

Dear family, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ, far and near,

Lydia, my better half, reminded me that we have not written a year-end newsletter for a long, long time. In this first year of my (Simon) retirement from full-time pastoral ministry, it seems a good time to return to this tradition. This will be a short reflection; we would love to connect with you and share more. But first, below are some family photos from 2023.

Top left photo: Lee Family of 18 at my Retirement (from pastoring at Richmond Chinese Alliance Church, after serving for 10 years) Dinner in January. We thank God that 400 attended.

Top right: Our trip to Israel and Jordan in May.

Middle left: Our 8 grandchildren during a family trip to Seattle.

Middle right: Hong Kong in November on our way to short-term-mission in KL, West Malaysia.

Bottom left: Banff, Canada.

Bottom right: The whole family again, to end 2023.



On January 1, 2023, we started my retirement year by participating in the first worship service of a church plant in Tsawwassen (south of Richmond) which we helped to start, led by my capable associate, Mark. Over 50 were in attendance that Sunday! On the last day of 2023, after leading a workshop at the 61st Canadian Chinese Christian Winter Conference (this year held in Richmond), we were able to join a gathering of “old-timers” (mostly from our university

fellowship days in Winnipeg) to count our blessings. To me, these two gatherings are like a beautiful inclusio for this year of change – praise the Lord!

Still a preacher at heart, I cannot resist summing up *retirement* in three words: *revisiting*, *relearning*, and *rebuilding*.

By *revisiting* I mean going back to our many former ministries. In 2023, Lydia and I visited Vancouver Chinese Evangelical Free Church where I first helped build the English congregation (43 years ago), Richmond Chinese E Free where I was the Church Planting pastor (40 years ago) and Winnipeg Chinese Alliance Church, which I attended first in 1969 when I was a student at U. of Manitoba, and where I later pastored, from 1985-1989. Our visit to Winnipeg was also part of a speaking tour with Far East Broadcasting (where I served from 1989-1994) and included visits to Calgary and Edmonton. Related to this theme was returning to Canadian Graduate School of Theology Vancouver to teach a counseling course in the fall. We marvelled to see that God's work has never ceased all these years. We rejoice to have met with all our dear friends and faithful coworkers. We are grateful for God's calling to be part of His own plan.

By *relearning* I mean going back to the basics in many areas of my life. As a Type A "leader" marred by an impatient personality, I am acutely aware that any form of "success" that I have "achieved" tempts me toward self-reliance rather than true reliance on God Himself. In facing unexpected challenges in the last couple years of my ministry and also navigating health issues, I feel I was prepared by God for the humbling process of retirement – reminded of God's desire for me to lay down my drive to control and to submit fully to Him.

Submitting to God, for me means learning to slow down and be more patient. Two "new" hobbies I have taken up have reinforced these lessons in tangible ways! The first is Chinese calligraphy and painting. My teacher is a famous master, and he is teaching me to start with the most basic strokes. I did not know that one could spend so much time relearning a character like "one" ("一", a single horizontal line)!

I have also been playing table tennis twice a week, recognizing that I need more exercise to improve and maintain my health (some of you know that I was hospitalized for a whole week at the end of 2022 due to a severe infection). Again, my coaches in table tennis must help me in unlearning all my bad habits and relearning the art of the sport. One major lesson has been to not play with brutal force with each stroke, but instead to relax and play patiently using the whole body.

With these lessons in mind, I have started to relearn the Bible and do more integration of theology and psychology in my upcoming teaching and writing projects.

By *rebuilding* I mean going back to strengthening my marriage and family relationships. All these years I have inadvertently been guilty of at times putting ministry above family. One of the first things I did upon retirement was visit the Holy Land with Lydia, fulfilling a promise I had made to her from all the way back in my Alliance Bible Seminary days, when she was not able to go to Israel with me. As we watch now from afar the tragedy of war, we give thanks for the opportunity we had to safely experience this place of profound importance (to our own faith and to many others) and to be able to return home to our family. We both continue to pray for peace.

Under this theme of *rebuilding*, we are also grateful for the family vacation to Washington State we had in the summer. This was our first big family trip (away from the Vancouver area) since Isaac joined Sarah, Vernon, and Elliott's family, and so we were travelling with a big caravan of 18! It has been a joy to feel like we have more time to be with our grandchildren now that we have less work events in our schedule. Lydia and I are so proud of the work Hannah continues to do at Vancouver Christian School and were also grateful to be invited by our son-in-law Eugene to help, in our small way, with the annual December fundraising for his organization, International Justice Mission. Both Lucas (with Xiaoming and their three kids Tobias (nearly in high school!), Acacia, and Nico) and Dorcas (with Jeffrey and their three, Malachi, Gideon, and Jonah (the "baby" of our family, but almost done toilet training!)) are also doing well, learning to embrace both the joys and challenges of "big family" life and continue to press on with building meaningful careers.

Lydia and I are so blessed that none of the children live farther than a 10-minute drive away and that we can gather regularly in our home, which to our delight is still considered "HQ" by our children and grandchildren.

Lydia adds: "We miss our church community at RCAC. At the same time, I am thankful that this season of fewer responsibilities has allowed us to focus on our health, on family relationships, and on friendships that are not necessarily connected to our church roles. No longer being 'Church pastor's wife' has given me space to reflect on my personal journey with God and to be still in the knowledge of God's loving sovereignty."

We look forward to a busy and fruitful year in 2024 (as well as more rest and play, and the learning that comes with it all!) as we follow God's plan for us in our retirement. We hope we can reconnect and share more in the future.

Peace and grace,

Simon, with Lydia

January 2024