

Dear Friends,

Tonight the graduating students at Taiwan Seminary will host the teachers for dinner at a seafood restaurant. This is the opportunity for the students to thank their teachers before they graduate tomorrow.

Last week I, along with two other colleagues at the seminary, hosted a retreat for these graduates. This is the first time we have held a retreat just before graduation, and it was wonderful. Last semester I taught this class of students, and over the semester five different couples in this class gave birth. It became humorous each week when I would ask where a particular student was, the reply was always the same: she's in the hospital giving birth or he is with his wife who is giving birth. These students are really helping a declining Taiwanese birth rate. One student would bring her baby to class. These babies, along with other children of students, joined us for the retreat.

In this fast-paced, concrete jungle, I try to plan retreats which give folks the opportunity to encounter God in a variety of settings. The retreat center we used is not far from Taipei, but is located on a beautiful river. The meeting room has huge glass windows, so one feels like one is outside. As the students arrived with their spouses and children and with other classmates, you could feel them slowly decompress. Several students led us in singing and then we divided into small groups to look at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In about a month, most of these students will begin their ministries in churches all over Taiwan.

As we broke for a meal, it was a joy to see them all so relaxed and enjoying being together. They took turns holding the babies, and even the children seemed to sense the more relaxed environment. After dinner, I challenged them to open the windows of their lives and future churches to let the wind of God's Spirit blow and renew and shape. Our dean of students will be moving to another call, so we arranged a cake and had a time to thank him.

The next day we had individual time to walk in nature and to pray and be open to God. Then we came back and shared our experiences. We then divided into pairs and shared our hopes and fears for the future and then prayed for each other. We ended with communion. We left the retreat center and drove to a restaurant where we shared a meal together.

As these students finish their three year Master of Divinity program, they will draw a name of a church out of a bowl next week. That will be their new place of service. I am praying that God will use them to strengthen the church and allow the church to be a blessing to this society.

Several of these students will join a group which I, and another colleague, will lead to Taize in France next week. We are taking a group of 26 Taiwanese pastors, seminary students, and college students. They will join thousands of young people from all over the world to pray, study the Bible, work together, and share together for a week on a hillside in Burgundy. It is always a sacred experience.

Wishing for you places and spaces where you too will meet the Living God this summer!

Warmest blessings,
John McCall
Taipei