

## **Bucher and Saipan and Yutu**

by Wes Eby, Global Representative

Do any of these names resonate? Bucher? Saipan? Yutu? Allow me to tell you how these three are connected. First, the Buchers are tentmaker missionaries living on the island of Saipan. Dave is pastor of the Living Hope Church of the Nazarene and a high school science teacher. Helen Ann, his wife, is an elementary literacy coach, and they have been working and ministering in Saipan for 17 years. Yutu is the name of a typhoon that slammed into Saipan in late October 2018, causing extensive damage. Yutu, a category 5 cyclone, was the strongest typhoon on record to hit Saipan. This horrific storm, however, got limited attention in the USA and has been called “the typhoon the media forgot.”

When I became aware of the devastation through a friend, I contacted the Buchers and asked if I could write about their work as well as Yutu. I am indebted to Helen Ann for providing me with the information in this article. In response to the great need in Saipan, our church donated cash so the Buchers could help the teachers in the school where Helen Ann teaches to replace supplies lost in the typhoon.

The remainder of this article is an interview format.

*Question:* Tell us about Saipan and something that may not be general knowledge.

*Answer:* Saipan is one of 15 islands in the chain of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific, east of the Philippines, south of Japan, just north of Guam. It became a part of the commonwealth of the United States in 1986. English, Chamorro, and Carolinian are the official languages, although all schools are taught in English based on the American system and calendar. At one point, there were 57 nationalities and languages represented on Saipan.

*Question:* Tell about your call to be tentmaker missionaries as educators.

*Answer:* When we moved to Saipan, we knew we would be volunteers, not career missionaries. The Living Hope church was unable to support a pastor, so it was clear that we would be bi-vocational or tentmakers—a tribute to the apostle Paul and the fact that he supported himself and his ministry by making tents. Since I had a degree in education, applying for a position as a teacher was the obvious choice. Dave’s degree was in pulp and paper technology, and he was hired to teach biology and chemistry at a new high school. Both of us have had opportunity to counsel and pray with students and colleagues who have come to us seeking answers. Dave has had students ask him medical and deep spiritual questions.

The Living Hope church meets in our home because we feel this is the best use of God’s resources. Over the years, we have had a consistent discipleship program at the church. We have strong Sunday school classes for children, youth, and adults. We also have children’s quizzing, vacation Bible school, teen retreats, and other programs.

*Question:* How have you and Dave been involved in community life beyond the school and church, and how is that impacting your witness for Christ?

*Answer:* We have had many opportunities to be a witness for the Lord in our community. We have been involved in Bible studies with other churches, in the Saipan Pacific Winds Community band, and the Friends of the Arts Community Theater. Dave has also been involved in training for the Red Cross. These activities provide times of discipleship and encouragement. Here is an example. One time when Dave had a role in the play *My Fair Lady*, he asked one young man what he would like to do in the next five years. Cameron said he would like to attend seminary eventually. Dave encouraged him to apply sooner rather than later. Today Cameron has completed his master's and doctorate and is teaching at a seminary in Romania.

Here is another example. Laura, our daughter, had the female lead in the play *Guys and Dolls*, whose character was part of the Save a Soul Mission and preached on the streets. One of the women in the play asked to eat lunch with Laura. She asked our daughter if she really believed the lines the character was preaching or if they were just part of the script. Laura explained her belief in God's saving grace and said they were not just lines to her. Just after Yutu hit Saipan, Dave and I visited this woman in the hospital and prayed for her and her husband who suffered physically after the storm.

*Question:* Tell about the devastation caused by Yutu.

*Answer:* Saipan is only 14 miles from north to south and 5 miles at the widest point. Yutu passed directly over the south end of the island where the population is more dense. The winds, more than 200 miles per hour, lasted for an extended time. Anyone with a tin house or tin roof lost the tin, meaning their homes were open to the rain and wind for many hours. Even concrete houses had windows and doors blown in, drenching furniture and other belongings. Over 1,000 families were displaced on an island where housing is in short supply.

Another major problem was the mold that grew quickly before being cleaned up and salvaging began. This was particularly true in the classrooms on many of the campuses, including the school where I taught.

The damage to utility infrastructure was great. New power poles snapped in this storm. Because water wells are run by electricity, we had no water. Priority in restoring power went to the hospital first, next the wells, and then the schools. Homes were last. It could be several months before everyone will have electricity again.

As to the schools where we teach, the high school where Dave works is a newer, concrete building and fared better than many of the structures on Saipan. The school where I work suffered greatly. With 32 classrooms and special education areas, 10 of them were unusable and needed major repair and renovations. Many of the resources in the classrooms were destroyed. When classes resumed on December 10, we had to have double sessions. While 10 classrooms were deemed unusable, the others were

cleaned and reopened, although many rooms have no air conditioning, and 5 classrooms and offices are still being run on generator power.

*Question:* How will the small donation from our church impact the teachers, and how may such donations impact your witness for Christ?

*Answer:* Your donation, along with others received, were distributed in the name of the Church of the Nazarene. Donations included cash, solar lights, mosquito coils and repellent, toiletry packs, games, school supplies, sanitizer wipes, compressed towels, cloths, etc. The gifts we shared with the teachers (and others) gave us an opportunity to share God's love with those who lost so much and assure them that they are loved and have been prayed for.

*Personal Note:* Our church has already received several notes from teachers in the school where Helen Ann works, expressing their profound thanks for our concern for them. What our church did is certainly not unique, but what all Christians do, or should do, when they learn of needs—giving cups of cold water in Christ's name.

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