



Taiwan Times

Byron and Melissa Manners Newsletter

Blog: <http://taiwantimesblog.wordpress.com>

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By the time this letter is sent out, we should be celebrating the Year of the Ox. So let me wish everyone a happy Chinese New Year. I am glad this past year has come to an end. However, in looking back, it has been one of the better years we have experienced in regards to church growth. When we had our annual meeting in December, I reported eight new people attending and three baptized this year. God provided financially and spiritually last year. Even though it has been a stressful year because of the COVID-19 and then losing my father, the Lord has helped us.

Thanksgiving was especially difficult for me. My father passed away in the beginning of November, so I was not looking forward to the special Thanksgiving service. We had a couple of testimonies and a special instrumental. Irene works as a nurse in another city, but she comes to visit sometimes. She believes in Jesus but has not yet been baptized. After service, she told me that she selected her song for me. Instead of preaching, I did a dramatic monologue on one of the nine unthankful lepers. I maintained my composure until I was just about finished but then broke down. We had some visitors that morning, and the Lord's presence made it a special day.



Between December 24 and January 25, we have attended four funerals. A missionary lady who attends our church also lost two of her siblings during that time. I conducted the first funeral the morning of Christmas Eve, but it was only a casket ceremony and then a ceremony before cremation. Oddly there was no funeral service or burial ceremony. The deceased was the father of one of my board members, and he had passed away just the day previously. The family decided to have a Christian funeral but wanted it done as soon as possible. I basically had twelve hours notice that I was conducting the ceremony the following morning. Because there was no funeral service, at the casket ceremony I talked about the necessity of being prepared to die instead of only offering words of comfort. Other than the lady from the church, the rest of the family present were not Christians. A former church member lost her mother to brain cancer in January which was painful for Missy. Two other church members lost a parent and a father-in-law to cancer. Those ceremonies were Buddhist, and I had to represent the church at the funerals. That can be awkward, but at both funerals the ones conducting did not give us pressure about holding incense sticks and worshipping the dead. It has been about ten years since we have attended a Buddhist funeral, but this year we have already been to two. Another is soon coming because the member who just lost his mother is about to lose his father. So several in the church are grieving right now. Please keep them in your prayers that they will sense the Lord's presence and comfort.



Christmas was a bright spot in an otherwise difficult time. We decided to do two Christmas programs this year. On Christmas Sunday the children had the major part of the service. In past years our kids did not like being up front. This year we had some new ones attending, and they wanted to perform. Ten days before the program, Missy started getting messages from one of the ladies helping with the program. She was very aggressive and demanded

some changes that would hurt others in the church. A week before the program she dropped out, and the four children she was bringing to church disappeared. I feel like this was a Satanic attack trying to divide the church. Even though that lady has friends in the church, none of them left with her. Missy quickly reworked things, and the program went pretty well. Thank the Lord for His guidance in this difficult situation!

We had a good number in the choir. Three of our young people also played an instrumental. The choir and the young people performed Sunday morning as well as Christmas evening. That evening we had around fifteen visitors. Besides singing, some of the adults acted a story out as it was read. Missy said the Lord really helped me speak. With both programs we used the theme, "What are you searching for?" It was a little difficult trying to come up with two sermons on the same subject, but the Lord helped me.



Christmas morning Missy had the privilege of talking to twenty-nine sixth graders about Christmas in a public school for forty minutes before the students began classes. She told the Christmas story and also talked about the legend of the candy cane. The church prepared candy canes and some other candy for each of the students. I felt Christmas day was actually normal. We celebrated in America with our families last year, and the American Christmas traditions seemed

foreign. I guess that is what twenty years in a country where Christmas is not a holiday and being thousands of miles from family will do to a missionary!

You may have noticed in the pictures that everyone is wearing masks. The government has asked that we wear masks especially when social distancing is impossible. There has been concern the COVID-19 would return this winter. Sure enough, in January a doctor treating a case that was imported became infected, and it has spread into the community. Right now we do not have any cases in our city, but our sister church up north is located where the outbreak has occurred. Hopefully the government will be able to control it, and we will not have to experience what the rest of world went through in 2020. We praise the Lord for how He has protected us so far. Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support.