

SNAPSHOTS

BH Open House and Charity Auction



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MIGRANT FOCUS

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Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge Sheltering migrants for 22 years

On 20 September 2008 the Bethune House celebrated its 22nd anniversary in grand style, with an Open House. Friends and supporters of the Bethune House, as well as others from the Hong Kong and Expatriate community were invited.

The Open House was also an opportunity to continue the fundraising campaign for the Bethune House. Around mid-August, an urgent appeal letter was sent out to various churches and individuals, explaining of the Bethune House's detrimental financial situation.

The appeal was met with donations of cash, clothes and food items. It was decided that the celebration of the 22nd anniversary of the Bethune House could be used to not only raise awareness, but to hopefully raise funds as well.

The day was kicked off with an interfaith service that included readings from the Koran, the Christian Bible and a prayer from the Buddhist tradition. Over 100 visitors enjoyed house tours during which they were able to meet some of the current clients, learn more about the history of the Bethune House, and the situation of migrant workers, namely domestic workers, here in Hong Kong.

After the tours, visitors enjoyed refreshments and browsed the sales table, complete with homemade pies, books on migrant issues and bottles of virgin coconut oil.

There was also a silent auction that ran from the opening until 3pm, during which participants could bid on small items such as fashion accessories, stuffed toys and cross-stitched framed wall hangings made by the residents of the Bethune House. Many of the Indonesian women were dressed in traditional costumes to help make the atmosphere more festive.

In the late afternoon, the Bethune House shifted to their evening program, which was graciously hosted in the social hall of Kowloon Union Church. The program included a poem read by the Bethune House residents, a welcoming speech by Bethune House board member Rev. Sharon Constable, a video documentary on the Bethune House, and cultural presentations given by both the Indonesians and the Filipinas.

The main event of the evening was the live auction, for which artists from the local community had donated their art works. Former Bethune House resident Janet Pancho Gupta donated 5 watercolors and a sketch. Three of the watercolor pieces were of current or recent Bethune House residents.

Other works donated included four photography pieces, two oil paintings, a scanned image with crayon, and a pigment and gold leaf piece. The auction was led by amateur auctioneer Liz Hooks. The attendees really got into the spirit of the auction, as friendly wars over particular pieces helped raise more money for the benefit of the Bethune House!

What was even more inspiring was the hard work put in by the residents of the shelter to make the event successful. They did everything to make the guests welcome and also make them understand how important Bethune House is to women migrants in distress.

All in all, both events, the Open House and Live Auction, were a huge success.

The Bethune House Board, residents and staff wish to express their deep gratitude and appreciation for all those who attended, participated and volunteered to help make the 22nd anniversary of the Bethune House a memorable one! 📷

Asian Migrants in HK hold summits and trainings on GFMD

Filipino, Indonesian and Thai migrant workers organized summits and trainings to challenge the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) that will be held on October 28-30 in the Philippines. All three nationalities agreed that migration can never lead to development and vowed to oppose the GFMD.

The APWLD, in cooperation with MFMW, AMCB and WEMC has made possible the production of an educational material in the form of a power point presentation. This was the main resource material in the orientation and training workshops held.

Last August 31, 2008, more than three hundred Filipino leaders attended the 3rd Filipino migrant workers summit in Hong Kong University. They came from around 90 organizations including from church groups and migrants' rights advocates.

The summit had workshops that encouraged the delegates to come up with a declaration afterwards.

Two weeks after, the Indonesian migrant workers headed by PILAR, (a coalition of Indonesian migrant workers against overcharging), drew together 150 individuals in their own summit to better understand the implications of the GFMD to the growing number of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong.

Simultaneously, the Thai migrant workers had a forum among its officers and members that discussed the negative implications of the GFMD and how to combat this. They agreed that the GFMD will worsen the situation of migrants and immigrants all over the world.

After the summits and training on GFMD, migrant organizations made a declaration and resolutions that will be forwarded to the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR) in Manila Philippines. This will be headed by the Asian Migrant Coordinating Body.

The IAMR is a parallel activity organized by the International Migrants Alliance (IMA), Migrante International and Asia



Training of GFMD educators among Thai migrants by the MFMW

Pacific Mission for Migrants that will involve the grassroots migrants which includes immigrants, refugees and undocumented workers all over the world and join the call to SAY NO TO GFMD.

Finally the Asian migrant workers in Hong Kong resolved to expose and oppose the real intention of the GFMD and vow to rally more support from other migrants in Hong Kong and their families back home. Two more gatherings from Sri Lankan and Nepalese groups are expected to be held to discuss the GFMD to their respective members. 📧

Beth's Story



When Beth arrived in Hong Kong her situation seemed promising. Her employer lived with his fiancé in Discovery Bay, a tidy, quiet and often friendly district on Lantau Island. But on the first night she had to sleep on the couch because the separate room mentioned in her domestic helper's contract was a lie. And when her employer left for Singapore two days later her life descended into misery.

With the employer out of sight, his fiancée proceeded to assault Beth. The slightest mistake in any aspect of housework brought swift retribution, first in foul language and then in beatings on the arm. One day she was hit in the face with a book. Desperately worried about her own safety and how she would support her three-year-old daughter in the Philippines if she fled, Beth felt confused, made worse

by constant hunger because she was only allowed one meal a day. Less than a week after arriving, this shy, unassuming woman had a knife thrust at her face, and six days later she was dismissed. She sought help from the Mission For Migrant Workers and found accommodation with friends of the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge. But she still had a struggle ahead.

Beth gathered her strength to face the challenges of proving her actions necessary. Filing a police case against the assaulter, filing claims of unpaid wages and benefits and gathering evidences to prove her case.

The Lantau police dismissed Beth's claim of assault in a form letter, citing insufficient evidence. Her employment agency resisted cancelling a loan it forced her to take in

the Philippines to cover illegal placement fees, but eventually relented. Beth's former employer ignored the case she presented to the Labour Department for unpaid wages, only appearing when it went to the Minor Employment Contract Adjudication Board. During the hearing he berated Beth for 'running away' and pressed her to apologise. He finally paid only part of the claim. Despite the seemingly discouraging results, they were not enough to make Beth waiver in her resolve.

Beth has just filed an application for a change of employment status with the Immigration Department. In a month, she should be able take up a contract with new employer – a fundamentally decent family. She has friends in Discovery Bay now, and elsewhere in HK. But more importantly she has regained her hope. 📧

UBUNTU Journey to HK and China, a Reflection

From September 3-14th the Mission hosted a United Methodist Women's group called Ubuntu, a Swahili word that means, "I am human, because you are human." The Women's Division and Mission Volunteers Division of the General Board of Global Ministries in America coupled and created this program for UMWs to go out into the world and learn about various Methodist projects, connect with other women, and establish relationships through dialogue, an incredible program geared towards justice and learning. The group ranged in ages from 13-80 and they all represented the Methodist Church with grace and respect. They connected on a level with the women here that is often hard to achieve across ages, nationalities and religions. After a week in Hong Kong the group journeyed into Mainland China to visit projects by the Amity Foundation in Pudong County. The following are reflections from two of the women of the Ubuntu team, Tracy Jentzsch and Helen Moe.

"My 13 year old daughter, Jordan, and I had the privilege of joining the Ubuntu Journey from the USA to Hong Kong/China. Prior to coming, we had been sent information on the Bethune House so we would have a bit of background on the work done there. But actually meeting the clients, staying a few nights in the shelter, and interacting with the clients and staff gave us a perspective that we could never have gotten from merely reading about the Bethune House. We experienced their lives for a few days; living, eating and sleeping where they do, as they do. We attended meetings with them at the Labour Department, and accompanied them to the hospital for treatments. We spent Sunday afternoon in the parks where they gathered with their ethnic groups, to retain their culture and for fellowship. We saw

the extreme dedication of the staff, and the caring, familial atmosphere that the women create in this small space that serves as both home and refuge. How could I have known what a profound effect this would have on our lives? We were able to see that these women struggle; that although they suffer from physical, psychological and sometimes even sexual abuse, that they are often underpaid and mistreated, that they work long, often unimaginable hours, that they still find hope. They know that the Bethune House, and staff, are working on their behalf, providing a safe haven and helping them navigate the legal system, the health care system and the world of the migrant workers in HK. We made friends at Bethune House, friend we won't forget. The experience left an indelible mark in our lives, and Jordan and



I know that we must tell people about Bethune House, and must find a way to help. Part of the tragedy of injustice is silence, and we have decided that we will stand with these women, and be a voice."
~Tracy Jordan



"My first impression when we first arrived was, I don't think I can do this. I wasn't feeling the best, and being taken totally and completely out of my comfort zone was overwhelming at best. But, in hindsight, our stay there with the women and helping out with the daily household chores, eating meals with them, and just seeing what life for them was like, was the best experience I have ever had. To see how they pooled together their monies for food, going shopping with the residents, and seeing them in the kitchen preparing meals, was not something you could ever read in a book about. And at night, it was amazing to see how quickly, at bed time, the entire house was transformed into one big bedroom. I have to say, I have never seen so many people sleep in such a small space. I kept thinking, maybe some are going to leave and sleep elsewhere, but no one did, and somehow, we all had a space to call our own. The most rewarding part for me was when we had our daily devotionals, and the ladies would join us. The look of hope and encouragement in their eyes will remain with me for a long

time to come. At first, I think they might have been a little skeptical of us, but when we really stayed overnight, and helped them out in the morning with their chores, then when we broke into groups and went the different places with them, I think they came to see us with a different respect. I personally was touched by not having my luggage, no clothes to speak of, and literally just what I had on my back, and several of the women from the Bethune House offered me clothing to wear until I got my luggage. Here they were with little or nothing, but still willing to give up what little they did have. I was very touched by that. And that day that I wasn't feeling well, how while laying there on the bed thinking that I should go home, all the ladies there in the room kept watch over me. In their own way they would take turns checking on me to see if they could do anything or get anything for me to feel better. And then later in the afternoon when one of them gave me a massage, I cannot ever tell you how good that felt. I just felt so loved and cared for by these ladies." ~Helen Moe

“May they rust in peace!”

OUR FAITH,
OUR STRUGGLE

Bp. Alberto B. Ramento, then Bishop of Tarlac and former Obispo Maximo of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, peace advocate, human rights defender and nationalist was brutally murdered in the early hours of October 3, 2006. Philippine government officials claim it was a simple case of robbery with homicide. Four suspects were arrested but two years after his murder, justice is far from being done.

Bp. Ramento has always been criticized for being political. He has always denied this and lamented how much people misunderstood him and others. Yet this has not hindered him in his involvements and commitment to peace building. He has always maintained that there can never be peace without justice. He has always maintained that all these are because of his Christian Faith. “It is not that I am involved in politics. It is that I am concerned with the morality of political actions.”

People remember him as a staunch human rights defender especially in his defense for the

rights of the peasants of Hacienda Luisita. People remember him for his courage to oppose the proposed charter change. People remember him for being the third party depository of the peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and National Democratic Front.

People remember him as one of those who went to the Netherlands for the release of a general and a captain of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and part of those who received them upon their release by the New People’s Army. People remember him as founding member of the Peace for Life. People remember him as he marched with them in the streets of Manila.

Yet few remember his earlier commitments to peace. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Christian



Peace Conference together with the Patriarch of Moscow and other church leaders. He was also in the central committee of the Christian Peace Conference of Asia.

The Christian Peace Conference worked for the disarmament, the end to the cold war and the destruction of nuclear weapons. At a peace conference in Gnadau, Germany in 1987 he gave a speech on disarmament. He concluded his speech with, “May they rust in peace!”

Yes he was a man of peace, and yet he died a violent death.



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