



MISSION CONNECTIONS

A program of Presbyterian World Mission • pcusa.org/missionconnections

Fall 2021



Caring for Pastors

John McCall

*Mission co-worker
serving in Taiwan*

Dear friends,

It is interesting in life how one experience prepares one for a future experience without even knowing it. When I was thirty, I was called as pastor of the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church in North Carolina. When I arrived, that church had about 35 retired pastors and their spouses. When I left that church to come to Taiwan, there were 50 pastors and their spouses. I learned during my time there how to be a pastor to pastors.

During my time in Taiwan, in addition to teaching seminary students how to serve as pastors, I also spend a great deal of my time each week accompanying pastors. In weekly pastor spiritual formation groups, retreats, and one-on-one conversations over meals, I listen to pastors here sharing both the challenges and joys of their lives and ministries.

Last week I taught a course for about 50 pastors entitled, "The Soul of the Pastor: From Exhaustion to New Strength and Vision." These pastors came from churches throughout Taiwan. There were women and men, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, those who had served in the church for over 30 years and those who had served for only a year or two. But they all were eager to learn and share. They came tired after seeking to be the Church during this pandemic and seemed to leave renewed and ready to continue to be Christ's pastors in high mountain churches and in big city churches. In addition to these opportunities, I often have the privilege of officiating at the weddings of young pastors and baptizing their children. This past Saturday, I left the seminary in Taipei, where I live to travel south on the big north/south highway to an aboriginal church located about an hour south. One of the young pastors in one of our aboriginal

spiritual formation groups was getting married to an elementary school teacher. I had given them pre-marital counseling, and the wedding was planned for May. But because of the pandemic lock-down here, they had to postpone their wedding until this week. Since only 50 people could be in the sanctuary, the rest of the folks were outside, and the windows of the sanctuary were opened so they could see and hear. Goolas and Anchi are from the Amis tribe, and they had decorated the sanctuary with aboriginal cloth and art. At weddings here often three different choirs will sing. When the youth from the church which Goolas serves stood up to sing a song of blessing, they played a traditional drum and danced as they sang. As the couple stood to receive their blessing, they smiled broadly.

When I arrived at the church, two high school boys were standing at the back of the sanctuary. We began to talk, and suddenly one of the boys said, "How do you know God's will?" I am always amazed here how easy it is to talk about God with folks I have just met. This boy is playing baseball in college and wants to become a professional



John with Anchi and Goolas at their wedding



John with Hong Chuan and Ching Hsin as he baptizes their daughter

baseball player. But he doesn't know if this is God's will for his life. I was able to ask him some questions and then prayed for him.

On Sunday, I drove with one of our seminary professors to a church on the north coast. I have known Professor Hong Chuan and Pastor Ching Hsin for 16 years. When Hong Chuan was studying for his Ph.D. in Old Testament at Union Seminary in Richmond, they would go and visit my Mom, who was in a Memory Care Center there. Ching Hsin gave birth to their first child in June at the height of the pandemic here. They have wanted to have a child for a long time, so this birth was a gift of great grace.

They had asked me to baptize their baby, to preach and to join Hong Chuan in serving communion. The Jong Shan Church is located at the entrance to

an elementary school, and over the years, Ching Hsin has been a wonderful pastor to children and youth from difficult backgrounds. Many of these youth were in worship on Sunday. I thought about the beautiful ways Ching Hsin has cared for the children of others, and now her own child was being baptized.

The pastors here live right at the church and, with the ease of social media, are expected to be available for both big and small things twenty-four hours a day. In the midst of service, it is easy for them to be so busy serving God that their own relationship with God becomes distant. So it is a privilege for me to be their encourager and to pray with and for them. They are able to share honestly both in our small groups and in our one-on-one conversations. As they are cared for, they then go to care for so many others.



The young aboriginal theologians

Thank you for your prayers and support, which allow me to come alongside these pastors.

Gratefully, John

Thank you for reading my letter!

Please consider supporting Presbyterian Mission through my ministry. I am grateful for your prayers, personal communication and financial support.

Gifts may be sent to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
P.O. Box 643700
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

For more ways to engage in Presbyterian Mission, please email mission.support@pcusa.org.

Thank you for your faithful support.

On the memo line, please write:

"McCall—E200487" (individual giving)

"McCall—D506712" (congregational giving)

Give online: pcusa.org/john-mccall

mission.support@pcusa.org.