

Stories and Testimonies

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Nowhere to Lay His Head

Written by Anawim's Co-founder and Pastor, Steve Kimes

In 1995, Diane and I invited Ed, a local homeless man to our home for dinner. He came over that night, and the next and the next. Then he brought friends until we were serving a meal almost every night of the week out of our two-bedroom apartment. We spent a couple of years just listening to our friends and helping with what little we could.

After a few years, we realized that the homeless community needed a worship service of their own and so began gathering in worship with homeless people beginning in 1999. Over the years, our ministry grew and we currently rent a facility from the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference where we offer a day shelter five days a week, showers, clothes, a winter overnight shelter and a small community house, as well as multiple worship services.



*Anawim participants join in worship at the day shelter.
From left to right: Jeanne, Zach, Bob, Rebecca, Genevieve, David, and Yvan*

It is our understanding that to be part of God's "kingdom" is to bring Jesus' shalom to those who do not know shalom. As the homeless are increasingly harassed and feared, they experience less shalom. In our facilities, however, people without homes experience respect, safety, and Jesus' love. It is a sanctuary for them, a rock of shelter in the midst of a storm. We don't always have answers, but we provide encouragement. We weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Most importantly, we welcome and offer love to even the most difficult of people. The police and other churches send people our way when there is no other help for them.

After twenty years of working with the most distraught and struggling people, we have tolls on our own strength and emotional resonance. Our long-term members are worn

and new supporters and volunteers are difficult to find. On the other hand, when we see someone get a job, get their life turned around and praise God for our work in their lives, it is all worth it!

Story Inserts:

Linda was a grandmother who lost her home, her car and her job because of a false accusation. She lived on the street for five years, all the while encouraging and supporting high school kids on the street. We supported her and seeing her talent in being a “mom” on the street, we invited her to take over our day shelter program. She now has housing and volunteers four days a week leading our day shelter program.

Michael (pictured below) sold and used drugs on the street for many years. He came regularly to the day shelter and church, and he would occasionally stay at our community house. However, drugs always pulled him back on the street. After a lot of prayer (by him and us), he and his best dog-friend, Alice, finally remained at the community house for good. Now he has gotten back in touch with his family and is leading our work day where the homeless care for our church property.



To support in prayer:

We are looking for more peacemakers and servants of the poor to join our work with us, as well as more support. We are also seeking a fuller release of the Spirit to give a renewal of joy and energy to love with Jesus' love.

For more information, visit Anawim's website:
NowhereToLayHisHead.org.

*Pastor Steve Kimes (right)
baptizes Christine*

God's Ever-Widening Circle

Based on interview with Lynn Parks, Associate Pastor of Oxford Circle Mennonite Church, and Anita Lyndaker-Studer, Executive Director of Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association

In 1946, a ministry outreach was started by a Mennonite family living in Oxford Village, a public housing development in northeast Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. What started as a Bible club for children and youth quickly grew to a Sunday School and then a church plant. Each week, Mennonites from Lancaster County would drive into the city to be part of the ministry. Eventually a pastor was called and over the last 20 years, Oxford Circle Mennonite Church has grown into a community-based congregation.

The church's transformation mirrored what was happening in the larger Oxford Circle community and in many urban centers across the country. As older Caucasian residents moved out of inner cities, younger people of color moved in and cities became significantly more diverse. As the Oxford Circle neighborhood changed, church members revisited the question, "Why are we here?"



Oxford Circle Mennonite Church members gather for Maundy Thursday Footwashing & Soup Service

This led to church members doing a door-to-door survey in the neighborhood and asking residents what they most needed. The 2010 Census revealed that about 40% of the residents are under the age of 21. Since many residents were new to the area, they also did not know each other or about Oxford Circle's ministry.



The idea surfaced to host a community festival. Church members agreed it would be a safe, family-friendly, low-pressure way to get to know new residents of the community *and* for community members to meet each other. That first community festival was a huge success and has become an annual summer event, now running for 14 years!

In 2006, the church also founded the non-profit organization, Oxford Circle Christian Community Development Association (OCCDA), with a focus on being the hands and

feet of God. Although part of the mission is to address needs of the community, Executive Director Anita Lyndaker-Studer shared about the importance of also being relational. OCCCDA staff and volunteers are intentional about building relationships while meeting the needs of the community.

Partnering with the national programs Bridge of Hope and Interfaith Hospitality Network are examples of meeting a dire community need while also building relationships. There are very few homeless shelters open to families (most serve only adult men or adult women). Oxford Circle partners with other congregations, taking turns hosting homeless families in their church building. One of Oxford Circle's small groups also serves in a mentoring role for Bridge of Hope participants.



The church and OCCCDA are also intentional about partnering with local schools to support neighborhood children. Schools are too often overcrowded and underfunded. Members whose children attend local schools are able to communicate needs and serve as a bridge between the church, OCCCDA and the school district. Providing supplemental education programs like after-school tutoring, the Summer Art & Enrichment Program, and the EDGE conflict resolution program are tangible ways to build relationships while meeting a significant community need.

Following God's call to remain in northeast Philadelphia and to be a peaceful presence, Oxford Circle and OCCCDA abide by the guiding question: If Jesus loves Oxford Circle and this community, how will they know? It is one thing to offer a service on Sunday morning; what happens the rest of the week?

Prayer walks through the neighborhood are one way the congregation lets residents know they are present and available. During the summer months, members gather in small groups an hour before church and walk through the community. Pausing to greet neighbors and pray with them lets residents know about the church and its ministries. Even though people may not go to church, or may attend another congregation, residents know that Oxford Circle is a safe place and many turn to the church in difficult times, regardless of an individual's church affiliation. Community members turn to Oxford Circle knowing they can receive support and encouragement.

Oxford Circle desires to equip its members to be witnesses wherever they may be – at work, in school, on their residential block. This is evident by a group of church members who host small group Bible studies for their neighborhood blocks. Sharing the Gospel and doing evangelistic outreach where you are is part of Oxford Circle's Kingdom ministry.

Associate Pastor, Lynn Parks, and OCCCDA Executive Director, Anita Lyndaker-Studer, share that the greatest challenge in these ministries is working with people because life is messy! So many residents live in deep poverty and are fighting for survival. Families fight difficult odds to overcome generations of brokenness and addiction, struggling to find ways of living differently. It is hard for *any of us* to recognize sin in our own lives and especially hard to break family patterns.

While people present great challenges, Lynn and Anita share that people are also a source of tremendous joy. Oxford Circle provides mentoring and discipleship, supporting people to grow in life-giving ways. (See inset story, *Growing God's Kingdom*, for a celebratory example.) Families are stressed, kids are stressed, and the church provides people with a place to rest. Members are conscious of the importance to share God's Good News when bad news overwhelms the airways. Remembering God's faithfulness, members ask: What do we need to put our hands on today?

Recently, the leadership team surveyed the 90+ children and youth who attend Oxford Circle Mennonite Church. One question asked if he or she had a problem, which adult would they go to. Every single youth was able to name two or three adults in the church who were not family members. This was yet one more sign of God's goodness and hope – that while relationships were being built, needs were also being met. Praise be to God!

Story Insert:

Growing God's Kingdom

Tyler* started attending Oxford Circle Mennonite Church as a teenager, participating in the youth program. When he graduated from high school and was trying to get into the work force, he met Michelle* and they began dating. When she became pregnant, they decided to get married and committed to a life together.

Over the years, Associate Pastor Lynn Parks has witnessed Tyler and Michelle navigating life together, growing in their desire to serve the Lord. They attend church faithfully with their young child and as they face life's inevitable challenges, they seek God's direction. They have turned to their small group for guidance in how to have a strong, Christian marriage.

As Tyler and Michelle grow in their marriage, they want to share with others and have been inviting couples to their home to grow together in understanding Christian marriage. Together, the couples continue to learn about marriage and discern how God is leading them.

To witness God's Kingdom growing from person to person is so encouraging. Youth get involved with OCCDA programs and build relationships which often leads the youth to start attending church. As they attend church and grow in their faith, they are encouraged to share God's Good News with others and the welcoming circle widens. These are signs of God's great faithfulness and the hope that comes with Christ Jesus!

*Names have been changed.

For a 2-minute video highlighting Oxford Circle and OCCDA, [click here](#). To see a claymation video created by OCCDA youth in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, [click here](#).

Ways to support with prayer:

- Pray for all the children and families that we work with who face immense challenges in education, inadequate medical care, ongoing violence and poverty.

Pray that we can know how to best support and serve the Oxford Circle community.

- Pray for renewed hope for people in the church living in Philadelphia, a city with one of the highest poverty rates in the United States. Things are broken everywhere we look and although we know God has not forgotten us, we need to remain firm in that assurance. Pray for refreshing energy and to draw on God for continued strength.
- Pray for OCCCDA's continued direction. The Oxford Circle community is very underserved – there are not many local services. Sometimes we are not able to meet a community need and refer people to outside organizations, only to experience the larger broken system. It is easy to get discouraged. There is always more and more that we could do. We need God's guidance to consistently discern: what is the next right step?
- Pray for faithful leadership. We know God has called us to these ministries for a reason. Pray that we can remain faithful to our calling.



OCCCDA group visits the Philadelphia Museum of Art

ReconciliAsian

building God's Kingdom one peace {moment} at a time

Based on interview with co-founders, Sue & Hyun Hur

The concepts of peacemaking and conflict transformation were unfamiliar to Sue and Hyun Hur who grew up in traditional Christian churches within Korean communities – for Sue in the U.S. when she immigrated with her family as a child, and for Hyun who was part of the Korean Baptist Church in South Korea. The Hurs were drawn to shalom theology and its practical applications for the tensions surrounding them in their local community of Los Angeles, California. The more they learned about Anabaptism, the more they felt called to start a church with specific outreach to Korean immigrants and Korean Americans.



(clockwise) Hyun and Sue Hur with their children, Lynn, Guhn and Yul

This proved difficult, however, because “Anabaptism” and “Mennonite” are not common concepts in Korean culture and any mention was met with suspicion and distrust. Because of ongoing tensions between North and South Korea, any group or organization that hints at a “peace movement” is suspect of being Communist and this was not working in the Hurs’ favor. They knew there was much they could offer their local Korean community in the way of conflict transformation; the challenge was to connect with people.

In 2012, the Hurs had the idea of offering seminars and workshops so Korean immigrants and Korean Americans could experience Mennonite theology and practical peacemaking skills firsthand. They partnered with Fuller Theological Seminary, knowing it would feel less threatening to host an event at a local venue versus their home-based church.

Bit by bit, the Hurs reached out and built trust, and as participants experienced the tangible effects of practicing peacemaking, the word spread. At the time, Hannah Heinzekehr was working with Mennonite Mission Network and learned what the Hurs were attempting to do with scarce funding. Together the Hurs, Heinzekehr, and Pacific

Southwest Mennonite Conference worked to set up a support team that would raise funds for continuing this ministry. Because of limits in the process, this quickly led to the “official” founding of ReconciliAsian and becoming a 501(c)3 organization in 2013.



ReconciliAsian fundraising dinner with close friends & supporters, Temple City, CA

Naming the organization ReconciliAsian was very intentional – it opens conversation because it is an unusual word and not so “loaded”. This allows the Hurs to share about peace theology and conflict transformation in a non-threatening way. In turn, this has led to the Hurs sharing with others about the brokenness that happened in the Garden of Eden and how ever since, God has been about the work of restoration. They share that we are citizens of God’s kingdom – something that resonates with Korean immigrants and Korean Americans who are bi- and tri-cultural and are often trying to figure out where they belong.

The Hurs also observed that within the Korean community, church becomes the place where many find self-worth. Because Korean immigrants often come to the U.S. highly educated but unable to speak English, they are forced to take low-paying jobs. This can be a blow to self-esteem and since the church is the locus of the Korean community, it is here where many seek fulfillment and meaning – including self-worth. As a result, the Hurs witnessed power plays and conflicts ensuing around church roles. They knew Anabaptist principles of conflict transformation could help church members navigate these multi-dimensional conflicts and they began offering workshops to equip church members in this way.

The Hurs witness their outreach coming full circle – a hope they had from the very beginning. Their practice of peacemaking ripples from their marriage, to their family, to their house church, to ReconciliAsian, to the broader community and world.

Many Korean Americans and Korean immigrants are still living with the history and trauma of war. The Hurs feel called to equip their Korean community with the skills and tools to navigate conflict in transformative ways. This ripples out in navigating conflicts that can happen between the Korean community and other ethnic groups, as well as rippling out globally to conflicts in Northeast Asia.

As this reach spreads, ReconciliAsian workshop participants become curious about Anabaptist theology and the Mennonite Church. On more than one occasion, people have been surprised to learn the Hurs are Christian pastors because they do not match up with previous Christian encounters or experiences. This gives the Hurs the opportunity to share that there are many ways to follow Jesus, and they are choosing to follow the Prince of Peace as citizens of God's kingdom.

To learn more about ReconciliAsian and to support this ministry online, visit ReconciliAsian.com.

Story Insert:

Seeking Shalom

As co-founders of ReconciliAsian, Sue and Hyun Hur are committed to sharing peacemaking skills and principles of conflict transformation with their local Korean community and beyond. So in the Spring of 2014, the Hurs gladly accepted an invitation to participate in a forum hosted by Duke University's Divinity Center for Reconciliation.

At the forum, they met Jun Nakai, a Japanese Jesuit priest who was studying at Boston College. As he learned about the Hurs work with ReconciliAsian, he asked if he could study with them for a summer. The Hurs agreed and a summer of transformation unfolded for each of them.

As the trio got to know each other, Jun opened up about his journey in discovering the painful history of the "comfort women" – Korean, Filipino, and Chinese teenagers who were taken during World War II to "comfort" Japanese soldiers. Parents were told very little about what their daughters were being called to do, other than support and serve the war effort. The young women were subjected to the horrors of abuse and rape and because of a strong shame culture, they would return home unable to share what happened.

For the last twenty years, these comfort women – now in their 80's – have come forward, speaking of what happened. The Japanese government denies there was any wrongdoing, saying everything that happened was voluntary.

As Jun shared his involvement in standing in solidarity with the comfort women, Hyun remembered the Glendale bronze statue created in memory of comfort women. There has been great controversy over the statue because the Japanese government wants it taken down. However, the statue remains as a reminder of the nightmarish history and as a vow to never let it happen again. The Hurs asked Jun if he would like to visit the statue.

When Jun, Sue and Hyun stood before the bronze comfort woman, it was an incredibly powerful moment. They stood in silence, particularly aware of their realities as a Japanese man and a Korean woman, standing together. Sadness overwhelmed them as they imagined these girls and all their unspoken stories.

Although their time before the statue was filled with pain, it was also filled with hope. The three talked together about their friendship and the hope that Jesus brings. This hope spilled over into the weekly peace study in Pasadena near Fuller

Seminary. Jun joined the Hurs and other Koreans to study the Bible and learn more about shalom theology. He committed to learning Korean and speaking Korean which was very meaningful to the group.

Sue shared that often the ideas of shalom and peace can feel so abstract, so out of reach. In the Summer of 2014, however, the three friends experienced the real-life ways that healing and peace can happen.



Jun Nakai (left) and Hyun Hur (right) with comfort woman statue in Glendale, CA

Ways you can support in prayer:

- Pray for peace in Northeast Asia.
- Pray for the Korean immigrants who are being sold the American Dream. Pray they are able to connect the dots and realize their unique position as immigrants who are multilingual with rich history – they can transcend the American Dream to something much greater as citizens of God's kingdom. Pray they embrace their identity and know who they are so shared stories can emerge and unite for peace.
- Pray for intercultural and interdenominational conflicts – that there can be openness across the differences and bridges of peace can be built.
- Pray that all those involved in this ministry can trust God more and as a result, rest more. When we trust God, we can have Sabbath. We tend to work too much, relying on our own strengths, but when we trust God, we can rest.
- Pray for people who can come alongside the ReconciliAsian team and join in peacemaking work. God continues to provide despite very limited funding, but it gets lonely at times. The Hurs would welcome sojourners in this ministry.