

VICE PRESIDENT TINK IS CONVERTED IN VIETNAM

By Dr. Fletcher Tink

Yes, I've been Vice President of Academic Affairs for Union University of California, going on two years. And yes, I have supervisory responsibilities to the academic programs that we conduct in Vietnam.

But from a distance, UUC Vietnam has remained something of a mystery to me, as I've had trouble attaching faces and courses to real life experience.

Yes, I've been to Vietnam two other times---ten years ago before I knew UUC existed, and then last year in a whirlwind visit that had me giving two days of seminars on "Theology of Work".

But this September was graduation season, and I was selected to conduct the follow-up four-day workshop "Ethics in the Workplace", to be followed up by speaking at our Ho Chi Minh City graduation ceremony in early September. Slowly the clouds of mystery began to dissipate.



First, I continue to be hugely impressed by our leadership there, especially my predecessor, the Dean of the program there. A man of wisdom, deliberation and grace, he embodies the best of Vietnam in his artful guidance of the program. And I found his staff and faculty to be people of seriousness and competency.

Second, I was truly impressed by the quality of the seminar participants and their engagement in discussions. They are more mature than I expected. I only wish I could have spent two hours with each one to hear of their spiritual journeys that brought them there. 19 of the 40 are converts from other religious orientations including Buddhism and Catholicism. Many are dual professionals working in business enterprises, administrating schools or teaching. They have buckets of life experiences so don't come naïve to the table. Their questions are profound and their honesty transparent as we discussed issues such as corruption, and difficult personal and institutional

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ethical choices.

Third, I was deeply moved by the quality of the graduation ceremony guided by the Registrar, complete with graduation robes, and appropriate pomp and ceremony. The hall was packed with family members and friends who attested to the long road that brought these 19 graduates at the Doctoral, Masters and Bachelor's level, to this moment. The singing was vibrant, the joy of a job completed was palpable, the celebration was entirely on a par with anything in the USA.

I love the city feel of the streets, the smells, the noise and the warmth of the Vietnamese people.



There is a vibrancy there unfelt in urban America. In crossing a street with a thousand motorcycles charging at you, you learn to dance your way to the other side.

I was encouraged to go to Hanoi for two days. As a teenager in the 60s, I had only grim pictures in my mind of that city. Yet what I discovered was amazing color, burgeoning little shop businesses, vendors and hawkers who walked with me not in a nasty fashion but almost as a tease, families

celebrating the weather, and charming university students who insisted in interviewing me in broken English in their curiosity to learn more about the West. It was all pleasant. There I felt young again and special.

I had the opportunity to attend three churches, two for expatriates and one, a big central church filled in that service by about 800 worshippers. There I felt like I had re-entered the 1950's with hymn music of my childhood, all so familiar and memorable. It was done well and with soul sincerity.

During my time there, I read a book on Christianity in Vietnam, a depiction of the costly history that has allowed me to find my role in that ongoing story. The evangelical witness has grown 900% since 1975, despite adversity, and the stories I learned put context and insight into my current experience ---and what a great, even though difficult, story it is.

As I read the book, I saw the thumbprints of UUC's mission throughout, both as instigator and harbinger of change. And I was thankful that I am now part of that process, an enthusiastic convert. Congratulations to the students! Congratulations to the graduates! Congratulations to all of those who have invested in UUC! And thanks be to God who has stimulated sacrificial people to put it all together.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

"A GRACE THAT IS AGES OLD"

"This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began..." 2 Timothy 1:9

I think often of those who suffer because they are followers of Jesus. And I think often of those

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who suffer because they are human beings and suffering comes to all human beings. As president of Union University of California, I remember our students who face oppression and the daily possibility that someone in authority will make their lives more difficult because they are Christians; that someone may use power abusively with the purpose of causing suffering in the lives of people in our UUC community. As one who pastored a congregation of fairly wealthy and privileged American Christians for 23 years, I also know that having wealth and privilege is no guard against suffering when a loved one, adult or child, sickens and dies due to a fatal illness. Poor or rich, powerful or powerless, there is no way in this life to avoid suffering. Suffering will find us, and we will suffer.

2 Timothy is written from the context of suffering. After a life that included much suffering as an apostle of Jesus, Paul is in prison in Rome. The "time of his departure has come" (2 Timothy 4:6). He doesn't expect to remain much longer in this world. He looks back over his experience of life, and he believes that suffering is a normal experience for those who follow Jesus. As a pastor, I look back over 40 years of pastoring, and I believe suffering is a normal experience of all people.

To a large extent the second letter to Timothy is about enduring suffering, about sharing suffering together, about being "good soldiers" of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3) who are willing to suffer for one another and for our Lord.

We are not to be ashamed when we suffer because our suffering does not mark us as people deserving of shame. Rather we suffer generally because all human beings suffer, and we suffer specifically because we follow Jesus. The reality is that in some places at some times, Christians are suspected, disrespected, and even despised by authorities and people who do not know the Lord.

But God did not give us a spirit of fear. God gave us a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). In a world where no human being, not even the persecutor, escapes suffering, Christians have the ability to endure suffering themselves, and to reach out to those who suffer, even the persecutor. Suffering does not defeat us. And we can show others the way through suffering because of the grace of Jesus Christ. That way is to rely on the power of God, who has saved us according to his own purpose and grace (2 Timothy 1:8-9).

Paul writes that the grace we have received in knowing Jesus Christ was given to us long ago, long before we were born or even before our parents or grandparents were born. This grace was given to us "before the ages began" (2 Timothy 1:9); "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). It is this ancient grace of God, given to us before anything existed or God had called creation into being, that sustains us in times of suffering. Paul is reminding Timothy in this letter of this truth.

Something about suffering surprises us. We hoped we would escape it. We hoped it would not happen to us. And when it does, we react with surprise and sometimes fear. Like Timothy we need to remember and claim that grace that goes back before the beginning of time and was designated as a gift for us, that we might persevere. And more than persevere, that we might reach out with that ancient gift of God's grace to draw other sufferers into the community of Christ's love.

Let us remember all who suffer, and especially the suffering church.

Let us give thanks to God for the grace given to us before the ages began.



Dale Sewall
UUC President

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS



Rev. Dr. Spencer T. Sutherland, the founder and president of the Vietnamese Theological College went to be with the Lord on August 18, 2015.

Dr. Sutherland was born on November 24, 1930 in New York to Rev. Frank and Gertrude Sutherland. When Spencer was a toddler, his family relocated to Southern California where he attended Coulter Academy before moving to Santa Cruz, CA for high school and college at San Jose State University. There he met Barbara June Baker, a lovely contralto from Turlock, CA. This duo sang their way through life starting at Simpson College, Fuller Seminary, a start-up church in Vallejo (where firstborn, Betsy came along), and then to Vietnam in 1957 as missionaries with the Christian & Missionary Alliance. In Vietnam, Ron, Jill and Spencer (Bud) were born.

After two years of language study, Spencer and family started in youth work in Saigon, but later he spent his Vietnam years teaching at the Bible Institute in Nha Trang, where he inspired so many men and women to follow the Lord in ministry.

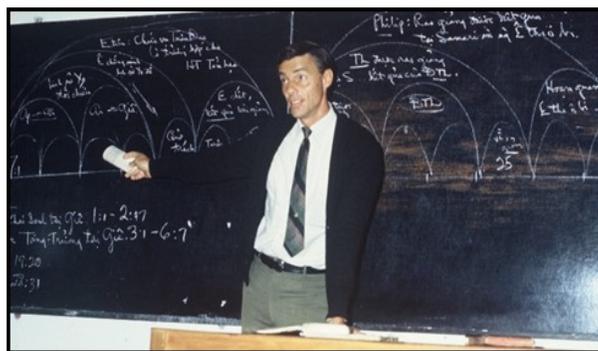
The family returned to the US in 1973 and, following his doctoral studies at the American Baptist Seminary of the West, he joined the new Alliance College of Theology in Canberra, Australia. In Australia he also preached and taught at the Chinese Methodist Church which later became Evangelical Chinese Church in Melbourne where many refugees from Vietnam were worshipping.

After a decade in Australia, he returned to Southern California to work with the Intercultural ministries of the Christian & Missionary Alliance for refugees from Southeast Asia where he devoted himself to the training of pastors and lay leaders.

In 1986 he and several Vietnamese ministers from different denominations founded the Vietnamese Theological College, now Union University of California. He served as the president and chairman of the board until 1990. Later he served with the Vietnamese District of the C&MA where he taught theological education by extension (TEE), which he had done extensively while in Australia. Later he and the Vietnamese District of the C&MA founded the Vietnamese Alliance Divinity School where he taught until retirement. During this time he also involved as a vice-president for Grace Mission University, a Korean-initiated seminary in Fullerton, California.



At Vietnamese Theological College, Westminister, California



At Nha Trang Bible Institute, Vietnam

Spencer tenderly cared for Barbara as she battled Parkinson's disease, passing away on December 20, 2010. He then married Olga Scolari in November 2011.

He passed into the presence of Christ on August 18, 2015, surrounded by family and friends. He is remembered as a man-after-God's heart, a tender husband, loving father, doting grandfather, humble teacher and mentor. His legacy lives on in the lives of his loving family and thousands of his former students and colleagues around the world.

Union University of California will hold a memorial service to honor his life and service on Saturday, October 3, 2015 at 3:00 pm at 14200 Goldenwest Street, Westminister, CA 92683.

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UUC
SPECIAL DAY OF
PRAYER

UUC's
Board of Directors
invites UUC students,
faculty and friends
to join them
in prayer for UUC
on Thursday
October 1, 2015



www.uuc.edu

UNION UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA GRADUATION

Nineteen students received their degrees in a graduation service held in Saigon on September 5, 2015.

Fifteen students completed their requirements for the M.A. in Ministry and M.Div. degree programs and four for the D.Min. program. These graduates are currently holding leadership positions in local churches, denominations and para-church organizations in Vietnam.



Dr. Fletcher Tink, Chief Academic Officer,



Graduation Service



Dr. Tu Truong, Dean of Vietnamese School



Dr. Kim-Lien Ngo, Chief Student Officer &

COURSE OFFERINGS - FALL 2015 - MODULE 2

English School of Theology

- Min-503 Pastoral Ministry
- BBL-502 Introduction to the New Testament
- EDU-502 Philosophy of Education
- LDR-506 Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

Vietnamese School of Theology

- BBL-504 - Luke-Acts
- CHH-501 - History of Christianity I
- THL-504 - New Testament Theology
- THL-515 - Fundamentals for Doing Theology

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