



September 18, 2020

Dear friends,

We have big news!

We're excited to officially announce our new, collaborative ministry - **Friends Network**. Read on to learn more about how we got here, and the opportunities that lie ahead.

Background

As you know, Friends of China has been training, sending, and supporting lay evangelists in China for twenty years. By God's grace over 320 evangelists have made lasting friendships, shared the Gospel with thousands, and developed a deep conviction for cross-cultural missions. We strongly desire to continue this important work.

However, China is not what it used to be. Security concerns have multiplied. The government is increasingly skeptical of Western influence. Thousands of missionaries have already left the mainland. And COVID has only made matters worse.

As a result, about two years ago our leaders began asking some important questions. What if the door to China doesn't reopen? How can we continue this important mission? Are there other places in the world where our mission model might work?

It was around this time that we began discussions with our brothers in ministry who were doing similar work in Vietnam. *Friends of Vietnam* was a young organization started by ministry leaders at Peace in Jesus Lutheran Church in Boise, Idaho. Its founders had a desire to reach Vietnam with the gospel, and they had begun sending and supporting lay missionaries to carry out this work.

It quickly became clear to us that a partnership would be mutually beneficial. By combining our administrative tasks, worker training and support systems, international networks, recruitment efforts, and funding sources, we would truly be stronger together. Out of these conversations, Friends Network was born.

What will change?

First, you'll notice the obvious – our new name. This change not only accommodates our growing ministry, but it also protects us from increased scrutiny in restricted areas like China and Vietnam. You'll also notice a new logo! Learn more about this symbol on the enclosed card.

More importantly, our new collaborative effort will allow us to be even more flexible and adaptable in our ministry approach. Throughout history God has opened certain doors for mission work and closed other ones. We do not always understand his purpose, but we trust him. And if

he is offering opportunities to expand our ministry and bring the gospel to more places, we are eager to respond.

What this means is that we hope to send lay missionaries to even more countries. Our board has already begun the process of assessing new mission fields, talking to national church leaders, and meeting with WELS and CELC world mission representatives. If the Lord blesses these efforts, we are planning to send mission teams to additional countries next fall.

What will stay the same?

A lot.

Our mission remains the same. As each and every one of our alumni has experienced, friendship evangelism is a powerful and effective method for gospel outreach. It's authentic, mutually edifying, and eternal. These are our core values, and they know no borders.

Perhaps more than ever before, this mission is also *important*. Relationships matter. The church matters. Evangelism matters. And our leaders remain committed to equipping and supporting Christians who share this conviction.

We also hope to continue building a wide international network. Anyone involved with FoC or FoV has seen the ripple effects of these ministries. International students enroll at our Christian institutions. Bible study friends invite other friends. Christians move to new cities and start their own fellowships. Local schools and churches are founded. Mission trips change lives. Friendships span generations.

The name is intentional. *Friends. Network.*

Messages from our leaders

"We pray Friends Network will be a new organization to do God's work better and more efficiently... to bring the gospel to many more souls in China, Vietnam and other countries as well. I pray you might consider supporting Friends Network in the future. It is exciting to think of what amazing things can be done through prayers and financial support from people like you." - Huu Trung Le, Chairman, Friends of Vietnam

"By God's grace we have been able to send workers to the places God was actively blessing. Now the Lord is opening some new and unexpected doors as we merge with Friends of Vietnam. People with a heart for the gospel and a love for Vietnam will provide guidance and wisdom. The Lord will provide the gospel and we count on him being faithful to his promise to anoint that message with the Spirit. It's up to us now to remember Jesus' words and pray as he directed, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.' (Matthew 9:37-38) We're excited to take this step, not just because we get to learn about a different country and its people, but because we get to be a part of God's plan to use the gospel to change hearts and eternal destinies." - Rev. Peter Leyrer, Chairman, Friends of China

Ongoing ministry

Active ministry does continue. We currently have 10 evangelists still in China. They patiently waited out the quarantine and have resumed ministry activities and Bible studies as much as they are able. We're also thankful for the dozens of Chinese Christians in our fellowship who lead Bible

studies and house churches around the country. May God give them strength to continue the Lord's work!

Most of our displaced evangelists have found temporary ministry assignments, enrolled at Seminary, or taken other part-time jobs until borders reopen and they can return to their lives in China. In the meantime, almost all of them have maintained weekly communication with their friends. They send scriptural encouragement, they pray together, they communicate about ongoing life. Friendship knows no borders.

What happens next?

First things first: as our team continues developing relationships with potential new mission fields, will you pray that God guides us and blesses our plans according to his will? We can manage the administrative tasks of merging organizations, but we do not know what the future holds for our mission and ministry. God does.

Next, we do require your financial support. There is a lot happening behind the scenes as we prepare to launch several new mission fields. God has always provided what we need, and he has used you to accomplish it. Thank you, as always.

Donors, you might have some questions! Here are some basics: *Friends Network* is now our legally registered name. Donations can be given directly to *Friends Network*. We also filed the necessary paperwork to continue "doing business as" *Friends of China* and *Friends of Vietnam*, so any gifts made out to either of those organizations will be processed by Friends Network as well.

We also know that some of you will prefer to support one specific mission field (like China). We have set up designated accounts to receive these gifts as well. If you specify in the memo line that you are supporting a specific mission field, we will make sure that your gift is used for that purpose.

All gifts can now be processed through our new website, www.friendsnet.org. If you choose to mail a check, please use the enclosed envelope with our updated mailing address.

Conclusion

Thank you for reading, and thank you for your partnership in this work!

God is good. Our goal, now and always, is to "declare his glory among the nations." We are so excited for this new opportunity to do so. May God bless it according to his will.

In Jesus name,



Aaron Wakeman
Director | Friends Network