

## **Missions Trip to Vancouver, Canada**

Thanks and praise be to God! Our team of 10 persons all arrived safely in Canada in three separate flights between October 14 to 16 for our missions tour of Vancouver, Canada. We were received at the Vancouver International Airport by our missionary, Ps Berechiah Lee, and the facilitator of this trip, Ps Kenneth Lo, and subsequently interviewed at the airport by Omni News, the local Chinese television news station. Pastor Simon, Bro Sing Sing, and Bro Kelvin were also interviewed by Fairchild television. Initial lodging was provided by 2 sisters in Christ who let us use their houses, but due to the lack of proximity to the places that we were to visit and conduct services at, we moved into 2 service apartment units at the Executive Airport Plaza hotel, Richmond, which made ferrying the team around easier for the organizers and volunteers.

An opening ceremony for our series of events was held at the Radisson Hotel on October 18 which was attended by local government officials, pastors and church workers, and representatives from other social concern organisations. Over the course of our 3 weeks in Canada, we visited and gave testimonies at various elementary and secondary schools to educate the youths and children on the perils of substance abuse and gang involvement. Parenting workshops were also held with several community organisations such as S.U.C.C.E.S.S, where interactive discussions were conducted together with songs and testimony presentations to help the attending group better understand the symptoms and dangers of drug abuse, and how to help their family members who are embroiled in the web of drugs and crime. The rate of crime and drug abuse is very high among the native aboriginals of the First Nations tribes, and a visit was made to their Community Night through the facilitation of the outreach ministry of Sis Esther Leung, daughter of the Cultural Regeneration Research Centre's Dr Thomas Leung. However, even though we were invited to join them, we were requested by their tribal chief not to preach the Gospel nor share of our testimonies on drugs and imprisonment. Despite the fact that they are still in denial of their situation and their need for the Gospel, we pray that God will one day open their hearts to be receptive of His Good News of salvation.

As with all of our missions trips, debutation sessions were held at churches and Christian organisations like the Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church, Surrey Chinese Baptist Church, Richmond Chinese Baptist Church, Delta Baptist Church, Vancouver Chinese Lutheran Church, the Vancouver Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship (VCEMF), and many others to sing and testify of the amazing work and love of God in our lives. Many of the Pastors were greatly moved by the testimonies of our brothers and have pledged to be a partner in the vision and effort to set up a Gospel based drug rehabilitation ministry in Canada. We also saw many souls who turned and received Christ as their Lord and Savior. All glory be to God! The response was sufficiently overwhelming that we had to increase the number of our presentations and debutations from 21 to 32! Radio interviews were conducted with our team members by Ambassadors for Christ, Far East Broadcasting, AM961, and AM 1470 (also under the umbrella of Far East Broadcasting) so that more people will be able to experience the Lord's live transforming Gospel through our sharing broadcasted through the Internet and radio.

By God's grace, our team made history when we entered Burnaby Youth Custody Services Centre on October 27, as we are the first foreign Asian group ever to be allowed into a custodial institution in Canada to conduct counselling and testimony sessions with the inmates! The inmates consisted mainly of youngsters between 12 to 19 years of age. There was one young boy who was only 13 years old but who had already been in and out of the custody centre for over 15 times! Initially, the inmates appeared to be uninterested of and even hostile towards our presence, but after hearing the testimonies of our brothers, many of them were deeply touched and the atmosphere became friendly and interactive. Even the wardens commented that never in the past years of their service had they seen such a positive reaction from the inmates towards counselors, and these are officers who had 15 and 25 years of long service respectively! At the request of the inmates, the Director of the institution invited us to return for a subsequent visit on November 1. During the second visit, the centre even made access more convenient for us by waiving some of the routine security processes like passport checks and allowing female inmates to join our sessions. Over the course of our 2 visits, many of the inmates pledged to renounce their old ways and quite a few even accepted the Lord as their personal Lord and Saviour! Such encouraging progress is truly the Spirit of God at work and we pray that the Lord will continue to guide and mould them!

Praise the Lord! Even in the midst of our work, God prepared times of leisure and rest for us. Many brothers and sisters in Christ received us warmly and showed us great hospitality in many ways, such as ferrying us around, letting us use their houses for lodging, treating us to meals, and bringing us on tours of interesting places. We visited the Wild Salmon Hatchery in the Capilano River Park and had the opportunity to walk across the world famous Capilano Suspension Bridge. There were also many scenic places like the Fisherman's Pier, the Queen Elizabeth Park and Stanley Park, aside from tourist attractions like the Gastown Steam Clock and Granville Island Handicraft Market, which we toured on our rest days. These places gave us a totally different experience from that which we were accustomed to as Asians living in Singapore, and their beauty together with the experience of the unique local culture made us marvel at the vastness and diversity of God's creation.

The Chinatown area is where drug addicts are known to gather and use drugs openly on the streets. When our team made a trip there, the scene was an appalling and shocking one, as even the front gate of the local police department was used as a meeting point for the pushers and addicts to buy and sell drugs, something that we would never see in Singapore even at the height of the drug plague many years back. Numerous haggard and sickly drug abusers roamed the streets with despair and hopelessness written on their expressionless faces. The local government had instituted a Safe Injection Centre in this district for the addicts where clean needles and syringes were provided for them to reduce the incidence of infectious diseases transmitted via needle sharing, but unfortunately this well meaning measure only served to worsen the drug abuse problem. Even our team, who were comprised of former hardcore drug abusers, was deeply shaken by the circumstances of things going on here. This visit to Chinatown opened our eyes to the grave situation of the drug problem in Canada and convicted us even more on the pressing need for an effective Gospel-based drug rehabilitation ministry to help the abusers break free from the deadly grasp of drugs.

During the Appreciation Dinner on our final night in Canada, the pastors and staff of the churches and organisations which we had worked with during this trip all gathered with us for a time of fellowship and farewell. Everyone present reiterated their burden to participate in this mission of love in response to the Macedonian call of countless drug addicts, to bring a ray of hope to those who are drowning in the pits of darkness and sin. Rev Wong Yi Sheng, Senior Pastor of Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church and Chairman of VCEMF, had an in depth discussion with our Pastor Simon Neo over the dinner and expressed firmly that he and his church was ready to join hands with Breakthrough Missions to realize the vision to set up a Gospel based drug rehabilitation ministry in Canada according to God's will and timing.

It is God's hand that opened the way for us to embark on this missions trip which initially seemed impossible due to our criminal records, for with Him all things are possible! We pray that God will continue to lead us in the endeavour to bring more people to the realization that they need the life transforming power of the Gospel to free them and their loved ones from the bondage of sin, crime and drugs that run rampant in this generation, and for the local authorities to see that the power of the Lord Jesus Christ's Gospel is the answer to making their nation a better place. Let all glory, honour, praise and power be unto the Lord our God forever! Amen.