



Vietnam Project

June 29 – July 10, 2015

As I sit in the airport terminal of Hanoi, I am trying to process the last two weeks. The city is a strange place. An amalgamation of ancient and modern. Opulent four story homes stand between broken down hovels. Little shops and big shops and sidewalk shops fill the city.

There are signs of hope and signs of despair everywhere in Hanoi. They stand side by side. A juxtaposition of realities.

But still, no one smiles.

Not on the streets anyway.

And here in the midst of this city that often contrasts itself with images of beauty and images of despair, stands the Church.

To be honest I would not have sought out this trip on my own. I had already planned to take these particular weeks off to work on personal projects. And, if I'm being really honest, I've never been attracted to any sort of mission outside of North America. But when Kent asked if I would consider coming along, I had an overwhelming sense that I was being called to Vietnam by God the Holy Spirit.

My father is a veteran from the Vietnam War.

Growing up I only had a vague sense of what my father experienced, but I knew it wasn't positive. The adjective "devastating" comes to mind.

There is a poetic symmetry being here in Vietnam. The mere mention of the country invokes painful memories for my father. And yet, here I am, training men and women to become effective Bible communicators. He was asked to bring a gun. I was asked to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And not only the training, but the encouragement that Cross Talk Global brings to these pastors and teachers is needed. Day after day I heard from pastors who experienced persecution because of the Name of the Jesus. One pastor told me about how police in plain clothes attacked their church building – forcing the congregation to split into five groups and meet in homes. Another pastor recalled how men surrounded his car and smashed the windows with clubs. Still another told me how their church could submit fifty locations for a meeting place, only to have their requests denied by a zoning board.

Even in the midst of persecution, the pastors still minister. They faithfully shepherd the flock entrusted to them by their Lord with whatever resources they have. Which are often not much at all.

Toward the end of the second week, many of the pastors expressed gratitude that Kent Edwards, Blayne Banting, and myself had come to equip them. One pastor said, "The stories of the Bible are much more real to me now." I asked one of the pastors' wives what she thought the long-term impact of Cross Talk Global might be in Vietnam. She said if pastors preached like this "it could transform all of Vietnam." Many of the pastors referenced the confidence they now feel preaching without notes.

During the past two weeks, I have felt an incredible sense of honor to serve the Church in Vietnam. I've listened to their hearts as they preached. And I've partaken in communion with some of them on Sunday.

As I depart Vietnam, I'm looking forward to debriefing with my dad. I will tell him that, against all odds, the Church is growing in Vietnam. That our brothers and sisters in Christ continue to be faithful to our Lord. And I will reflect on the mystery of God. The irony of our Lord – How, as my father trained me in the Name of Jesus, he was also training me to return to Vietnam in his place.

Because of Jesus,



Nathan J. Norman
CrossTalk Instructor
The Orchard Church Senior Pastor
Traverse City, MI