



EXTENDING BEYOND

Do not be afraid — embrace God's peace!

By Marisa Smucker, executive director



I recently took a trip to Taiwan with Mission Network regional director for Asia Andi Santoso, to visit one of our partners, Mennonite Christian Hospital (MCH), and international workers Caleb and Stephanie Schrock-Hurst. The Schrock-Hursts began their service work in February. During our visit with Caleb and Stephanie, I asked if there was a Scripture that stood out for them during their initial months on-site. Caleb shared that the phrase “do not be afraid” has come to mind often, because the CEO of MCH, Jacob Wen-Hsin Chang, has frequently told them, “Don’t worry, everything will be okay.”

As I reflected on Caleb’s words and John 14:27, I thought of the initial process in connecting Caleb and Stephanie with MCH. Jacob and the leadership from the hospital had requested

that Mission Network send workers, and we were able to find a good match for them in Caleb and Stephanie. However, the start of their term was delayed by a year, due to Caleb’s health. Typically, a partner would start their relationship with the international workers when they arrived in person, but in this case, MCH considered Caleb and Stephanie partners for the year before they arrived. MCH joined us in praying for Caleb and Stephanie, and it felt like they were truly bonding from the moment the connection was made.

There are so many ways that things may not go as planned when workers begin their term in a new place. And yet Jacob and the hospital staff demonstrated the essence of John 14:27. We can have peace and not be afraid, because God is the provider and equips us with all that is needed. The hospital staff trusted God and were well prepared, even for the unforeseen event that delayed Caleb and Stephanie. However, now that

Continued on page 4

Yunjean Chen, Grace Mei-yu Zhao, Stephanie and Caleb Schrock-Hurst, Jacob Wen-Hsin Chang and Daqian Zhang sing praise to God in a chapel that is part of the Mennonite Christian Hospital complex in Hualien, Taiwan. Photo by Marisa Smucker.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

— John 14:27 (NIV)

Settling into Hualien

Caleb and Stephanie Schrock-Hurst serve at Mennonite Christian Hospital (MCH) in Hualien, Taiwan. Established in 1948, MCH is the largest Mennonite hospital in the world and is a major regional teaching hospital, with over 500 beds and 1,000 staff. This blog was originally written by Stephanie and published in May 2026, a few weeks after their arrival in Taiwan.

By Stephanie Schrock-Hurst

After a few weeks on Taiwan's beautiful east coast, our days have settled into a steady rhythm: focused language study on weekdays and recovery and exploration on weekends.

We began full-time Mandarin classes March 9, at National Dong Hwa University (NDHU), a spacious state university located in Shoufeng Township, roughly a 25-minute drive from our apartment. Caleb and I are in different classes — I'm in level 2 and he's in level 3. While this means we spend long days at NDHU — my morning class and his afternoon one creates a schedule that runs a little more than 9-5 — it's proving to be the best arrangement for our individual progress. While one of us is in class, the other can focus on reviewing or doing homework without distraction.

The long days can feel tiring, but they also help us stay disciplined. We're both making progress, and our colleagues at MCH have been generous with encouragement, often commenting on how quickly we seem to be picking up the language.

Weekends look different. We explore Hualien City, study at a local coffee shop, enjoy lunch with new friends, attend the local Mennonite church, and catch up on chores and rest. These slower days help us recharge and feel more connected to our new community.

Stepping into service

Even though language study is our focus right now, we began leading an English-language Bible study at the hospital recently. This weekly group brings together hospital staff — nurses, development team members and supervisors, among others — to learn about biblical leaders, while practicing English conversation. It's been a fun way to build relationships with our new colleagues.

I've started volunteering once a week at the nursing home attached to the hospital's Shoufeng branch, just a 10-minute drive from the university. After my morning class, I go there to help with a new "coffee hour" that began last month. Local cafés take turns coming in every other Friday to brew fresh coffee and offer sweets for the residents. The elderly residents, most of whom are wheelchair-bound, absolutely love it.

Serving coffee has quickly become one of my favorite parts of the week. I've enjoyed getting to know the residents.



Photo by Marisa Smucker

Stephanie and Caleb Schrock-Hurst stand with Jacob Wen-Hsin Chang at Mennonite Christian Hospital in Hualien, Taiwan.



Photo by Marisa Smucker

Above: Stephanie Schrock-Hurst, Renzhi He, Mark Lin, Caleb Schrock-Hurst and Rose Lin walk in a marketplace at Yehliu Geopark. Below: Looking out at the Pacific Ocean from the Yehliu Geopark.

They are wonderfully patient as I practice my Mandarin, and they even teach me a few words in Taiwanese. These small moments of connection feel meaningful and remind me why we're here.

Experiencing Hualien through the senses

Living in Taiwan brings a mix of new and familiar sensations.

What we feel

Taiwan sits on what is known as the Ring of Fire, so earthquakes are part of life. We experienced our first significant earthquake — magnitude 5.7 — late one Thursday evening, while getting ready for bed. The shaking disoriented us — we couldn't find our footing, and the clanging of objects in the apartment added to the unease. My heart raced, and I had to focus on deep breathing. The quake lasted less than a minute, but within two minutes we received calls and a text from hospital colleagues checking on us. Their calm reassurance — "If no one is yelling in your building, there's nothing to worry about" — helped us relax.

We've now felt three quakes around magnitude 5, and each one feels a bit less alarming. As locals often say, "The only people worried about earthquakes are those who aren't from Hualien." Taiwan's strict, frequently updated building codes provide us with confidence that the buildings will withstand the shaking.

What we hear

Every afternoon, we hear cheerful music drifting through the neighborhood. In our first jet-lagged days here, we excitedly thought it was an ice cream truck making frequent rounds. I even joked that daily visits might become annoying, particularly when trying to get over jet lag. It turns out the music signals the arrival of the garbage truck! Unlike in the U.S., residents don't leave bags curbside — you must throw your bags into the truck yourself. In Hualien, the truck plays the catchy tune to alert residents of its approach.

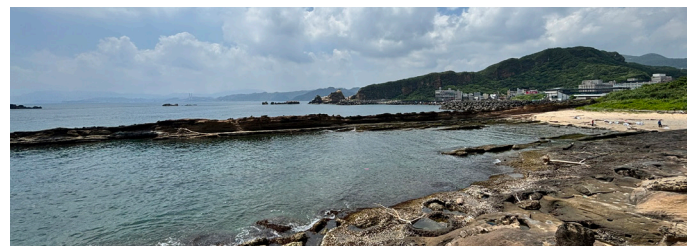


Photo by Marisa Smucker

What we see

Hualien sits between the rugged Central Mountain Range and the vast Pacific Ocean, making it one of Taiwan's most scenic places. We enjoy running or walking along the coastal path that starts near the port. We sit and watch cargo ships dock and unload. Then, heading south, we continue along a tree-shaded section of the trail, before crossing a wooden pedestrian bridge over an inlet. Here, the view suddenly opens, and we have a full view of the ocean.



Photo by Leo Visions on Unsplash

What we taste

Bubble tea has quickly become our go-to afternoon treat, especially on warm days or after finishing an “adulting” task — like taxes. The university campus doesn’t sell it, so we’ve limited ourselves to weekends — with only one accidental double-bubble day so far. As I told some Taiwanese friends, with a laugh,

“We know this is very 外國人 (wàiguó rén, foreigner) behavior, but we’re okay with it.” (Disclaimer: As a public health nurse, I do not recommend this habit.)

What we smell

Though it’s not officially the rainy season yet, frequent showers have brought the rich, earthy scent of wet soil and fresh greenery. It feels pleasantly familiar — much like the first hints of spring in the U.S. I’ve always loved how changing seasons carry their own smells, and that comforting aroma of rain on warm earth makes this place feel a little more like home.

Gratitude amid transition

We’re deeply thankful for the new friends we’re making here and for the technology that keeps us connected with loved ones back home.

Looking ahead, we have about two more months of intensive language study, before transitioning to full-time

work with MCH. The foundation we’re building now feels essential and exciting.

Hualien continues to surprise and welcome us — one class, one conversation, one ocean view and one earthquake at a time. ■



Photo by Marisa Smucker

Caleb and Stephanie Schrock-Hurst share a meal with Rose Lin.

Join in this mission and give today!

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Your gift will go to the Mission Network fund, which helps support people like Caleb and Stephanie, as well as other Mission Network partners, personnel and programs.



Community is the center of our lives

Continued from page 1

they have started, it is clear to see that prayer and preparation made for a smooth transition, and they have readily welcomed Caleb and Stephanie into their staff and integrated them into their work.

What are you afraid of in your life? As you consider, remember John 14:27 — do not be afraid, and embrace the peace that only God can give, trusting that the Holy Spirit is

with you always, teaching and guiding you to be a witness to God’s reconciling work in the world. ■

Marisa Smucker

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Executive Director

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