

4 CORNERS

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Growing Christians and Churches in Mongolia



“Is Jesus American or English?” asked a perplexed young Mongolian. This must have been one of the most frequently asked questions in Mongolia during the early 1990’s.

Mongolia, a nation that had lay hidden between the two giants of Russia and China, was then just emerging from 70 years of Soviet Communism. As the country embraced democracy and opened its doors to the world, missionaries flooded in. There was then no church and only a handful of Christians were known to exist. But a period of dynamic church growth followed as young people desperate to fill the void in their lives hungrily responded to the new and exciting gospel message. Churches sprung up all across Ulaanbaatar and other countryside towns and cities as hundreds were drawn by the infectious first flush of faith in Christ.

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A movement had begun. A movement that was essentially spontaneous and unstructured - God drawing people to Himself.

That was almost 20 years ago. Those exhilarating days when Mongolians and missionaries alike were caught up in the exciting, spontaneous outpouring of new life in the Spirit have been replaced by the steady settling routine of church life. The ensuing years have been filled with challenges and struggles as the Mongolians have sought to understand what it means to be a Christian and follow God in their everyday life. Sadly there have been those who have fallen away. Perhaps they came into the church with mixed motives or unrealistic expectations of God. But thankfully many still remain, growing stronger, wiser and becoming pillars in the young Mongolian church.

The days for ground-breaking pioneer missionary work have passed. The Mongolians with their nomadic hearts have a natural commitment to evangelism and mission and are proving excellent and effective evangelists amongst their own people and beyond. Most Christians, after the years of Soviet oppression are eager to stand on their own two feet and take full responsibility for the church and its direction.

However, the church is still in its first generation and there are few, if any, who have known the Lord for more than 20 years. Consequently few could naturally be called true 'elders' of the faith; those who have known and walked with God through the long years of the ordinariness of life, and proved God to be utterly faithful in all circumstances. But faith and godliness are growing in people's lives. Life experiences are all the time gently moulding the Christians' faith in maturity and wisdom, but it does take time. It did in the first century churches too.

The young Mongolian pastors and leaders, many of whom are in their mid-thirties, are wonderfully filled with enthusiasm and zeal to teach and proclaim the Word of God but at times they flounder. They struggle. It can be a challenge to maintain and deepen their own walk with God and continually seek to edify the body of Christ. They struggle to handle pastoral issues and resolve conflicts but they want to lead.

In their hearts there is a strong underlying desire to serve God and the church, but they recognise that they need support, support which as yet, they are not easily able to give to one another. They need others, who with experience and maturity, will become their friends and quietly walk alongside them.

It's not glamorous, up front work. Often there are struggles and skirmishes as the Mongolians seek to re-orient their lives to God through the ups and downs of everyday life. It requires faithful servants, who will patiently walk with the believers. Christians, who will support, teach and mentor as the opportunities arise, allowing God in his great grace to establish his life in their hearts, his teachings in their churches. It's slow, steady work requiring steadfast endurance. At times there are disappointments as people fall away, but there is also great joy as you watch God transform people's lives and continue to build his church in Mongolia.

If you are interested, and would like to be involved in the work in Mongolia, then do contact us. Constitutionally there is religious freedom, but the government remains reticent to issue visas to missionaries. Traditional missionary roles are not viable and anyone interested in serving the Lord in this far-flung corner of the world will need to find an alternative visa platform. Thankfully, however, after a period language study, the opportunities are limitless. You can be involved in an NGO, teaching, or a small business enterprise, all giving opportunities to build deeper relationships with the Mongolians and see the Lord work in their lives and yours.

Mark and Gill Newham



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