

Taiwan...A Lesson in Teamwork

Later this year, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding by the Rev. Dr. James Laidlaw Maxwell, Sr. of the Presbyterian Church of England, and the Rev. Dr. George Leslie Mackay of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The PC(USA) began its mission service in Taiwan after World War II.



This anniversary milestone, coupled with our church's prayer and financial support of the Rev. Dr. John McCall, a mission co-worker serving in Taiwan, led the FPC mission committee to propose a vision trip to Taiwan. John has been serving in Taiwan for over 16 years now, currently as an instructor at the three seminaries of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan.

For six days in July, a team of seven (Michael Baron; Coreen Ford; Kelly Kost; Warner McNeilly, III; Amy and Bruce Ramsden; and Tom Van Pernis) sought to experience Taiwan with John in a way that reflects Eugene Peterson's translation of John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood." John reminded the team, "As Christians and mission co-workers, you are called to move into the neighborhood to live with and love the folks to whom you have been called." Thanks to John's efforts, the team was quickly immersed into the local culture and enjoyed intimate and personal insights into the lives of many wonderful faith-filled Taiwanese in their own neighborhoods.



Only three percent of the Taiwanese population is Christian. The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan is the largest Protestant denomination on the island (around 200,000 members) with about half of its churches serving the aboriginal people. These aborigines make up less than 2 percent of Taiwan's population and nearly 70 percent of them are Christians. John has spent a considerable portion of his time in Taiwan working with these Christians both while teaching in the seminaries and on weekends preaching in their churches.

John's gentle ways were fully on display as the team met with a Taiwanese pastor, his young son, and one of John's seminarian students on John's home porch. The team heard stories about the struggles faced by the aborigines seeking employment in the growing urban areas and the pain of young adults leaving their indigenous communities and never returning. For the aboriginal men, the cultural norm is for their wives to work while the men remain at home to care for the children. Many of John's students are men who work tirelessly to balance their call to ministry with the cultural expectations of their families.



The team visited three different Presbyterian churches during their time in Taiwan: Lotung, Dongson, and Bi Ho, with Lotung being the largest at 450 members. When asked by our team how many regularly attend worship, the answer was "450." Just imagine if all members on roll at FPC actually attended worship every Sunday!

To celebrate this church's 100th year anniversary, 250 of its members joined forces to craft a hand-written bible with verses in either Mandarin or Japanese. The entire project took about three months

and stands now as a wonderful testament to this church's commitment to the Word of God and a gift of faith for future generations.

As the team heard from the pastors and leaders of these churches, they were deeply inspired by their commitment to some of the same social issues faced by US communities like poverty and injustice for the marginalized. They heard of outreach ministries to provide food, clothing and toys for children in need. They met families who felt the call to ministry generation after generation with one family having six pastors among the grandfather, grandmother, sons, and even a grandchild about to become the seventh in the family.



While at the Bi Ho church in the mountains on Taiwan's east coast, the team led a Vacation Bible School for the village children on Saturday morning in which they led parachute games and also helped the children decorate book bags for school.

Later that afternoon, No-mah (a pastor at a different aboriginal church as well as the husband of the pastor at Bi Ho church) and a number of the village youth took the team to a river that cascades down the mountain. There are a number of waterfalls and, with the help of these aboriginal young people, the team climbed up the river and its many waterfalls. It is a river strewn with big boulders that can be slick. The team was so inspired to see how these youth worked so beautifully together to get the American guests up the falls shouting their tribal word of encouragement above the sound of the pounding water.

The village youth offered their knees and shoulders to make a human ladder upon which team members climbed. The youth never complained and always flashed smiles of encouragement as team members grabbed for handholds or footholds on the slick rocks. As soon as all were up one fall, one of the youth would scamper up to the next fall to scout out the best route for the team.

In this world of so many sad divisions, it was amazing to witness the teamwork and the servant hearts of these young Christians. Afterwards, the mission team reflected that what started for them as a day to experience Taiwan's beautiful wilderness, ended with the memory of a lesson from these youth of how to work together and have such fun while doing it.

Taiwan offered so many sights, sounds and tastes to experience throughout the visit. The Portuguese called Taiwan "Formosa," which means "beautiful island" and the FPC team agrees wholeheartedly having walked the beautiful Taroko Gorge, driven the eastern coastal highway on precipitous high mountain roads all the while seeing the blue Pacific Ocean just a short distance away.



The team returned excited to continue building relationships with the Christians in Taiwan and China perhaps by offering an English immersion camp in China for pastors there. If you are interested in this future opportunity, please contact our Missions Office at 615-298-9593 or adultmissions@fpcnashville.org. To learn more about the multitude of local, national and global missions supported by FPC, please visit the mission portion of our website found at www.missions.fpcnashville.org.