

2007 Report # 4 from Hong Kong
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LaoMoon's Story (This will preach)

Her real name is Vongdeuane Sengone from Laos; but I call her "LaoMoon," as her name means moon. Vongdeuane, a 27 year old first year student here at Lutheran Theological Seminary Hong Kong, is a beautiful woman with eyes that sparkle, shiny black hair and always a smile that reveals perfect white teeth and skin color of a golden brown with just a hint of gray shade. She is in my class in Pastoral Formation and is a room-mate of my Cucu from Sumatra, Tio Sihombing.

LaoMoon became a Christian in her teen years in her predominately Buddhist country. In so doing, her two brothers, seven sisters, and mother and father all disowned this last born in the family. They quit her college support and ridiculed her worship attendance in the Lao Evangelical Church where another of my former students, LaoChan, now ministers.

About seven years ago her mother was diagnosed with cancer in five places in her body and given 22 days to live. When LaoMoon arrived at the hospital, she was asked to leave and even her mother insisted, "Get out! I hate you." She left weeping a deep sadness of grief and rejection. Two days later she returned and, although her mother resisted, she placed her left hand on her body and lifted her right hand toward heaven praying fervently for her mother to be healed. The assembled family were aghast at such strange boldness.

Two days later, the doctor announced that she was clear of all her cancer! Since then her parents, while not yet being baptized, have witnessed to their friends who come to their garden to purchase produce. These friends have, in turn, come to worship. One sister does attend the services but has not given up Buddhism...yet.

LaoMoon began working for the church and now has a scholarship to attend this seminary in a four year program after which she will do two years of internship back in Laos. "I want to be the Pastor and tell other people about God," she said to me as we walked across the mountain to my class. Because she is a woman she will not be permitted to preach in the "big" services...but can in the small country congregations. And it will be powerful!

Sava is Safe for Now

There is a horrible slaughter of people going on right now in Myanmar, which used to be called Burma.

Our international student fund and St. John's member Keith Knapp has saved one of the young pastors there from certain persecution.

Sava attended Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong taking the Theological Librarianship 2 year program. He returned to Myanmar and began work in a little Christian seminary. Then he started work at LTS in the doctor of ministry program with our Dr. Jerry as advisor.

During his work back home he was badly beaten while on a 12 mile walk to call on an ill member of his church.

He recently made it out of this country, which is governed by a military dictatorship, and came to Hong Kong. He had no money and would have had to return the second week of October. Knowing that Sava could finish his academic work by Christmas, Dr. Jerry wrote to Keith Knapp, who has helped Indonesian students in the past, and asked for enough money to keep Sava in Hong Kong until Christmas. This would spare him possible imprisonment and perhaps even torture. And he could be awarded the Doctor of Ministry degree. Keith graciously put the necessary funds in the St. John's International Student Fund and it was transferred to Hong Kong right away. For now Sava is safe and working hard on his thesis which is the negative and positive influence of the independent Evangelists in Myanmar.

Tang Kam Poh, Paul's Story

This year there is just one ELCA scholarship recipient at this Lutheran Seminary. Tang Kam Poh whom we call Paul, is a Chinese Malaysian whose grandfather emigrated from Mainland China in the 1940's.

When Paul was 17, a chemistry teacher told him about the Christian faith and he was baptized. This caused his family of 6, and his girlfriend's family, to disown him. Actually, he was physically thrown out. They did not speak to him for 3 months. He later married the girlfriend who became a Christian. Their two children have also been baptized.

Next, Paul attended the Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican & Presbyterian Trinity seminary in Singapore. After that he served as a parish pastor in the Lutheran Church of Malaysia until his Bishop selected him to come to Hong Kong in the Masters program. When he graduates, he will return to serve on the faculty of the Lutheran Bible Training Institute in Malaysia.

A Melody of God's Compassion (This will preach)

One of my Cucu at STT-HKBP was about to graduate. As was my custom, I wanted to buy him a good guitar. I usually do that for my Cucu whom I support so they have it to use in their Vicar year church for singing and youth ministry.

I always buy the best guitar merchants offer in Pemantang/Siantar. This time I was busy preparing to leave after teaching for two months. So I gave the money to my Cucu so that he could make the purchase.

When the night came to say goodbye, as usual, all my Cucu gathered at the guest house with their guitars so we could sing and dance the tor tor as our customary farewell ritual. But when this last Cucu arrived he brought with him the cheapest, little, inexpensive instrument one could find. It looked like it was for a small child. I was so disappointed in him that I scolded in a stern voice, "I am so disappointed in you. I gave you money for the best guitar in town, and you bring this thing!"

His eyes welled up with Batak tears at my chastisement. He then told me in a quavering voice, "Ompung, I am so sorry that I disappointed you tonight. When I went back to my village there was a neighbor widow who had had nothing to eat for four days. So I took some of your guitar money and bought a big bag of rice for her. This little cheap guitar was bought with the money I had left.

Then he said in a more confident tone, "But, Ompung, when I play this guitar, it will make beautiful music." He then played and sang the most lovely melody I have ever heard in any country or culture. It was the music of God's compassion and kindness.

Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong

Total enrollment: 335, 184 men and 151 women, 77 Lutherans, 214 other denominations
Overseas students number 65; 270 from Hong Kong; New students this fall 84; Students from Mainland 13; Daytime plus evening 560.

By academic programs:

B.C.E. = 7

B.Th. = 62

M.Div. = 81

M.A. = 35

S.T.M. = 10

M.Th. = 8

D.Min. = 50

Th.D. = 19

Diploma = 5

Special = 58

Total = 335

Chung Yeung Festival

This Friday, October 19, is Chung Yeung holiday. It is sometimes called Double Ninth Day because of the day being on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.

I will conduct an all day retreat for both of my classes on "Understanding Yourself" based on the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. It is the way they get all the required contact hours when I don't stay quite all the semester.

The holiday's origin goes back to 200BC when a man of the Han Dynasty avoided a catastrophe in his village by taking his family to a high place for the day. In Chinese folklore, the man took with him food and a jug of chrysanthemum wine. This developed into a tradition for Chinese to go picnicking in the mountains on this day.

There will be crowds of Chinese come to the Christian graveyard...and to the many Buddhist graves all over this mountain. Families visit graves to pay their respects to ancestors. They share the food they have brought along, especially Chinese cakes, Ko, which is a homonym of the word "top." They believe that those who eat cake will be promoted to the top. (We Americans believe that those who eat cake will need a diet!)

Indonesia Christian fellowship

Today, October 28, two of our Batak students and I went to the large Indonesia Christian fellowship where I preached a Reformation sermon and then after a nice lunch, taught for an hour on the Reformation. Then we had almost an hour of questions. There were about 400 domestic helpers at worship and 100 at the afternoon class. They were so eager to learn and wanted to know all about All Saints and Hallowed Eve when Luther posted his theses (Halloween). Some former students bought pumpkins and carved faces and lit them with candles. Some Chinese were shocked and thought it was pagan worship. To get to this congregation, which meets in a community center on the Island, we had to hike down the hill, take the train to its end, take a bus and then a local taxi. The Pastor is ordained and is a student in my Pastoral leadership class.

Gospel Mail (This will preach!)

Robuanga was an evangelist in Myanmar. His concern was the few Christians of the Chin hills. In 1946 he made an appeal at an assembly held in Aizawl. The people responded by gathering books, clothing, knives, spoons and packed them in wooden boxes. Now the problem was how to transport them to their destination. It was too much for even 100 volunteers to carry. The young Mizo Association decided to help with the project. It was soon called "Gospel Mail." Young people from one village would carry the boxes to the next village in relays. The address on the boxes said: Salvation for Souls. TO: Mr. Robuanga, Ruantlang, Champhai. As time passed the boxes were carried more and more reverently with prayers and singing of hymns. Healing and divine properties were attributed to these boxes. 23 boxes were collected and distributed in the Chin hills by September, 1946. In the next couple of years over 300 boxes reached Champhai. The impact of the Gospel Mail was astonishing. Wherever the Gospel Mail traveled almost the whole population became Christian. The American Baptists had been working there with little success for many years. They would not accept these new Gospel Mail converts so the converts formed a strong Presbyterian Church of Myanmar. In our culture we might call it, "Service Evangelism."

Many celebrations

Saturday night the international students met in the dining hall where they had prepared delicious foods from at least 8 countries. They celebrated Luther's birthday, a student's birthday, a Myanmar and Mainland persons returning home and my departure. We sang and danced. We 4 Bataks taught them the Tor Tor.

Early Sunday we walked to Shatin and started our trip to the Indonesian Fellowship in North Point which was celebrating its 4th anniversary. I was guest of honor cutting the cake, etc. A group from Jakarta was there. They credit me as being one of its founders. There were about 500 in attendance.

Die Schwesterngemeinschaft

From there we went a long way by 3 MTR hitches to the offices of the Chinese Rhenish church, to also eat with the many domestic workers from Indonesia (some were Muslim). For a week now there have been 10 here from the Community of Sisters in the United Evangelical Mission who are from the Medan area in Indonesia (Die Schwesterngemeinschaft der Vereinten Evangelischen Mission). I have 2 students who belong so I have been spending a lot of time with them. Their founder was Hester Needham.

We did an afternoon session with them and the asylum seekers and domestic helpers on empowerment from God's promises. From there it was on to the evening service at Tao Fong Shan where this group installed a new member, Hartini Sinaga. Then after the service, we held a party in the Tao Fong Shan guest house where the Indonesian women have been staying. Good wine and dancing celebrating Hartini's joining the sisterhood. They all speak German, so I did my best which they loved.

This sisterhood began years ago when it was not popular for single women to go into the missions. They relate closely to IKADIWA, a sisterhood in Indonesia which many of my former Deaconess students belong to, that was founded by Indonesian women after meeting with these sisters in Germany

Farewell to Hong Kong.

I finish up two classes and a thesis advisory and my learning group this week. Then next week I will conduct a 4 day seminar for 12 Doctor of Ministry students and a 1 day seminar on Financial Administration and Fundraising for Seminaries for our advanced degree overseas students. I return to the US on Saturday, November 24. There will be many farewell dinners between now and then.

As usual, I will give away most of the books and some of the clothing I brought along. My next report should be (God willing) next April from Indonesia.

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