

# REPORT #1 FROM HONG KONG, MARCH 2006

Jerry L. Schmalenberger, ELCA Global Mission Volunteer



On our return trip from Arizona, Carol and I stopped to visit Tai, Lin Chun (Punkin) at the Agape Institute in Pomona, California, an all Chinese Mandarin speaking “theological school” with extraordinary emphasis and exclusive rights to the Holy Spirit. After arriving back in our Pittsburg, California, home we spent time with my colleague, Dr. Jane Tam from LTS Hong Kong, now teaching at Christian Witness Chinese Seminary in Concord near our home.

And what a joy it was to have our Pahompu (Batak for granddaughter), Deaconess Mathilda Nainggolan, from Sumatra spend some time with us in our home and help with an evening presentation on Global Missions at St. John’s, Antioch. She danced the Batak Tor Tor and then we had the whole group stand and dance with us.

Even elderly with canes were trying their best. Can you picture it? Lutherans dancing in Church! Mathilda is doing her CPE at John Muir Hospital in Walnut Creek, the same program that Punkin completed a year ago. Thilda lives with a wonderful volunteer family, Lou and Grala Warren, from St. Matthews.

## Return to Tau Fong Shan

With a 17 hour Air China trip through Taiwan I have returned for the 9<sup>th</sup> time to Tau Fong Shan Mountain and the 92 year old Lutheran Theological Seminary to preach and teach and coach as my calling in retirement continues.

I live in a tiny comfortable apartment with a too short bed in the seminary dorm. 121 steps up the mountain is my office in the classroom building in the seminary complex that was originally constructed up here on the mountain in 1990. The office was intended for a bathroom. I seem to have an uncanny urge to flush out bad theology and often speak of baptism. It is a very moving location. (My Bataks call a bathroom “the place of contemplation.”)

I join faculty from Hong Kong, Sweden, Germany, Finland, US, Norway and Denmark. Our ELCA missionary/faculty members are Ted

Zimmerman teaching New Testament, John Lemond teaching Church History and Heather Helgeson, teaching English. Clergy couple John & Valerie Peterson work with local congregations and the Philippina domestic servants. We also have a Missouri Synod Professor, James Rimbach who teaches Old Testament.

Presently the ELCA has 284 missionaries in about 48 countries. 119 were new in the last year. 44% are under the age of 30. The total budget is 29 million with 20 million going toward south/south and partner churches projects. This is about 1/3 of the ELCA budget.

## My academic work

following courses: Pastoral Leadership and Church Organization, Congregational Conflict Management, New Ministry Paradigms and Marriage and Family Counseling. I will also lecture on Homiletics, my first love. There will be additional tutorials as well.

As an example of the mix of students and cultures, I have 20 students in my Congregational Conflict class coming from Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Bangladesh, Nepal, Hong Kong, Nagaland, Sri Lanka, Germany

and Indonesia. At 8am I try to greet them in their own language and with their own name. They howl with laughter when I often get it wrong.

### **A sign of our times**

We worship daily in a beautiful chapel with translation through earphones in three languages. Yesterday, 4 times the Cantonese preacher said the Old Testament name for God, *Yaweh*; the English translator each time called it *Yahoo!* I struggled to keep my usual religious composure.

### **The menu**

With the exception of Saturday night and all day Sunday, food is served in the dining hall with 10 around greasy round black tables while we sit on tiny four-legged stools. It is always rice, boiled whole fish, and a vegetable which appears to me as if they just trimmed the shrubbery! Sometimes there is also meat, chopped bones and all, in small pieces. And always "surprise soup" in a large vat. When we dip down in there we get surprised with all sorts of unidentifiable animal parts. We eat from a small bowl using chopsticks. For breakfast it's toast, peanut butter and jelly, and rolled oats. Tuesday is "egg day." I am the only faculty who eats all his/her meals with the students. They have tug of war over who will wash my bowl and sticks. And they all race to sit next to me because I usually have a bottle of chilies to which they help themselves.

### **Sumatra Batak Connection**

Since I have been dividing my overseas time between Sumatra and Hong Kong I have been able to establish real ties between Batak students and this seminary. Deonald Sinaga now has his doctorate and a respected position in the HKBP (Huri Kristen Batak Protestan) Church. Presently my former students Panditas (Pastors) Benny Sinaga, Wilda Simanjuntak and Sahat Gurning are here working on Masters so that they can go back and teach. There is also a Simalungun Batak (GKPS, Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun)\* attending. Next fall Dewi Sinaga, faculty member at STT-

HKBP seminary, and Tio Sihombing, graduate of the Balige Deaconess School, will arrive to study. This is all made possible by our friend's support and the maintenance by our church of an international student fund to which Carol and I contribute heavily, as well as one other couple at St. John's. We are seeing the next generation of leadership in the HKBP Church develop.

My group of five students from Myanmar just left my room (three men and two women). I served them soda, cookies, peanuts and ice cream. I'll do the dishes in the morning when I have hot water for my shower.

After we discussed tomorrow's Annunciation of our Lord (March 25th) and read Luke's account, I asked them to share their happiest childhood memory. Anthem told of his joy when he shot his first bat with a "flip jack" (in their language, catapult) at the age of 10. Lau also told of the rite of passage into manhood when they killed their first bat and how the family put on a celebration of the killing. They scrape the bat and rub on an orange powder and eat it.

Sharon's story was of how there were only two chairs in their house and her grandparents sat on them. Her grandfather would ask her to rub his sore feet and then complain about how she did it. With tears in her eyes she told of her happiest memory which was when he thanked her and gave her a piece of sugar cane as a reward.

Another told of his baptism, still another of passing school exams.

Thida was telling her story about getting her first pair of shoes, when Sharon, still thinking about the sweet sugar cane, chimed in, "My happiest memory at LTS is tonight when Dr. Jerry invited us to his room and gave us ice cream."

*\* By placing either HKBP or GKPS on the web you can find more about them. Both churches are members of the Lutheran World Federation.*

"Learning is having fun with the seriousness of knowledge. Learning about ourselves is enjoying the important gifts God has given us." - Robert J. Wicks in *Self Ministry Through Self-Understanding*.

### **About the bird flu**

Several of you have asked about the bird flu. March 26th they announced that there were now 7 cases in neighboring Cambodia. There have also been some in Guangzhou where I will teach in a couple weeks. But all the cases have been through direct contact with the diseased birds...and none from one person to another. Usually the Chinese live in very close proximity with their chickens or ducks. Here in Hong Kong none has been reported but they are preparing nevertheless. Princess Margaret Hospital has been designated to care for the first cases if, and when, there are any. They had lots of experience with SARS and infectious disease two years ago.

*Jerry Schmalenberger*  
JLSchmalen@aol.com