



Church of Christ in Gwinnett

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*The birds of the air come and perch in its branches.
- Matthew 13:32*

Issue 64
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Thanks for serving families in need!

On behalf of the COCG and Helping Mamas, we send thanks to the 2024 Helping Mama's volunteers! Whether you assisted with distributing diapers and women's products, sorting and organizing in the warehouse, or purchasing baby items to fill the sacks during Christmas, your dedication significantly impacted the lives of families in need.

In 2024, over three million essential items reached the hands of those who needed them most. Your efforts contributed to making that happen.



February service opportunity



April service opportunity



July service opportunity



October service opportunity



December "Gift of Change" contribution drive

Thank you for embodying the spirit of service and love. Together, we are making a difference! Let's continue in 2025.

– Lauri Bernard



Overflowing with joy!

The afternoon of Sunday, February 2nd, was sunny and bright, but the smile on the face of Jana Tondo as she entered God's eternal Kingdom outshone anything outside! And the smiles on the faces of her friends and family as they shared their hearts and encouraging scriptures at her baptism were almost as dazzling. Here are a few scenes from the Emmetts' sunroom that day—







Let's continue to support Jana and all our young disciples with our prayers for their strength and growth, and with encouraging fellowship times—which all of us need, really, not just our young ones!
 “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”
 (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Two paths in life join together...



Saturday, January 18th, became a very significant day in the lives of two disciples in the CoCG—that was the day Karan Sarai asked Julie Fields to marry him, and she said yes! After Karan's outdoor proposal, many of their friends and families joined in the celebration at an engagement party at Donnell Francis', including several disciples from Kansas, where Karan lived before moving to Georgia. We wish Karan and Julie great joy in their journey forward together!

Catching up with...



Vinh Scott Dang and Kim Pham
with their sons Kevin and Joe

Where are you from originally? What would you like people to know about where you're from?

Kim: I come from Vietnam, from the city that back then was named Saigon but now is Ho Chi Minh City. It's a very busy city, very crowded. I grew up there with my family. One thing that's different there is the traffic—there are so many people riding motorcycles! The traffic there is very dangerous; there are no rules for when you're driving—everybody drives by their feelings.

Scott: Kim is from the city, and I'm from a smaller city—Da Nang City, in the central part of Vietnam; there are a lot of nice beaches there. We went on a missionary trip to help set up a church in Da Nang, and we stayed there for three years, from 2005 to 2008, then we went back to Ho Chi Minh City.

Ho Chi Minh City has a lot of traffic. You risk your life crossing the street; the traffic doesn't stop, they just keep on going, so if you want to cross the street it's like playing Frogger! Once you've lived there for a while, you have faith that they will go around you. If you hesitate, then it's difficult for them to guess where you're going to go, so you just walk by faith, close your eyes and go forward, and hope no one's going to hit you. It's a very interesting city, and they welcome foreigners. There are a lot of museums to go to.

Outside the city there are some beautiful places to visit also. People live very traditional lives, very simple lives, in the country—they do a lot of farming. The country is a very beautiful place!

And the food—it's hard to go there and diet! Pho is very popular there; it's a traditional Vietnamese noodle soup. And eggrolls, so many types! There's great traditional Vietnamese street food—you can buy snacks, or barbecue, or bánh mì, a special type of sandwich like a sub sandwich, very fresh, that is very popular there—and it's cheap, too, compared to here.

Kim: I believe that people who go there fall in love with the food; it's very interesting, very delicious. People don't eat with forks, they use chopsticks! And in Vietnam we don't use freezers—the Vietnamese who live here are so surprised how much stuff you buy in America is frozen. Everything there is always fresh, and we cook every day, morning and evening.

Scott: The wet markets there sell fresh vegetables, meats, fish, and so you don't have to store things in the fridge or the freezer. The lifestyle there is very simple. Most of the houses there are close to each other and smaller than what we have here because the city is very condensed, very congested, so when you buy a home it's more like a condo or a townhome, not like a home with a yard.

Kim: And buying a home in the city we pay by cash totally, 100%.

Scott: Not many people in the city can afford to buy a home. Most people live in the countryside and come to the city to work because of the job opportunities. The lunar new year celebration is called Tet and it's a big thing in Vietnam; that's when everyone goes back to their hometown to visit the family for maybe a week or 10 days, and then they come back to the city to work. In Vietnam they go by the lunar calendar for traditional events, and the Western, Gregorian calendar for business—they use both.

Kim: The culture is like Chinese culture, because we were conquered by China for something like a thousand years.

Scott: Yes, Vietnam was influenced by China a lot, and a lot of people there even speak Chinese. But Vietnam was colonized by the French for about a hundred years, so it was influenced by French culture too. When you go there you see a lot of French architecture, the villas that they built. Catholicism was brought over by French colonists, so there are many Catholics in Vietnam, too. The two biggest religions there are Buddhism and Catholicism.

Religion there is not free; churches are controlled by the state. The government controls what's going on in churches. You can't preach whatever you want to preach. We have five churches there—one in the north, one in the central region, and three in the South. They're like house churches; we're not legally permitted to be there—we don't have a license to operate. Any time they want, they can close it. It's more open now than when I lived there; then we could not even meet together in a building—we met in secret places, or at home. Now they're allowed to meet in a building.

Kim: But even now the government still has some spies watching you, and they know everything.

Scott: That's why I mentioned [in the sermon on Sunday the 19th] that we're free here to worship—that's a freedom sometimes we take for granted. There are a lot of Christian groups persecuted there and put in jail for their faith. They aren't free people; there is no free speech.

Kim: And it's not just the church—in society outside you can't say everything you want to say, you have to be careful. If you say something wrong you will go to jail.

Scott: The government there controls the social media, controls the Internet, so you cannot write whatever you want to write or you cannot say anything against the government, you would be questioned or investigated and go to jail. It's just like China—it's not totally free, not a democracy. How did you come to live in the Atlanta area?

Kim: I met Scott in the church, and we were married in Ho Chi Minh City in 2000. It was a leader-matching marriage, but more than that, it was God matching us in marriage. I never thought about living in America then; when I was baptized and became a disciple, my goal was just the mission in Vietnam. I had a dream that my husband would be an evangelist, I dreamed that we would share our faith with people, but I never dreamed that we would go to America. But when my son Joe was about six years old, I talked to Scott about going to America because I saw that his faith was not growing anymore. Also, I wanted my children to have a good education. And Kevin, my second boy, had lung problems; I was thinking he needed another environment to help his lungs, because in the city the air is very polluted—those are the three reasons why I wanted to be in America. We came to Atlanta because Scott grew up here.

Scott: I lived here before I went to Vietnam; I graduated from Meadowcreek, actually! Then I went to a community college here which is now part of Georgia State, and then I went to University of Georgia. And then right after graduation I went back to Vietnam to be part of the mission team. After being there for 15 years we both decided to go back here because our children were growing up and they needed to go to school here, and so that's why we came back in April 2010—over 14 years ago now.

What do you do for a living? How did you choose/come to be in that field?

Kim: I work for one of the Vietnamese magazines, I've been the office manager since 2012—that's a long time with one company! About three years ago I started on accounting, and now I'm working two days a week as an accounting employee at a CPA firm.

Scott: Kim is very good in management and human resources—in Vietnam, before she became a disciple, she owned her own textile company, and she managed a big number of employees working in the factories. She's very good at managing people, and organization—that's her strong point.

For me, when I came back to the U.S. I had to start over in everything. In Vietnam I taught English as a second language, so when I came back, I started to teach for a while at one of the schools here. Then I got laid off and I didn't know what to do—I had to support my family! I started a lawn care business, I had to learn how to cut grass and do lawn care. That's what I did for a couple of years, and then I did some interpretation work—helping people with medical or court interpretation. I also received my real estate license, and I worked in that for a while; I still have my license, but the market has changed a lot, so I stopped doing that.

Now I'm continuing to do medical interpretation; at first I had to go on-site, to court or to hospitals or doctors' offices, but now I do it at home. I work online, over video. This job is suited for me because I wanted to spend more time with the children and help them with whatever they need, to take care of the family and cook for them, take them to band practice or whatever—Kim works outside and comes home later, so I take care of the home business.

Kim: He's a chef—he's Mr. Mom!

Scott: Yeah, I do most of the cooking at home. And because I work at home, I'm more flexible. I enjoy my work—I love it. When people go to the doctor but they can't communicate with the them, I'm able to help them; there's a lot of need in this field. You cannot get rich on this kind of work, but the income is enough for us to get by on. We understand each other; we help each other out.

Kim: I feel so grateful; I feel like God is really working in our life. After 25 years, even when we don't talk about something it's like we know everything about each other. So many times I've thought that maybe he read my To Do List—there's something I was going to do, and he did it. Everything in our life, like children and social things and friends and the church and whatever—you know, we understand each other and we cooperate really well.

Tell us how you first got involved with disciples – what was your first impression of them?

Kim: I remember how I met a disciple one night. I had so many problems, I felt very, very unsuccessful, and I had so many questions—I wanted to find Him one day and to ask Him so many questions about who He is and the reason why I am here on this earth. My family was Catholic, but I don't think I believed much in God, even though my parents forced me to go to the Catholic church. But I always had questions about God! I went to see the Catholic priests, but they couldn't answer my questions.

My life was not good at that time, so I was more interested in knowing Him. And one night I was lonely, I went to a big hotel with some of my friends, and I went to the small library in the hotel; I met one disciple there. She asked me to just make friends, and shared her phone number. One day after that she invited me to the Bible talk, and I went. It's the first time I saw many people opening their Bibles—in the Catholic church we didn't read the Bible much, just read about Catholic principles and things like that. She gave me a Bible to read, and I started reading it that night; I didn't sleep, I just read the whole night—"Wow, this is so interesting!"

The disciple asked me about studying the Bible, and I said yes. And I stopped my business—that was when I had the textile business, fabrics and fashion; I talked to my employees and said, "OK, you guys, stop, I need the time"—then I started to study the Bible every day. I didn't do business, I didn't do anything, I just studied the Bible, and in one or two weeks I got baptized. My life turned upside down—totally different! You know, the Kingdom of God is like a treasure; when the people find it, they don't care about anything else, we just go forward, sell everything. But that's my life—I just want to seek God!

Scott: Growing up, my family believed in Buddhism, they followed that tradition, so my background is Buddhism—I didn't know anything about God, but I was searching for God, and I wanted to live the life that is right. I went to a Pentecostal church, and this guy I didn't know sat next to me—I went there for a little while, and then I stopped going there. But then he worked next door to me, I was delivering pizza and he was delivering steak, and so I met him again. He became a disciple, and he invited me to a Bible study. When I first saw the people at the Bible talk, I felt so much love, and it just impressed me—it was like a family! I saw the love that I'd been missing. So then I was invited to church, and the brothers asked me to study the Bible; I studied the Bible and I prayed, and in a short time I became a disciple. I joined the campus ministry at UGA, then a couple of years later, right after I graduated, I went back to Vietnam to be part of the mission team—the mission team was already there, so I went there to ask them if I could be part of it.

What really impressed me from the start was the love, the friendly atmosphere that I was looking for. I grew up in the U.S. far from my family. When I was 10 we escaped Vietnam on a boat, just my brother and me. He was my guardian, so wherever he went, I went with him, though sometimes I was left on my own because he had to travel somewhere else to work. The rest of my family was in Vietnam, so I was lacking that family atmosphere; that's what I needed, and that's what God showed me there. "God puts the lonely in families," you know.

What has surprised you most about life as a disciple?

Kim: The big surprise for me in disciple life is to know God and to know Jesus, and to have this dream—when I was growing up I had a dream about how people can live trusting each other, loving each other, live pure lives and be righteous, like in the novels I read when I was growing up. I didn't see that in real life. That's been the big surprise in knowing God—I see it in the Bible, that's He wants people to live like that—and as disciples, we are living like that, and that's the big surprise for me.

Scott: When I first became a disciple, I was just amazed at the relationships, the love and the brotherhood. I feel that God has shown his love for me through the disciples, through people that really honestly love you—I was looking for that, and God has shown me that. And it's only through God that we can have this kind of fellowship. So it's just like Kim said, we found a treasure that we would sell everything to buy, that piece of land that has that treasure, and that's how I feel too. I'm very grateful how God has brought me up and built my faith and helped me to grow and develop in my walk with Him.

What has your biggest challenge been in following Jesus, and how do you deal with it?

Kim: I don't feel much like things are challenging. Whatever my discipler tells me to do, that's what I do. God designed me like this; I think this is a blessing. I could have a discipler who is younger than me or whatever, but whatever she tells me—"Go this way, that way"—I follow it exactly. Everything, I believe, is from God—that's my heart. Like the church matching me with Scott—I feel happy with that! God does the planning, God is the way; God knows more than we know! I could see that the result of things I did in the past was not good—but then I get to know God in His wisdom, and His plan is perfect!

Scott: Right now I don't really know what the biggest challenge is—I just enjoy every day, I enjoy my relationship with God; every other thing seems nothing. The challenge I think for me is to try to be righteous and be holy—in the world we're always bombarded with worldly things, and I think God just challenges you to be pure, to be righteous.

What is your favorite scripture?

Kim: My favorite scripture is the one about how whatever God does is good for the people who believe in Him, who love him (Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.") That's something that has really followed me all my life. Since I've known him, whatever happens, even what people see as bad things, that's always what comes to my mind. And even though sometimes I don't see the reason, I know there has to be a very good reason it's happening—I may not see it now, but I do believe there's a miracle there!

Scott: There are so, so many that I love, but I think for me one that I really strive to be more and more is Ephesians 4:2, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." That's one I work on and meditate on every day.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time—interests, hobbies, etc.?

Kim: I love watching movies! When I was single, I would read a book, but I don't feel I have much time to do that, so just relaxing and watching movies.

Scott: My new hobby is hiking; I like hiking up the mountain, Stone Mountain. After you climb a while, you get in condition, and you climb better. I enjoy that quality time, hiking and spending quiet time with God. And I love listening to worship music and learning to play—my ambition is to learn how to play the piano, and my hope is one day I can play and sing worship songs at church.

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

Kim: I am super, super afraid of roaches! Sometimes I want to ask God the reason He created them! I couldn't live in a place that had roaches.

Scott: I think people would be surprised that I cook for my family; I'm a really good cook, I'm the main cook for my family.

Kim: Sometimes I get emails about cooking dinner for people in the church; I always sign up, but when people come and say, "Thank you so much, it was very good," I say, "No, no, I signed up, but Scott made the dinner!"

If you could speak to yourself as you were ten years ago, what advice would you give yourself?

Scott: I think maybe to be wiser in the way I talk to people. Sometimes, like in my parenting, I see I could have been wiser, not so strict or controlling, and more understanding.

Kim: I think I'd want to grow more in trusting God. I remember sometimes struggling, wanting to control my husband in some ways—like trying to organize him; I wanted him to grow, but I wasn't seeing it. It was on my heart, but it wasn't happening. So I thought, "Just let God take care of it"—then I saw him growing a lot!



We welcome news and pictures on interesting personal stories, family group activities, and more. Please send them to Nancy Berry, nberry2@gmail.com. Thank you!

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