known by Trimet as Fareless Square, but a need for deep budget cuts prompted the agency to limit free rides to rail service only in 2010 and subsequently to discontinue the fare-free zone entirely in 2012. Approximately 8% of commuters bike to work, the highest proportion of any major U.S. city and about 10 times the national average.

Portland is often cited as an example of a city with strong land use planning controls. This is largely the result of statewide land conservation policies adopted in 1973. Besides, Portland’s urban growth boundary adopted in 1979 separates urban areas from traditional farm land. In October 2009, the Portland City Council unanimously adopted a climate action plan that will cut the city’s greenhouse gas emissions to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.

**Cherishing Freedom of Personal Life Style in a Non-violent Way**

Because of strong free speech protections of the Oregon Constitution upheld by the Oregon Supreme Court in State v. Henry, 732 P.2d 9 (Or. 1987), which specifically found that full nudity and lap dances in strip clubs are ‘protected speech’, Portland is widely considered to have more ‘strip clubs’ per capita than Las Vegas or San Francisco.

However, things are not all romantic in the pursuit of freedom. Sinners are still sinners without Christ’s redemption. Portland has been titled as "Pornland" for its strip clubs, erotic massage parlors, and high rate of child sex trafficking. A judge dismissed charges against a nude bicyclist in November 2008 on the grounds that the city's annual World Naked Bike Ride was "a well-established tradition" in Portland. The first instance occurred sometime around 1999 and had less than 7 participants. The 2009 Naked Bike Ride occurred without significant incident. There were an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 participants. In June 2010, Portland's World Naked Bike Ride had an estimated 13,000 people.

Fortunately, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report in 2009, Portland ranked 53rd in violent crime out of the top 75 U.S. cities with a population greater than 250,000. The murder rate in Portland from 2005 to 2009 averaged 3.9 murders per 100,000 people per year, which was lower than the national average. In October 2009, Forbes magazine rated Portland as the ‘third’ safest city in America. So, in a sense we can say that Portlanders are pursuing freedom in a relatively non-violent way.

The IFC sketch comedy series Portlandia shoots on location in Portland satirizing the city as a hub of liberal politics, organic food, alternative lifestyles and anti-establishment attitudes. The Portland Alliance, a largely anti-authoritarian progressive monthly, is the largest radical print paper in the city. Just Out, published in Portland twice monthly until the end of 2011, was the region’s foremost LGBT publication. A biweekly paper, Street Roots, is also sold within the city by members of the homeless community.

With such a backdrop, we can expect that Portland strongly favors the Democratic Party. In the 2008 presidential election, Democratic candidate Barack Obama easily carried Portland, winning 245,464 votes from city residents to 50,614 for his Republican rival, John McCain.

Sam Adams, the former mayor of Portland, became the city's first openly gay mayor in 2009. In 2004, 59.7 percent of Multnomah County voters cast ballots against Oregon Ballot Measure 36, which amended the Oregon Constitution to prohibit recognition of same-sex marriages. The measure passed with 56.6% of the statewide vote.

**Potential to Become A City of Peace, A ‘Jerusalem’, Real Salem**

The US consulting firm Mercer, in a 2009 assessment "conducted to help governments and major companies place employees on international assignments", ranked Portland 42nd worldwide in quality of living. The survey factored in political stability, personal freedom, sanitation, crime, housing, the natural environment, recreation, banking facilities, availability of consumer goods, education, and public services including transportation.

Computer components manufacturer Intel is the Portland area's largest employer, providing jobs for more than 15,000 people, with several campuses to the west of central Portland in the city of Hillsboro. The metro area is home to more than 1,200 technology companies. This high density of technology companies has led to the nickname Silicon Forest being used to describe the Portland area, a reference to the abundance of trees in the region and to the Silicon Valley region in Northern California. The Silicon Forest is home to facilities for hardware makers such as Tektronix, TriQuint Semiconductor, Lattice Semiconductor, Siltronic, … and software companies such as McAfee, Mentor Graphics, Jive Software, etc.

Other than economic opportunities, the city also focuses on developing a livable environment. The City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement serves as a conduit between city government and Portland's 95 officially recognized neighborhoods. Each neighborhood is represented by a volunteer-based neighborhood association which serves as a liaison between residents of the neighborhood and the city government.

It does not mean that Oregonians are ‘saints’ but it means that most of them seem to be ‘teachable’. For instance, in the 1980s and 1990s, radical skinhead groups flourished in Portland. In 1988, Mulugeta Seraw, an Ethiopian immigrant, was killed by three skinheads. The response to his murder involved a community-driven series of rallies, campaigns, nonprofits and events designed to address Portland's racial history, leading to a city considered significantly more tolerant than in 1988 at Seraw's death.

**Preparing Ourselves to Minister to Their Spiritual Needs**

In order to get our church prepared well to minister to the white Americans living in our neighborhood, I believe the first step is to pray for a white pastor who loves to work with the Elders in our church. Such a pastor will bear witness to the white in our neighborhood that our church is a church that they may consider attending. On the one hand we know that many Portlanders believe that religious faith is important. On the other hand many of them do not like to affiliate themselves with a typical evangelical Christian church. A white pastor working with a group of Chinese elders may signify to them that this is an atypical Christian church that it may be worth looking into.

Secondly, we should understand that an average American evangelical church may be able to minister to those American ‘seekers’ who accept their styles. However, there are those American ‘seekers’ who thirst and hunger for deeper spiritual experiences beyond religious concepts. Our Chinese heritage of Christian spiritual experiences may be something that meets their needs. Instead of adopting more and more American styles of worship services and preaching, we should carefully preserve or ‘revive’ some of our traditional Chinese styles of seeking God that may speak to those American ‘seekers’, e.g. opening the sanctuary Monday to Saturday to encourage ‘seekers’ to come and spend time alone with God reading scripture and praying; actively seeking the illumination from the Spirit in understanding the Scripture; spending time quietly waiting for the leading of the Spirit when praying, etc.

Thirdly, we need to start studying more about the physical Kingdom Vision revealed in the Scripture. Oftentimes an average evangelical Christian thinks that their faith is all about getting saved and going to be with the Lord after death. These are just unattractive abstract concepts to those Portlanders who are interested in non-violent green movement, liberty/freedom of speech, neighborhood voluntary services, etc. Fortunately, the whole Bible has a lot to say about our earthly Kingdom Vision. We should be excited in talking about our future when our Messiah comes again to make our Kingdom Plan a reality. We can start participating in some of those works that are obviously aimed at creating a healthier neighborhood. However, it is important to get ourselves well trained to have fruitful and biblical conversations with those new-world activists.

Fourthly, we can actually use our current resources to work with our neighbors to build a more eco-friendly city. For example, we can let people use our big parking lot as a ‘park and ride’ site. We can also install solar panels for generating power and then allow certain organizations to use our site for educating the public on solar energy. We can also consider running some kind of homeschooling collaboration center. These are just examples. There are a whole lot of things that we can do to show our neighbors that we are serious in living out what we believe. Jesus told us to love our neighbors and we should work together to create a better environment for everybody in the neighborhood.

Fifthly, as we know that many Oregonians cherish their freedom in pursuing their personal life styles, we can host on-going seminars inviting people from all walks of life (preferably from our neighborhood) to share with us their alternative life styles in a hope of helping to create a warm tolerant neighborhood. Actually we should encourage our own members to be open-minded to learn from others as regards the alternative life styles. current ones and more pleasing to God. After all, the Bible tells us time and again to be humble and teachable. We should be willing to change when we learn that we are not doing things the right way. For instance, I have just learned from my son recently how to save the left-over to make compose for fertilizing our own backyard.

Sixthly, the Bible says, ‘Without a vision people will perish.’ (Proverb 29:18) We can work with our neighbors to create a vision for our neighborhood. Hopefully we can help our neighbors see how blessed we are living in this city with such a potential of actually becoming a city of peace and happiness (a Jerusalem). We can invite artists to turn our external walls/sidings into big canvases to present inspiring visions of a healthy and friendly neighborhood.

Last but not least, as we know that most Portlanders want to pursue what they love in a non-violent way, we can help organize our neighbors to keep watch over our neighborhood to deal with rude and selfish behaviors, and help weaker individuals or families handle situations in which they are being victimized. Hopefully through these works we can help our neighbors see the universality of sin/selfishness. With the grace of the Lord and His miracle working power, hopefully people can see that God and the Savior we believe in are good and righteous. Psalm 18:32 says our God is ‘the God who girds me with strength and makes my way blameless’. Our goal is not having our neighbor see that we share exactly the same vision with them, but letting them find out that we persevere in our good works because we have the Son of God in our hearts and we have eternity to build the City of God.

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