

# Vietnam Timelines

with reference to  
Mennonite involvement

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# Vietnam Timeline Fact Sheet

With special reference to Mennonite involvement

- 1945 Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were colonialized by France in the late nineteenth century. Various independence movements flourished during the early twentieth century. During World War II Japan occupied Vietnam. After the Japanese surrender, Ho Chi Minh on September 2 proclaims an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam. French refusal to grant independence leads to the French Indochina War.
- 1954 MCC enters Vietnam. The Geneva Accords of July 21 end the war with a provisional division of North and South Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. MCC executive secretary Orié O. Miller on August 16 welcomes to Saigon Delbert Wiens, the first MCC volunteer. MCC staff provide relief assistance to displaced persons from the North. In 1956 Willard Krabill signs an agreement to work with the Christian & Missionary Alliance leprosarium in Ban Me Thuot. C&MA missionary work beginning in 1911 led to the establishment of the Evangelical Church in Vietnam (ECVN). The Roman Catholic Church had been active in Vietnam since the seventeenth century.
- 1957 Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), then called Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, begins work in Vietnam. Arlene and James Stauffer arrive in May, followed by Margaret and Everett Metzler in November. While involved in intensive language study, they support the witness of the C&MA and the ECVN.
- 1960 MCC begins a joint medical program with the ECVN, developing a clinic and hospital at Nha Trang which continued until 1975. EMM's Vietnam Mennonite Mission secures a headquarters' property in Saigon near the Binh Dan Hospital and develops a student center, offering English and Bible classes. Another witness center opens in Saigon's Dakao area. Phan Ba Phuoc confesses faith in Jesus Christ and is baptized on May 28, 1961. Failure to organize elections to unify North and South Vietnam in 1956 gives rise to the formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in December 1960.
- 1962 EMM sends four additional missionary personnel in September. MCC's Daniel Gerber and C&MA's Archie Mitchell and Ardel Vietti are taken captive by NLF soldiers May 30 and never return. The United States sets up the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam to direct US military actions. (President Harry Truman sent the Military Assistance Advisory Group in 1950). Two advisors killed in July 1959 are considered the first two American deaths in the US War.
- 1963 EMM sends two more missionaries in September. Political strife leads to the military coup against Republic of Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem and his assassination on November 1.
- 1964 The Gia Dinh community center is established in September with day care nursery, English classes and preaching services. Later the Dawn primary school is established. The Vietnam Mennonite Mission receives official government authorization. American military involvement increases with the Tonkin Gulf "incident" in August; US planes bomb North Vietnam. The US Congress authorizes military action in Southeast Asia.
- 1965 Nine persons baptized on Easter at the Gia Dinh center symbolize the formation of the Vietnam Mennonite Church. The American War expands with sustained bombing of North Vietnam and the arrival of Marines to Da Nang in March. MCC expresses to President Lyndon Johnson "deep concern over the enlarging war . . . with its consequent toll of human suffering." Mennonite missionaries also prepare a statement of concern about the American War.
- 1966 On January 1 Mennonite Central Committee, Church World Service, and Lutheran World Relief begin Vietnam Christian Service (VNCS), a joint service program administered by MCC. Dozens

of new personnel arrive to serve in many new locations, primarily in Central Vietnam. *Gospel Herald* and *The Mennonite* in January publish a special Vietnam issue. EMM sends two more personnel to Vietnam.

- 1968 The Tet Offensive beginning January 30 brings the war to the cities and towns, and tempers America's optimism about the war's outcome. Several C&MA missionaries die in Ban Me Thuot. President Johnson on March 31 halts bombing the North and proposes peace negotiations. Paris Peace Talks begin May 13. In May another military offensive devastates the area adjacent to the Gia Dinh community center; missionaries and VNCS staff work together to assist war victims.
- 1969 Tran Xuan Quang is ordained pastor of the Mennonite church on March 16; he had assisted in the teaching and visitation ministry of the church since August 1965.
- 1972 The war continues with intermittent peace talks. In March North Vietnam launches offensive over the Demilitarized Zone, seizing Quang Tri province. In late December the US heavily bombs Hanoi and Hai Phong. MCC sends first shipment of medical supplies to North Vietnam.
- 1973 In January MCC leaves Vietnam Christian Service to again administer its own programs. The Paris Peace Accords signed January 27 ends US troop involvement in war. (Total military and civilian deaths were 1.5 to 3.5 million, including more than 58,000 Americans). Prisoners of war are exchanged. The last American soldiers leave in March, but the US leaves thousands of civilians to support the Saigon armed forces. Military activity between Viet Cong and Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) continues.
- 1975 North Vietnam forces seize Phuoc Long province in January. In March they attack and seize Ban Me Thuot, leading to the withdrawal of ARVN forces. By the end of March Viet Cong forces control Central Vietnam. Most MCC personnel leave the country. Most VMM personnel, many due for furlough, leave Vietnam early April. Defeat of ARVN forces at Xuan Loc April 21 ends ARVN resistance. Saigon surrenders to Viet Cong forces April 30. Four MCC persons are the only foreign Mennonite personnel remaining in Vietnam. An MCC delegation to Hanoi in November reaffirms MCC's commitment to continue relief assistance to war victims. MCC continues its programs to Vietnam from a base in Bangkok, opening an office in Hanoi in 1990.
- Post-75 The country is reunited in 1976. The people struggle through a difficult decade of economic deprivation with limited political and religious freedoms. The Mennonite Church facilities were confiscated in June 1978. Nguyen Quang Trung and Ngo Thi Bich begin occasional Bible study, worship and fellowship meetings in their home in 1983. The government initiates new freedoms in 1987. EMM assigns Donna and Gerry Keener to Vietnam in 1997 with Gerry relating closely to Nguyen Quang Trung. Representatives of the North American Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship also visit Vietnam in 1998 and initiate a relationship with an independent group led by Nguyen Hong Quang.
- 21<sup>st</sup> C In July 2003 the various Mennonite groups formed the united Vietnam Mennonite Church. In July 2004 both Trung and Quang were ordained. In late 2004 the Church separated into two groups. Trung led the one group to full official registration on September 29, 2007; the first organizing conference of the Vietnam Mennonite Church took place November 15-17, 2008. It became a member of Mennonite World Conference in 2009. The Church began organized leadership training courses in January 2006. In March 2010 twenty-six pastors were ordained. In November 2014 twelve students graduated from the bachelor of theology program. The unregistered Mennonite church has experienced repeated harassment. This group also carried out an extensive training program. Both groups continue to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **VIETNAM MENNONITE CHURCH – BRIEF HISTORY TIMELINE**

- 1957 Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) begins work in Vietnam. Arlene and James Stauffer arrive in May, followed by Margaret and Everett Metzler in November. While involved in intensive language study, they support the witness of the Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA) and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN), AKA Tin Lanh.
- 1960 EMM's Vietnam Mennonite Mission secures a headquarters' property in Saigon near the Binh Dan Hospital and develops a student center, offering English and Bible classes. Another witness center opens in Saigon's Dakao area. Phan Ba Phuoc confesses faith in Jesus Christ and is baptized on May 28, 1961. Additional missionaries were sent by EMM in 1962 & '63.
- 1964 The Gia Dinh community center is established in September with day care nursery, English classes and preaching services. In 1967 the Rang Dong (Dawn) primary school is established on this property. The Vietnam Mennonite Mission receives official government authorization.
- 1965 Nine persons were baptized on Easter at the Gia Dinh center symbolize the formation of the Vietnam Mennonite Church.
- 1969 Tran Xuan Quang is ordained pastor of the Mennonite church on March 16; he had assisted in the teaching and visitation ministry of the church since August 1965.
- 1972 Following the purchase of the Gia Dinh community center land in 1971, a church building and the Rand Dong (Dawn) primary school buildings are erected on the grounds.
- 1978 The Mennonite Church facilities are confiscated in June. Nguyen Quang Trung encourages the members to worship in Baptist or Tin Lanh congregations until they are able to meet again as a Mennonite church.
- 1983 Nguyen Quang Trung and Ngo Thi Bich begin occasional Bible study, worship and fellowship meetings in their home.
- 1997 EMM assigns Donna and Gerry Keener to Vietnam with Gerry relating closely to Nguyen Quang Trung. Activities increase in the area of relief operations and Bible studies.

- 1998 Representatives of the North American Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship (NAVMF) visit Vietnam and initiate a relationship with an independent group led by Nguyen Hong Quang.
- 2003 In July the various Mennonite groups form the united Vietnam Mennonite Church.
- 2004 In July both Pastors Trung and Quang are ordained. Late that year the Church separates into two groups.

**The following timeline relates to the recent history of the Vietnam Mennonite Church, the group under Pastor Trung's leadership, AKA the registered group:**

- 2006 The Church begins organized leadership training courses. This is a certificate program that trains active pastors and church workers. In 2015 the 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort of students is enrolled.
- 2007 Pastor Trung leads the group to full official Vietnam government recognition in September.
- 2008 The first organizing conference of the Vietnam Mennonite Church takes place in November.
- 2009 The church becomes a member of Mennonite World Conference.
- 2010 In March twenty-six pastors are ordained. The bachelor of theology (BTh) program is established.
- 2014 Twelve students graduate from the bachelor of theology program in November.
- 2015 Current status: Membership - 6,200 (over 5,000 are ethnic minorities); Pastors and Apprentice Pastors - 64; Worship locations - 93.

Compiled: GHK & NQT – July 2015

# **A BRIEF SKETCH OF VIETNAM MENNONITE CHURCH HISTORY**

## **In North America and its ministries in Vietnam and Cambodia**

### **FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT:**

After the migration of Vietnamese to North America in the mid 1970's, several Vietnamese Mennonite churches were established as follows:

Philadelphia, PA 1981; Calgary, AB 1982; Edmonton, AB 1995; Winnipeg, MB 1986; Vancouver, BC 2001; Allentown, PA 1996; Falls Church, VA 1989; etc. Current membership in Vietnamese Mennonite churches in North America today is about 500.

Vietnamese Mennonite Brethren churches were also established in North America after 1975.

North American Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship (NAVMF) was officially formed by the North American Vietnamese Mennonite congregations in July 1997 in Winnipeg, MB.

September, 1997, NAVMF sent Nhien Pham and Can Le to Vietnam to meet Quang Hong Nguyen and invited his congregation, the Christian Love Church with 300 adherents, and several leaders to join the Mennonites.

In 1999, the Vietnam Evangelical Mennonite Church was temporarily formed with 1200 adherents. Quang Hong Nguyen was the leader of this Church.

In 2003, the united Mennonite Church of Vietnam was formed by several distinct groupings of churches, all of whom desired to be part of the Mennonite Church. There were about 10,000 adherents. The church appointed a leadership board with Trung Quang Nguyen as President, and Quang Hong Nguyen as General Secretary.

Because Quang Hong Nguyen and his group was vocal on injustice issues, on March 2nd, 2004, Quang Hong Nguyen and five other Mennonites were arrested and imprisoned for the charge of resisting the officers on duty.

November 2004, due to disagreement on how to relate to the government authorities, the church split. Trung Quang Nguyen led the Vietnam Mennonite Church with a position of more cooperation with the government. This group later became known as the registered Mennonite Church. Dung Le, Quang's wife led the Vietnam Evangelical Mennonite Church the group more resistant to government control. This group is known as the unregistered Mennonite Church.

November, 2005, Quang was released. Mrs Dung Le resigned and Quang was re-elected as president of the unregistered church.

There were efforts by EMM and NAVMF to re-unite the two groups. But so far, there is no success. EMM and NAVMF recognize both groups, but for the legal and political reasons, EMM began to relate more closely with the registered group, and NAVMF with the unregistered group.

**Highlights related to the recent history of the Vietnam Evangelical Mennonite Church – also known as the unregistered group:**

- In 2007, the Mennonite Ministry Training School was opened at the headquarters of the unregistered church in District 2, Ho Chi Minh City.
- December 2010, the headquarters of the unregistered church was destroyed by the government authorities.
- In 2011, the headquarters was relocated to Ben Cat, in the Binh Duong Province. The Mennonite Bible School was also opened there.
- In 2012, the authority permitted the unregistered church to use the city's theater to host its spiritual renewal conference. The church experienced a short peaceful period.
- In 2014, there was unrest in the factories in Binh Duong.
- March 2014, the authorities asked the church to close the Bible School, but the church didn't comply. Conflicts began.
- June 2014, a hundred policemen invaded the Ben Cat Headquarters. Students were beaten and arrested but were soon released. The Ben Cat Headquarter has been abandoned since.
- Quang started quietly build his new home and new church in District 12 of Ho Chi Minh City. But the construction was soon put on hold by the authorities.
- Quang was attacked and hospitalized in November 2014. During this same time, Pastor Hung Manh Nguyen of the Cow Barn Church in Binh Duong, and other Mennonite pastors in the Province of Quang Ngai were harassed.

- International Mennonite agencies send letters to Vietnamese authorities to advocate a peaceful dialog with the unregistered church.
- June 2015, Hung Manh Nguyen was able to arrive in Canada and gave his testimony in the Canadian Parliament.
- With the advocacy of the US embassy in Vietnam, June 2015, Quang Hong Nguyen, Dung Le and Hong Thi Nguyen went to the capital of Hanoi to meet the Government Religious Bureau for a peaceful solution. The unregistered Mennonite Church was promised with the freedom to carry on religious activities, and encouraged to register locally, and to re-unify with the registered Mennonite Church.
- The unregistered Mennonite Church is in the process of reconciling with local authorities and re-organizing itself.

Highlights related to NAVMF activities in Cambodia:

- 2007 - Establishment of a Vietnamese Mennonite church in Phnom Penh.
- 2015 - Establishment of a Vietnamese Mennonite church in Kratie.

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