



Global Outreach: International China Concern (ICC)

by Melanie Au

Melanie went to Changsha with ICC to help at the government Welfare Centre for 2 weeks.

The lessons learned from my trip to China began even before I stepped on the plane.

And they came in forms that I didn't quite expect.

With my application to ICC approved, vacation from work granted, and my health doing well, I felt like everything was falling into place - until my visa to China was denied. I was confused - had I heard God's calling wrong? I had been so sure He had distinctly spoken to me about going to China. But as quickly as my questions arose, the Holy Spirit also began to encourage me: "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me..." (Psalm 138:8) "Blessed is she who believes that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished" (Luke 1:45). And as I struggled to trust God with the situation, I began to see His purpose: "...to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart"(Deut 8:1). Did I think I was qualified to go because of my own abilities? Did I desire to go to China or to obey God no matter what - even if it meant staying in Vancouver? God was teaching me that He had the right to choose how, when and where I served Him, and that His purpose for me was to bring Him glory through obedience.

By the time I stepped on the plane, I was much more aware of God's grace and truly saw my trip as a gift.

Of course the lessons didn't stop there. Our team was frustratingly delayed for one night in Shenzhen when we discovered that train tickets into Changsha had been all sold out. But what we view as detours are often an opportunity to see God work. Our stay in Shenzhen allowed our team time to pray and commission each other -- and this became the most powerful experience of fellowship and revelation of God's plan for each of us on the entire trip.

It was definitely heartbreaking to see so many children not receiving the care and love they need. Many of them have never been hugged or played with and had bedsores and scars on their wrists and ankles from being tied to their beds. I'll never forget the children who cried when we put them back in their beds after working with them each day. But there is great hope as well: living conditions are much improved and the government is welcoming ICC teams and therapists into the centre. More able-bodied children are allowed to roam the halls in walkers and some workers show real care for the children. Although we were only with the children for two weeks, some of them who were unresponsive at first were laughing by the end.

But I knew the biggest change was not in the children - it was in me. I left with a profound sense of God's sovereignty, knowing that he was using these children to teach me to love more deeply and depend on him. I was inspired by the ICC staff who left their homes and families to serve God in a smoggy city where crossing the street means putting your life at risk. I have greater faith that God can change any situation, no matter how challenging.

Couples Interview continued from pg. 1

that suit our family needs, helping us meet our financial needs. It has not been easy as sometimes it requires a lot of patience on our part to see what God is doing.

E: What are your thoughts on living together before marriage?

W&W: We're not saying it's impossible, but we feel it would be really difficult to remain sexually pure if a couple was living together before marriage. A few years ago, we seriously contemplated going to Japan together to complete a teaching ESL course. In the end, we felt it was unwise to put ourselves in a setting in which sexual temptation may become a real issue.

F&M: [We follow] Hebrews 13:4: marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

E: In Canada, the average age of marriage is 31 for men and 29 for women (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2008); what are your thoughts about this?

W&W: Oh really? Interesting, we learn something new everyday. Thanks iiConnect!

F&M: We got married around that age so it is not any different. Ming feels that you need some time to know yourself and what you want to do with your life. Because of that, getting married at the age is good.

E: What is one piece of advice you would give to couples who are engaged or about to be married?

W&W: Enjoy this time...but don't forget the importance of the church community! Stay connected!

F&M: Learn about each other. Do not assume that the person will understand you and know all your needs. Continue to communicate with each other. This requires work. "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other." - Ps 85:10

E: What is one piece of advice that you would give to singles looking for potential spouses in the future?

W&W: 🎵God is watching, watching over you. 24/7 watching over you. Your life is in His hands ...woh woh....He's got great big plans 'cause He's watching over you. 🎵Seriously, God cares for you and He is preparing something that is more than what you can ask or imagine.

F&M: Be content with yourself. As you are looking, go and do things that you would like to do, not waiting for a spouse to do it with. Learn new things. You do not know if you can do them after you are married and what skills you need when you are married. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." - Philippians 4:6

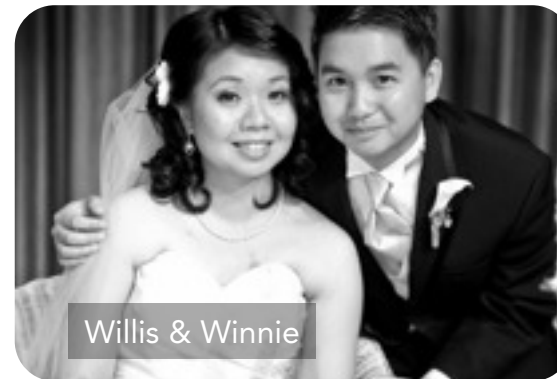
To be honest, when I first got the email from Pastor Cindy about writing an article about marriage, I really didn't think I was the most qualified person that iiConnect could've found, and if I was, then we were in serious trouble. I was very relieved when I found out that the article would be about comparing a newlywed couple with another couple that has been married for years and years. After a few emails, I received answers from Willis and Winnie, whom have been married for almost a year and from Ming and Francis, a couple who have experienced many seasons of marriage. Their answers were insightful and interesting and I hope you will find that as well! — Einar Wong

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Willis & Winnie



Francis & Ming

Einar: What was the first impression of your spouse when you first began dating?

Willis & Winnie: When we first met each other, our first impression of the other person was nothing special. However, when we first began dating, we felt that each other was nothing but special.

Francis & Ming: F - Ming was warm, friendly, open and approachable (still); M - Francis was very polite and kind.

E: Was there any difference between how you imagined your wedding to go and how it actually went?

W&W: In terms of how the wedding day went compared to how we planned it, we thought it was everything we asked for and more.

F&M: F - A wedding is just a wedding - a party. It doesn't prepare you for the marriage that follows; M - It went well. What did not go well, no one else knows.

E: How are household chores divided up in your marriage?

W&W: We once read in a book that marriage isn't a team sport in the sense that each person has a role to play and as long as each person plays his/her role, the team would have success. The book described marriage as more of a two-person sailing expedition. Each person needs to do whatever is needed to make sure the journey is successful.

F&M: It depends on what is going on in our lives. It first started with being even. Then Ming was working in the house, looking after the kids. At that time, she did more of the household chores. Now she is working more, Francis is doing more of the household chores and he is better at it. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in

humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." - Philippians 2:3-4

E: How do you deal with conflict in your marriage?

W&W: Commitment to communicate, no matter what.

F&M: James 1:19: My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Proverbs 10:19: sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues. Proverbs 12:18: the words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

We try to live by these principles. One thing we do not do is to deal with our conflict in the public.

E: How do you keep your romance alive?

W&W: We've only been married for less than a year...maybe ask us again in 10 years? or 5haha

F&M: We had kept our romance by spending time with each other. When the kids were young, we managed to dedicate time at night, early morning or coffee break during the weekend. Now that we have not raising any kids, we need to find an activity other than eating to keep our romance alive. (Francis - read the book Song of Songs more)

E: How have you seen God through your own marriage?

W&W: God often uses our spouse to reveal certain things about ourselves. He often

Couples Interview: Willis & Winnie Wong, Francis & Ming Leung

Interviewed by Einar Wong

speaks truth through our spouse to keep us accountable. He also uses our spouse to encourage us and to pick us up when we are down.

F&M: God has given us a lot of blessings through out marriage - raising our kids, finding jobs

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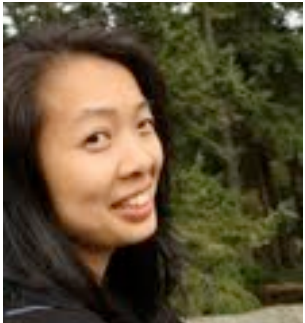
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Two Tales of One City

Part 1

By Christy Lew

It's been four months since I started my internship living with the Servants Vancouver community in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and it's been an amazing ride so far – I've been so blessed to live, learn, and serve down here! I'm so excited to be able to share a little of my experience with you...



First off, what do I do? Kind of tough to explain, but basically I live full-time with a Christian community in this neighbourhood, practicing radical hospitality and building relationships with folks in the area. We host open dinners three times a week, have daily prayer rhythms, visit friends in the hospital, hang out at drop-in centres, prayer-walk the streets, journey with friends detoxing before rehab, celebrate birthdays, study the bible together, grow things in our urban garden, fly kites at the park with the community's kids, make and eat amazing food from (almost) expired donations, squabble over dishes, laugh, sing, and dance – and a million other seemingly ordinary things.

It's more than that, though. What makes them something special is who we choose to do these things with. First, we do them in the context of a community because, really, we need each other. Living and serving with other people who are following Jesus means we have support – brothers and sisters who will back you up, walk with you, and speak truth into your life when you need to be challenged and called higher. And second, we do these things with people in the DTES, because God seems to have a special concern for the poor, marginalized, abandoned (just take a skim through scripture!). And as people wanting to follow God, we're starting to get His heart for those at the edges of society.

Life is both hard and easy here. Well, by 'easy' I mean that the neighbourhood is saturated with services for food, shelter, clothing, laundry, advocacy, taxes, pharmacies, clinics, needle exchanges, drop-ins...pretty much anything you'd ever need. It's hard because these things don't mean much up against deeply entrenched, systemic hurts, like addiction, mental illness, poverty, abuse, violence, trauma, and neglect. The heart of the matter doesn't lie in the nature of drugs or the lack of affordable housing (though maybe important), but in the need for healing – healing that comes from God and within community. That's what I've been learning: that we're all on a journey of healing from pain and brokenness in our lives.

It's been a humbling experience to be down here. I came to help, but found that I had very little to offer. I came to serve, but found I needed to learn instead. I wanted to see change, but found myself being changed in the process. I think I'm starting to get a better idea of what it's like to experience the Kingdom of God here on earth; I'm getting a glimpse of what it must've been like when the early church started, when it was made up of tax collectors, fisherman, and prostituted women doing life together, sharing their things, and being serious about the work of prayer, teaching and making disciples. What a beautiful image of church that is when people from very different cultures, income brackets, careers, social classes, etc. come together in unity because of an encounter with Jesus, and a relationship with Him that calls them to love God and love others.

I've grown up in church, and VCBC has amazing people and a lot of wonderful things happening, but I'd love to see God's heart for the poor and His call to radical discipleship be more fully realized in our congregation. I'm seeing that you find God in the margins, and it's there where you fall in love with His priorities and the people He loves, where His Word comes alive, your faith is grown, and you can see His mighty power at work in your life and those around you.



Two Tales of One City

Part 2

By Yolanda Bonkowski

When Aaron and I first moved to Vancouver, our new GPS told us to go through East Hastings on a journey from downtown to Lynn Canyon loop. So we did, and exited the most beautiful part of the city, and turned into the stretch of East Hastings where it was filled with homeless people everywhere, lying, sitting and sleeping on the street. My heart sank. This was the first time I had ever driven down East Hastings.

I began to question this surreal encounter, and God slowly chipped away at my soul. After reading the books “Under the Overpass” and “Irresistible Revolution” lent to us by Alfred Lu, a theme between the rich and the poor kept on reoccurring as I read the Bible.

“... but when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14: 12-14)

If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:3-4)

I think God was trying to tell me something, that what I saw was real. There is a lot of inequality in this world and in this city; what are you going to do about it? After a conversation with Christy Lew, she invited me to visit this place called Jacob's Well. It is not your typical come-and-serve type of place, we just hung out in a space much like a cozy coffee shop and we shared time together with tea, baked goods, card games and conversation much like a family visit in the living room but with Downtown East Side (DTES) neighbourhood friends. It was great.

I soon joined the Wednesday team which included an art time, and it has been such a blessing to get to know some of the people in this neighbourhood and erase the misconception I had of them.

I still remember the fear I had when I first got off the bus at the corner of Main and Hastings. This is the ONE corner I had always been afraid of while driving, and now I had to walk from there to Jacob's Well. But soon this ridiculous arrogant fear I had of people attacking me, and stealing from me was gone. People are people and God accepts each of us the way we are, so why do I have to marginalize them when they are different from me? Being in DTES weekly has led me to look at people with fresh eyes, and reminded me to look for the image of God in each individual.

After all, we are all made in God's image, and He called it good.

Path to Baptism

By Shirley Zhai

December 18, 2011

I was born and grew up in China. From very young, we were taught to believe that there is no God. People who believe in super powers were mostly illiterate and definitely considered superstitious. We were atheists. But when I grew older, questions like “Where were we from?” “Where are we going?” “What is the meaning of life?” started to come into my mind.

Fifteen years ago, while I was studying in Belgium, an English couple invited me to join their Bible reading Group. However, I was never touched by the stories because I didn’t believe in miracles.

Five years later, I worked in Shanghai and met a lady who was like an angel to me. She once said “Sister Xiaowei, since I believed in God, I am joyful and happy.” I admired her, but at that time I still was not sure of God’s existence.



After I moved to Canada, I met Grace Lu. She brought me to the block fair in the summer of 2010 and it totally changed my view toward Christianity. I was deeply touched by the huge amount of volunteers of all age groups, who were all welcoming and sincerely kind. Then Grace invited me to come to Sunday worship. Since Sep. 2010, I’ve been coming to this church.

I remember coming into the church so many times after a heavy week; the burdens of my heart were lifted by hearing the wisdom and calling of Jesus Christ during preaching, and during Dr. Jack’s classes. Wisdom from Jesus Christ drew me to come, and slowly and gradually I saw Him, and felt His presence.

It has been difficult for me to admit that I am a human being with lots of brokenness. In conflicts, I always blamed others and made excuses for my own contributions. Through prayer, God revealed to me that I could either remain stuck feeling resentful for the rest of my life, or I could do something to improve relationships. Not long ago,

I plucked my courage and took the first step to thaw the ice with my in-laws. I didn’t expect the positive response from my husband. For the first time I saw Jesus’ saving love, not only affects myself but also my husband. I am continuing to pray to God to show me the way along this journey of reconciliation with my in-laws.

I am thankful for having the Bible; learning from it nourishes my heart and soul. I thank God for opening my blinded eyes, giving me strength while I am weak, telling me that I am worthy and lovable when I feel bad about myself and for shining light in the darkness of my soul.

I would like to thank the following people who assisted in my spiritual journey: Chris and May from Belgium, Grace He from Shanghai, and Grace Lu for being a mentor. I also thank Pastor Cindy, Dr. Jack and Lisa, and Alfred Lu, for their support.

Above all, I thank my heavenly father for His unconditional love. He never lost his hold of my hand even at the moment I was in doubt about him.

Youth Coffee House

(May 19)

By Ernest Law (Grade 8)

The Coffee House was a very splendid event for newcomers and believers of God at VCBC. The Coffee House had games, performances from the EDF Band (Elim Daniel Fellowship Band), a drama from the Elim group, very delicious food, people sharing about how they met God, and not to mention a sharing on what faith is about.

The thing I enjoyed the most was performing for everyone with my fellow EDF Band members. There were 5 of us in the group and we performed the songs, “Don’t



Stop Believing, “Safe and Sound”, and, “T.G.I.F.” (with rewritten lyrics). Another very awesome thing that happened at the Coffee House was the games. There was a variety of games and they ranged from interesting ones like, “Rock, Paper, Scissors, Squirt!” to games that were hilarious like, “Can You Dance Like Matt?” What I loved the most was the

One last thing to mention about the Coffee House is the fact that a lot of people came to the Coffee House. It just felt warm and spiritual because of the fact that there were so many believers of God that attended. I also really felt that the newcomers were drawn more to our faith and to our youth group as well.

food. It was buffet-style and there were homemade pizza bites, M&M cookies, brownies, strawberries, fries, chicken fingers, spicy salsa chips, melons, pretzels, and not to mention my favourite food BBQ chips and much more.