

“Welcome to the gathering of the saints who are sinners and the sinners who are saints.”

Pastor David, at the Evangelical Church of Bangkok where we attend, often gives this greeting at the beginning of the Sunday service. I (Christine) would like to give tribute to our “home church away from home” in this newsletter. We have attended this church for 14 years, serving in many capacities: from teaching, leading worship, playing instruments, directing the choir, functioning in elder and intercessor roles, to networking people and resources.

It represents a little taste of heaven to be surrounded in the pews by people I don’t know, but who worship in the language, culture, and costume of their home countries. I see refugees from the Congo (“Do you speak French?” I am asked) and from Pakistan (they lead the worship in our life group). I see Thais trying to break free from the bonds of Buddhism and tourists experimenting with it. I see business people looking for a place to speak English or take a break from 100-hour work weeks. I see missionaries who are leaders on their field.

Most of us are expatriates, united in the common struggle of culture shock, heat waves, and spiritual mirages. Friendships form faster and go deeper than those in our home countries. No one meanders into the sanctuary with a comfortable coffee cup. So many come with tears and raised hands, contrite before God, seeking His face. We all cry out to Him in the midst of satanic oppression on our lives, this city, this country.

*Blessed be Your Name, in the land that is plentiful...
On the road marked with suffering, though there’s pain in the offering,
Blessed be Your Name.*

We sing with thankfulness in our hearts to the Lord, with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. I look forward to heaven as I worship, eager to see the “gifts of the nations” brought to Jesus. I already see the gift of song-writing coming from western countries, and the gift of performing them coming from Asian countries. Wow, how our Filipino friends can lead our music time! Just last Sunday they led us in singing “God is So Good” in almost a dozen languages.

We give our offerings and tithes as another act of worship, praising the Lord for the missionary teacher sent from our fellowship to Mongolia. Every month we “commission” the continual flux and flow of those who leave our fellowship for other parts of the world, saying good-bye and seeking God’s protection and the spread of the gospel through them. Our “church on the mission field” is a sending church to another mission field!

We recite together Bible passages, creeds, and prayers. We take communion together with thankfulness, sometimes passing the elements, sometimes going forward to receive them at tables throughout the sanctuary. A thoughtful blend of church traditions is important for this collection of people from 40 different denominations. We take notes

carefully on the pastor's sermons. These meditations and songs all become for us life-links to take us through another week

At the end, Pastor David asks us to hold out our hands as if we are receiving a gift. He pronounces the "bene-diction," the "good-word." He reminds us that "though it may not seem so, this world is dying." And so we depart with scripture ringing in our ears and our spiritual vision re-set.

Thank You, Father, for this oasis for so many here in Bangkok. May Your Holy Spirit continue to soften hearts and show us how to serve and be a part of Your kingdom here. Amen!