

2nd Opinion: Great news at a glad reunion

August 3, 2007

Posted: 8/03/07

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By Brad Riza

They all are older now, and most are larger around the middle. Some have less hair, and everyone's hair is a little lighter than it was then. Still, they made their way to Hideaway, near Tyler, this summer for an unusual military reunion. They weren't all from the same military unit, not even from the same branch of the service. They were Marines, Air Force, Army and Navy. Some were postal workers, and others were fighter pilots and airlift specialists. Some were police and others chaplains. They weren't even in Vietnam at the same time. The only thing these people had in common was a connection with [Trinity Baptist Church in Saigon](#).

In the early '60s, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board endorsed Jim and Mary Humphries to go to Vietnam and pastor an English-speaking church in downtown Saigon. That was their mission—but they did way more than that! They worked with military and embassy personnel for sure, but they also reached out to many Vietnamese families, sharing their friendship and eventually the gospel. They trained and mentored Vietnamese who would be future pastors and leaders.

On a Friday night in July, many of those whose lives were touched by Jim

and Mary traveled to their home just like they used to do on Friday nights in Vietnam. And just like in Vietnam, they had a great meal and a wonderful fellowship time. They met others who had been a part of that congregation at a different time. They spoke of ministry and worship and communion. They recalled working with orphans. They sang together, just as they did almost four decades ago.

No one spoke of politics. They did not debate the propriety of the war. They simply celebrated the opportunity to share ministry during a year that they were there—a year they were away from their families when they found a church family to fill that void.

A missionary who now ministers in Vietnam gave a report and praised those who served all those years ago, saying they had laid a foundation for a Vietnamese church that thrives today. Forced underground when South Vietnam fell, the Baptist work in Vietnam survived and has grown. Grace Baptist Church in Saigon, a lineal descendant of Trinity, is the mother church of hundreds of house churches all across Vietnam!

Grace recently was fully recognized by the Communist Vietnamese government. In their application for recognition, Grace had to write a purpose statement. They debated being politically correct and saying they would do social work and teach English and work with orphans. What they decided to say was what was in their heart: “To preach the gospel all across Vietnam, to seek to bring the nation to Christ.” Amazingly, the Communist government granted their application, and while perhaps not realizing the meaning of those words, it said the church’s operations within the country are “limited to their purpose statement.”

Perhaps the worst thing Ho Chi Minh ever did to his Communist movement was press for the unification of North and South Vietnam. His success in the mid '70s has now opened the entire country to the gospel. What a unique turn of events, and we were all part of that all those years ago. Who

would have thought? Who could have thought? Only in the providence of God!

Brad Riza, director of missions for Paluxy Baptist Association, is a retired U.S. Air Force chaplain. He served in Saigon in 1971-72.

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