



FRIDAYFAX 2.0

Issue # 15, Nov 23, 2007

Kingdom-focused E-Mail news-bulletin with inspiring reports of God at work around the world, with special emphasis on the current global reformation of Church and Missions. **Editor:** Wolfgang Simson. Subscription: €30/ US-\$ 40 per year. Freitagsfax 2.0, PO Box 1248, D-79397 Kandern, Germany. Email info@ffax2.com; website: www.ffax2.com. © Dawn Europa e.V.; 22 issues per year, available in English and German.

Missional “Cities of Refuge” today

In biblical days, Cities of Refuge were towns in Israel where those that had accidentally killed someone could flee for protection, finding a safe place as they were awaiting a fair trial. The Bible mentions six such cities: Hebron, Golan, Ramoth, Kedesh, Shechem and east of the Jordan. Many people in today’s fast-paced world have, for any amount of reasons, missed a beat, have fallen out with the system and have, as a result, become social outsiders, pariahs, outlaws, those that populate the fringes of society. All that society usually does with its own fringes is to ignore them, look the other way, or, at best, tuck them away and place them in hostels, institutions or prisons.

How would God deal with people that have had their falling out with society, with those that the ‘society proper’ rejects – or even with those that reject themselves? Wolfgang Fernández, based in Colorado Springs, USA, is a father figure and a close friend of a movement that gives an answer to this question. He writes:

“Jongli is a town south of Taipei on the island of Taiwan. This is where Timothy and Monica Chang have opened a modern-day ‘Hebron’, a ministry modelled after the ‘City of Refuge’ concept. After leading one of the largest evangelical churches in the nation for many years and spearheading a significant renewal movement among evangelical churches, Timothy experienced changes that led him to close the doors of that church and open the doors of his home. He lost his position, his power and prestige and found himself all alone. But God invited him to have a new family. He went to Jongli and there he met the poor, the despised and rejected. In the last six years, together with his wife Monica, they have served over 700 people. Today, 200 live together in one of the neighborhoods of Jongli. The family - actually it is more like a village! - is made up of the poor, the mentally unstable, youth at risk and many who recently have come out of jail.



Beauty out of Ashes

Last year, Hebron launched the ‘Don’t die Please’ campaign. Taiwan has a fast increasing suicide rate. The people of the Hebron community are opening their hearts and their homes to those who are at the end of their rope. In this kind of work, life and death walk side by side. Not too long ago, while I was living there, two people passed away. One of the women they were caring for ended her life. She jumped from the 8th floor of an apartment. Another man, who had spent 35 years in jail, died from cancer. He had found freedom and a new life here. Even though his natural family had rejected him, when he came out, he found a new home in Hebron. Imagine a church to whom courts give custody of a 16 year old headed for prison for raping a 10 year old. Or takes care of children whose mothers are serving time in jail. Or is visited by 40 juvenile court judges sent to review their rehabilitation work with young people (the judges went away stunned!). Even if someone lives in a nation who’s government was supportive of Christian causes, someone even with a strong, qualified staff and a sizeable budget would find it difficult to meet social needs like this. How much more astonishing would it be to see something like this happening under a government that sees no reason to support Christian causes. The majority of the population in Taiwan is Buddhist and politicians rather court them for the votes. Hebron staff is mostly made up of people who sold and or used drugs, spent time in jail for various crimes, many have dealt with severe mental problems and others are recovering from suicide attempts. The question of finances is basically dealt with on a day-to-day basis. They receive a lot of used items, which they refurbish, and use or sell. Basically no one here takes a salary but everyone has everything they need for life, including a simple place to live and three good meals a day.



Belonging before believing

This morning I went for physical training at 0530am with 30 teenagers. Through discipline and hard work, they are learning that they belong, and their self-esteem is being rebuilt. Paul was a successful businessman in Taipei. He openly shared that late last year he sought to end his life by taking 320 pills. He 'failed' and ended up here. Everything has now changed for him. He has found a new family and purpose. He said: 'I used to live to make money. Now I live to serve my new family.' In Hebron, he now runs the library. And after 30 years of not using his gift for writing, he miraculously recovered it and has not stopped in nine months! Like others here, the people in Hebron learn to own their failures and limitations. They are taught that we redeem our weakness by embracing them as part of ourselves. And as they experience how Jesus embraces them, they start embracing him. Recently, together with many members of the community, we went up to the mountains to baptize 9 people. It was very special to hear the testimonies, watch people being baptized by their friends and then pray and hear God speak to them. After that, we ate and ate, sang and enjoyed wonderful fellowship. (Take a minute and see the pictures in the album @ http://wolfhowler.typepad.com/photos/hebron_in_taiwan/index.html)

The sense of attraction that this "family" creates on those that watch from the outside is quite magnetic. Since Hebron began, others have followed Timothy's example and more and more creative communities have started and are meeting needs that church-as-we-know-it-today would never touch. From dealing with alcoholics and street people in downtown Taichung (Central Taiwan) to a riverside center that provides wilderness experiences to young urban teens who never get to be out in nature, thirteen new communities have sprung up. Timothy's goal is to see 100 communities established in Taiwan and to start sowing seeds beyond this island. 'Son of Man' is another one of these communities. They are located in the hills outside Taichung. They are a self-contained people who raise their animals and food and are housed in Mongolian-like tents made entirely of recyclable materials. They invite anyone (see picture on the right!) who is not able to cope with life to join them and allow them to see another possibility, another way to function and share life. They communicate their ethos through poetry, writings, and beautiful music, which they sometimes sing in a pedestrian area of the city. 'Son of Man' is truly a place where people can learn to live again. And with communities like this, the people of Taiwan have a chance to learn how to live again.



Great Commission and Great Commandment

As I experience the Emerging Church in Asia, I see something that is attractive, something that those who are under its umbrella enjoy and something that the outsiders are noticing and find attractive as well. The feedback echoes the compliment in the book of Acts: 'see how they love one another'. It is interesting that most things around them seem desperate, life looks disorganized and little appears to be like any other church. Yet, just like Jesus said, people are attracted to them because they actually can see the love they have for each other. Both sons of millionaires and sons of nobodies are united together in one family! This is of particular interest at a time when the church is mostly known for what it's *against* instead of what it's *for*. I have learned that the Emerging Church in Asia is quite simple yet very deep. It is first of all, a family. People eat together, work together, weep and laugh together. Monica, Timothy's wife, told me 'sleep is the only thing we don't do together'! (having been there, I know it is the truth!). I have come to understand that unless the church functions as a redeemed family it really misses to give the most searched-for environment people are looking for today. There is no need for cool music, no need for clever sermons, no efficient structure. All that people are desperately looking for is a family that will accept them as they are, not as they should be, for none of us will ever be as we should be. The people here want to see 'cities of refuge' like this one established everywhere. And so it is that God literally turns a place that collects the garbage and refuse of the world into a center for world missions."