

Written by Wing So, translated by Connie Fung, Samantha Ching and Theodore Ching

Introduction

In the past three decades,
Within the territories of the Forty-niners,
Stood the House of God -- the sign of the presence of the mighty Kingdom of God.
Whether we were local residents of the rich ghetto around Grant Avenue,
Or the more affluent dwellers in the entire Bay Area,
We shared the same fate -- being ignorant of the saving knowledge of Christ.
But once we became the followers of Christ,
We went through a great transformation,
Free from fear and worries.
As for myself, whenever I think of the separation scene,
Or hear the congregation singing the farewell song,
I just could not hold back the tears rolling down from my eyes.

1. The April 26th Incident

The Story of San Francisco Evangelical Free Church began with the April 26th Incident.

In 1987, I was the pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (Chinese Congregation) with 300 to 400 attendees. At that time, the church was undergoing a crisis on the charismatic issue. The Senior Pastor, who was leading the Chinese Church and the San Bruno Branch Church, was enthusiastic about the charismatic movement, supernatural healing, speaking in tongues... etc. However, the deacons of the Chinese Church were opposed to this theology.

On April 26th 1987, I had prepared a sermon on charismatic issue basing on 1 Corinthians 14. As soon as the elders heard about this, they strictly forbade me to deliver it. Abiding to their order, I only distributed the handouts of my sermon to the congregation, leaving the pulpit empty. Despite this, an elder stepped forward furiously and tried to address the congregation. In order to ease the tension, I ended the worship earlier, causing another small commotion. This was the April 26th Incident.

Afterwards, I received a letter from the elders suspending me from pastoring for three months. An investigation team was appointed to investigate into this incident. However, they allowed me to lead the “Brotherly Love in a Foreign Land” (異鄉鄰舍情), an important outreach program to be launched in June. In this event, there would be a bible conference in the morning, some games and workshops in the afternoon and in the evening, Ms Tomi Wong (黃愷欣) would sing in the Gospel Meeting and I would give an evangelistic message. Unexpectedly, there were hundreds of people attending the event. Many accepted Jesus as their Savior and the faith of many Christians was revived and renewed. This encouraged us during our darkest hours and we enthusiastically started to plan for the future. Just at that joyous moment, I received a lay-off letter from the elders, the reason being incompatibility. Although we had verbally made a five-year contract, I was forced to leave. Later, I learned that the Senior Pastor of CPC was also forced to step down. However, I never knew the reason behind it.

Years later, after the SFEFC was established, one of the pastors then paid me a private visit. He, on a personal basis (not on behalf of the elders of the CPC), apologized to me for not speaking out to support me and tell the truth at the heat of the crisis then. I

appreciated his sincerity and alleviated my anguish. I believed that the Holy Spirit had moved him to do this courageous act and thanked God for this opportunity for me to heal and forgive. From then on, the April 26th Incident was no longer a burden to me.

2. The Church on “Mount Zion”

After I had left the CPC, Doris and I started to plan our future. At that time, the L.A. Chinese Evangelical Free Church was looking for a Senior Pastor. Based on the extensive experience of serving as a pastor in Evangelical Free Church for many years, I decided to submit my application for the position. Knowing our plan, many brothers and sisters from CPC who have decided to leave the church urged us to stay in SF. Inspired and deeply moved by the event of “Brotherly Love in a Foreign Land”, these brothers and sisters had a godly vision to establish a community church among the Chinese. Therefore, Doris and I decided to stay in SF to start a new church with them.

With the help from Rev. Don Carlson, a missionary of EFCA, and Rev. Hauser, the Superintendent of EFCA -Western District, we were able to smoothly set up the new church and named it “Evangelical Free Church Chinatown Chapel”. After a lot of hard labor, we rented the Assembly Hall of Francisco Middle School and held our first worship service on the last Sunday of August in 1987. About 150 people attended and we had lunch together after the service to celebrate the birth of our church.

A few days later, however, we received a call from the Principal of Francisco Middle School. Because asbestos was found in the campus, he told us that they could not rent the campus to us anymore and we had to stop meeting in their hall. The news shocked us. We had limited time to locate a new venue and inform brothers and sisters about this sudden change. This seemed to be “a mission impossible”; but God’s grace was sufficient. God moved Dr. Hui, the Principal of Garfield Elementary School on Filbert Street, to rent their campus to us. We were able to hold our worship services there until we bought our own property on Union Street.

Now the Principal was not the only person that we needed approval from in order to rent Garfield Elementary School. Another key person that we needed permission from was the janitor. The Principal said to us, “If Mr. Yeung (the Janitor) is not willing, I have no way to rent it to you.” Thank God, Mr. Yeung was willing to let us use the campus and he was very supportive. Later, when we moved to our own place on Union Street, he became our janitor for some time. We have become good friends

Garfield Elementary School is located at the hilltop of Filbert Street, which was famous for being one of the steepest streets in SF. I always told the brothers and sisters that our church was like Jerusalem on Mount Zion, as it was located on the top of a hill. Every Sunday, we went up to “Zion” to worship our God. One time, the car of Doris Ma broke down and caught fire on this steep slope. In the beginning, the school allowed us to park our cars in the playground but was deterred as some of our cars might leak oil. Therefore, we had to go up to the top of the hill on foot. We especially appreciated the elderly’s fortitude, as it was a strenuous task for them.

As an act of gratitude to Garfield Elementary School, I acted as a voluntary story-teller every week. I told the 4th and 5th grade students the classic Chinese story “Outlaws of the Marsh” (水滸傳)¹ in English. The students were particularly interested in Li Kui² (nicknamed “Black Whirlwind”). The students were not the only ones listening; a nurse named Jimmy from Health Center Four and was on duty for Garfield Elementary was listening as well. Every Wednesday, when he went to the school, he dropped by to listen to the story. Afterwards, Jimmy was converted to Christianity and is now attending the Belmont Evangelical Free Church. Every Christmas, the principal invited me to be the Santa Claus. With my portly body at that time, I was surprisingly suitable for this task.

¹ “Outlaws of the Marsh” (水滸傳) is considered as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese Literature. Its title has many translations. The most well-known are “Hui Hu Zhuan”, “Outlaws of the Marsh” and “Water Margin.”

² “Li Kui” (李逵) is one of 108 heroes in the “Outlaws of the Marsh”. He is a tough fighter and characterized by his berserk behavior in combat and dark complexion.

3. Our Vision and Mission

It was not our intent to set up the new church just because of the fact that we had to leave the CPC. Instead, we had a godly mission --- basing and centering on HIS word to establish a Chinese community church in SF. Finding the venue in or near Chinatown was crucial to this vision. Miraculously, God had prepared the Garfield Elementary School for worship and a small flat on Sacramento Street for our office and fellowship.

The Church's motto was based on the "3E" model: Evangelism, Establishment and Equipment.

Evangelism (E1)

Apart from seekers' sensitive worship services, evangelistic Bible studies and personal evangelism training, we also organized and conducted various outreach programs. These include:

- Friday English Class and Citizenship Class – We rented the Newcomers' Education Center on Kearny Street and ran a tutorial center to teach the adult new immigrants English and prepared them to take the citizenship test. At its peak, there were more than 100 students. Many of them were later converted as Christians. Once, an ex-student called me from Florida. He thanked us for our help and care that enabled him and his family to settle down smoothly in America. Their encouragements motivated us to continue the service.
- Chinese School – Saturday morning was our Chinese School. We taught Chinese language and culture to the Chinese kids. It enabled us to reach out to their parents. Quite a few of them became Christians through this channel.
- Learning Center – It was the English tutorial center for the middle school and high school students from the new immigrant families from Monday to Friday. Apart from teaching English, we brought them to outdoor camp, provided information on colleges and universities and led them to Christ. In July 2017, when I was preaching in a family camp organized by Chinese Family for Christ (家新), I met some of these ex-students. They had become Christians and have been serving in churches faithfully. This really encouraged me.
- "Senior Center" – Every Tuesday, we had our Senior Center. It catered to the needs of the senior citizens in our community. We covered topics like health issues, cultural interests, and social/political issues. We also had Tai Chi and other forms of exercises. Many of the seniors were attracted to this center and later converted as Christians.
- Chinese Radio Broadcast – Mr. HU Zhangzhao (胡章釗先生) and I hosted a radio broadcast program named "Under the Same Roof" (屋簷下). It was very popular among the Chinese in the Bay Area. Many people came to know God through this program.
- Summer School – Every Summer, we had summer school for about eight weeks for elementary students. Every year, we had about 80 students coming to join us.

Establishment (E2)

We have four aspects in establishing our fellow Christians, namely:

- Worship
- Christian Education
- Caring ministry

- Fellowship

For Worship, we have two services in Cantonese, one for Christians and one for seekers; and one service in English.

For Christian Education, we have established a curriculum for adults. It includes six basic courses:

- Evangelistic Bible Studies
- The Path To Maturity
- Christian Living
- New Testament Introduction
- Old Testament Introduction
- Basic Theology

Apart from these basic courses, we also provided elective courses on “Bible Study on various books”, “Managing Stress and Emotion”, “Family Issues”, “Church History”, “Love and Marriage” We expected that everyone should at least finish the basic courses and continue learning God’s Words.

For Caring Ministry, we emphasized on empathy. Brothers and sisters should treat the Church as their own family. It was not a bureaucratic or rigid organization, but a warm and homey family. Annually, we had summer camp and bible conference. All these enabled us to have more chances for fellowship and for studying God’s words. We wanted to nurture a culture of “Pray Unceasingly, Learn Diligently, Care Whole-heartedly” (不住禱告、不住學習、不住關懷). This was our vision and mission.

Church growth relied on a healthy development of various fellowships. We had a fellowship for the elderly. In the beginning, we had less than 10 members. With the leadership from Madame Ng, Lana and Mr. Fong, this fellowship developed fast. At its peak, it had 80 members. For families, we had “Family of Grace Fellowship” (家恩). Jason’s home has been the venue for gathering for all these years. For young adults, we had “Able”. For teenagers, we had “Kairos”. In addition to these Fellowship groups, we also had other fellowship / bible study groups.

Equipment (E3)

E3 is discipleship. It was a very important strategy for the growth of the church. We have trained quite a few spiritual leaders who later were called into the full-time ministry to spread the Gospel and serve His children. Among them, Andy Chu, Andy Wong, Alex Wong, Eison and Iris, Andrew Choi, are now pastors and leaders in churches.

4. Merging with the Richmond EFC Church

When we planned to set up a Chinese Evangelical Free Church in San Francisco, we found that there had already been one. In February 1964, due to the increasing number of Chinese immigrants and the need for the spread of the Gospel, Rev. Stephen Chia (謝獻燻牧師), with the encouragement from Rev. Linguist (梁貴文牧師) of the Evangelical Free Church of America, started a family gathering on 1858 Mason Street. The Church belonged to the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA). In 1972, the Church was well-developed and they purchased their property in the Richmond District. They had some Cantonese-speaking members, but most were American-born Chinese who only spoke English.

There was a great need for preaching the Gospel among the Chinese in San Francisco. After numerous prayers and discussions, the brothers and sisters from the two Evangelical Free Churches, agreed to merge into one in April 1989. Thus it was renamed "San Francisco Evangelical Free Church". The site in the Richmond District became our fellowship center and the Garfield Elementary School became our worship venue. While Rev. Chia served as a consultant pastor, I served as the Senior Pastor, Pastor Bryan Fisher (a graduate from the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) served as the pastor of the English congregation, and Pastor Vicky Ng as our Youth Pastor.

5. Home Sweet Home

Searching for a church property in Chinatown was not an easy task. We had been praying that God would provide a good one for us. We targeted on an old church on Union Street, a Methodist Church built in the beginning of the 20th Century. It was later converted to a theatre, then was rented to the Daisy Nursery. We contacted the Methodist Church for purchasing this property, but they had no intention to sell it. One day, Stephen Kwan of our church building committee drove by the site and found a Sale Notice hanging on the building. We immediately contacted the landlord, but unfortunately, it had been sold. Our only option was to tell the landlord that if the buyer withdrew the offer, we would buy it. We submitted the offer any way, even though we knew that it took a miracle for the buyer to withdraw.

God in His grace did perform a miracle: the buyer withdrew due to the problem of zoning. We happily purchased this property. Yet, we had to solve three problems:

- (1) How to settle a deal with the Daisy Nursery.
- (2) The application for the Building Permit requires public hearing. In San Francisco, the process for public hearing is very complicated. It is not uncommon that a construction could be delayed for a long time.
- (3) Financial need: We need a lot of money to purchase the property, to compensate the nursery and to renovate the property.

God again worked sovereignly to resolve our problems one by one.

First, the Daisy Nursery was very cooperative. They accepted the amount of compensation we offered and moved out before the end of the contract.

Secondly, regarding the public hearing for the Building Permit, our case was scheduled to be the last one on the hearing date. We strategically planned to have more than 80 church members attend to fully occupy the room, so that “professional paid counteragents” could not get any seat. On that day, we arrived the City Hall by 4:30pm, as our case was scheduled at 5:00pm. By 5:15 pm, the previous case still had not ended and we became nervous and anxious. Just at that time, we saw a Korean came out, angrily arguing with a White man. When a group of hostile Koreans were approaching, that White man hurried away with fear. Afterwards, we found out that that White man was a counteragent. He came to oppose the building of the Korean church. With his opposition, the Koreans could not get the required permit and the construction was delayed. When we saw this happened, we hurried into the room and filled all the seats. In less than 10 minutes, the permit was granted to us. Our construction could start as scheduled.

Last, it was about the financial need. I always told brothers and sisters that money was never a problem when we have faith in our mighty heavenly Provider. The brothers and sisters from the Richmond Chinese Evangelical Free Church were very generous. They sold their property in Richmond to finance the San Francisco Evangelical Free Church to buy the property on Union Street. Moreover, donations and interest-free loans from many brothers and sisters poured in.

Soon the fund was adequate. And, in just a few years, all our loan was paid off. This was indeed another miracle and a blessing from God.

In 1989, we moved into the new site. We again invited Ms Tomi Wong (黃愷欣) and her husband to hold a concert/evangelistic service. That night, the church was packed with people with no empty seats. I was responsible for preaching the message and was pleased that scores of people accepted Christ as their Savior. What a meaningful beginning!

6. What type of church was the SFEFC?

In the early 90s, we asked an expert on “church growth” to evaluate our church. At that time, our congregation had more than 400 people. Among them, 318 filled out the following questionnaire.

We found some interesting findings.

A. General Information

	<u>Average in SFEFC</u>	<u>Averages in American Churches</u>
1. Age	42.3	45.8
2. Gender	Male: 41.5% Female: 58.5%	Male: 44.2% Female: 45.8%
3. Single	48.4%	22.9%
4. Children per family	2.4	2.6
5. Education Level	13.6 years	14.5 years
6. Blended families	4.5%	11%
7. Time/distance to Church	28.3 minutes 10.8 miles	12.7 minutes 6.3 miles
8. Occupation		
(a) White-collar	54.5%	48.5%
(b) Blue-collar	15.8%	15%
(c) Unemployed	3.9%	3.0%
(d) Retired	19.7%	13.2%
(e) Others	6.1%	20.3%
9. Working Mother	38	[Not Available]
10. University Graduates	17.9%	8.7%
11. Annual Family Income	\$34,388	\$39,973
12. Church Donations	6.2%	6.4%
13. Donations to other organizations	6.7%	8.5%

B. Spiritual Information

	<u>Averages in SFEFC</u>	<u>Averages in American Churches</u>
1. (a) Believers	94%	97.3%
(b) Seekers	0.6%	0.4%
(c) Those who are unsure of their faith	5.4%	2.3%
(d) Those who learn about God in our church	41.5%	18.1%
(e) Time since conversion	25.9 years	17.8 years
(f) New believers – converted less than a year.	6.0%	2.0%
2. Ways of Conversion		
(a) Sunday School (EBS)	41.2%	11.7%
(b) Parents	14.1%	28.4%
(c) Self	10.1%	8.1%
(d) Bible Study	7.8%	4.9%
(e) Media, like radio, newspaper	6.9%	1.8%
(f) Other Religious Organizations	5.2%	7.7%
(g) Friends and Relatives	5.6%	17.5%
(h) Church Outreaching Activities	3.6%	3.4%
(i) Pastors	1.0%	13.7%

C. Other Information

	<u>Averages in SFEFC</u>	<u>Averages in American Churches</u>
1. Congregation (Worship)	420 people	[Not Applicable]
2. Duration of Attending SFEFC	5.4 years	11.2 years
3. 72% of the congregation stated they would not leave the church in the near future.		[Not Applicable]
4. Factors affecting church attendance:		
(a) Sermon	96%	89%
(b) Pastors and leaders	93%	84%
(c) Theology	92%	94%
(d) Ministry Activities	88%	56%
(e) Worship	87%	84%
5. Aspects to be improved:		
(a) Youth Ministry	42%	65%
(b) Ministry for the Singles	42%	43%
(c) Women Ministry	47%	69%
(d) Men Ministry	48%	43%
(e) Personal Evangelism	48%	42%

Utilizing the statistics above, we deduced our strengths and weaknesses.

- Our ministry work was good. 41.5% of our church members was converted in our own church. It was much higher than the average of the churches in America.
- EBS was a very effective means of ministry. 41.2% of the believers was converted through EBS. It was a very high percentage.
- The percentages of University graduates and the retired were high. They were 17.9% and 19.7% respectively. Most of our members were middle ages. Their average age was 42.3. Our average income was below the American average, our average education level was not high either.
- Our weakest ministries were on the youth, while our strongest was on the elderly.
- Interestingly, personal evangelism was weak, though most of our members were converted in our own church.

7. The Joy and Sorrow of Serving at SFEFC

Gui Youguang (歸有光), a Chinese scholar of Ming Dynasty, had written a prose “Xiangjixuan zhi” (項脊軒志). It says, “During the period I lived here, it was full of joy as well as sorrow.” In the few decades that he lived in Xiangjixuan, he experienced family changes, personal conflicts, separation and death. These made him feel sad and helpless. But amidst these sorrows, there were moments of joy and encouragement.

The church is a close-knit family. Working in the church for so long, I have seen many unions and separations, births and deaths, successes and failures, joy and sorrow ... This inevitably reminded me of Gui’s quotation which sheds a lot of truths to real life. As a pastor, I had numerous chances to share the joy and the sorrow of brothers and sisters and I counted it as special blessings from God!

Once, in the middle of the night, a church member called me. He had severe abdominal pain and did not know what to do. I immediately drove him to the hospital. He was found to have acute bleeding gastric ulcer, a very dangerous and life-threatening condition. Another incident involved a member who was divorced and needed to take care of her children single-handedly. She was suffering from depression and insomnia. She called me when she was extremely desperate. I had the chance to support and counsel her, leading her to Christ. It was a blessing to witness the power of God’s words in transforming her life.

Apart from the above, I have three other stories that I can never forget.

A sister from Hong Kong was pregnant and they planned to deliver the baby in SF. Since they did not have a car, I promised to drive them to the hospital when she started to have labor pain. I didn’t know at that time that this sister was exceptional in tolerating pain. She did not contact me until the pain was excruciating. When she called me, I asked, “When did you start the labor pain?” She answered, “I don’t know whether it is labor pain. I just feel something is pushing.” I was alarmed! I immediately rushed to her house, picked them up and headed straight to the hospital. During the ride to the hospital, the husband realized that the baby might need to be delivered on the way. Feeling panicky, he put his hand on the belly of his wife and ordered, “Child, don’t come out yet!” I brought them straight to the ER where she gave birth to the baby within 10 minutes even before I had parked my car. Wow! If the deliverance happened ten minutes earlier, I couldn’t imagine what would have happened! Thank God!

Their child has grown up now. He called me occasionally on his birthday, thanking me for what I had done at that time. I thanked God for him.

The second story was a tragic one.

One day, a church member working as a nurse called me. She had a patient with leukemia. Chemotherapy had no effect on her. The only option she had was bone marrow transplantation.

However, it was extremely difficult to find a matching bone marrow. This patient was only 28 and had two children. She was a retired member of the Chinese National Volleyball Team. After she had married, she lived in California. Having discussed with her family, she decided to see if her siblings in China had a matching bone marrow. A doctor in China said that the bone marrow of her older sister and younger brother matched. Then, they applied for visas to the US for the bone marrow transplantation. Unfortunately, the US Embassy in China did not approve the application, saying that her siblings had intentions to stay in the US. Hopeless, this sister asked for my aid.

I called the President of the EFCA for help. He introduced me to an officer of the State Department. This officer was a Christian. He said that the US Embassy in China had the sole jurisdiction over the approval or disapproval of any visa application. Even the US President could not challenge the decision. In view of this case, he was willing to try his best to further discuss with them.

A week later, I received good news: The US Embassy in China granted the visa to them and they were scheduled to arrive SF in two days. When I broke the news to the hospital, I heard shouts of joy from all the staff over the phone. Unfortunately, the joy was short-lived. To everyone's dismay, the doctors soon found that their bone marrows did not match. When I drove her home, she was overwhelmed by hopelessness and grief. I comforted her with Bible verses, saying that life was unpredictable and there was a time for everything, but Jesus had paid the ransom for us. "Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Afterwards, we prayed together and she accepted Christ as her Savior and entrusted her life to Him.

Our church had a special worship service on Thanksgiving Day. This sister asked to give a testimony. That day, her testimony touched the whole congregation. She said, "I felt grieved that I would die at a young age, leaving my husband and my young children. Now, I understand that I am not leaving; I will just go to a better place before you all, enjoying the eternal and blessed life that God gives me. I'm not afraid!" What a transformation!

A few days after her funeral, her husband, feeling shocked, told me that right after his wife had died, his sister-in-law requested him to marry her. The reason was that she did not want to go back to China. I arranged for a meeting with the elder sister and the younger brother. I told them that they had to return to China, otherwise I would lose all credibility. No one would believe me nor the church any more in the future when we need any help. However, they did not listen to me. Although they had spouses and children in China, they chose to stay in the US. I was extremely disappointed with them.

The third one was full of twists and turns.

The Pagoda Theater was near to our church. In the late 1990s, a businessman from New York rented it and planned to convert it to a Broadway theater with a pub. A public hearing was needed due to the change of usage and the need to rebuild. A neighbor alerted me, "So Sir, if the Pagoda Theater was converted to a Broadway theater with a pub, our lives will be disturbed. Can

you help draft an opposition letter to the City Hall for us?" I agreed with his viewpoint. With the approval from the Deacons Board, I wrote a letter on behalf of the church to oppose the project. Unexpectedly, after this letter had been sent, troubles knocked at our door.

At first, the businessman came with a solicitor and tried to persuade us to withdraw our letter. He even offered to let us use the site with a low price. Then, some Chinese leaders came, asking us not to spoil the relationship between Chinese and Italians. After that, some Supervisors of SF called us. Some supported us. Some opposed us. Finally, there were visitors from the Fire Department and the Liquor Licensing Department. During that period, we were highly cautious of our safety. As I was planning to leave SF for Hong Kong, I felt it unfair to leave this mess to my fellow colleagues. With the consent from the Board members, we compromised. We agreed to withdraw the opposition letter if they would close the business by 10pm daily.

God's work was amazing. Just at that time, Dot Com bubble collapsed. The businessman lost a lot of his capital and he could no longer run the business. He called a stop to this project. It was just like the wall of Jericho that was totally destroyed. Until now, the future of Pagoda Theater is still undecided. What a miracle from God!

8. Exotic Journeys

Apart from E1, E2 and E3, the SFEFC also put emphasis on E4 which is “Expanding the Kingdom to the World” or “Missions”. In addition to giving financial support to various missionaries and ministry organizations, the church also encourages and trains workers for missionaries overseas. At present, we have trained two missionaries who are currently serving overseas. We also have many short-term missions. Among these missions, the most unforgettable was the one at the refugee villages in N. Thailand in 1994.

The story of the refugee villages in N. Thailand had a very pathetic start.

After WWII, the Chinese Civil War began. In just a few years, the troops of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) routed out of the Mainland and retreated to Taiwan, forming a separation and confrontation of powers in China. Yunnan was the last province that was “liberated” by the Communists. Because the Kuomintang (KMT) had stationed many troops there, it was difficult to defeat. The Communist Party used various tactics, such as insinuation, discord, and bribery, to convert the generals and soldiers to Communism, and they did this successfully. The troops loyal to KMT had to flee from Yunnan in the middle of the night and headed to the forests in Burma. As most of them had fought the Japanese in Burma, they were familiar with the terrain there. Among the descendants of the retreating troops, there was the father of Rev. Boonsong Santisitpong (何以嵩牧師). At that time, Rev. Santisitpong was only four years old. His father was a soldier. When their family arrived at Burma, the Burmese government made complaints to the UN. Afterwards, they needed to leave Burma, and retreated to the hills near the Thai-Burma border.

At that time, the guerrillas of the Thailand Communist Party was strong and the army of the Thailand government could not compete with it. Therefore, the Thailand government proposed to use the KMT troops to fight the guerillas. If they succeeded, they could stay in N. Thailand as refugees. The KMT troops were so proficient that in just a few months, they annihilated the guerrillas. From then on, the KMT troops began to live in N. Thailand. However, they were not given any citizenship; they were neither Thai nor Chinese. They were just refugees without a country, without any rights or responsibilities. Since they did not bring their families with them when they left China, they married the women of the local minorities, bearing children and living in poverty. At present, there are a few ten-thousands of them scattering in different villages. The most famous ones were Ban Hin Taek (滿星疊村) and Wei Ma Village (回馬村) in the north.

The soil on the hills was not fertile. Agriculture was almost impossible and their lives were difficult. After a while, they decided to start planting opium and marijuana. They got rich by trafficking them to the rest of the world. The place became known as the famous “Golden Triangle”. Those who were unwilling to participate in this unethical business were living in extreme poverty. Interestingly, every village has a church due to the fact that many

missionaries had gone there to spread the Gospel. One of them was Ms Dorcas Ma (馬小芸 宣教士). Evangelism there was not easy. First of all, issues concerning drugs were severe, since many people worked for the opium business. Secondly, many of them were drug addicts. Thirdly, their education level was low. In poverty, many teenagers, both boys and girls, went to Bangkok or Chiang Rai stealthily, working as prostitutes. In just a few years, most of them would die of AIDS.

When we first arrived there, we found a strange situation. There were no teenagers over 15 years old in the village. The villagers told us that the teenagers had gone to Bangkok "singing". Afterwards, we found that "singing" was a slang for "being a prostitute". On Chinese New Year Eve, we visited a family in which there was only a woman. She had a daughter who was "singing" in Bangkok. She expected her daughter to come home for the Chinese New Year. Sadly, her daughter never came back. Later, the pastor there told us that her daughter had died of AIDS not too long ago. Whenever we met the lovely children there, we knew that they would have the same fate in the future. What a gloomy picture!

How would one solve this problem? I believe education is the solution. Ms Dorcas Ma caught this vision and built a school at the bottom of the hill, which provided residence and scholarship for the children. With better education, they could find better jobs. This is the only way to help them. Unfortunately, not many Christians were willing to work in that school at that time.

We stayed in Wei Ma Village for a few weeks. During that time, we saw a lot of weird and unjust events, but we had no means to help. Many pastors there were illegal immigrants from Burma. They lacked the qualities and attributes of a pastor. It was really difficult to serve. Fortunately, Ms Dorcas Ma had done a lot of good work. Sadly, Rev. Boonsong Santisitpong passed away not too long ago. He had indeed fought a good fight, kept his faith and finished his race with flying colors. We are thankful to have missionaries of such caliber.

9. A Brief Departure from San Francisco

In 2000, both my children had graduated from college and were independent. We were called to serve in Waterloo Hill EFC in Hong Kong. We served there for the next 13 years and returned to SF in November 2013.

Before I left SFEFC in 2000, the Deacons Board and I decided to divide the 600-people congregation into three branch churches:

- (1) Hope Evangelical Free Church – an English church. We rented a church in the Sunset District which we purchased later.
- (2) Grace Evangelical Free Church – a Chinese church. At first, it shared the same premises with “Hope”. Later, they purchased a property on the 46th Avenue and became independent.
- (3) About 250-300 people stayed in the mother church in Chinatown.

When I looked back, it was not a good decision for SFEFC. Most of those who stayed in the mother church were either elderly or youngsters. Since the English-speaking members had moved to “Hope”, those youngsters who stayed with their parents in the mother church did not have adequate guidance and teaching because of the absence of an English pastor. There was also a lack of middle-agers in the church. Although I was not there during this challenging time, I could imagine how tough the situation was. I have to thank God and the pastors who served during that period for their perseverance and faithfulness. Since I was not there during that time, I am in no position to write the history and development of this period.

10. There is still hope

With the sudden death of my daughter-in-law, Doris and I decided to return to SF in 2013. At first, I was working part-time as an interim Senior Pastor in SFEFC. I resigned after a year, and instead, worked as a volunteer consultant pastor, without changing the job duties.

I have to admit that this period was one of the most difficult times in my entire career. First of all, we are living far away from the church. It was difficult to care for the church and the brothers and sisters. Secondly, after having left SF for 13 years, there were lots of changes. The culture and the philosophy of ministry were very different from before. Not only that, the inhabitants and composition of Chinatown had also changed a lot. Apart from serving in SFEFC, I also started a bible study group in Pleasanton, which turned out to be very rewarding. I struggled in whether to continue serving in the SFEFC or not. There were times that I was at the verge of deciding to leave, but when I saw the need for the Gospel in Chinatown and realized that the number of converts has increased quite a bit in just a few years, I did not want to abandon them. With the encouragement of some brothers and sisters, we have finally decided to stay. Although it was a difficult time, God cared for us. God's grace was sufficient for us, for His strength is made perfect in our weaknesses.

I am glad to have witnessed the revival of the church in these two years. Recently, the outreach program "Brotherly Love in a Foreign Land, 30" (異鄉鄰舍情 30) has convinced many of us that the field was ripe for harvesting! However, we also know that Satan is busy at work to attack us too, causing us to lose faith. We have to look up to God regardless of what happens. Even if our health fails, or our faith is fragile, or the church is weak, we do not lose hope in our mighty God who is always sovereign and in control. No matter what happens, we will put our trust in Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Let us look up to Him, and witness His power, for He will bring us victory!