

Steve & Suzanne's

PRAYER MATTERS

Because Prayer Changes Things in Vietnam

TMS TMS-Global.org

ServingTheKingdom.org

December 2020



Where do we go from here?

Just as 2020 became a year reluctantly focused on learning to live in a pandemic-swept world, we hope, we *pray*, that 2021 will be a year devoted to overcoming the world-wide pandemic and living into this new emerging normal. The pandemic brought out the best in some, the not-so-best in others, but in all that has happened we see new opportunities for the light of the gospel to shine in Hanoi, and we hope you see them in your community also. As believers we are beginning to see that *where we go from here* will ultimately be determined by what we do now to write the next story of our shared history/journey.

"It's time for the church to rise up and be The Church," HIF's lead pastor, Jacob Bloemburg said at the beginning of the pandemic. Only God can heal the deep wounds that the pandemic exposed: cultural wounds, personal wounds, political, relational, societal and spiritual wounds. It is not that the pandemic caused or brought them on, it is more

that it exposed what had, maybe, been there for a long time.

In this issue of PrayerMatters you will hear of the emerging church we have been helping with near Hanoi; you'll hear of the ongoing discipleship opportunities and our COVID hobby, The Bonhoeffer Project; and you'll hear about the Bibles your gifting helped provide for newly baptized believers.

Consider making a **year-end contribution** to support our ministry (Buchele #0342-SUP), or a **special contribution** (Buchele #0342-SPJ) to provide more Bibles or other material support for the church and believers in Vietnam.

We are thankful for each of you and for being part of this community we call friends and supporters. As 2020 (thankfully!) comes to an end, we plan to go from here and be the collective church the world needs at a time like this. Many of you have been such an encouragement to us during this challenging year and we are so grateful for what you do to make our work possible.

Where do we go from here? God only knows, but where ever we go, we'll do it together. As one theologian wrote at the beginning of the pandemic: "There's a sense that we're all in this together—every continent, country, class, religion, race, age, or gender. We're all subject to this crisis. Suffering has an ability to pull you into oneness."

Thanks for being one with us in service to our LORD.

Peace,

Steve & Suzanne

Contacting Us

Donations:

Payable to TMS-Global

PO Box 936559

Atlanta, GA 31193-6559

800.478.8963

Designate: BUCHELE-0342SUP

or: BUCHELE-0342SPJ (special projects)

Mailing Address:

213 Rio Vista Dr

Georgetown, TX 78626

205-282-4353 (Google #)

www.ServingTheKingdom.org

steve.buchele@tms-global.org

suzanne.buchele@tms-global.org

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Emerging Faith Community Update

ECOPARK, VIETNAM In our September eNews we mentioned that we have been helping with a new faith community, and that God willing, it would be an HIF site one day. Well, that day is near! HIF has initiated the process of bringing Ecopark into its “fold”. True to its name, Ecopark is a township outside of Hanoi that is set in a beautiful, park-like setting. Many people choose to live there despite the long commute into Hanoi because the quality of life is so much better: lots of trees, less congestion, grass for children to play on, there are community buses that run regularly into Hanoi, shuttles that run regularly throughout Ecopark, easy and cheap electric assisted bicycles for rent at key locations, bicycle friendly streets, and car and motorbike horns are banned. Fun fact: Ecopark was inspired by The Woodlands, outside of Houston.



When we met in a home and watched HIF services.

When we met in a home and watched HIF services. HIF Ecopark emerged from the March-May COVID-19 lockdown in Hanoi. In March, when the government banned worship gatherings across Vietnam, HIF encouraged its small groups to shift to meet together in homes for worship with HIF online. The Ecopark small group did that, and continued meeting when Hanoi was on lockdown (since Ecopark is outside the city limits, it never fully locked down). They found that when the ban on worship services in Hanoi was lifted, they preferred to continue to meet together in a living room in Ecopark instead of commuting into church in Hanoi more than an hour each way.

At first they just followed along with the livecast of the HIF service online, but then they began to develop their own leadership team, and like the story of the young church in the book of Acts, “the LORD added to their numbers”. Several are blessed with the gift of musical abilities, and so they started doing their own praise and worship music and



Before Ecopark was an HIF site we met in a member’s home and enjoyed their dogs during worship, giving new meaning to the phrase “service dogs”.

watched the rest of the service online. Then they had their own testimonies and watched only the HIF sermon online. Eventually, they started doing their own messages also, rotating among the



The first new believer to be baptized at HIF Ecopark was discipled into the kingdom by friends who got together and read The Bible with him.

group’s leadership. This is when we started going out there regularly, meeting with the steering committee, and guiding them in ways that would pave the way for Ecopark to become part of the HIF body. It felt to Steve like he was a part of the circuit rider tradition of the early Methodist church, where the pastor visited the parish once a month to marry, bury, baptize and serve communion; for Steve, though, it was really only the last two: baptism and communion.



The Ecopark group also decided they could use the extra hours they would have spent commuting into Hanoi to disciple people in the community and invite others to experience worship lived out in a local faith community gathering, instead of inviting them into Hanoi for a Sunday service, a much less likely proposition.



Today HIF Ecopark numbers around 30 average in worship plus a large number of children, and now rents a larger room in a language center run by Christians. It is chaotic sometimes, beautiful often, and a fresh out pouring of God’s Holy Spirit. With the possibility of Suzanne’s eyes reacting to the air pollution in Hanoi, we are praying about moving out to Ecopark when we return to Vietnam. By living there we would be more fully present to the HIF Ecopark community, and we could still commute into Hanoi a few days a week to do other HIF work. Please pray with us as we seek God’s will in this next phase of our lives.

The Bonhoeffer Project

We didn't know of this thing called a COVID hobby until we heard about it from our daughter Anna, whose hobby was growing mushrooms. Ours was The Bonhoeffer Project.

HANOI - Since June, we have been part of a cohort-based discipleship program called The Bonhoeffer Project. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor and theologian, a professor, an anti-Nazi dissident, and finally, a martyr who died during World War II. He believed that unless one followed Christ in a serious fashion, it cheapened the grace of God. Bonhoeffer did an "experiment" from 1935-1940 with groups of eight to ten people who spent a year together studying, discussing, and doing discipleship. The cohort met once a month. Our cohort is largely pastors from India, Nepal, and the US (and the two of us in Vietnam), and we meet monthly for 3 hours on Zoom in the early morning Asia time (evening US time). We are working through two books, *Conversion and Discipleship: You Can't Have One Without the Other* by Bill Hull, and *Learning to Live and Love Like Jesus: A Discipleship Journey for Groups & Individuals* by Brandon Cook. We also have projects due each month that include a set of questions to answer. For example, in November we each studied one of the four Gospels (Suzanne took Mark and Steve did Luke, and others in our cohort did the others) and did a detailed examination of all the ways in which Jesus trained his disciples. It was really interesting to see with new lenses how Jesus treated his disciples: Jesus taught them, they observed Jesus doing ministry (healing, driving out demons, teaching others, and debating the Pharisees and chief priests), and when the disciples did things, Jesus gave them guidance and feed-



Suzanne and El are reading the gospel of Mark together

back. After Jesus spoke to crowds in parables, he was available to answer the disciples questions privately. Jesus sometimes got exasperated them, but berated them only when they lacked faith.

As another part of The Bonhoeffer Project, Steve worked with HIF pastors to examine the "levels" at which discipleship occurs at HIF, and really ponder the effectiveness of what HIF was doing at each level. This led to a sermon series and also a potential job description for Steve, targeted at the mid-level (small group ministries), which is the level in need of the most pastoral intervention at HIF. Suzanne used what she learned in The Bonhoeffer Project as she led a series of

women's Bible studies, and also began working with a woman from South Africa. She and "El" started reading slowly through the Gospel of Mark together. Using a modified Discovery Bible Study method they read through and ponder each story to see what it reveals to them, what it says about God or Jesus, and what it says about humanity or themselves. Since we left Hanoi in mid-October for Suzanne's eyes and to welcome our new grandson, they have continued meeting online when possible, and are currently in Mark 8. They are both learning a lot, going through Jesus' story from John the Baptist through Jesus' ascension. Even though Suzanne gets up quite early in the morning for the meeting (it is El's evening), it is a highlight of her week!

Bibles for new believers

When you contribute to our TMS-Global Special Project Fund (Buchele #0342-SPJ), you help us put Bibles into the hands of Vietnamese and foreigners living in Hanoi who have gone through the Alpha course or through other vectors are choosing to be baptized at HIF.

Like many churches, HIF has found itself in an unbalanced budget situation – while they were able to keep many costs down, especially for the 11 weeks we didn't meet per government mandate, even with costs down HIF's income is down more. This is due to several factors – many foreigners left Hanoi for various reasons (health, death or major illness of a family member abroad, or they just happened to be outside the country when it closed in March, and it still hasn't reopened to most people). In addition, like everywhere, the poor economy has affected incomes, which in turn affects churches' incomes. HIF Pastors and staff saw our dwindling English language Bible supply, which they typically replenish a few at a time as someone travels from outside the country (for example, each time we flew to Hanoi,

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Praises & Prayers

Suzanne's Eyes

Thanks to all for prayers for Suzanne's eyes. She saw the glaucoma specialist again last week. Fortunately, her eye pressure was once again within normal range, amazing! But unfortunately, the new drops were just too irritating to continue. So, we're trying something different again. With 4 weeks between a new drop regimen and the next re-check, it's a slow process. Also VERY thankfully, her eyesight is still significantly improved from its rapid decline in Hanoi. Her next appointment is the week after Christmas. Suzanne feels like she is in excellent hands and is not at all worried. Thanks for continued prayers!

Grandchildren

We are very blessed to be in Texas to help our daughter and son-in-law as they adjust to a family of two children. Lucas is 5 weeks old as of this writing, and big sister Nelda is adjusting to the addition well. We help with Nelda several days a week and see them all for dinners regularly (our only "COVID bubble"). Lucas has jaundice but is gaining weight and sees the doctor regularly for check-ups. We ask you to pray for him and the whole Mineta family, for calm days and restful nights.

A Buchele Family update

Many of you know our kids, so here's a quick update:

Our daughter **Anna** lives and works in Boston as an engineer working on vision systems for a robotics and automation company. She is enjoying living with two friends in an apartment in Cambridge, especially since the pandemic means she only goes out for necessities. Her COVID hobby has been growing mushrooms and cooking.



Anna and her dog Bo, who left this world a few weeks before we arrived in Texas. He was loved and is missed.

Grace and Ryosuke live in Round Rock, Texas with their now two children, Nelda (2 1/3) and Lucas (5 weeks). It's been tough living and working at home with kids during the pandemic, so they have been happy for our help, and our house and yard as extra "safe" space to hang out and for Nelda to play in. Grace is on maternity leave until after the new year, and Ryosuke will finish his MBA in May and works one day a week at a wealth management practice.



The Mineta Family: Grace, Lucas, Rio, and Nelda.

Fox got married to **Mica** in September, and together they have embarked on new lives together! They bought a 30 ft. R.V. and a truck to pull it, fixed up the R.V., sold their car and many of their possessions, gave up the lease on the house they were renting, and have hit the road! They are working remotely from the R.V. and are currently in Florida with Mica's family, likely through the new year.



Fox & Mica and their "rig" before setting out for places unknown.

Bibles for new Believers, continued from page 3

in Nov 2018, Sept 2019, and Feb 2020 we brought English Bibles in our luggage). HIF has an Alpha cohort about to complete, and two baptisms scheduled for December. The baptism gift from HIF is a Bible – either English or Vietnamese, whichever those being baptized prefer. Because of HIF's unbalanced budget, we were able to step in with our Special Projects Fund to ensure that gifts of English Bibles were still given to all who undergo baptism at HIF and wanted one. We placed the order for 50 Bibles while we were in quarantine in the US, and they arrived in Hanoi last week.

Thank you for support of our ministry and projects, which is ensuring that Bibles are available to all who seek to learn more about God though HIF in Hanoi!