



# FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Reno's First Church - Organized in 1868

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Ministers

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Dear Jim:

When I received your letter, I intended to lay aside the suggestion that I try to write of my grasp of the relationship between Jonestown and the sixties. I see no time in the foreseeable future when I will have the energy and time to write an article. However, rather than letting your query pass, I decided to respond off the top of my mind in this letter. I write of observations, impressions, hunches and reflections.

I assume that events which occur simultaneously and/or consecutively in a culture are related to each other. Specifically, I assume that everything that was happening in the United States in the sixties was interrelated. Furthermore, all of those events had roots in our national history. Finally, those events continue to bear fruit. Just as they grew out of history, they shaped history.

Jonestown erupted out of the human soul, and out of a particular history. I'll try to sketch my recollections of some of the things that happened in the sixties. The next question is: "Where are these movements and the people who were involved in them today?" Peoples Temple was directly related to the most important things that were happening during that decade, and the people who died in Jonestown were directly involved in the issues and turmoil of the sixties, or were their heirs.

Here are some of my memories of what was happening during those years. Black Americans were affirming their dignity, and were engaged in the civil rights struggle, which stimulated other minority ethnic groups to act. Students demanded greater participation in the governance of universities and colleges. They initiated the Vietnam Teach-Ins and mobilized the opposition to the war. The sensitivity training sessions of the National Training Laboratory mushroomed into the human potential movement. Many of the young became attracted to Eastern religions. The counter-culture, and along with it the drug scene, was a part of the whole. Sexual practices and mores were changing. Homosexual women and men began to claim their civil liberties. Women dusted off the old banners and renewed the historic struggle.

Each one of these movements, or phenomena, had a wide spectrum of involvement. All were related to each other. The Black affirmation and struggle for civil rights included the Black Muslims, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the NAACP, the Urban League, CORE, SNCC and Stokely Carmichael, and Koinonia Farm. They shared a common concern. They fought on different battlefields. Some worked through the courts; others engaged in direct action. This war to make the Constitution apply to all Americans was met by the strategy of all deliberate delay by entrenched white power.

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The Anti-War Movement included such diverse groups as the F.O.R. and the Yippies, the Quakers and the young socialists and communists. Teach-Ins, draft card turn-ins and burnings, the tidal wave of draft avoidance, resistance within the military, the underground, the McCarthy campaign and the Democratic Convention were all part of that scene.

The other movements of the sixties had similar spectra of involvement.

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Jim Jones and Peoples Temple were deeply involved in the dominant movements of the sixties. According to the retiring executive of the F.O.R., while he was pastor in Indianapolis, Jim Jones integrated the Methodist Hospital overnight. Peoples Temple was an integrated church from the beginning when other churches were trying to become integrated. When the perspective on integration changed, Peoples Temple continued as an integrated community. Consequently it came under severe criticism from those who felt that Black people needed Black leaders.

Peoples Temple created and sustained a community during those years when the young especially were looking for new forms of communal life. The tide of new communities cast upon the shore all kinds of communes, including Christian communities. Peoples Temple was a heterogeneous community. Its simple life style attracted middle class white people who were unsatisfied with our affluent society.

Peoples Temple welcomed men and women from the drug scene. Rehabilitation of people injured by drugs was not its central concern. In this it was different from Synanon and local drug abuse centers. Peoples Temple did provide a community which enabled many to bring order out of their chaotic lives, but this number was few compared with the membership.

Peoples Temple was never simply a community concerned with itself. It was concerned with civil liberties as it was with civil rights. Long before The Christian Century or New Republic or the ACLU became concerned with Senate Bill #1, Peoples Temple was sounding the alarm. Jones and his community were always concerned with legislation.

Jim Jones, who for a time worked with the poor in Brazil, identified with the struggles of the oppressed in Latin America. He shared the outlook, although not the stability which comes from biblical rootedness, of the people of Solentinam and their priest. Peoples Temple always identified with the poor. Most members had always been poor. More than any other movement the civil rights movement was of and with the poor. The loss of hope of the poor accounts in part for the attraction of Peoples Temple, and the migration of more than a thousand people to Guyana.

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The high tide of the civil rights movement of the sixties ebbed. The nation turned inward. The best that can be said for this is that the nation needed time to integrate the changes which had occurred.

Many, perhaps most, of the people who were involved in the sixties in the struggle for greater justice and for peace have moved into established careers. The Vietnam Era Veterans continue to bear the consequences of that war. Discrimination and injustice and threat of war are still with us. In America the poor are the despised poor as the Jews of Europe for centuries were the despised Jews. The poor are the scapegoat for the ills of the land.

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Peoples Temple and other groups knew that the work of the sixties was only the beginning. Unlike the nation which turned away, these groups continued the work in which they had been engaged. The discontinuity of concern and work was not with these groups, but with the nation. In my judgment, Peoples Temple did take a major turn in the spring and summer of 1977 when hundreds of people migrated to Jonestown. I see that turn as a giving up on the United States and putting all of their energies into establishing their new community.

Peoples Temple fell, as I have suggested elsewhere, because the self-destructive forces which were always present in Jim Jones and the community became overwhelming.

Perhaps another time I can write to some other questions which you raised.

May the shalom of Christ be with you and your loved ones,

John V Moore

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