

HFC Congregations in Philadelphia Host Celebration

On November 21, 2017, approximately 150-160 gathered in Philadelphia to celebrate the 15th Anniversary of Harvest Fellowship of Churches. For the past 12 years, congregations in the Bridgeport, CT region have hosted the celebration, as it is more centrally located for the majority of the HFC churches. However, this year, the HFC Oversight Team, for several reasons, felt led to relocate the event to a different region. The Philadelphia congregations graciously accepted this offer. Bishop Leonard (*picture*) and Anna Mary Burkholder, along with a team of volunteers, did an incredible job of preparing for and hosting the meeting, which was held at Oxford Circle Mennonite Church in North Philadelphia.



Asian congregations in the Philadelphia region, under the leadership of Benny Lee (*picture*) from Abundant Life Chinese Mennonite Church, led the gathering in beautiful worship. The celebration included many additional worship presentations, including

Pastor Bo Guadeloupe and a team from City of Refuge Church, a congregation with Koinonia Fellowship of Churches. A choir from the Philadelphia Indonesian Mennonite Church sang, as did a youth



choir from the same congregation. Also, a visiting group from Philadelphia Chin Baptist Church (Myanmar), with whom Bishop Leonard has a relationship.



Various inspirational testimonies were shared. For instance, Anita Charlestin (*picture*), missionary to Haiti appointed by HFC and the Gospel Light Community Church, shared that 120 people have accepted Christ and 10 weddings were performed, all since the HFC mission trip there in February! At that time, four congregations were received into fellowship. Pastor Kai Chan, from Boston Chinese Church of Saving Grace, shared about their plans for outreach in the community. Pastor Kilat Lembong, from Philadelphia Indonesian Mennonite Church, shared how 9 people were baptized recently, including 8 youth. One of the youth, Kintan Sulistiyono gave her

testimony of what her steps of faith have meant. Pastor Wes Holland, from Gardiner, ME, provided a video greeting. Also, Bishop Henry reported how Pastor Kayamba, from Disciples International Christian Church in Portland, ME, is reaching out to church members who recently moved to Montreal, Canada. Pastor Kayamba hopes the group will become a new church plant soon. Finally, Isabel Rodriguez, from Good News Christian Church in Bronx, NY, shared about the transforming power of Christ in her life.



We were blessed to have visitors from Koinonia Fellowship of Churches, including Bishop Lawrence (*picture*) and Nereida Chiles, and Pastor Juan Marrero. Bishop Chiles shared opening greetings and a brief exhortation. Pastor Clair Stauffer, representing New Testament Fellowship, shared testimonies of what God is doing in that Network.

Bishop Henry Buckwalter gave a message entitled “*Pursuing God’s Presence: Overcoming Discouragement*,” based on Psalms 18:16-19. His message included how Satan often uses discouragement to defeat us in our life and ministry. Pursuing God’s presence by drawing near to Him is one way of preventing discouragement to overwhelm us in our lives. Bishop Henry shared three declarations based on this Scripture that are important for overcoming discouragement. They included: Declare – “Jesus is my Deliverer;” Declare – “Jesus is my Support;” and Declare – “Jesus Delights in Me.” He challenged the congregation to ask themselves the question, “What new steps am I willing to take to pursue God’s presence?” He said, “Pursuing God’s Presence” is the theme he has chosen for HFC in 2018. He will look for ways to resource congregations on this theme. It should also be noted that the sermon, along with the entire program, was simultaneously translated into Mandarin, Cantonese and Indonesian through headsets.

Bishop Buckwalter invited all the pastoral couples present, including visitors, to come forward where he gave a closing blessing to them.



The grand finale of the Celebration was an amazing meal, which included many kinds of Asian cuisine, along with a bit of other food choices. The fellowship was wonderful!

Bishop Leonard said of this regional meeting, "It was probably the first time a large percentage of the audience actually attended an HFC Anniversary Celebration." HFC Oversight Team most likely will plan for future celebrations to be held in other regions.

HFC gives glory to God for His faithfulness and goodness for all He is doing throughout the Network over the past 15 years.

