

## **2008 Report 3 from Hong Kong**

Jerry L. Schmalenberger, ELCA Global Mission Volunteer  
JLSchmalen@AOL.Com

### **Hy and Van's Viet Nam Story**

They met in a Bible class he was teaching and she, five years younger, a student. The romance soon blossomed and they were married in May of 2007. Both worked for a Korean Missionary. This Vietnamese couple are now at LTS, Hong Kong. Huynh Thi-Thuy-Van, having graduated from the University, is working on a Master of Divinity in order to return to her country to teach in her church's seminary.

Because he is the son of a Christian pastor in the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam and has received two Master's in Theology in Korea, Nguyen Trvong-Hy is now working on a Doctor of Theology. It will take three years for both of them to complete their academic program. They will be very valuable assets for the re-emerging church in Viet Nam which still must endure many hardships under the Communist government. Hy's father studied, and was ordained, before the war and continues to serve as a pastor in the church which does not allow the ordination of women.

Van, a petite and vivacious woman with sparkling eyes and personality to match, is in my class on Human Relationships and Congregational Conflict Management and explains that she is content to be a female "preacher" without ordination, which is permitted. At lunch one day Van told me that when she was a child and her family converted to Christianity, her grandfather disowned all of them including his own son!

Neither are sure just who provides their scholarships but they will be speaking soon in a church in Hong Kong which evidently must have provided it for at least this year.

When asked about their experiences here, they made interesting observances. Hy stated that he wasn't used to the more formal Lutheran liturgies and worship. Van said that she was shocked at the way faculty gave many different opinions and then she had to decide! In Viet Nam, they just followed whatever their Pastor taught.

### **Bergquist, our LTS Treasure**

Picture title: Dr. James Bergquist, 76, helping three LTS students from Laos with the Gospel of Matthew.

After serving in the parish ministry, James Bergquist and his wife Lorrie went to India as missionaries for the American Lutheran Church. After their term there he became the academic dean of Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. Then it was on to head up American Missions for the TALC continuing on in that leadership capacity in the new merged ELCA. From there "Dr. James" as students at LTS call him, moved to lead the Lutheran Bible Institute in Seattle which became Trinity Lutheran College under his leadership.

He retired in 2000 and signed up for the ELCA's Global Mission Volunteer program. Under that auspices he has taught 9 semesters at LTS, 3 in India, and one as interim Pastor in New Zealand. Having graduated from Luther College and Luther Seminary and receiving his PhD from the University of Southern California, he has specialized in New Testament and Missions. A large man with an even larger heart, his fatherly concern for students and expertise in his field have been invaluable to LTS faculty and students alike. President Lam, Tak Ho calls him, "Our LTS treasure."

### **Visitors from China: The Three Self Church in China (self supporting, self governing and self propagating)**

Oct 21 we had a large delegation of Christian educators, Pastors and Seminary professors from mainland China come here for an afternoon visit. Some were former LTS students and my acquaintances from working in Bugi and Guangzhou while teaching in Hong Kong. Here is what I learned about the government approved "3-self" church in Mainland China: The statistic from some years ago was that there were 16 million church members. Now they say 20 million. And the believers are much younger on average. 35% have a college degree. There are 55,000 registered churches which are always overflowing. There is a dire shortage of Pastors, but to compensate have additional 5.5 million presbyters and 150 thousand volunteers. They have published 2 057 million Bibles. (3 million a year).

Mainland has 18 seminaries with a total enrollment of 1,800. The challenge is for better educated Pastors who can teach their congregations true Christianity as many still follow the superstitions of their ancestors like sleeping on a Bible to get rid of their head ache.

### **Melamine is still with us**

Now it is in eggs from the Mainland. The toxic substance which killed many pets in the US and babies in Hong Kong and Mainland has now been found in our eggs. Evidently farmer's price paid to them for chicken feed is based on the protein level the feed has in it. So, not unlike the problem with the baby formula, they are adding melamine which makes the protein content look high. Here at the seminary, Tuesday is "eggday." I think I will pass.

### **Fruit money debate**

The hot debate in Hong Kong right now is how much "fruit money" the elderly should receive each month. (Fruit money is the pension paid to old people.) The chief administrator of Hong Kong announced that he would not raise the present amount; and, that there would be a test to determine if they really needed any. The citizens really demonstrated. And the administrator backed down and said there would be no test and the the allowance would be raised to Hong Kong 1,000 per month. That is about US \$130.

### **Did we make a difference?**

Because I will return to the US to my American wife on November 15th and I am presently going through class evaluations and composing of my report to the Global Missions of the ELCA, I am asking the question that I always ask: did I make a difference by being here this semester? Perhaps you can judge:

- There will be two students from Laos, two from Hong Kong, one from Nepal, one from Hong Kong and one from Myanmar who will return to their country to try planting a new church.
- There is a new student who is presently working in an institution for the disadvantaged in

Sumatra who has begun her Master's degree in Pastoral Care at STT-HKBP. And two new Batak students will begin their post graduate work here next September. One is from the Deaconess school and one from the Seminary.

- There are 3 Hong Kong Pastors who have suffered from conflict in their congregations who feel that they are ready to try again. In the same class there are an additional 20 who we hope are equipped to handle congregational conflict (some better than others) in their respective ministries and 12 different countries. Four of them are now prepared to teach this subject in their seminaries.
- There are at least 24 former students, now Pastors in Hong Kong, of many different denominations, for whom I have provided support and encouragement.
- There are 13 post graduate students who have been exposed to a different style of teaching and learning and will serve on different faculties: Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines and Viet Nam.
- 16 students from 12 different countries will return to their churches having experienced the Martin Luther "Table Talk" style of mentoring. They have been exposed to a variety of theologies, worship practices, cultures and strong opinions...including the Lutheran faith.
- A seminary professor from Viet Nam and one from Myanmar will return to their Bible schools ready to introduce a new-to-them subject, Pastoral Care and Counseling.
- A young Deaconess from Sumatra, Indonesia will have finished her study of Diaconal Ministry and take her place on the faculty of the HKBP Balige Deaconess School. (I also learned so much from this tutorial)
- A pastor from Thailand, who could not get out of his country, will continue his work on his D.Min. program, thanks to my work with him over the Internet, so as to teach Practical Theology after he graduates from here.
- The first female Pandita to have a Th.D in the 3.5 million member HKBP Indonesian church will graduate June 7 and return to teach at the HKBP Seminary. And another Batak student will return with his Th.D degree in New Testament to teach in Medan, Indonesia. Still a third will return equipped to organize and run a theological library at the same seminary.
- And an Indonesia Fellowship here in Hong Kong of about 250 domestic servants will have heard the Gospel preached in a narrative style based on solid theology. Their Pastor has received a good dose of homiletics and dogmatics as well.
- This seminary has also learned about transparency and bylaws and faculty handbooks and the need to spread the decision making power among many.
- And the difference between teaching to accomplish good test results and teaching for learning in order to be best equipped to respond to their call from God to ministry.