

Copyright (c) 2020 Baptist Press. Reprinted from Baptist Press (www.baptistpress.com), news service of the Southern Baptist Convention. The original story can be found at <http://www.bpnews.net/54442/simple-gesture-spreads-comfort-amid-covid19-outbreak>

'Simple gesture' spreads comfort amid COVID-19 outbreak

by Diana Chandler, posted Tuesday, March 10, 2020 (one month ago)

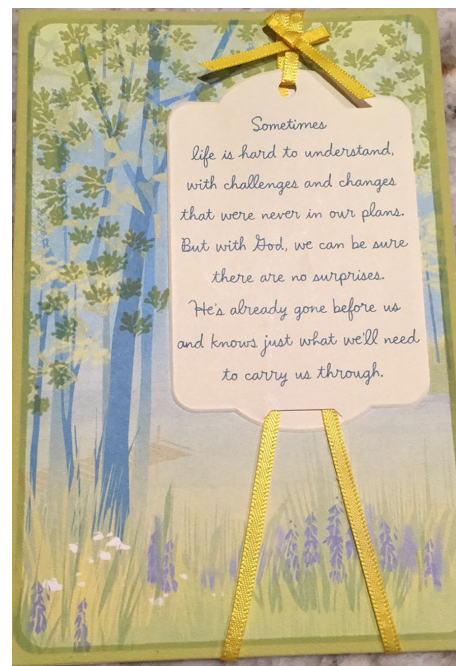
AYLETT, Va. (BP) -- Internet service is spotty in rural, unincorporated Aylett, Va. There, a small women's group at Beulah Baptist Church read an article in the March print edition of the Dover Diary, spotlighting ministry in the U.S. during the coronavirus outbreak.

The account of fear, wisdom and xenophobic bullying written by Carter Tan, English pastor of Grace Chinese Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., about 50 miles away, caught the eyes of Friendship Women on Mission member Judy Shepard.

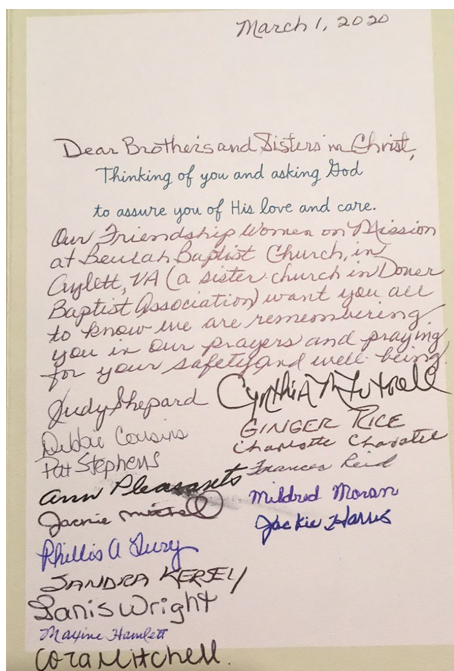
"It's a difficult situation for all people groups in this point in time," Shepard, wife of Beulah Baptist pastor Ed Shepard, told Baptist Press. "We just wanted to let them know that a sister church in the association was praying for them, and continuing to remember them in our prayers."

Shepard bought a simple card of encouragement for all 15 or so members of the mission group to sign.

Tan had written the article -- also published in BP -- weeks earlier, when U.S. cases of COVID-19 were perhaps in the single digits. Cases were only linked to those who had traveled abroad, but community or person-to-person transmission has since been documented in the U.S. The Dover Diary, the newsletter of the Dover Baptist Association in Ashland, Va., reprinted Tan's column.



Carter Tan, English pastor of Chinese Grace Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., expressed gratitude for a card of encouragement he received from a small women's mission group from Beulah Baptist Church.



Members of Friendship Women on Mission of Beulah Baptist Church in rural Aylett, Va., sent a card of encouragement to Chinese Grace Baptist Church pastor Carter Tan after reading his account of ministry during the coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak.

"He had written of the sentiments of this coronavirus and the effect that it was having on his congregation, partially out of fear and partially out of good old precautionary common sense, as he put it in the article," Shepard said.

"And then, the thing that was really beginning to add to all of this decrease in attendance for these reasons, was that his daughter unfortunately at school had had a boy come up to her and had teased her by calling her 'coronavirus.' And that just struck a vein within me that the cruelty that we can have towards people who are God's children, just as we are."

Tan told BP he appreciates the sentiments of the women he'd never met a sister church he had never visited.

"It was just really sweet," Tan told BP. "And for me as a pastor, you know, knowing that this is not the local church that's going through this, but it's the kingdom of God, and other churches are encouraging us during this time, ... that God's kingdom is larger than a local church."

Cases of COVID-19 have since swelled to more than 800 in the U.S., where at least 28 have died from the disease, according to official tallies Tuesday (March 10). At least five cases have been reported in Virginia, and the U.S. National Guard is preparing to deploy to New Rochelle, N.Y., where the largest cluster of U.S. cases -- 118 -- have been reported.

The women's group mailed the card weeks after Peter Yanes, executive director of Asian American relations and mobilization for the SBC EC, encouraged Southern Baptists to reach out to Asian congregations to express love and concern. Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd held a prayer call regarding the disease's impact in the U.S. and abroad.

Shepard called it God's timing, that she should read Tan's article a day before the group's monthly meeting.

"It was just the Lord and my love for God's people that led me to want to do something for them and to let them know we were praying for them, and it just shows you how a simple gesture can go a long ways to let people know that they're not in these things alone, that other people are praying for them," she said. "To me, a prayer life is one of the main things that we can do to help our hearts and minds be in tune with the Lord and thus in tune with what He would have us do in the world."

It's a sentiment churches can easily express to other congregations, said mission member and Beulah Baptist WMU director Maxine Hamlett.

"We hope that it would boost the pastor's spirits to let him know that were praying for him and for his reduced number in worship service," Hamlett said.

As for attendance, Grace Chinese attendance was rebounding until U.S. cases of COVID-19 began increasing, Tan told BP, describing the increase as a second wave.

"Up until a week ago, attendance had started going back up," Tan said. "I see that as a second wave that hit. ... Attendance took a hit again.

"I suspect as the CDC (U.S. Centers for Disease Control) begins increasing their testing kits and then sending them out, more cases are going to pop up. So I don't expect this to slow down anytime soon. In fact, I think the opposite is going to happen."

More than 114,000 cases of COVID-19 have been reported, and more than 4,000 people have died, according to daily tracking sites.

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists'... [Expand Bio]

SIGNED UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER? Get Baptist Press in your email by subscribing to our daily newsletter at bpnews.net/SubscribeBP.