

TAIWAN TIMES

February 26, 2010

Dear friends and prayer partners,

Wow! Where has time gone? We have already celebrated Chinese New Year, and are a week into the year of the tiger. In Chinese thinking, the tiger is not a completely good animal, nor a bad one either. People born as tigers are supposed to be unpredictable, rebellious, passionate, daring, impulsive, vigorous, affectionate, and generous. They can also be reckless, impatient, quick-tempered, obstinate, selfish, aggressive, and moody. We Christians don't put any confidence in these kinds of superstitions, but it is interesting that traditionally cats are not pets here for the most part. Tigers and cats can bring bad luck, so most people don't want them in their houses. I have seen lots of BIG rats running around here recently (no, not in the house, outside), so we could use some more cats in the neighborhood.

December was an extremely busy month (it usually is), but January and February have been slow. The time between Christmas and Chinese New Year seems like wasted time as far as church work goes. Since Chinese New Year was very late this year, we have had two slow months. To start our news, the last Sunday of November we had the annual church business meeting. We have usually done this in March, but we decided we are going to follow the custom of the mother church up north and do it before the year begins. It was a smooth meeting, for which I am grateful. You never know what can happen in a meeting here. Thankfully no surprises!

On top of everything else in December, we were able to make a trip to Tai-Zhong to pick up some things my mother and sister-in-law sent from America. My parents have a friend who lives in Pennsylvania that is also a Taiwanese citizen. When she came to Taiwan the last time, we were sent a box with a few things, so we made time for a day trip to the big city in the middle of the island. We met Mrs. Lee around 1:00, and went out to look at the sea of flowers east of Tai-Zhong. She then directed us to a place called Lavender Cottage where they have more flowers. I tried some lavender ice cream--not too good. It left a soapy taste in my mouth. They also had blueberry ice cream, which I loved. This place was near the top of the mountain between two counties. The map showed the road went down the mountain. I

thought it would be better to get back to Tai-Zhong that way. Well, the road ended at the county line. There was this little narrow road that continued, and so I tried it. We ended up right back at the Lavender Cottage. Finally we got out of there, ate supper at Ponderosa in Tai-Zhong City (which Mrs. Lee did not know was there), and headed home. We arrived about 11:00, so it was a pretty long day.

For the Christmas program I got roped into helping in a drama. It has been a while since this church has done a drama. Traditionally that falls to the youth group. Our youth group is “interesting.” Two girls come for Sunday School, and will not participate in anything else. The others are all in university, except one that is in sixth grade. It was impossible to get them together to practice, so we adults had to do most of the drama. I was Zacharias. I am not that good at acting, and having to speak in Chinese made it worse. Thankfully I only had a couple of lines. It was different missing my Sunday afternoon nap for a couple of weeks. Practices did not go all that well, but somehow it went off okay during the program. It was actually one of the better parts of the program, and it was nice to see so many people working together. My years teaching American Literature at Sheng-de Christian College had given me some experience in helping my classes put on dramas, but it is a whole different thing acting in one with Chinese people. The Lord gave grace, and it is over. But the Christmas story might never be the same to me!

The program could have been a disaster, but the Lord helped us. I had been focused on the annual meeting, and did not pay attention to the Christmas program like I should have. I think the coworkers, particularly the one in charge of Christmas, did the same thing, so it was hectic getting everything together. The coworker heading it up waited until the very last week to start working. We did not get posters printed and invite people the way we should have. There were several in the church that complained about the lack of organization. It was stressful, but I learned that I am going to have to stay on top of things. The coworker in charge this past year is very willing to do the work, but needs direction. I am not sure what happened with the one who assisted her. She was in charge of refreshments, and was supposed to be at church around 5:00 to prepare the food. She showed up at 6:00, and forgot the sandwich buns. She did not get the gifts for the kids and called Missy the day of the program to go and buy them. So we had an exciting time with this Christmas program. Many Chinese people have trouble with organizing, and it is one of the things Americans must learn to live with here. But other than the stress behind the scenes, things went well.

We had around 85 come to the program, down from over 100 last year, but still many visitors. I thought it was one of the better programs I have been to in Taiwan. We did it on Saturday evening, December 19. We started at 6:30, and that is dinnertime, so people straggled in throughout the program. However, we wanted to get the program done, refreshments served, and the church set up for Sunday before too late. The program went well, we made contacts, and then cleaned up a little.

The following morning was terrible! We had 38 for worship, but it seemed to be a service that just dragged. The worship leader that morning told me he did not get to bed until 3:00 because someone came to visit him after the program. I had not slept well, and really had a hard time staying awake trying to prepare for the service. People again straggled in late. I thought we might have this problem because of the program. Last year we had the program Sunday evening, and Sunday service was good. However, several people spent all day at the church, and Monday they were tired. Maybe the answer is to do it on Friday evening, but it could not start until 8:00 probably, and it would be midnight before everyone left. I don't know what the answer is, but I hope I find a solution before too many more years go by.

The Sunday after Christmas we went to a funeral. A lady I used to pastor in the Kao-hsiung Church passed away. I think she was 90 years old. The funeral was in the next county over from ours, and instead of driving, I decided to ride the motorcycle. Riding a motorcycle in good clothes is a challenge, but I was afraid we would not be able to find parking. The funeral was nice, but the church it was held in speaks Taiwanese; so, some of the funeral was in Taiwanese, which I cannot understand. The message was in Chinese, and I thought the brother who brought the message did a good job. The church does not have a pastor, so a professor had the message. It was one of the best messages I have heard in Chinese. I could not understand everything of course, but it is nice to go to something like that and be able to understand a lot.

The first Sunday of January after church we had our first coworkers meeting of the year. I got a good look at the finances and was very pleased. This has been a tough year in Taiwan because of the bad economy, but the giving for the year was only down 50,000 NT (about 1,500 USD) with the building fund offerings included. We raised 522,000 NT (15,000 USD) this year toward buying our own place. Of course it takes a lot more money to buy a place here. We are probably looking at ten to fifteen million NT. But we have around three

million now designated for this, and a good bit more in the treasury. Just this week we were given a gift of 50,000 NT for the building fund. The Lord is helping us, and hopefully we will be able to have our own place.

I did gently scold the coworkers and encourage them to try to correct a couple of problems. First was a lack of planning for special events. Second was in the area of being a friendly church. I noticed at the Christmas program we had several new people, but the church people basically ignored them. So I asked the coworkers to take fifteen minutes after church to greet everyone instead of rushing off to do things. I am going to have to force myself to do better in this area also. I still fight shyness, and also feel my Chinese is not as accurate as it should be. But I also want the church to grow, and an unfriendly church will not grow. The coworkers have done pretty good at cooperating, so hopefully we will see improvement in this area.

During January we had to go out to eat a lot. It is the custom here for bosses to invite employees for a feast before Chinese New Year. In times past they would serve chicken, and whomever the chicken head was pointing to would lose their job. (Yes, we eat chicken with the head still on sometimes. No worse than eating a fish with the eyes staring back at you!) One of the things Pastor Grant, the big boss at headquarters, is big on is expressing appreciation. So we took the secretary and his family out for some Cajun cooking at an American restaurant. They have a little boy, and before we went out to eat, we took them to the big mall and rode the huge Ferris wheel on top of the mall. I have wanted to do that since the mall opened three years ago. Someone gave us free tickets, so finally I had my chance. There is a link to pictures from the Ferris wheel at the end.

Later that week we took the previous year's coworkers to a little restaurant. One of the coworkers recommended the place. It was pretty good, and I have been back once since then. They have a meal of salmon served with mashed potatoes and cheese on top, plus a scoop of rice, and it is absolutely delicious! The prices are pretty reasonable, and I can get full there. Come on over and we will take you out!

In January we made another trip up north. One Saturday evening my field director called me and told me the next Tuesday he was going to have surgery for kidney cancer. I knew he had

been having trouble, but was not sure what the problem was. The next morning I told the church people, and there was a shocked silence. Bradley Halter founded this church and pastored for around ten years, and several of the people from that time are still in the church. So Thursday we drove up and took one of the ladies in the church with us. She got to visit some old friends from her time studying in Florida, and we got together with some old friends also. Friday morning we visited Bradley and his wife in the hospital and came home. The doctors think they got all the cancer, and February 21 he resumed preaching. He is still recovering, but doing well. But that was a curveball.

Over the past three months we have had some new worship leaders. A man named Ivan used to come to church here when Pastor Halter was pastoring, but moved to Australia. Now he is back because of work. He plays his guitar every Sunday and that adds to the service. He also has started leading services like he did many years ago. Another lady that is actually Malaysian has started leading again. She did it before her son was born. He finally is able to go to children's church, so she can be more active in the church. One of the coworkers named Judy has also started leading, so finally we have enough leaders. It has been a struggle to get people to lead because no one wants to do it more than once a month. Others are finding their places of service in the church, and I am happy to see more than just the coworkers involved in helping. We have had several good services lately, and I think part of it may be that more people are contributing to the services. In America preachers say that you get out of a service what you put into it, and I think this applies here also. It is exciting to have people come and tell me they want to serve, and one of my goals is to train different ones so they can take their place in the church.

In wrapping this up, I want to leave you with some prayer requests. First, let me report on someone I asked you to pray for in the last letter. Alice has disappeared. All of a sudden she quit coming to church and Bible study. We have tried to contact her and cannot get in touch with her. I don't know if she is overseas, or if she has lost interest. I fear it is the latter. I am also concerned with others that have not yet been converted. Patrick and Josh have not moved yet, and there are others in the church. Last year we only baptized two, and my prayer is that this year we will have more.

Another thing I am concerned about is that there is a division among the coworkers. Pastoring in Taiwan is like pastoring Corinth in some ways. I Corinthians 3 talks about

carnal Christians fighting with one another, and we are going through a time like this about a decision the board made. My prayer has been that God will show these ladies their hearts and that they will see their need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I am not discouraged by the problem. Ever since I began pastoring here I have been praying that my people would be filled with the Holy Spirit. I sense God is dealing with some of them, but in the meantime I stand in need of wisdom. I hate conflict, and am not a strong leader in dealing with it.

Below are links to our picture albums:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/Melissa71169/Christmas2009#>

<http://picasaweb.google.com/Melissa71169/TaiwanLifeAndSceneryJanuaryFebruary2010#>

From Taiwan,

Byron and Melissa Manners