

# BCEC *CONNECTIONS*

*A publication to inform, involve, and unite the BCEC extended church family*



## **Are Political Favors a Curse or a Blessing to Christianity?**

BY SENIOR PASTOR DANIEL CHAN



When I studied church history at Boston University, I observed that for

2,000 years, the church and the state had inevitably encountered and interacted in history. Christians are citizens on earth as well as in heaven (Philippians 3:20). However, in the eyes of those in power, it is more important that their fellow countrymen focus on their status as earthly citizens and their contributions to the country. When the Roman Empire believed that the Christians were detrimental to the stability of the country, it suppressed them. Nevertheless, the church grew despite persecution. Later, Constantine fought a decisive battle. Because of a dream that involved the Christian cross, he began to favor Christianity.

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As a result, the state and the church began many centuries of cooperation. The status of the church was changed from being a subject of suppression to a group with privilege. Over time, the role of the church subtly changed. As King Darius said when he allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, *“Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God. The cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province from Beyond the River. And whatever is needed — bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests at Jerusalem require — let that be given to them day by day without fail, that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.”* (Ezra 6:8-10 - ESV) Sure enough, after Christianity became the state religion of Rome, the church gradually took up the role of blessing the regime. The desire to critique the government was relatively reduced.

Europe in the following centuries experimented with the integration of politics and religion. During that time, the Pope was as powerful as a king. The archbishops in various locations were as powerful as provincial governors. As a result, political practices and power struggles entered the church. The political nuances of the church in some big cities became too complicated for the average priest to handle.

Jesus Christ had no political power, but he changed the world with the gospel. The process was slow and costly. However, when political favor is enjoyed, changes might happen quickly. Yet the result may not be the one Jesus envisioned. There is a story about the famous theologian Thomas Aquinas visiting Pope Innocent II who had used political power to get into his position. Innocent was assessing his enormous papal assets. He joyfully told Aquinas that the church can no longer say, *“I have no silver and gold”* (referring to Acts 3:6 - ESV). Aquinas responded with a sigh and said, *“But now the church cannot say in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”*

The interaction between the church and the state can be viewed as a social phenomenon. Therefore, understandably, it attracted the interest of sociologists. Secular sociologists will observe and explain church history from a sociological perspective; Christian sociologists have personal experience of the Christian faith. Believing sociologists possess an additional perspective. However, in order to avoid being criticized as being academically biased, they have to present their view in a scholarly way. In an article published in *Christianity Today* on May 6, 2021, Professor Saiya from Nanyang Technological University in Singapore published a paper from a sociological perspective entitled *“Proof That Political Privilege Is Harmful for Christianity.”* He began by asking, *“Why is Christianity growing in some countries but declining in others?”* Saiya then referred to a study by his research team in which the team spent 10 years collecting data from 166 countries concerning church growth. He found that church vitality and growth are inversely proportional to preferential treatment from the government. In other words, as the preferential treatment from the government increases, interestingly, church membership decreases. Saiya noted that his research is set in the context of 21st century societies and does not extend to previous eras.

In conclusion, Professor Saiya mentioned three myths of church growth. The first is the rejection of multiculturalism. Many Christians believe that removing other religions and multiculturalism from society will lead to greater growth of Christianity.

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However, Saiya pointed out that churches in seven of the 10 countries with the fastest growth for Christianity in the world do not receive preferential treatment from the state at all. The churches in these countries need to "compete" with other ideologies and beliefs. Nevertheless, this competition produced greater vitality and a better understanding of the believers' faith. To me, from a historical perspective, the state's preferential treatment and the monopolization of religions can indeed bring short-term growth to the favored faith. However, in the long run, the church will descend into complacency and the faith will become simplistic.

The second myth raised by Saiya is seeking privilege. However, privilege can incur resentment and opposition from non-Christians, making them shy away from the church. If the privilege comes from the help of politicians, some kind of quid pro quo may be expected. The church will then be involved in an endless exchange of favors. Saiya's team found that nine of the ten countries with the highest Christian population declines have governments that gave Christianity considerable privilege. In addition, some studies show government-sponsored missionaries are often less effective than missionaries who belong to faith missions.

The third myth is fear of persecution. Saiya's team observed that from the mid-20th century to the present, many places where Christian groups have grown the fastest are countries that are unfriendly to Christianity. This does not only produce numeric growth, but also strengthens Christian character.

In conclusion, Saiya reminded Christians in Europe and the United States not to get too cozy with politics or desire special favor from the government when seeking to revive Christian culture in their countries. As an Asian who received a doctorate degree from an American university, Saiya observed that many non-Christians and faith seekers in the United States believe that Christians are tied to a certain political system or political party. This assumed affinity for the state is so pronounced that they lose interest in hearing the gospel. His observation is worth thinking about. In a free society, holding the government accountable and critiquing government policies are the rights and responsibility of every citizen. Christians cannot shirk their civic duty. Participating in voting is also a task that Christian citizens should not avoid. Being called by God to engage in politics is a noble mission. However, as we engage in politics, we need to be careful about the double-edged sword of the historical power exchange between church and state.

The passage above reminds us not to be discouraged when our faith is not favored by the government. However, it does not mean that we need to remain silent when the government promotes all kinds of social and ethical experiments that go against biblical principles. Instead, we need to speak against government policies that are hastily made to please the dominant culture, while neglecting the long-term ethical impact on society. This includes policies that gag the conservative voice and punish people just for saying the wrong pronoun. The United States will have a general election soon. Besides considering the ability to govern, we also need to consider ethical issues as we vote. We certainly do not want to see our country fall deeper into an ethical limbo.

# Summer Local Mission

BY JOHN WONG, NEWTON CANTONESE



*“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 15:5-6 - NIV)*

Many brothers and sisters from Boston Chinese Evangelistic Church participate in summer local mission and winter local mission that are organized by the Boston Short Term Mission every year. After the pandemic, some local Chinese churches have resumed many of their gospel outreach ministries, but some have not. Local short-term missions are a good opportunity for believers from different churches to go into the community to spread the gospel together, learning from each other and encouraging each other.

To take advantage of the outreach activities that some churches have arranged for June and a visit to

Boston by last year’s summer local mission’s speaker in that same month, this year’s summer mission was held in advance throughout the month of June. Although the preparation time was tight, 46 believers from eight local Chinese churches signed up to participate in the end.

This year’s summer local mission continued to be held in a hybrid format. The online evangelism trainings were held on Friday evenings, with topics including “Keys to Gospel Visitations” (Pastor Daniel Chan), “Preaching the Gospel to the Sick” (Pastor Kenneth Kwong), and “How to Guard Against Heretics” (Minister James Leong). Participants could choose to participate in real time or watch the recordings afterwards. Arranged by different partner churches in different places, on-site evangelistic activities were held on Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays. Activities included evangelistic concerts by the Heralders, visits to elderly homes, nursing home visits, street evangelism, and evangelistic seminars on the theme of “Ancestor Worship and Christianity.” Participants could select which activities to join. Everyone is welcome to visit Boston Short Term Mission’s website to watch a short review video: <https://bstm.org>.

We thank the Lord that many participants felt they benefited greatly from participating in this year’s local summer mission. Some first-time participants had the opportunity to experience the joy of evangelism, and even some experienced participants had gained new insights. In addition, the leaders of the partner churches felt that the summer local mission was able to help promote and improve the outreach ministries that they have been organizing. May God receive all the glory!

## **Prayer requests**

1. Pray that God will water the seeds we have sown in the hearts of many in the various different activities, and strengthen the faith of those who have accepted Christ.
2. Pray that God will continue to ignite our passion for preaching the gospel and inspire other believers to join our ranks.
3. Thank you all for your support and encouragement to the Boston Short Term Mission! Pray that God will lead our team forward, so that we can serve believers and churches more effectively.

# Farewell to Senior Pastor Daniel Chan

BY BCEC BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Senior Pastor Daniel Chan will be dearly missed at Boston Chinese Evangelical Church. Several brothers and sisters took the time to write a tribute to Pastor Daniel, ahead of his retirement.

*Deacon Billy Ng, Chinatown Cantonese*

I have known Pastor Daniel, since he started serving at BCEC in the 1990s. Over the years, I have seen how God has been using him as a vessel for His Kingdom. It is such a blessing to BCEC from all his years of dedicated service and his spiritual guidance. He is humble, genuine, gentle, patient, and just a down-to-earth person. His preaching and teaching are concise yet profound and impactful. His explanation of the Bible verses using resourceful examples makes it easy for everyone to understand and brings new light to the interpretations of God's Word even though we have read those Bible verses many times.

My wife Grace and I always look forward to his sermons and will definitely miss him after he retires. I know that God will continue to guide Pastor Daniel in living out his purpose and mission in his retirement.

*Elder Chuk Lam Yuen, Chinatown Cantonese*

We honor our beloved Senior Pastor Daniel Chan, as he retires after more than 30 years of devoted service at Boston Chinese Evangelical Church. His kindness, gentleness, and

unwavering faith have been a guiding light for our congregation and the community. A godly and faithful leader, he has shepherded us with love and wisdom, always putting others before himself. His sermons have inspired, his counsel has comforted, and his presence has been a blessing to many. His humble and always ready to help attitude has been exemplary for us. As he embarks on this new chapter, we celebrate his legacy of faithfulness and love, knowing his impact will resonate for generations.

Thank you, Pastor Daniel, for your incredible dedication and service. May God bless you abundantly in your retirement.

*Elder Jack Lee, Chinatown Cantonese*

I would like to highlight three attributes of Pastor Daniel from my experience of working with him for over 30 years on the Board of Deacons and on the Board of Elders.

1. He is a very humble servant of the Lord. I have never seen him lose his temper, even when he was challenged at board meetings. In this regard, we at BCEC are blessed that he falls in line with our three previous Senior Pastors.

2. He is very hard working. He continues to perform the work of a "generalist" congregation pastor (preaching, officiating funerals and weddings, counseling, doing home and

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Senior Pastor: **Rev. Daniel Chan**

Assistant Pastor (Cantonese Congregation), Chinatown Campus: **Rev. Kenneth Kwong**

Assistant Pastor (English Congregation), Chinatown Campus: **Rev. Enoch Liao**

Assistant Pastor (English Congregation), Chinatown Campus: **Rev. Steve Liu**

Assistant Pastor (Mandarin Congregation), Chinatown Campus: **Rev. Andy Su**

Assistant Pastor (Cantonese Congregation), Newton Campus: **Rev. Barry Lam**

Assistant Pastor (English Congregation), Newton Campus: **Rev. Ken Liu**

Children's Ministries Director, Chinatown Campus: **Lorraine Ho**

Director of Women's and Caring Ministries (Cantonese Congregation), Chinatown Campus: **Venus Yim**

Director Young Adult & College Ministries: **Ryan So**

Director of Student Ministries, Newton Campus: **Chris Horte**

Interim Project Destiny and Youth Outreach Minister, Chinatown Campus: **Louis Leung**

Interim English Minister, Chinatown Campus: **Vernon Cheung**

Director of Seniors and Outreach Ministries: **Benny Chiu**

Interim Chinese Minister, Newton Campus: **Peter Wong**

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# Farewell Pastor Daniel

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hospital visitations, etc.) after becoming the Senior Pastor of a large, complex, multicultural, multi-staff, multisite church like BCEC. He does it well without complaining.

3. He is a good preacher. He often laments that he can't preach without notes. However, it is exactly because he writes down his sermon beforehand that he can preach with concise, logical words that are easy to follow and understand. His mastery of the Chinese language and knowledge of history enrich his sermons. His delivery is intelligent and non-robotic, unlike some people who just read their notes. He once shared that preaching from Psalms is most challenging to young preachers, and I am glad that he chose to close his tenure as Senior Pastor at BCEC with a sermon series on the Psalms.

I will miss Pastor Daniel a great deal when he steps down as Senior Pastor, but look forward to his return as a guest preacher in the future.

*Michael Ho, Chinatown Cantonese*

Pastor Daniel has been my mentor for almost 30 years. I received one-on-one discipleship training from him in the 1990s, and have been serving on

the Missions Committee since then.

Pastor Daniel is a people person. He is more concerned about maintaining relationships and harmony among people, rather than the work itself. Not that ministry is unimportant, but the ministry itself must not come at the expense of personal relationships. This is something I learned from him.

Persistence is another virtue I learned. In the face of difficulties, Pastor Daniel would persist and continue the work he was called to do. He has strong faith in our Lord.

May our Lord continue to guide him in his retirement years.

*Emily Ho, Chinatown Cantonese*

Dear Pastor Daniel, it's hard to imagine your upcoming retirement is approaching. It feels too soon, and we are deeply saddened to see our respected senior pastor leave. Your kindness, humility, and easy-going nature have touched so many lives. Your care for people, especially those who are suffering, has been a source of comfort and support. Your sermons are both profound and simple, making God's teachings easy to grasp.

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# Farewell Pastor Daniel

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Pastor Daniel Chan and his wife Bet Har Wong Chan are all smiles at 120 Shawmut Avenue.

I am just one of the many who have been blessed by your wisdom. Even before our deacon meetings, you always lead us in Bible study, showing your dedication to our spiritual growth. You've worked tirelessly to nurture our faith, and for that, we thank and praise God for your pastoral care and companionship. May God bless you with good health and joy in the days ahead, and may you continue to reflect His guidance, calling, and blessings in your retirement.

*Elder Brian Hui, Chinatown Cantonese*

I met the young and promising brother Daniel Chan at a young adult fellowship retreat at our church in the 1980s. We were assigned to the same group, giving us the chance to have more in-depth conversations. Through our discussions, I began to notice his extensive knowledge and spiritual gifts. It became clear to me that brother Daniel had the potential to become a great pastor, so I encouraged him to pursue theology. I believe this retreat played a significant role in his decision to enter full-time ministry.

To keep it brief, except for the few years when brother Daniel pastored a church in Hong Kong, I had the privilege of serving alongside him in various capacities at Boston Chinese Evangelical Church for over 30 years. I thank God for those opportunities.

Pastor Daniel is a faithful and devoted pastor — gentle, gracious, and highly knowledgeable. He is well-versed in church history and Chinese literature.

Pastor Daniel's commitment to caring for the congregation is evident in his excellence in everything he does. Despite his busy schedule, rain or shine, Pastor Daniel always made time to visit and pray for the elderly and those in need at homes and hospitals, offering timely support to many.

Pastor Daniel, thank you for shepherding us over the years. We will never forget your biblical teachings and guidance.

In November 2024, Pastor Daniel will retire as the church's fourth senior pastor. May God bless his retirement with good health, abundant grace, joy, and cherished moments with Sister Bet Har and family.

Pastor Daniel, I am confident that God will continue to use you to pass on your pastoral experience, wisdom, and truth to the next generation. Together, we will keep spreading the gospel, so that more people may be saved by grace.

# Chinatown 2024 Mid-Autumn Festival Outreach Spreads God's Love in the Community

BY MINISTER BENNY CHIU, CHINATOWN CANTONESE



The 2024 Chinatown Mid-Autumn Festival occurred on August 11. About 130 brothers and sisters served in various capacities — assisting at the photo booth, running the game stalls, and performing music.

We give thanks for God's grace and guidance, as the 2024 Chinatown Mid-Autumn Festival turned out to be a complete success. First and foremost, we are especially thankful for the great weather on the day of the event. Although rain was initially forecasted, God showed mercy, granting us comfortable weather that allowed the entire event to proceed smoothly. Whether it was the street booths, game setup or street evangelism, everything unfolded seamlessly under His protection.

On August 11, about 130 brothers and sisters enthusiastically served in various capacities — assisting at the photo booth, running the game stalls, performing music, evangelizing in the streets, or working behind the scenes in preparation. Each participant dedicated themselves wholeheartedly, displaying tremendous love and unity. Everyone worked together, striving to advance the gospel, and it was through such dedication that the entire event was richly blessed, spreading God's love to every friend in the Chinatown community.

We are grateful that God enabled brothers and sisters to collaborate and have a unified heart in this ministry. We ask the Lord to continue to use our service, allowing us to lift up His name and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ at every future evangelistic opportunity. To God be the glory!



# Vacation Bible School Dives into Deeper Connection to God

BY MINISTER LORRAINE HO



During Vacation Bible School week in August, the theme of “Scuba” taught children to dive deeper into a relationship with God.

Children are ready to receive Christ at a young age. Therefore, we ought to work hard to reach them, so they pursue God and can enjoy His blessings for the rest of their lives. It was wonderful to serve with 48 other Vacation Bible School (VBS) volunteers, who shared the joy and love of Jesus with the VBS students. Some of the helpers were only 11 years old, learning to serve others and support their teammates. More than half of the 64 elementary-aged students live right in the Boston community and come from non-Christian families. Some of the students invited their friends to join. Others are from our Chinatown and Newton Campuses.

For a week this August, we dove into the theme of “Scuba” and learned to dive deeper into a relationship with God. Each day was filled with Bible learning, which emphasized how Jesus is a friend who is real and can be trusted. Most importantly, He provided a way for us to be His friend forever. Each afternoon, we created science lessons that matched this year’s ocean theme. Educational topics included different ocean zones and the creatures that live in them, echolocation, climate change and its effects, and what the children can do to make a difference.

Please lift up the students who heard the gospel message in prayer. Pray for the seeds to grow and the Spirit to work mightily in them. Pray for the volunteers to continue to mature in their walk and have a love for service.



# Reflections After Being Back from a 12-Month Sabbatical

BY PASTOR ENOCH LIAO



Pastor Enoch in front of Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon.

I am grateful for the opportunity to take a 12-month sabbatical. I would like to take this opportunity to share a little bit about my sabbatical.

What did I do?

One of my goals included studies and taking classes. The Lord allowed me to begin a program of study at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. This mostly online program on intercultural education fits well with our church, and I have benefited so much from my time there already.

Another goal was to visit with, connect, and learn about other Chinese heritage churches around the country. The Lord provided me with opportunities to travel to multiple states to minister in a variety of churches and conferences this past year. It was a joy to have opportunities to teach, preach, provide counsel, offer coaching, and consult with a number of ministries.

A third goal was to spend more time with family. It turns out we had an active year of taking trips with our kids and spending more time at home. Our oldest son, Evan, also graduated from college.

How was my sabbatical made possible?

The Lord graciously provided for me and my family. The Lord provided financially, as our financial situation is somewhat different during a 12-month sabbatical. The Lord also allowed me to gain admission to a great program at Western Seminary.

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# Pastor Enoch Liao's Sabbatical Reflections

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But mostly, the Lord provided in the form of brothers and sisters who took on my responsibilities while I was on sabbatical. BCEC has had a sabbatical policy in place for many years, so the pastoral staff and lay leaders have had many opportunities to cover for staff when they go on sabbatical. But covering responsibilities for a year requires much work and creativity. I would like to thank Pastor Daniel for his support during my sabbatical. I also want to thank all the English pastoral staff. Pastor Ken took over as the Lead English Pastor for both campuses. Pastor Steve Liu took on overseeing the Chinatown English staff and ministries. Pastor Steve also oversaw our operations staff. Minister Ryan So took on leading our adult small groups. Minister Lorraine Ho took the chairperson role for our Missions Committee. I'm also grateful that we have been blessed to have interim staff contributions by Vernon Cheung and Louis Leung. Both the Board of Elders and Board of Deacons have offered prayers and encouragements. Many lay leaders adapted to work with different ministers. And many more people supported in ways too numerous to name. Thank you and praise God.

What did I learn from my sabbatical?

The Lord was gracious to allow me to start my sabbatical with energy and excitement. Though I definitely took more time to rest, reflect, and even relax, the Lord allowed significant progress towards certain life and ministry goals. I learned much from my studies, interactions with other churches, and through extended times of prayer and journaling.

I also learned a lot about other Chinese heritage churches. I spent time with churches in the South, the Midwest, southern California, the mid-Atlantic, and the northeast. Though different parts of the country have regional differences, there is much we have in common with other Chinese heritage churches throughout the country: experiences of acculturating to this country, joys and challenges of raising bicultural families, common challenges of developing Chinese or Asian American identity for those who are growing up as Chinese American.

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Pastor Enoch and the Liao family at Tufts' Commencement. (From left) Kian, Pastor Enoch, Evan, Karen, and Owen.

# Pastor Enoch Liao's Sabbatical Reflections

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Pastor Enoch, Kian, and Karen Liao at the Championships for Drum Corps International in Marion, Indiana.

I also learned what it meant to just come to our own church and be a regular member. During this year, unless I was out of town, I worshipped at BCEC with my family. I attended fellowship meetings as often as I could, and my wife and I continued in our small group. God reminded me how blessed we are with the relationships in our church. We have so many opportunities to serve one another, to serve the community, to share the gospel, and to build community.

I have been back from sabbatical for less than one week as I write this, and I am looking forward to catching up with people, reengaging with our leaders, visiting our members, and serving with our elders in this coming season.



Pastor Enoch with his older two sons Evan (left) and Owen (center) in San Diego for Christmas.

# Chinatown English Youth Learn to Trust God Through ‘Seasons of Change’ at BaseCamp

BY PASTOR STEVE LIU, CHINATOWN ENGLISH



The Chinatown English Youth BaseCamp Retreat took place from August 23 to August 25 at Camp Sentinel in Tuftonboro, New Hampshire.

The Chinatown English Youth BaseCamp Retreat occurred from August 23 to August 25 at Camp Sentinel in Tuftonborough, New Hampshire. A total of 60 youth and counselors went away to worship, reflect, fellowship, rest in nature, and hear from God on the theme “Seasons of Change.” It was a great time to wrap up a busy summer of outreach and activities, as well as to integrate youth for a new fall season of fellowship.



# BCEC Members Walk in Global 6K for Water

BY LING-MEI WONG LEUNG, CHINATOWN CANTONESE, ON BEHALF OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MINISTRY



Team BCEC raised nearly \$20,000 for water projects. Runners, walkers, and dogs all gathered along the Charles River.



Boston Chinese Evangelical Church participated for the fourth time with World Vision for its annual Global 6K for Water. The Social Responsibility Committee invited all congregation members to raise funds for water projects, including hand-washing stations and clean water pipelines in disadvantaged communities where World Vision serves in.

In developing countries, more than 800 children under the age of 5 die daily from diarrhea caused by contaminated water, poor sanitation, and improper hygiene. The task of collecting water falls mainly to women and children, especially girls, who carry water an average of 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) a day. Without access to a clean water source, their days revolve around a walk for water: gathering enough to cook, clean, bathe and drink. This greatly hinders many women and girls from attending school. World Vision's work helps provide clean water for communities to flourish.

Together, we raised nearly \$20,000 for water projects on May 18. BCEC runners, walkers, and dogs all gathered on Saturday morning at Arsenal Yards to begin the 6K in prayer. Praise God for all the brothers and sisters who participated in the Global 6K.



BCEC participates in the World Vision Global 6K for Water on May 18 at Arsenal Yards, Watertown.

# Blood Drive Collects Life-Saving Hope

BY LING-MEI WONG LEUNG, CHINATOWN CANTONESE, ON BEHALF OF NEWTON CAMPUS CONGREGANTS



A blood drive took place August 14 with the Red Cross at Boston Chinese Evangelical Church's Newton Campus.

Boston Chinese Evangelical Church's Newton Campus hosted the Red Cross for a blood drive on August 14. A total of 31 blood donors from the church and the community gave blood. The Red Cross indicated it was a successful drive, as the donated blood could potentially benefit 93 people.

The Red Cross team appreciated the facilities at Newton Campus and emphasized the importance of more Asian blood donors. Blood has different haplotypes that are specific to unique ethnic groups, which decreases the risk of rejection for people who receive blood transfusions regularly. Approximately a dozen BCEC volunteers led by Pastor Ken Liu and James Lam participated with facilities set-up, running the welcome table, and hospitality. BCEC volunteers provided lunch, frozen treats, and flowers for the Red Cross staff. It was a wonderful day collaborating with the Red Cross and meeting donors from Newton and neighboring communities.

## *Chinese Leaders Gather for New Church Vision*

BY THE CONNECTIONS EDITORIAL TEAM



The Chinese Leaders Meeting occurred on September 14 at Boston Chinese Evangelical Church's Newton Campus.

# Blessings from Participating in Short-Term Missions

BY MINISTER PETER WONG, NEWTON MANDARIN

Thanks to the grace of God the Father, through the church, I have learned about the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ: “Jesus came to them and said to them, *“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18-20 - NIV) This Great Commission established the direction of my life: to make disciples of all nations. From 2017 to now, the Lord has given me the opportunity to receive the blessing of participating and supporting frontline missionary service in several countries with unreached people. An unreached people refers to a group of people whose Christian proportion is less than 2%. It is the 2% minimum that is needed to reach the entire group; if there are less than 2% Christians in an area, it is almost impossible to spread the gospel throughout the area. I hope to use this article to share some of my experiences on short-term missions, and encourage you to try joining a short-term missions team and witness the Lord’s miraculous deeds in different places.

## **Eye-opening short-term missions trip to Lebanon**

In March 2018, God gave me the opportunity to go on a short-term missions trip to Lebanon with three pastors and senior missionaries. That trip can be described as eye-opening. God showed me His wonderful work among the suffering Syrian refugees. I saw that one by one Muslims accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord of life under the guidance of the Lord. Many of them met the Lord Jesus in person in dreams, which convinced them that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. A true God who is trustworthy and admirable. Even though they faced persecution from their family and friends after they believed in the Lord and even put their lives in danger, they remained firm disciples of Jesus Christ. They gave thanks and praised the Lord in their testimony! One of the scenes that deeply moved me was during a prayer meeting in the Bekaa Valley. I saw a group of Syrian, Iraqi, and Lebanese believers gathering together in the church and blessing the name of the Lord. In fact, about 10 years ago, several of their countries were still at war with each other and fighting against each other. They were among the enemies, but because of the power of the gospel, they were all united and became members of God’s Kingdom! Our God is really the Lord who does wonders alone! Another highlight of that trip was that the Lord gave me the opportunity to meet missionaries from East Asia, and they shared how they embarked on the road of cross-cultural missionary work under difficult circumstances. Their complete dedication to the Lord really inspired me to serve the Lord. I initially thought that it would be some time before churches in East Asia sent people for overseas missions, but the Lord’s work is beyond people’s imagination. Hallelujah! Before returning, our team leader asked us how the overseas Chinese church could help through support. Can I receive greater blessings through frontline missionary work? His question changed my view on participating in missionary work. It is not about what to do in the field, but to share blessings with the brothers and sisters on the frontline and behind the scenes! Our primary goal in participating in short-term missionary work is to watch God in action, see what the Lord wants us to see, hear what the Lord wants us to hear, understand the Lord’s heart, and wait for what the Lord wants us to do, even if it is just greeting missionaries, or praying for someone who is suffering.

## **Kyrgyzstan’s spiritual warfare in the verdant steppes**

In June 2020, God gave me the opportunity to visit Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia. There are the Tianshan Mountains covered with snow all year round and the vast green prairie.

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# Short-Term Missions: God's Work in the World

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## **Blessings to the Khmer people in Cambodia who survived horror**

In the 1970s, the people of Cambodia encountered an unprecedented disaster, and about 30% of the country's population was massacred. The country was hit hard on all fronts, and misery and poverty became part of life. Our church has been sending short-term missions teams to this country since 2019 when possible to partner with local missionaries and pastors, and lend a helping hand to children and college students in need. While the gospel door was still wide open, we introduced the Lord Jesus to the local people by celebrating Christmas. Although our strength is small, we were willing to offer our “five loaves and two fishes” and lead them to the hands of the Lord. He turns our small offering into a blessing for many people! We never imagined that we could bless more than 500 children and villagers every year. When we distributed Christmas gifts to the children, I felt as if I had stepped into a time tunnel and saw my younger self receiving Christmas gifts from American missionaries in Hong Kong. This vivid memory of gratitude almost made me shed tears. Our church theme this year is “Running the Race,” which also reflects the missions field! I suddenly thought that 30 years from now, the children who receive gifts today may also be distributing gifts in God's church. To the next generation of people in need, I would like to offer my prayers and thanks in advance!

## **Short-term missions to Japan makes missionary dreams come true for retired believers**

Japan, a country with a developed democracy, is the second largest country in the world with unreached people. Missionaries call it a land of hard ground for the gospel. This year, the Lord also moved several brothers and sisters who have entered the golden years (over 60) to join a nine-member short-term missions team to Japan to go to the Nagoya region in central Japan and the Kyushu region in southern Japan. The brothers and sisters put aside their comfortable retired life and traveled to various towns and villages in Japan to give the Japanese people they met the opportunity to hear the gospel. The team worked with frontline evangelists, conducting visits, praying and evangelizing on the streets, and participating in and leading multiple meetings. We really didn't expect to see the Lord's miraculous work. In one meeting, five friends decided to trust in the Lord, and among them were already baptized members of the name of Christ. Praise the Lord! I thank God for this team of brothers and sisters who are retired but made time to work for the Kingdom of God. I encourage brothers and sisters who have retired from work to consider stepping out of their comfort zone for two weeks every year to visit missionaries or assist them in small ways. You will experience His wonders firsthand.

Everyone can play a part in responding to the Lord's Great Commission. The key is not what to do, but whether we are willing to do it. We may not necessarily be full-time missionaries, but we can still do missionary work. May we work together for the gospel for His glory and honor.

# Stephen Minister Training Adds Six Ministers

BY GRACE HUNG, CHINATOWN CANTONESE



The 7th BCEC Stephen Minister training graduates (from left to right): Lai So, Amy Li, Sandra Chan, Christina Leung (trainer), Grace Hung (trainer), Hiu Man Chan, Wanda Lam and Edwin Kuk. (Image courtesy of Grace Hung).

The 7th BCEC Stephen Minister training graduates were Lai So, Amy Li, Sandra Chan, Hiu Man Chan, Wanda Lam and Edwin Kuk. They were commissioned on June 23 at BCEC's Chinatown and Newton Campuses.



The six Stephen Ministry graduates were commissioned during the Newton Cantonese Service.

# Project Destiny: An Urban Ministry

BY MICHAELA LAM, CHINATOWN ENGLISH



Project Destiny counselors served middle schoolers at BCEC's Chinatown-based summer camp.

This summer I had the opportunity to serve at Project Destiny! Even though I grew up at BCEC, I never really knew what Project Destiny entailed.

Project Destiny is a gospel-based, month-long middle school summer camp in Chinatown. We have charting (chapel), field trips, classes, small groups, and so much more! Many campers are from lower-income Asian immigrant families, so we connect cultural and language backgrounds while making new, enriching experiences accessible to them. Therefore, we raise support through money and prayer, along with donated meals for camp. Our primary purpose is to model Christian character, love, and hospitality to the young and unreached.

For the longest time, my perspective of serving at the camp meant that I had to wear a weird polo, and sacrifice a month where I could have been working... and I did not want to do that. But year after year, my friends became involved, and as I took my faith up for myself in college, I wanted to serve as well. Just plainly serve — because God would provide, no matter what! And if God was real, I wanted to do everything I could to serve, as we faced the unfinished task.

I was repeatedly reminded of how results were in God's hands. No matter how much we talked in small group, or how much love we poured into the campers, only the Spirit could change them, especially through prayer. Proverbs 21:31 — we were just preparing the horse, but victory was in His hands. I was amazed when I saw one camper said that she believed in God from 25, 50, to 75%! It was an answered prayer.

As senior counselors, we lived together in the beautiful Emerson dorms. We were at church 24/7 and all working for the same purpose to practice Christ's love! We each led a small group and class of our own interest, and we relied on each other and God's guidance to carry us through. Junior counselors assisted us, and we were grateful for all the behind-the-scenes work from the interns.

At times, it is so hard to see God's plan. However if we close our eyes and let Him take the wheel, we can rest assured that He is doing mighty work in our lives, and changing us to serve His people more.

# Our Journey to Congo: A Testament of Faith and God's Goodness

BY KEVIN FONG, NEWTON ENGLISH



The Congo short-term missions team (left to right): The Chens (Micah, Tony, Faith and Isa) and the Fongs (Helena and Kevin).

During the Missions Conference in November 2023, our hearts were deeply moved by Dr. Henri and Joyce Samoutou, whose dedication to alleviating blindness and visual impairments in Africa's remote and poorest regions has been remarkable. Driven by their faith and guided by the calling from Luke 10:9 — "Heal the sick, and tell them the kingdom of God is near you" — they have committed their lives to providing essential eye care. Their mission extends beyond addressing physical blindness to confronting spiritual blindness, embodying a holistic approach to healing and service.

We were blessed with the incredible opportunity to go to Ouessou, Congo to assist in preparing the newly-built New Sight Hospital for opening to the community. Our team from Boston Chinese Evangelical Church included the Fong family of Kevin and Helena, and the Chen family of Tony and Isa, along with their children Micah and Faith. While we initially faced uncertainties and apprehension, God's grace and the fervent prayers of our supporters transformed our fears into peace and anticipation. Our two weeks in Ouessou were filled with profound experiences and meaningful accomplishments, each day revealing the depth of God's provision and the impact of our collective efforts.

Each weekday, our routine began at 7:30 a.m. in the interim Eye Center's courtyard. Over 15 staff members and patients gathered for a time of worship. We sang uplifting hymns in French, including "To God Be The Glory" and "What A Friend We Have in Jesus," followed by a brief devotional and testimonies from our team. These morning gatherings were not just routine but a powerful expression of community and unity, setting a spiritually invigorating tone for each day.

Then we went to the new facility and, assisted by the facility guards, we worked diligently to move and set up the contents from 10 shipping containers. This process involved sorting, assessing, and organizing various items, and assembling tables, chairs, cabinets, and dental equipment. We created a functional workspace equipped with tools, shelves and a printer. The comfort provided by air conditioning and fans was a welcome respite from the tropical heat, enhancing our ability to focus on and accomplish the tasks at hand.

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# Congo: Bringing New Sight to the Blind

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The New Sight Hospital is more than just a medical facility. It includes a lecture/worship hall, pastoral library and children's center. Henri and Joyce's vision is ambitious and far-reaching, aiming to demonstrate God's love through both practical support and spiritual outreach.

On the weekend, we ventured into the town of Pokola. Our trip there involved crossing the Sangha River on a barge and traveling along an unpaved road through local farms. Established by a logging company, Pokola features essential facilities such as a school, marketplace, hospital, and also a music studio! Despite challenges, we witnessed the resilience and spirit of the local community, which remains a testament to their strength and perseverance.

Another memorable aspect of our trip was attending a Sunday church service. Conducted in French and Lingala, with Henri providing translations into English for our team, the vibrant worship experience included enthusiastic singing and dancing, a sermon about God's promises to the obedient, and a touching baby dedication. Our team had the honor of contributing to the worship by performing a French version of "Faithful One" and participating in communal prayers and offerings. The sense of shared faith and devotion was truly uplifting.

Our journey was marked by many blessings and miracles. God's blessings extended beyond the work itself. We rejoiced alongside the five patients who regained their sight following surgery and cherished the daily morning worship sessions. The Samoutous and New Sight staff showed unparalleled hospitality, providing accommodations that were the best we have experienced on a missions trip. We enjoyed private air-conditioned apartments with flush toilets and hot showers, and our laundry was done for us daily. The daily morning worship sessions, filled with the fervent energy of the New Sight staff, were a wonderful way to start each day. Despite the heat, we were able to cool off in the air-conditioned room as needed, which made our physical efforts more manageable. We are deeply grateful for their warm welcome and the opportunity to work and worship alongside them.

Looking ahead, we are excited about exploring opportunities for future BCEC teams to support the children's ministry in Ouessou. New Sight's initiatives include a community room and a monthly children's magazine, which they distribute to local schools. They are actively seeking volunteers for various roles, including magazine distribution, medical and dental care, IT support, and administration.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our Heavenly Father for the privilege of experiencing His grace and goodness throughout this journey. We look forward to continuing our support of this vital mission and witnessing how God will continue to work through the New Sight Hospital to bring hope and healing to those in need.

For those interested in supporting this mission or volunteering, please reach out for more information on how you can get involved. Your continued prayers and support are invaluable as we strive to extend God's love and care to the people of Ouessou.

# Kyrgyzstan Short-Term Missions Team Demonstrate Jesus through English Lessons

BY WILFRED CHAN, NEWTON CANTONESE



The Kyrgyzstan short-term missions team sets off from Boston's Logan Airport. Its eight members included BCEC's Wilfred Chan (fourth from left) and Mei-Hua Li (third from right), along with brothers and sisters from River of Life Christian Church in Boston.

I praise God for allowing me to go to Kyrgyzstan to serve about 60 children in an English camp for several days in June 2024. Not many people know about Kyrgyzstan. It is a small country that is located at the northwest border of China with a population of 7.2 million. The total land area of the country is about 77,000 square miles. According to Wikipedia, it is the second poorest country in Central Asia.

For this trip, we had a team of eight people go; six of them were from River of Life Christian Church in Boston (ROLCCIB), and two were from BCEC. Even though we were from different churches, we worked well together as brothers and sisters in Christ. We designed the lesson plans, prepared craft works, and practiced dance together. Moreover, we learned a lot from each other.

At the English camp, we served about 60 children. We divided them into three classes based on their ages. We had English lessons in the morning, activities in the afternoon, and dancing and singing in the evening. With the help of the local interpreters, we communicated well with the children. They loved all these activities. At the end of the camp, many of them approached their teachers and requested us to come back soon. Some of them invited us to their village to have a feast with them for their holiday, the day before we were scheduled to leave the country. We enjoyed their homemade food, and had a wonderful time playing with the children.

I prayed that what we did can help the children to grow and to be touched by God's love. I also prayed that we had fostered good relationships with their parents and school teachers, so that we can go there more often. I encourage brothers and sisters to consider traveling there to help the children to learn English, so that the children can experience God's love.

# Experiencing God's Grace in Kyrgyzstan

BY MEI-HUA LI, CHINATOWN CANTONESE

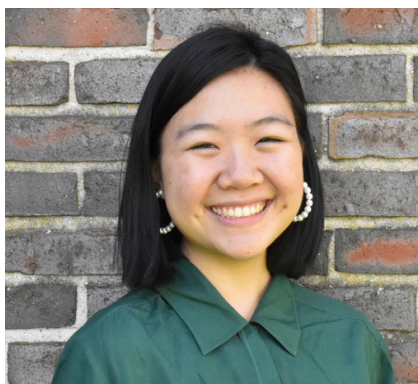
This is my third overseas short-term mission trip. As the COVID-19 epidemic passed, I felt God's calling again and participated in a short-term mission trip to Kyrgyzstan as a high school teacher at the English camp. I personally love learning new languages and experiencing new cultures, and this trip to Kyrgyzstan was yet another unforgettable experience. It is really a wonderful thing to work together with brothers and sisters from the River of Life Church and serve God together.

Due to the short preparation before the trip, I briefly learned a few Russian phrases and then embarked on the trip (I have to say that Russian is not easy to learn). Although we communicated mostly through body language while we were there, worship and dance connected us nicely. Everyone looked forward to the evening dances and games each night and happily took part in them. (The Donggan people dance nicely by the way). On the last day, there were a few high schoolers who were sad to see us leave. We hugged and cried together. Although I couldn't understand what they said, we were connected through a hug and simple phrases such as "хороший" (Great work). This reminded me of Jesus sharing his love at different life stages with people He love. Also, there was a teenage helper who attended the camp last year and came back this year to help translate. I heard that she also participates in Bible studies in her free time, and I hope that she will grow in God's word and come to Christ eventually.

I thank God for allowing me to know and listen to the experiences of missionaries and to understand their experiences more deeply. Their immigration experiences remind me of my family's experience of immigrating to the United States when I was a child. How brave it was. I was once again reminded that it takes a lot of bravery and courage to move to a new place to bring glory to God.

## *Blessing Beyond Words in Costa Rica*

BY ELYSIA MOY, CHINATOWN ENGLISH



For two weeks this past July, I was in Costa Rica serving with Students International, and my time there was a blessing beyond words.

Students International (SI) is a ministry organization that reaches out to low-income communities by incorporating community development and displaying God's love. They have locations in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Dominican Republic. In each country, they have ministry sites to serve the different needs of communities such as education, health and fitness, and microfinance.

In Costa Rica, I served with the

Women's Social Work/Microfinance ministry, which met at the SI office on weekday mornings and afternoons. Ladies from the neighborhood came to teach and learn different skills, including sewing, crocheting, embroidery, and jewelry making. I participated in the classes, and when I wasn't focused on the craft, I helped Heydi and Cindy, the two ministry site leaders, with preparing refreshments

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# Costa Rica: Blessing and Being Blessed

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The Women's Microfinance ministry in Costa Rica served community and spiritual needs.

for *cafecito*. This is a key time of day for Costa Ricans to pause, drink coffee, and enjoy conversation with others.

I witnessed the ongoing relationships that my younger sister, Carissa, has established with the long-term staff and students in the Tutoring ministry. Carissa spent the summer prior serving with SI as an intern. Each morning, my team began the day with devotions. The devotional study theme was “A Life Worth Living.”

*The foundation for a life worth living is to be reconciled to God, to receive His lavish love and forgiveness for our sins, and to be in close relationship with Him. We belong. We are loved and not alone. He is for us and not against us. He has a unique purpose for us to live out. And we know that we will be with Him for eternity.*

From these devotional times, God showed me how my personality, passions, life experiences, and spiritual gifts uniquely shaped me into who I am today. God has a purpose for my life, and I've been right where I needed to be these past four years since finishing college. This is an excerpt from my journal entry:

*God has a purpose for her life, and while it is still coming to clarity, Elysia has seen and witnessed how God has given her the gifts and talents to bring laughter and joy as a beacon of hope, to support ministries with administrative tasks, to listen well when someone is in need of counseling, and to serve humbly through action.*

God knew that He had to take me to the urban neighborhoods of Costa Rica for me to recognize and understand what God has been doing in my life. For God's purposes, I was saved at BCEC when I was 12. God wants me here, right where I am, at BCEC to serve the community that I have been so blessed to be a part.

Since returning from Costa Rica with this renewed passion, I zealously look forward to how God will use me to bless and be blessed by my church home, BCEC.