

Mayflower Church: Life greater than they dared dream

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Pastor Pan Yongguang prayed for his flock throughout their more than three-year ordeal, when he and members of his persecuted church feared deportation back to China.

Today, he echoes the Apostle Paul's testimony to the Ephesian church that God is able to do "abundantly more than we can ask or imagine."

"We never dreamed of such a beautiful place," he said, describing his church's new home in East Texas.

More than 60 members of the Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church—nicknamed the "[Mayflower Church](#)" for their pursuit of religious freedom—fled persecution and harassment in China.

Initially, they moved to South Korea but were denied asylum there. They relocated to Thailand on tourist visas, but when those visas expired, the Thai government would not renew them unless members of the church reported to the Chinese Embassy.

After a deportation hearing, Mayflower Church members were [fined and detained](#) in Thailand six days.

'A Good Friday miracle'

Following extensive behind-the-scenes work by the U.S. Department of State, the international community and several Christian human rights organizations, including Freedom Seekers International, ChinaAid and 21Wilberforce, Pastor Pan learned he and his church members would be

resettled in the United States.



Rushad Hussain, ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom with the U.S. Department of State, and Randel Everett, founding President of 21Wilberforce, waited at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport to welcome members of the persecuted Mayflower Church to the United States. (Courtesy Photo)

Rushad Hussain, ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom with the State Department, and Randel Everett, founding president of [21Wilberforce](#), were among the welcoming party when the Mayflower Church landed April 7 at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

“It was a [Good Friday miracle](#),” Everett told a 21Wilberforce luncheon crowd in Temple June 15 when he introduced Pastor Pan.

Pastor Pan described how his congregation constantly lived in fear of a knock at the door by the state police in China, until they made the decision to leave their homeland in October 2019.

“We never thought we would come to America,” he said through an interpreter, his teenaged son Paul.

Comparing his church's journey to the United States to the Exodus experience of the enslaved Hebrews in Egypt, he said, "The ocean is much wider than the Red Sea."

Eight babies were born to members of the Mayflower Church since members left China in 2019. When most of the church members arrived in Texas on Good Friday, one member had to stay behind in Thailand—a mother who was due to deliver a baby.

Both the mother and her baby Monica, named for the mother of fourth-century theologian Augustine, have been reunited with the rest of the church in East Texas.

Resettled in East Texas



Randel Everett (right), founding president of 21Wilberforce, talks to Deana Brown, CEO of Freedom Seekers International, about the Mayflower Church. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Deana Brown, founding CEO of Freedom Seekers International, and an associate were in Thailand visiting the Mayflower Church when the deportation hearing was scheduled, and they were jailed along with members of the church.

Brown saw the timing as providential. Because American citizens were detained along with the Mayflower Church, several members of Congress intervened on their behalf, and the U.S. State Department quickly got involved to secure their release and relocation to the United States.

Since the [Mayflower Church arrived in East Texas](#), Brown's organization has been instrumental in facilitating their resettlement.

"We have a local lawyer working on securing work permits for them," she said.

Language assessments have been completed, and members of the Mayflower Church now are enrolled in English-as-a-Second Language classes using curriculum donated by the Literacy Council of Tyler.

Members of the Mayflower Church planted a community vegetable garden, and they are enjoying tending it, she noted.

"It's a big adjustment. The culture here is so different," Brown said. "Many of them left parents and grandparents behind in China.

"But they are happy now that they are here. They're no longer afraid."

Educational opportunity



Pastor Pan Yongguang (center) of the Mayflower Church and his son Paul enjoy a tour of the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor with Emily Prevost, associate provost. (Photo courtesy of Deana Brown)

At the luncheon in Temple, Pastor Pan was seated at the same table with Brown and Emily Prevost, associate provost for academic engagement at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

He talked about three teenaged girls in the Mayflower Church who hope to

attend a university in the United States, but Pastor Pan said he wanted to make sure they would be in a Christian environment.

Prevost introduced Pastor Pan to a Bible professor from UMHB who was attending the luncheon, and she told him about the university's Christian mission. That afternoon, she arranged for Pastor Pan and his son to tour the UMHB campus.

In an email the following day, Pastor Pan described the girls' reaction when he told them about UMHB, noting they want "to go to this college tomorrow."

"I had read them a biography of [Florence] Nightingale when they were kids, and they always wanted to be nurses," he wrote.

UMHB has one of the top-ranked undergraduate [nursing programs](#) in Texas and boasts a 100 percent job placement rate.

"For the past 10 years, I have been encouraging them to have faith that God will help them and that God's grace is sufficient," Pastor Pan wrote.

"Their dreams for many years can finally come true."

Members of the Mayflower Church would welcome the opportunity to practice their English by corresponding with Christian pen pals, Deana Brown noted. To connect with an individual member of the church or a family—or to help provide financially for Mayflower Church resettlement—[click here](#) or [here](#).