

## **BREACHING A GREAT DIVIDE YOUTH FROM A COOPER CITY CHURCH GO ON A MISSION TO CHINA, SPREADING THE WORD IN THE COMMUNIST NATION**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Many travelers report that a foreign journey changes their outlook on the world. For 16-year-old Joseph Salamida of Davie, a recent mission trip to The People's Republic of China changed more than just his perspectives.

"It was a life-changing experience," he reported after traveling to Hong Kong, Beijing and Japan with a group from his church, The Pentecostals, in Cooper City. "We saw how hungry the people were for the Gospel," he said.

Salamida and 41 other church members spent nine days holding street services, passing out Christian tracts, delivering Bibles and other literature to pastors and participating in a prayer walk around Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

"The Prayer walk was a most powerful experience," said Brian Fegter of Miami who serves on the church's staff and was one of the trip's sponsors. "We were there in the middle of the seat of power for all of China, and we felt a freedom of the Spirit."

(Prayer-walking is a method of intercessory prayer often used by Christians that involves walking while praying for a specific city or location.)

Fegter said that the group could not visibly hold a prayer service in the square, so they walked around it in groups of two or three. "It looked like we were just talking to each other, but we were really praying," he said.

Mark Hattabaugh, the church's pastor, agreed that the experience was significant. "We knew the history there and their desire for freedom," he explained. "We knew that no matter what the government did, we could still praise God. He is there."

Knowing that there are restrictions on some religious activities in China, Angelica Suarez, 17, of Margate said that she experienced the contrast of religious freedom in the United States with the limitations there.

"One of our kids got caught as he was passing out tracts," she said. "He wasn't arrested, but we are not used to the police looking at you as if you are doing something wrong when you aren't."

"You couldn't publicly pray or publicly speak the name of Jesus in China," she said.

Despite the differences, participants said that they felt very comfortable and welcome. "The people were so glad to see us and to know that people here care about them," reported Hattabaugh, who lives in Hollywood.

“We are all family and I think that the Chinese Christians realized that they are not alone,” he added

In Hong Kong, the group worked with Philippine women who work as domestic employees for businessmen. “They work six days a week and then spend their day off in church,” reported Salamida. “I learned a lot from that about how we get stressed out about little things and they are just happy to be in church on their day off,” he said.

Hattabaugh said that he looks for dual achievements on church mission trips. “First, we want to impact the people and serve them,” he said.

Participants said they felt that they had an influence as they delivered 600 Bibles to pastors and lay leaders in Chinese churches. “We also took them study material and tracts to use in their ministry,” Hattabaugh said. “We were worried about getting the material through Chinese customs, but we got them there with a lot of prayer and fasting.”

“Our second goal is that we want to see lives changed,” Hattabaugh said. “We want to see some of our people become missionaries themselves.”

Several participants in this year’s mission to China are already considering missionary service. “I love to work hands-on in missions,” said Fegter. “That’s where my heartbeat is.”

Fegter previously served a six-month term as a missionary in Freeport, Bahamas. Now, he said he wants to learn Spanish and consider service elsewhere.

Suarez is also considering her future. “Right now, I want to get youth to the mission field,” she said. “That what God wants me to do.”

“In the future, I will go the way that God wants me to go,” she reflected. “I’ll go wherever He leads me.”

**BREACHING A GREAT DIVIDE, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, Jul 26, 2002**