

NORTHWESTnews

GOOD SAINT NIKOLAUS

MCC Portland welcomes new interim pastor by Patricia L. MacAodha



The Rev. Mike Nikolaus looks forward to his stay in the Rose City

After going more than half a year without a pastor, Metropolitan Community Church of Portland has named an interim replacement.

The Rev. Mike Nikolaus of MCC Los Angeles arrived May 1 in the Rose City, where he will stay for six months to a year until a permanent pastor is found. His first visit to Oregon was at Easter, when he preached at the church.

He sees himself as "a leftover hippie from the '70s who grew up and became respectable." An avid jogger, he believes his fondness for entertaining, especially brunches, is a result of his "Martha Stewart gene."

A native of Wheeling, W.Va., Nikolaus refers to himself as "a cradle Catholic" who went through 12 years of Catholic school and left the church not because of any specific grievance but because of "that doubting, skeptical stage that many young people go through at a certain time in their lives." He attended University of Charleston, emerging with a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1973.

Two years later, while at a drag show, he met the Rev. John Gill of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., who told him about the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. He joined the clergy 15 years ago.

Nikolaus served as senior pastor at Christ MCC in Miami from 1987 to 1995 and at First MCC in Atlanta from 1998 to 1999. At MCC of Boynton Beach, Fla., he served as interim pastor. In 1997, he received a master's degree in pastoral ministry from St. Thomas University in Miami.

He recently wrote his first book, which will be published this summer by iUniverse. He calls his style "multifaceted," describing *Tugs of War* as "using the spiritual wisdom of the ages to get centered when life is pulling us apart." He wrote it "to assist the reader in finding middle ground making more informed choices for the living of his or her life."

A friend encouraged Nikolaus to produce the book as an incentive to spur his speaking career. In 2001 he completed the Toastmasters International Communications Training Program.

"While [the book] is theological/religious in nature, there is a stream of practical wisdom for dealing with life's everyday demands," he says. "I tried to write *Tugs of War* using thought forms and language which appeal to...people who are turned off by traditional religious jargon."

Nikolaus has a special interest in two organizations: Second Harvest, a national food bank that raises consciousness about the hunger problem in the United States, and the Southern Poverty Law Center. He is especially attracted to its "Teach Tolerance" program and its strategy of bankrupting the Ku Klux Klan.

MCC Portland already has heard his opinion of religious intolerance. His Easter sermon focused on the prejudice against practitioners of Islam and how important it is to counteract bigotry.

Nikolaus looks forward to his stay in Portland. "The limited time element," he says, "allows one to come in and do what they really feel needs to be done without fear of long-term political fallout."

During his visit here in March, he immediately fell in love with the city. He is impressed with the efforts of his predecessor, the Rev. Roy Cole, and hopes to use his own skills and expertise to aid the congregation in building on "the great foundation that is already there" and setting "a positive course for the future."

Nikolaus sees a challenge, as well, in the interim position. "The duty of the interim," he says, "is to serve as a bridge between the past and the future and to prepare the way for the next permanent pastor."

He feels the interim person makes a difference for the permanent replacement who follows, especially when the congregation loses a long-term pastor. He says such churches have become accustomed to the former pastor's style and personality.

"If a new person arrives and makes even the slightest changes," he says, "there is often an unconscious but tremendously strong resistance." The interim pastor's job is to get people thinking "outside the box" and "in bold and different ways."

And afterward? Nikolaus—along with his two dogs, Abby and Shelly—will return to Los Angeles, where he hopes to establish a full-time speaking and writing ministry, traveling to special events such as church anniversaries and other organizational gatherings.

His first official appearance behind the MCC podium will be May 5, and a special welcoming event is being planned so the congregation and community will have an opportunity to meet him. □

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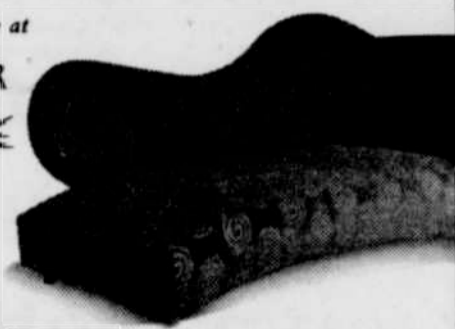
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