

The Robert Smith Family

*serving our Lord
joyfully on the island of*

Barbados, West Indies

March 25, 2016



God is so gracious to allow sinners like us to be a part of His work! In our last letter, I wrote of a Chinese couple who are coming to our church. Their proper names written in English are Mr. Xiangguang Fan, and Ms. Zhihong Wang. They told us that we can call them Francis and Hong for short. Boy, was I ever glad of that!

Ms. Hong speaks little English, and so Francis will usually interpret for her. I have been going to their restaurant nearly every Thursday to teach them about the Bible. One day after the lesson, I asked them how did you come to our church? We had never met them until one Sunday morning when they came the first time. They do not live near the church or even in our parish of St. Philip.

Francis began to tell me the story. He grew up as a Buddhist in China. Francis came to Barbados in December of 2003 just a few weeks before we came to Barbados. He lived for four years in St. Philip just a mile or so (as the bird flies) from where the church is located now, and although I had knocked those neighborhoods we had never met.

He moved to the Christ Church parish and eventually left his job as a cook in a restaurant to open a small restaurant of his own. Francis' only interaction with church was with the Jehovah Witnesses here in Barbados. For some years they taught him and he attended their church. He was about to be baptized by them when something seemed to stop him. "The teaching just didn't seem right," he said to me. He couldn't put his finger on it, but something held him back. The Jehovah Witnesses kept after him, but he finally quit their assemblies for good. He was confused, and he didn't know where to go.

Meanwhile, Hong came to join him in Barbados last fall. Although she had also grown up in a Buddhist home, a friend in China had encouraged her to read the Bible. She read the Bible all the way through. She even visited a church in China with her friend. After joining Francis in Barbados, she told him that she wanted to go to church, and they began looking for a church to attend.

They went down the street to a church nearby, but upon arriving there, the people ignored them as if they were not there. They looked at each other and said, "This cannot be the place." And so they left. They tried church after church. At one charismatic church service, they looked at each other and said, "This is a party, this cannot be the place."

Francis began looking through the phonebook for a church to attend. There are dozens upon dozens of churches here. He was confused; he didn't know what to do. As he looked through the phonebook, he noticed under Baptist churches, one in red bold print- **St. Philip Independent Baptist Church** with a cellphone number, and the address. He wondered to himself, "What kind of a church has a cellphone number for a church number?" Something told him to call that number. He didn't call. Well, Hong still wanted to find the right church, and something (or rather Someone) was still urging Francis on the inside to call that number. A week or so passed, and the Voice continued urging him to call, and so one Saturday he called!

I answered the phone and heard a man with a distinct Chinese accent asking me for directions to the church. From his place to our place there are many twists and turns, you never go straight anywhere here. I gave him directions, and I wondered what would become of it.

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Home Church- First Baptist Church, 507 State Street, Hammond, IN 46320 219-932-0711

The next morning in time for Sunday School, Francis and Hong arrive at the church. They left immediately after Sunday School. We didn't even have time to meet them properly. The next Sunday was the same, and so on, and then one Sunday they stayed through for the main service.

Oftentimes they would leave halfway through the morning service rushing back home to prepare the restaurant for opening. Well, I began having Bible lessons for several weeks with them at their restaurant as we wrote in our last letter, and after several weeks we taught about Christ and what He has done for each of us.

The next week, March 10th, as I was teaching (with Francis interpreting for Hong's sake), I asked them, "Do you remember how God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden so that Adam and Eve could make a choice of their own free will?" They both answered, "Yes, we remember." "Do you understand that man is a sinner and that Christ has paid for his sins?" I said. Again they answered, "Yes."

"And now it is your turn to make a choice. What will you do with Christ? You can receive Christ and His payment for your sins, or you can pay for them yourselves. What will you do with Jesus?" They looked at each other, and said, "We want Christ!" Hallelujah!! What a wonderful, amazing moment! They each prayed individually. Francis in English and Hong in Chinese asking Christ for His gift of salvation. Francis looked up at me afterward, and he said, "I feel all different inside! I am so happy."

Praise the Lord for allowing us sinners to be used to bring other sinners to Him. God is so good! Francis and Hong continue to be faithful each Sunday to church. Thank you for being willing to give and pray that we could be here for these marvelous moments of harvest! What an amazing God we have Who would direct people from China to travel halfway around the world so that they might find Christ! It reminds me so much of Acts 10, the story of Cornelius.

Just a note on immigration matters here-

1. As you know from our last letter, the Brian Smith family has been told to leave Barbados within two weeks of their work permit expiration which is May 25th, 2016. Nothing has changed in this respect up to this time. Last Tuesday, our church here has submitted a letter to the Minister of Immigration asking him to allow the Brian Smith family to stay. We continue to pray.
2. On March 4th, I submitted my application for my work permit renewal. In the past, it has taken between 4 to 6 months for an approval. So we are just praying and waiting on God (and Immigration) for an hoped-for approval. Our work permits are usually 3 years in length.
3. Last July, I submitted an application for immigrant status. This is a separate issue from a work permit. As I understand it, if I am granted immigrant status that would be like a legal alien in the U.S. obtaining a green card (which allows them the right to live and work in the States). I have an appointment for an interview with Immigration concerning immigrant status on April 21st. I would certainly appreciate your prayers concerning this also. I believe if I obtained immigrant status then there would be no longer a need for a work permit.

Thank you for your prayers, your love for the Lord and His work, and the support that you faithfully give that we might be here serving our Lord. Blessings on you!

Robert, Rhoda, Buddy, and Becca Smith