

# MENNONITE PARTNERS IN CHINA



## MPC CELEBRATES 30 YEARS

Thirty years is a short period of time in China, but given modern Chinese history it is quite significant. During decades of incredible change, many of MPC's institutional and personal relationships have continued unbroken. The longevity of the program is a testament to those who founded the program on the basis of reciprocity, learning from each other and long-term commitment. It is also a tribute to the hundreds of North Americans who have spent time teaching in China and those Chinese scholars who have studied and taught at Mennonite colleges. Rather than putting together a large celebration, MPC invited officials, visiting scholars and friends to dinner celebrations in Dazhou, Nanchong, Chengdu, Zigong and Leshan. The celebrations included obligatory speeches, toasts and time spent getting reacquainted. -Myrrl Byler



*Pictured MPC 30 Year Anniversary celebrations in Leshan (left) and Nanchong (above right). EMU Cross-Cultural at the Great Wall (below right).*

## Fall 2012 Newsletter

*The Year of the Dragon*

*Mennonite Partners in China is a program of Eastern Mennonite Missions, Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Church Canada Witness and Mennonite Central Committee.*



## EMU Cross-Cultural

All students at Eastern Mennonite University are required to spend time in another cultural setting, with most spending time in an overseas location. Of the nineteen students who spent three weeks in May in China, a third had never been on an airplane and only a few had ever been outside of the U.S. The challenge of large crowds, lots of attention when traveling, living with host families, trying to communicate with simple English or a few words of Chinese and eating strange food stretched students considerably. The three weeks included seeing the sights in Beijing, Xian, Chengdu and Hong Kong. The group spent ten days in Nanchong where they participated in *tai-ji* and language classes while living with families and relating to Chinese students in a variety of settings. -Myrrl Byler



## Bluffton MBA's Gain Firsthand Look at Chinese Economy

This was the third summer for MPC to host a group of MBA students from Bluffton University and their accompanying professor, Karen Klassen Harder. The purpose is not to make business connections but rather to get a firsthand look at what the articles and textbooks have been talking about for the past few decades. There were visits to factories run by General Electric, Cooper Tire and Sauder Manufacturing, meetings with the American Chamber of Commerce in Beijing and time with MBA professors and students at Sichuan Normal University. There were learning visits to a real estate company and even the American fast food chain Subway. A highlight was the visit to Farmer Duan's home in the countryside outside of Nanchong. A strength of this program is the focus on the broader cultural issues and overall climate in which the economic growth of China is taking place. -Myrrl Byler



## China West Normal University Training Program

When a group of university administrators from China decide that they want to learn everything there is to know about how an American university is run, Bluffton University is a great place to go. Not only did Bluffton provide 10 days of workshops and lectures on nearly all aspects of running a university, they did an incredible job of showing hospitality to the 16 staff persons from China West Normal University (CWNU) in Nanchong, Sichuan, who were there during July. The closing ceremony, held in the backyard of President James and Karen Harder's home, combined gourmet food with speeches and recognition from Bluffton trustees and even the town mayor. The group did have a few days for travel and sightseeing on the east coast, but even the skyscrapers couldn't compare to Bluffton in the minds of the group! -Myrrl Byler



## East to West: A Delegation from China West University Visits US

Long-term relationships with universities in Sichuan bring a variety of requests and this summer that included MPC arranging and hosting a dash across the country for the party secretary of China West University (Chengdu) and seven of his office staff. The stated purpose of the trip was to visit Xihua students studying in the U.S. and also alumni who are teaching and working. The ten day trip included San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Yellowstone National Park (no students in this location!), Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington D.C. This was not a group that spent a lot of time sleeping! -Myrrl Byler



*Pictured: CWNU administrators in Bluffton, Ohio (below right). Bluffton MBA's mingle at Sichuan Normal University (above left) and take a tour of a Sichuan farm (top right).*

## Everett Metzler—What a Privilege!

Everett's passing on July 26 was far too sudden, but the memories he has left will remain with those who knew him. Everett and Margaret were the first long-term MPCers, teaching in China from 1985 to 1996, with a few semester-long stints in later years. And all of this after many years in Vietnam and Hong Kong. Former CEE director Bert Lobe shared the following in memory: "Everett had what appeared to be an innate capacity to bring the best to a conversation. His presence and words were consistently helpful! His pleasant disposition and personal warmth endeared him to others. He was wise and patient and looked for the best. Everett's presence outside of the US, in both China and Vietnam, served to remind their friends in these places that Americans were committed to listening, to laughing and to understanding the complexity of Vietnam, China and the US. Everett found and touched the best in others and that is what he will be remembered for. Everett is among those whose presence among strangers helped humanize, build confidence and break down stereotypes. His was a life well lived, lived with others always in focus. Thanks be to God." -Myrrl Byler

## Third Annual Summer Institute of Language and Culture

A week-long symposium brought together Chinese professors with their counterparts from MPC. The keynote speaker, Dr. Wang Xuefu (of the Nanjing Institute for Zhi-Mian Psychology), used Lu Xun's metaphor of the "Iron House," the ideas that bind and choke us and that we fear we may never break free of. From there discussion topics ranged from an overview of Chinese history to a discussion of teaching methods to an introduction to the modern Chinese-Canadian identity, among many others. With such ample fodder for conversation the lunches and break times spent talking with participants from all backgrounds proved to be every bit as interesting as the symposium sessions themselves. After a week of discussion and socialization, teachers left with new ideas and connections, hopefully recharged and ready for the semester ahead. -Andrew Fairfield



## Robert J. Suderman Visits China

Students from two seminaries in China were pleased to welcome Robert J. Suderman, former executive secretary of Mennonite Church Canada. At the seminary in Chengdu, Sichuan, Suderman explored the politics of Jesus using both Biblical and historical contexts. He discussed the political options available during the time of Jesus and went on to explain how Jesus rejected many of these notions. -Jeanette Hanson



## Yin Hongtao Attends Mennonite Church Canada Assembly

Yin Hongtao, MPC Beijing, works with the China Vision group of churches. He attended the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly held in Vancouver, Canada to represent China Vision and to build connections with Mennonite Church Canada. He returned very enthusiastic about the conversations he had and the potential for sharing between churches. "In many ways," he said, "our strengths and weaknesses are opposite. Where the Canadian congregations talked about declining numbers, we are overwhelmed with people coming into the church. Where we strive to plant roots for these fast growing congregations, they have deep roots in the rich soil of Anabaptist heritage. I feel so strongly that we really need each other." There are already plans for building more connections between Mennonite Church Canada and China Vision in 2013 with invitations between congregations, both from East to West and West to East. -Jeanette Hanson

*Pictured: Robert J. Suderman gives a lecture at the seminary in Chengdu (above). Summer Institute of Language and Culture participants in Chengdu, China*

## Summer Kids Program in the U.S.

This year's program got off to a rough start when more than two-thirds of the students from Nanchong applying for visas were rejected by the U.S. Consulate for various unclear reasons. In the end 45 students from Nanchong and Anqing did make it to the U.S. where they spent four weeks improving their English skills, taking pictures in front of famous places and learning about life in America. Congregations in Hartville, Ohio and the Reading, Pennsylvania area hosted the kids for two weeks, providing families for them to live with, English classes and afternoon activities. The kids also struggled with communicating in English, living in strange homes and eating food they hadn't tasted before. However the ties to their host families were meaningful and real, making an impact on the kids' lives in significant ways.



## Radical Journey Participants Spend Year in Nanchong

"What does service really mean?" This was one of the questions that Radical Journey participants struggled with last year living in Nanchong, Sichuan. Radical Journey is a program of Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Church Canada Witness that gives young adults from North America the opportunity to serve internationally for 10 months.

Traditional ideas of service often focus on rural-based, physical labour projects or disaster relief. These ideas were challenged as the three students, Kate Swartz (Pennsylvania), Laird (Kansas) and Paul Dyck (Manitoba) lived and worked, taught English and studied Chinese in a modern urban area with a population of over 600,000.

Does service include the humility of learning Chinese when you already speak the powerful English language? Does it mean presenting that English language as a gift to your hosts in a spirit of reciprocity? Does service mean accepting Sichuan hospitality when

you can't face another hot pot dinner? Maybe service could also mean building bridges of increased understanding between the East and West.

The Radical Journey participants lived in a place where McDonalds is just down the street, a high speed train will get you to the provincial capital in less than 2 hours, and young people wear jeans and watch American movies. These three young adults faced a very different culture with grace, and moved from "this doesn't make sense" to "I don't understand." -Jeanette



## Fujian Summer Teaching

This summer saw the coming together of gifts and need in the global church family. A request for teachers in a summer English program at a county church in Luoyuan, Fujian matched an offer made by a group from First Mennonite in Edmonton, Alberta. Dean and Heather Prior, former MPC teachers, were joined by their children David and Tianna, Len Siemens (Winnipeg), Esther Siemens, Dawn Roadhouse and Randy Delay and their children, Taryn and Ethan.

This group taught children in the church-run language training centre for 3 weeks. Teaching lively children with very basic or non-existent English skills in very simple classroom situations is not an easy task. Songs, rhymes, games, pictures and lots of patience were needed daily. The group showed much flexibility in their approaches as they learned to know their students. The highlight of the time in Luoyuan was living, working, and worshipping together with the language centre staff, all of whom are local Christians and young leaders in the church.

The church in Luoyuan is looking for a full time English teacher to work in the language training centre with local English teachers to provide a language service to children in the community. The congregation sees the language centre as a form of community outreach, specifically designed to help disadvantaged, rural students get into college. Under a system that values English as a requirement of the national college entrance exam, most rural students find it difficult to compete with the English levels of urban residents.

# Introducing MPC Personnel

**Molly Buckwalter Fairfield**—Andrew and I just recently moved to Chengdu from Leshan, a small city two hours away from Chengdu. We spent the last two years teaching English at Leshan Normal University, but have recently changed occupations and are now studying Chinese at South Western University of Finance and Economics. I couldn't be happier with my decision to study Chinese for a semester -- there's nothing quite so motivating as a classroom environment, homework, and exams. I am very grateful to MCC for allowing me to take some time to study Chinese; I'm hoping that better Chinese skills will help me to be a better English teacher next semester when we resume teaching in Wuyishan, Fujian.

**Andrew Buckwalter Fairfield**—I've always enjoyed eating together as way to build friendships. Sichuan-style barbeque is magnificent, and my single favorite way to make friends. Walking around my new neighborhood in Chengdu I was a little concerned because I didn't see any chairs and tables spilling from the sidewalks into the streets. Fortunately I have managed to find a few good, cheap places nearby, so I'm hoping to start up the cycle of invitations with a professor and some of his friends. Sometimes relationships blossom and sometimes they don't, but the food is guaranteed to be good.

**Dave Eby**—Hi, my name is Dave Eby and I have been teaching in China since 2008. I teach at Anqing Teachers College and usually teach oral English to English major students. This year, I am also excited to be teaching a new course to Business English majors focusing on business communication in both written and spoken forms. This course is of particular interest to me because before coming to China, I worked as a manager in a manufacturing company for 13 years. My undergraduate degree is also in business. In addition to teaching, I enjoy sports and reading, especially John Grisham novels.

**Eric Eberly**—I hail from Hartville, Ohio and have been in China for nearly 7 years. This is my final semester in China and it will be a busy one as I prepare for my wedding in Nanchong, China where I have been teaching at Xihua Normal University for the past year. As if planning a wedding wasn't enough, I will travel to my former home of Fujian for a week during the national day holiday for the 100 year anniversary of Mennonite Brethren Missionaries entering Shanghang in the

south part of the province. I will also put on my tour guide hat for a group of Canadians on their journey down the Yangtze during their visit in October. I hope my role as a cultural bridge will continue through my marriage to Ling Dong, and my anticipated job teaching in the IEP (Intensive English Program) at EMU in the spring of 2013.

**Todd Hanson**—I taught high school English in Saskatchewan before coming to China. I'm teaching English major graduate students at Sichuan Normal University in Chengdu, and this year, among other things, I'm teaching a new course: "How to be a grad student." I am also in a PhD program at Simon Fraser University. I really enjoy riding around on my "Flying Phoenix" ("It's just like the one my grandfather had!" a young man told me while we were stopped at a red light) and I always carry my camera around because photo opportunities abound (in spite of one of my student's hoodies that says, "This is not a photo opportunity"). One of the highlights of my time here was the day someone did not call me a "laowai" (foreigner). That day, I was labeled in a much more satisfying way: "laowai de baba" (foreigner's father).

**Viola and Peter Labun**—After a fulfilling career in teaching (almost 7 years) and healthcare administration (27 years) for Viola, and a rich career of teaching (30 years) in a variety of contexts for Peter, we have arrived in China for a year long service opportunity. There were three factors that influenced our decision to leave our home in Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada, our two children and elderly parents, and come to China.

- a) We were both retired but felt the need for continued meaningful purpose in our lives.
- b) We felt that with all our experience we could still contribute in some way.
- c) We have had many opportunities to travel but were limited to seeing the sights; we did not get to know any of the people in the various countries we visited.

For these reasons we pursued service opportunities with Mennonite Church Canada, which connected us with Mennonite Partners in China. So here we are in China for a year, teaching English at Xihua Normal University in Nanchong, Sichuan province.

We had an interesting conversation with one of our Chinese teachers about Christianity. She had a great respect for Mennonites who she says have done great service to Chinese people, not beginning and ending with an invitation to meet Jesus, but have come with a

servant heart, to meet needs of Chinese people. So, our mission seems clearer, that is, to serve Chinese people out of love for them, and then to say why, when they ask.

**Brian Lim**—I am a Chinese-Canadian who grew up in Winnipeg, now living in Toronto with wife Janet and son Joel (5 on October 5th) - former medical imaging research scientist, now a high school physics and environmental science teacher. I still enjoy pick-up basketball and volleyball, although my knees and ankles are much less forgiving now. I'm on a 1 year sabbatical from teaching physics, and am now teaching English at Fujian Normal University in Fuzhou, which is where my family roots are found. Aside from a few short summer teaching trips to China in the mid-2000s, I last lived in China from 1999 to 2001, teaching English and Western Culture at Chongqing University of Medical Sciences. It has been a very comfortable re-immersion in China, aside from our adventures with bureaucracy in obtaining our work visas. The book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mom* and the Tim Horton's commercial about a Chinese-Canadian father, his son, and hockey are topics I will gladly discuss with anyone.

**Janet Sio**—My name is Janet Sio and I am happy to be teaching English in Fujian province, which happens to be my family's ancestral home. I am a Toronto native, having been born and educated as a pharmacist in Canada. As a teacher, I first taught at North Sichuan Medical College in Nanchong, Sichuan province for 2 years with Mennonite Partners in China (then called China Educational Exchange) 1999-2001. Upon returning to Canada, there was a new government sponsored program developed at the University of Toronto, called the International Pharmacy Graduate program which attempted to "bridge" the qualifications of internationally trained pharmacists to regulate their ability to practice in Canada. I joined the staff of this program since I could merge my TEFL experience in China with my pharmacy practice and found joy in helping restore the professional recognition and dignity of these new immigrants. My husband Brian and I have a five year old son, Joel. Joel has been attending a local bilingual kindergarten and through him, we have had many new and different opportunities to experience life in China, that we didn't have before as singles. We hope to support the local church while we are here and have met many Christian teachers and colleagues on campus and at Joel's school just in the month that we've been here already!

**Esther Snader**—I am in my 15th year of teaching English in Anqing Teachers College. After teaching in Christian elementary schools in the states for many

years, teaching college students in the government system here is quite different. My job includes teaching English to around 300 students each semester. I have built up a library with the help of many friends to give my students English literature to read. I enjoy chatting with the many students who come to my library and pointing them in the direction of literature that can make a difference in their lives.

**Kate Wentland**—My name is Kate Wentland and I'm from Southern California. I previously taught in Wanzhou, China from 2000-2002 under MCC and MPC. I have now returned to China, and am teaching Theological and Biblical English at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. It's an exciting place to be because my students are preparing for ministry in churches across China. During this past month, I have been energized by the warmth, friendliness, and hospitality of my students. I have been pulled into various social circles, and I have been spending a good deal of my free time with students. I am grateful that I been able to start so many friendships so quickly. I am also an avid cook, and I am organizing a cooking group for students that will start after the national holiday.

**Emily and Andy Yoder-Horst**—This is the third year in China for us, Andy and Emily, where we have been living in Zigong, Sichuan. Before coming here we were both teaching in elementary schools in Denver, Colorado, Emily as an ESL teacher and Andy teaching in a special education classroom. The biggest thing for us this summer was welcoming Alina into our family in May. While short nights of sleep don't always make us feel energized, her smiling face usually does the trick. Some of our interests include traveling around China, reading, hiking, and sometimes art projects of various sorts.