

July-August 2005, *Equipping*

A Moment for Celebration: A Mission Moment

We invite you to share the following story with your congregation. It should take no more than 2 minutes to read aloud. You might also wish to include the story in your church newsletter.

Celebration Story: Persecution and Church Growth



The past year and a half has not been an easy time for many in the Mennonite Church in Vietnam. In addition to the imprisonment of six church leaders, two of whom are still in prison, the Mennonite churches of the highlands region have experienced more than their fair share of trials. In particular, minority groups of the highlands have been restricted in their freedom to worship and express their faith openly.

But despite the restrictions on the church, a recent report from a Mennonite leader in the highland region is full of thanksgiving to God for the continued growth of their church in this part of the country. "Although our situation has been very difficult" the report says, "the church of the Lord has continued to increase." Two years ago, on July 27, 2003, about 3000 Christians of this region joined the Mennonite Church in Vietnam, and today they number over 5500.

Despite new government regulations instituted last November to increase religious freedoms, many highland churches have been dispersed by the authorities and not allowed to meet together. One church of 600 divided into 23 small groups, meeting weekly, another into 30 groups... The report notes that, as churches were forced to close, "a number of brothers and sisters fell away, (but) the number of believers on our church records (show) 5572 faithfully kept on meeting in their congregations. Is this not a miracle?"

The report concludes with thanksgiving. "We give thanks to the Lord! Even though difficulties and persecution came to the church workers – these did not bring harm to the church; on the contrary, they established our faith more firmly for many people, and provided training in 'Stephen opportunities' (Acts 11:19)... We continue to thank the Lord."

Through the work of the North American Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship, Mennonite Church Canada Witness is supporting pastors and evangelists of these Mennonite Churches. As members of the worldwide Mennonite family, let us thank God for the faithful witness of our brothers and sisters of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam. Your prayers and support of this church are a real encouragement to a tested but growing faith community. They are also an encouragement to the rest of the world, including our own congregations.

—Gordon Janzen, Area Facilitator for Asia & Middle East
Mennonite Church Canada WITNESS