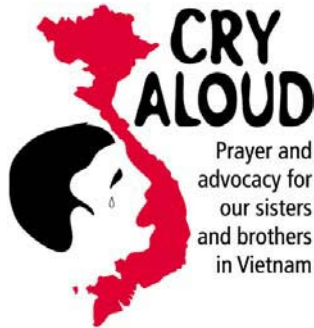


September 2004, *Equipping*



Mennonite Church Canada supports the Mennonite Church in Vietnam through the ministry of North American Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship (NAVMF).

Background

Vietnamese Mennonites are facing significant political pressure and persecution for living out their faith. Leaders have been beaten, arrested and held, church documents have been taken, and in one case, a church building has been destroyed.

Many house church groups have joined the Mennonite family of faith in the past 2 years, especially groups from among minority tribes people of the central highlands. These tribes have been asking for more say in their own governance. The Vietnamese authorities are wary of these desires. Many tribes-people have become Christians, and the government wrongly suspects their religious faith to be related to their political aspirations.

In a March 2 incident, people who attend the Mennonite church in Ho Chi Minh City attempted to report to precinct authorities the activities of two secret police who had threatened church members. Several persons were beaten, and deacon Nghia and evangelists Thach, Nhan and Phuong were arrested. They were accused of creating a public disturbance and opposing persons carrying out official duties. Three months later Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, vice-president and general secretary of the Mennonite Church of Vietnam, was arrested to be investigated for inciting others to resist persons carrying out official duties. On July 3 Ms. Le Thi Hong Lien, a children's Bible teacher, was arrested on related charges. They are all held at undisclosed locations. Family members have not been permitted to visit them.

Only in January 2003 did global Mennonites receive reports that as many as 8-10,000 Christians in Vietnam have embraced the "Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective," (which was translated into Vietnamese several years ago). Their leaders have expressed a strong desire to become part of the worldwide Mennonite church. Eastern Mennonite Missions personnel and Vietnamese Mennonite leaders in Canada and the United States have since had frequent and close contacts. This new group joined the Mennonite church established in the 1960s with Eastern Mennonite Missions support.

The Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam are two of the six recognized religious groups in Vietnam. There are other evangelical groups—like the Mennonites—which function primarily as house churches and have few or no church buildings. Some of these groups meet quite openly in the cities, though in rural and isolated places they often face much harassment. There is indication that the government wants to work out some accommodation with these groups. Yet the government insists on controlling religious groups for fear that they might weaken the sole authority of the Communist Party. The Catholic Church, the mountain people and many others look to Pastor Quang as an example of peaceful dissidence because he speaks out of his faith on behalf of justice for poor, powerless and underrepresented peoples.

Support

American Christians need much humility in responding to this situation, for our nation rained down terrible destruction and death upon Vietnam only a generation ago. Our current trade and aid policies affect the lives of ordinary Vietnamese people today. We are grateful for the development progress that Vietnam has made, and for the improving relations between our two countries.

On June 14, 2004, MC Canada sent a letter to H.E. Mr. Richard Lecoq, Canadian Ambassador to Vietnam, asking for his assistance to seek the release of Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang and his colleagues and the return of their confiscated property. A second letter was sent to Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister, Bill Graham. Mennonite World Conference representatives, as well as MC Canada General Secretary Dan Nighswander, have also met with Vietnamese officials in Geneva. We invite you to pray for leaders of the Vietnamese nation, for the release of the imprisoned leaders, and for the growth of the church in Vietnam.

For additional suggestions and information, see <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/peace/vietnam/>

Worship center

To encourage prayer for our sisters and brothers in Vietnam, consider adding bamboo shoots or a bowl of rice and chopsticks, or a cross and glass droplets on an open Bible to your congregational and home worship centers for the next weeks.

Prayer

I cry aloud to God, that the Lord may hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints. Psalm 77:1-3

God, we cry aloud for the Vietnamese Mennonite Church in the day of their trouble.

We pray for strength and wisdom for all believers to continue in their Christian walk and witness. We ask that you give them unity through the Spirit while their leaders are in prison and their worship services are disrupted.

Give them faith that passes human understanding.

Give them a witness that speaks your love to unbelievers around them.

We ask special blessing for the believers among minority groups, who have dealt with harassment from local authorities for the past several years. Help these persons find alternative ways to gather for worship and mutual support.

We pray for the families of those imprisoned, that they feel your presence and consolation. May those who have been appointed to take the place of the leaders in prison feel your guidance and wisdom.

We pray for those who are in jail and who have been beaten. May their spirits and bodies find healing during their prayers to you. Give them strength to endure whatever trials they are facing.

We pray that the leaders of the Vietnamese government release these Christians and recognize the spiritual and moral character of these our brothers and sisters who have so much to contribute to their country.

And give courage to we who know so little of persecution, so we learn from Vietnamese Mennonites how to live by Christian convictions without regard for consequences.

Teach us how to cry aloud to you, Lord, to strengthen our brothers and sisters in this hour of trial. Hold them close in the nighttime of their soul. Comfort them.

In the name of Jesus, risen from the dead,

Amen.