

Then
& Now

Hong Kong

BY LARRY HALL

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eathered apartment buildings crowd the view from Pastor Titus Poon's office window.

"It's equivalent to a small city, probably 200,000 people," he explains, gesturing to the mile or so of the city visible beyond the 16th floor the church occupies in a 25-story building. "That's our mission field."

Below us, tall weeds and shacks with rusting tin roofs compete for precious space on the flat roofs of aging buildings in the shadow of newer, 30-story buildings. On the street, double-decker buses barely avoid rushing taxis, bicycles and pushcarts.

Seemingly everyone is talking on cell phones, ignoring the drug dealers working cautiously in the shadows and the clusters of chatty, uniformed schoolchildren. In an endless human stream, sharply dressed office workers head to their destinations, parting briefly to avoid sweaty construction workers laying broadband cables through holes in the sidewalk.

This is Hong Kong, the harvest field of a group of four churches collectively known as Wa Wai Assembly of God.

Pastor Titus is embarrassed by his cluttered office. "The last two months have been hectic leading up to a conference that just ended," he says, "and I haven't cleaned up."

I was fortunate to squeeze in an appointment with him. As he studies reports from the church's 43 cell groups, he

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A. Walker Hall

A Wa Wai church school opened among refugee shacks.



Church schools were built on the flat roofs of seven-story refugee apartments.

describes his congregation as mostly young adults with middle-class lifestyles.

“Middle class” would not describe the people who gathered in the first Wa Wai church planted 40 years ago by veteran missionaries A. Walker and Nell Hall. Hong Kong in the 1960s was overwhelmed with a flood of refugees who often had nothing but the clothes they wore. The British who governed Hong Kong at the time could not build even the simplest apartment buildings fast enough.

The school system was swamped with children needing an education. Grateful for any help, the government gave space on the flat apartment rooftops to people like the Halls if they would agree to operate a primary school. The Halls could not possibly afford to acquire such prime space any other way, and it served double duty as a church.

Almost immediately, lives began to change dramatically. Nell wrote in early 1964: “An idol worshipper got saved. She was going to take her own life, but now we can’t keep her quiet. She has to tell everyone that her heavy burden is gone and she has PEACE.”

The young adults of Pastor Titus’ church gather on Saturday night. The worship team comes early to pray in a circle around the altar. By 6:30, the church is at capacity with focused worshippers in full voice. The decibel level is almost painful, but the sweet presence of the Holy Spirit is unmistakable. Before the evening ends, almost the entire floor of the sanctuary is covered with young people enjoying a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit. One of them is Wai-Lit (Joe) Wong.

Joe’s parents never married. His 15-year-old mother, Pek-Kam Wong, planned to marry her boyfriend and make a home for her new baby, but it never happened. Her boyfriend dropped out of sight, and Pek-Kam soon left Joe in the care of her mother.

Joe remembers his excitement at age 6 when his mother decided to move back home. But the happy times he longed for were not to be. His mother was a drug addict, and within a year his grandmother was caring for a second baby. Joe’s uncle, a drug dealer and addict, was a violent, hot-tempered man who also



Walker and Nell Hall demonstrated the effectiveness of evangelism through compassion ministries among refugees.

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brought his babies and problems into the home. Soon Joe was expected to help raise four younger children.

Eventually, Joe's mother overdosed and was rushed to the hospital, paralyzed.

Yet the Lord, who watches out for sparrows, did not ignore the plight of a young boy and his desperate mother. Provisionally, Pek-Kam's hospital bed was next to the mother-in-law of Pastor Deborah Tong. Deborah worked side by side with the Halls, pastoring the Wa Wai churches for decades before passing leadership to Titus. She was well-schooled in the power of evangelism through compassion to the needy.

Deborah introduced the dying mother to Jesus. When members from the church visited the hospital, Joe's mother accepted Christ as her Savior. After she died, they arranged for a funeral the family could not afford and began bringing Joe to youth services. At only 10 years old, Joe remembers how much he loved church. Six months later, however, his family refused to let him attend any longer.

Several years passed, and Joe met classmates who attended a Wa Wai church. This time his family did not interfere. For the past four years, Joe has been a living example of Christ's transforming power.

"I have peace and joy," he says with a smile. "I used to be insecure, but now I'm confident."

Joe led his niece and five close friends to Jesus and now leads a cell group of friends his age. Though he rarely sees his own father outside of prison, he says, "I think I'd like to be a social worker and help kids."

Annie Bailie's young mother also faced death after a lengthy illness.

"Lord," Annie prayed, "if You will let my mother live two more years, I'll go wherever You want me to go."

Miraculously, her mother recovered and lived two more years. Sensing the Lord calling her to China, Annie agonized between fulfilling her earlier promise and a sense of duty to her aging father. Finally, Annie felt peace about her call, and she sailed for China in 1928.

Foreigners were not always accepted in the villages, and Annie was sometimes pelted with cow manure. One young boy, Kwai-Wing Tam, was particularly nasty and did everything he could to disturb the meetings Annie tried to conduct.

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Annie Bailie preaches in the Ping Shan Church that she planted.



A. Walker Hall

Nell Hall celebrates with new Christians who turned from idol worship.



With no children of her own, "Auntie Annie" was a spiritual parent and inspiration to hundreds of Chinese boys and girls.

During one noisy Chinese New Year's celebration, Kwai-Wing lost fingers to exploding firecrackers. As the foreigners at the hospital cared tenderly for the young boy who had tormented them, they won his heart with the love of Jesus.

"He returned a different boy," Annie recalled. "Jesus can take away a heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh."

In 1949 Annie came to Hong Kong as the communist government took control of China. Finding an old building formerly used to raise pigeons, she cleaned it and began holding children's services. Soon the small building was filled with the singing of excited children. Annie never married, but the diminutive Irish woman became the beloved "auntie" of hundreds of Chinese children.

Siu-Ming (Samuel) Chueng was a young boy who came to the meetings. His family was unchurched, but he received lots of love and hugs from Auntie Annie.

"She had a favorite phrase she taught us in English," he says. Carefully, with musical inflection, he recites: "Keep your eyes on Jesus." His eyes gleam as he recalls his childhood days. "I was still the only believer in my family at the time," he says. "When I decided to go to Bible school, my family opposed the idea. Annie had very little money, but she sacrificed what she had to help me pay for school."

Today, while he studies for an advanced theology degree, Samuel sits in the senior pastor's office in one of the churches that "Auntie Annie" planted.

See-King (Perry) Wong was a childhood friend of Pastor Samuel. They sang the same happy songs as they sat on old hard benches in the "pigeon house" Sunday School. Annie shared more than her faith in God with young Perry; she took him into the house she shared with her co-worker, Chi-Wai Poon, who was also Perry's aunt.

Perry lived with his adopted family until Annie's death. As a young man he attended Bible school and now pastors Ping Shan Church, which Annie established. In December 2004, the church celebrated 50 years of ministry.

Annie's efforts birthed two churches and three schools and launched 10 pastors into ministry. All



Children embraced the meaning of love in Annie Bailie's Sunday Schools.

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Harland Park

of them are reaching more children eager for hugs, children who will also be encouraged to one day lead churches and schools.

Harland and Betsy Park sailed for China in 1930. One of their letters took four months to reach their mission headquarters in Springfield, Missouri. In it, they wrote: "One old man opposed the gospel and persecuted his Christian wife for years. But prayer changes things. God touched his heart, and now he loves those things he formerly hated."

Sui-Lei Lee was swept off her feet by a seemingly wealthy man from Hong Kong. When he offered marriage, she didn't hesitate. Life in the glamorous city was an enchanting dream for a small-town girl from Hunan, China.

For a time, while in a border town waiting for the move to Hong Kong, she lived her dream. Rent was cheap, and her husband even hired a maid for her. The fairy tale ended abruptly, however, when she moved to her husband's house in Hong Kong. The home was already full of in-laws and other family members, and the "wealth" was barely able to pay the bills.

Sui-Lei found herself working long hours serving her in-laws, but still they despised her. She felt helpless, isolated and lonesome for her own family. Two children were born, adding to the stress and expense. Her husband began gambling away his paycheck, choosing to stay away from home rather than fight with an increasingly unhappy wife. They began divorce proceedings.

Desperate for friends, Sui-Lei welcomed visitors from the Wa Wai church where her son attended preschool. Long-forgotten memories from her childhood came flooding back, and Sui-Lei surrendered her heart once again to the Lord she had known as a child. The change in Sui-Lei's attitude toward her husband and his family was dramatic. In family devotions, her husband heard his children praying for him every night. Any thought of divorce was dropped. In time, her husband followed Sui-Lei to the altar. Soon afterwards, Sui-Lei befriended two other women from similar circumstances, and they too accepted Christ.

"I was just 7 years old when I attended a VBS that Harland and Betsy Park held in the 1940s," John Ip says. "I was from a mainline

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Harland Park laid a foundation of faith in God's ability to provide.



Harland Park

Chinese Christians gather in front of a church begun by Harland Park.



A Buddhist priest tries to pray a soul from hell.

denominational church but I had a real hunger for the Holy Spirit.”

Betsy Park influenced John with her willingness to live frugally, trust God to supply and use every dime.

“I felt a call to the ministry, but I didn’t have the money to attend Bible school,” John says.

People in the church helped him with half the cost of a boat ticket to school, but John’s faith was on trial for the remainder of the ticket and his school tuition.

During a fervent prayer meeting he held alone with God in the basement of Bethany Bible School, he held up his tuition bill of several hundred dollars and pleaded with God. “Lord, this is Your bill because You brought me here,” he prayed.

Little by little, God showed how He could supply John’s financial needs from a variety of sources.

When an elderly Harland looked for someone to lead a church built on faith, God impressed him to call John. For more than 40 years, Pastor John led First Assembly of God in the same walk of faith.

“One of our branch churches needed more space and was eager to buy adjacent property,” John recalls. “The congregation wanted me to ask Harland to raise the money in the United States.” Instead, John encouraged the people to believe God for the funds. “You must trust the same Lord that Pastor Park trusts,” he told them.

Every day the pastor of the branch church placed his hand on the wall of the adjacent building and prayed God would supply the need. One day a fire erupted in that building. Suddenly its owner was willing to let the property go to the church for a fraction of its value. Today, under the leadership of Pastor Peter Ho, the Harland Park Memorial Church, a branch of First Assembly, is valued at 10 times the purchase price.

More valuable than property, missionaries left behind leaders who understand and practice the indigenous principles of Assemblies of God missions. Believers have learned to trust God for their needs, reach the lost of their communities through the compassion of Jesus, and train their leaders to continue fulfilling the Great Commission. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.



Harland Park

Through lives lived by faith and in love, missionaries helped shape the character of Chinese children who are now leaders of churches and schools in Hong Kong.

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