
Cross Cultural Discipling Mission Benjamin & Karen Rees December 2009

IF YOU RECEIVED THIS VIA E-MAIL: We value your prayers, but we also value your good will. If anyone who receives this would rather not receive it in future, please let us know and we will remove your address from our list.

IF YOU ARE READING THIS ON THE INTERNET and would like to receive this prayer letter regularly (roughly once a month), please send your request to <reesmission@gmail.com> and we will add you to the mailing list.

Written on December 2-3. Weather – (4:05 p.m. on 2 December), sunny and cool. Temperature, 21°C (70°F). Relative humidity, 70%. Air pollution index, (general) 60-75, (roadside) 80-100.

WE'RE STILL ALIVE!

No, we haven't had any major catastrophe to prompt the above headline. It's just a family "in joke." Whenever one of our kids goes too long without communicating with us, Karen is likely to send an e-mail headed, "Are you still alive?" Since it has been nearly five months since I sent the last of these "monthly" e-mail updates, you may be wondering. Yes, we are still alive and basically well. We have just had a very full schedule and no time to write or send a letter like this.

U.S. TRIP

We arrived back in Hong Kong on schedule on August 20. Our time in the U.S. was a blessing, but a mixed blessing.

On the plus side: We made it to all the appointments listed in the very full itinerary I sent out in July. We were able to see all but a couple of our regular supporters in the states we visited, plus a lot of old friends in these areas. We enjoyed the hospitality that was extended to us wherever we went. We had good visits with Karen's parents and some of our respective siblings. We spent a good amount of time with our kids. We were able to spend quality time with our mission directors. We had a good time of fellowship with other missionaries at the Lake James School of Missions in Indiana. When we had a serious problem with our car, it happened in a place where there were friends particularly qualified to help.

On the negative side: There was far too little time! With only six weeks available, and so many people to see and so many things to do, we started with a very full schedule. When problems came up, there was no room to bend. Although most people have called our trip a "furlough" or a "vacation", there was almost no time to relax or rest. Karen's mother had serious health problems while we were there, and we were worried about her. My own blood pressure went up several weeks before we left for the U.S. and stayed high the whole time we were there, even though I was taking mild blood pressure medication.

Back in Hong Kong, our apartment was well looked after while we were gone. The church seems to have managed quite well except that the attendance was down and hasn't really recovered since our return.

* Thank God for all the blessings of the trip, as listed above.

* We are thankful to God and to the people involved for all the help we received with the trip – for help in arranging the itinerary, for Christian hospitality, for help with problems, for extra thoughtful touches (like the church in Illinois that bought us a mobile phone to use as we travelled), etc.

* Thank God that Karen's mother recovered well from the health problems she had while we were there, but please continue or renew your prayers for her health for another reason. She fell recently and suffered a compression fracture in her spine.

* Thank God that my high blood pressure seems to stem from stress and not other problems, and I am learning how to manage it better.

SPECIAL EVENTS IN THE CHURCH

No sooner did we get back than we had to start helping to prepare for various special activities in the church.

Ambassadors Anniversary: The Ambassadors group in the church celebrated its 11th anniversary on October 26. This group meets roughly once a month. They have a lesson, singing, games sometimes, and a fellowship lunch. The teaching alternates between lessons on Christian money management and an emphasis on evangelism. Jim McElroy was the guest speaker for the anniversary.

McElroy Visit and Workshop: Jim McElroy was a classmate of mine at Ozark Bible College. His parents were Barton and Betty McElroy who were missionaries to the Philippines. He grew up in the Philippines and served as a missionary there himself. He currently ministers to a mainly Filipino church in the Seattle area and visits the Philippines a couple of times a year to teach and to administer the Master's degree program of Manila Bible Seminary. He made a side trip to Hong Kong in late October and held a seminar for us on "Overcoming Evil with Good." This started with his talk to the Ambassadors anniversary and continued with further sessions in our regular church services and on the public holiday on Monday.



Jim McElroy signing copies of the handbook for his seminar

Church Anniversary: The church celebrated its 28th anniversary on November 8. (The actual anniversary is on the 22nd, but celebrating early allows more time afterward to prepare for Christmas activities.)

The guest speaker was Albert Bulalayao, the youth minister at the large Cruzada Church of Christ in Manila. As usual, the extra costs of bringing a guest speaker from the Philippines were covered by one of the regional groups in the church (this time, the Tagalogs) so they didn't need to come from the over-stretched church budget.

December Events: Christmas is one of the major holiday celebrations in the Philippines, with preparations beginning months before the day. Many of our Filipino members try to schedule their holidays to go home for Christmas if possible. For those who are here over the holidays, people's lack of free time and the church's lack of its own meeting place prevent us from doing some things, but the church will have several special events during December. The Faith Circle group, which mainly organizes fellowship activities on public holidays, will have a Christmas party during the Bible study time on Dec. 13, and will hold a drama contest in a park on Christmas Day. (We will have our family Christmas some other day.) The choir will present a special musical program during the worship service on December 20. We will probably have some kind of "Open House" at our place on New Year's Day.

* Thank God that the special events so far have gone well overall, despite some misunderstandings in the planning stages of some of them.

* Pray for the special events still to come this month and on January 1.

BAPTISMS



Raja, Chitra and Dalani after their baptisms, accompanied by Raja's mother, Rani, holding Dinah, their baby

The Sri Lankan Tamil couple, Raja and Chitra, and their older daughter, Dalani, were baptised on October 10. (The younger daughter, Dinah, is still a baby.) They have not attended our congregation very often, since they found another church, "The Vine Fellowship", which has a number of other Tamils attending and has provided them with a place to stay and has helped them financially. (The Vine is a large independent congregation that seems similar to a Charismatic Baptist church in its beliefs and practices.) But we continue to be involved in their lives. Karen has been seeing them once or twice a week to have Bible studies with them and to tutor Dalani. Recently she has started teaching Raja and Chitra to read English better. When they were ready to be baptised, Raja requested that I baptise him. Some of the Vine church people were a little sceptical, questioning why we should be baptising one of "their"

prospects. But Raja and Chitra explained our prior and continuing involvement with the family, and Chitra, who didn't care who baptised her, suggested that Vine church people could baptise her and Dalani. At the baptism I stressed that they were not being baptised into a particular church, but into Jesus Christ. It was actually a three-church baptism since a few people attended from another church that has helped the family some.

* Thank God for their baptism and continue to pray for their spiritual growth.

* Pray for their application for refugee status, and for their financial needs. The legislature here recently passed laws re-affirming previous policies that asylum seekers can't work here. (A court ruling had allowed them to work for awhile.) But the government only gives them minimal financial aid and the various charities and churches who help the asylum seekers have limited resources themselves and can't help enough.

URGENT PRAYER NEED FOR CHURCH MEETING PLACE

The church has been meeting in its present venue in the YMCA since March 1992. This location has been a blessing in many ways. We would like to continue meeting there, but are facing the possibility of losing it.

The attendance in the congregation has always been transient. Unlike most Hong Kong churches, which are made up of local Hong Kong Chinese members, our members are mostly foreign contract workers – most from the Philippines, although over the years we have also had people from many other countries. People come to Hong Kong and come into the church; later they leave to return to their home countries or move on to other countries. In recent years, for many reasons, the rate of people leaving has been faster than the rate of new ones arriving, and the attendance has declined. With a decline in attendance, there has also been a decline in the giving.

For a couple of years, the giving has not been enough to cover the rent of the meeting room. Fortunately, there were considerable savings from better years, and this covered the shortfall. Now the savings are almost exhausted. The YMCA requires that we sign a contract for three months at a time, and it is time to sign a contract for January to March. If we renew, the January rent will be due in mid-December. We should (barely) have enough for January. Unless there is a completely unforeseen major increase, there will not be enough for February or March.

The room we are in now will hold 100. (At one time our attendance was even larger than that, and we had to have two services.) At current rates of giving and with our current budget, we need an average attendance of at least 60 for their giving to cover the rent. Our average for a couple of months earlier in the year was slightly over 50, but the past few months it has been only a little over 40. The YMCA does have smaller meeting rooms that rent for less, but they have a maximum capacity of 50, which would effectively prevent us from growing to more than that. (Other groups would like to have the room we now have, so if we give it up it is unlikely we could ever get it back again.)

This is not an appeal for extra money. The church has always been self-supporting and should continue to be self-supporting. What we want from you is your prayers.

* Thank God for providing the church with this room that has been such a blessing in so many ways and for so long.

* Pray for wisdom as to what to do now. The YMCA has asked us to give an answer on Monday, Dec. 7. The church officers will discuss the matter this Sunday, the 6th. Pray that it will be clear whether we should move to a smaller room that will be more affordable but will put a cap on possible growth, or should renew the contract, in faith that the attendance and giving will grow enough to pay for it.

* Either way, please pray that the attendance and the giving will improve.

Benjamin & Karen Rees, CROSS CULTURAL DISCIPLING MISSION, discipling the peoples of the world from a base in Hong Kong, China.

Address: 85 Broadway, Flat B, 5/F, Mei Foo Sun Chuen, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Tel: (852) 2742-6484. (**Fax** by arrangement at the same number. Call first.)

E-mail: reeshk@netvigator.com or reesmission@GMail.com.

Forwarding Agent: Penny Graves, 3300 E. 13th, Joplin, MO. 64801-5825, U.S.A. Tel. (417) 659-8105. E-mail:

pgraves@joplin.com