

## Pacific Grace multiplies

**P**acific Grace Mission Chapel was planted in Vancouver by the B.C. MB Conference Board of Church Extension in the 1950s. How that small English-speaking outreach became two large Chinese congregations meeting in four locations is an intriguing—and inspiring—story.

From the beginning, Pacific Grace had a number of Chinese attending. In time, the Chinese continued to increase in numbers, while the English part of the congregation dwindled, and in 1977 the congregation was renamed Pacific Grace Chinese Church.

### BURNABY

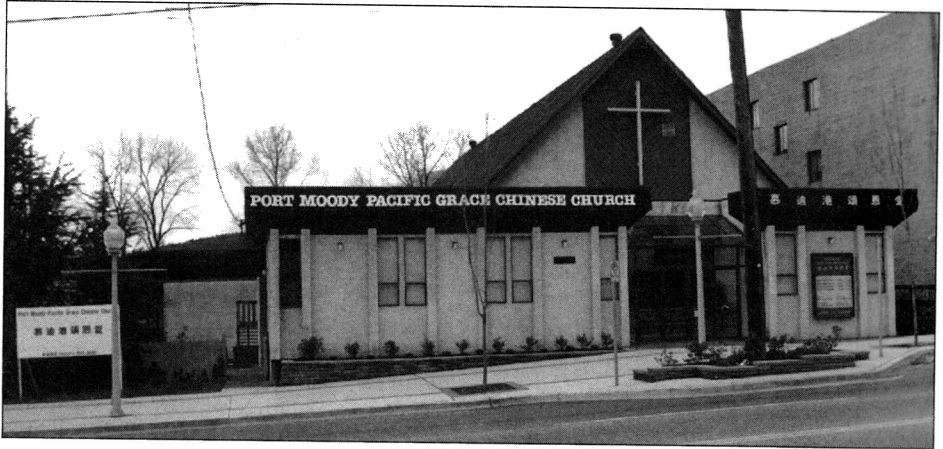
The church continued to grow. It also became concerned for the salvation of the increasing numbers of Chinese living in the neighbouring municipality of Burnaby. In 1991, about 40 members were sent out under the leadership of pastor Keynes Kan to plant a daughter church, Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church.

The Burnaby church began renting Ellesmere United Church. The United Church even changed its worship times to allow the Chinese to hold their worship service and Sunday school on Sunday mornings. The Chinese church grew quickly, and the Ellesmere facilities were soon inadequate to house all of the Chinese fellowships and Sunday school classes. An empty store on the corner was rented for a church office and Sunday school classes; then, some classes

were held in a restaurant next door; next a family bought a house next door suitable for 10 more classes; finally, an old building on the Ellesmere United Church property was renovated.

### PORT MOODY

Even all of these measures were not adequate. The Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church was now running three



worship services, and its fellowships were running out of room again. It was decided to plant a daughter church farther south under associate pastor Isaac Chang. In the next six months, the congregation investigated 50 sites for the church plant, but could find nothing suitable.

Then the congregation learned that a church building was for sale in a location to the east, in nearby Port Moody. The

membership of the young congregation included many recent immigrants, and half of the members were students, so the congregation was not sure that it could afford to buy a building. Still, the congregation prayed about the matter and decided to investigate. They discovered that the building was spacious and centrally located, and that there were already 90,000 Chinese in Port Moody, Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam, with the numbers increasing rapidly. The church leaders decided that the opportunity was too ideal to pass up.

The leaders took the matter to the congregation. The members had already demonstrated their support for evangelism by bringing many non-Christians to evangelistic events. Now they voted 98 percent in favour of purchasing the Port Moody building.

The difficulty was that the congregation needed to raise \$400,000 for the down payment on the \$1.3 million building within two months. Members began packing lunches instead of eating out, stopped going to malls, donated birthday gift money, took second jobs and sold assets in order to be able to give more to the building fund, and by December, 1994 the goal was met.

Rather than use the Port Moody building for the church plant, the main congregation decided to move to the new location, allowing the Ellesmere United Church building to be used for the church plant.

The two locations are still one congregation with a common treasury, deacons board and pastoral staff: senior pastor Keynes Kan, associate pastor Isaac Chang and children's ministries director Sabrina Bach.

The "church plant" began functioning using the old name (Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church) in the old location on Feb. 19. It still has two worship services, with a total attendance of 220. The church is organized into "fellowships" named for biblical characters: Caleb (age 50 and up), Joseph (couples



At the dedication service of Pacific Grace Chinese Church (South): (l-r) Keynes Kan (senior pastor of Port Moody and Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese), deacon Ben Li (chair of the Pacific Grace church extension committee), David Chan (senior pastor of Pacific Grace Chinese Church North and South), Herb Neufeld (B.C. MB Conference Moderator), Ike Bergen (B.C. MB Conference Minister), Sue Neufeld (a worker with Pacific Grace Mission Chapel and Pacific Grace Chinese Church 1954-82), Enoch Wong (former pastor of Pacific Grace Chinese Church, now advisory pastor of Port Moody and Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church), Owen Leung (associate pastor of Pacific Grace Chinese Church North and South) and Paul Wang (pastor of Evangelical Chinese Bible Church).

aged 40-45), Joshua (couples aged 35-40), Isaiah (couples aged 30-35), Daniel (a career class for those 30-40), Ezra (for those in 3rd and 4th year of college), Elijah (for those in 1st and second year), Timothy (high school), Josiah (for English speakers in grade 10 and up) and Pioneer (for those from age 2 to grade 10).

#### NORTH AND SOUTH

Meanwhile, the mother congregation has also continued to grow. To accommodate its congregation of 500 people in its 250-seat sanctuary (at 1587 Frances Street in Vancouver), the church was running three worship services on Sunday morning: Cantonese services at 8:30 and 11:15, and a service in English at 10:00.



Dedication service for Pacific Grace Chinese Church South

Pacific Grace began investigating options, including starting another daughter church and buying another building. It found an appropriate building at 50th Ave. and Fraser St., about 15 minutes drive to the south. The building covered two lots including a 450-seat sanctuary. Two other houses were also included with the property. The building was being sold by a Chinese congregation from another denomination (Evangelical Chinese Bible Church), which was building a new \$6 million building.

A \$1.3 million mortgage was necessary to buy the building, and the Pacific Grace leadership did not think it was appropriate to burden a daughter church with that kind of debt. It therefore decided to buy the building, remain a single congregation but meet in two locations. About half of the congregation is now meeting in each place.

The South Pacific Grace building was dedicated on March 26. This group has a single worship service at 10:00 a.m. By design, it is a more contemporary seeker-sensitive service, intended to appeal to the unchurched. There is a freer preaching style and more contemporary music, using overheads instead of hymnbooks. Sunday school is held before the service, and cell groups meet immediately after. The North Pacific Grace group is still running two services but has temporarily

## MCC B.C. withdraws support for women's conference

At a special May 1 meeting, the Mennonite Central Committee British Columbia Board decided that it could no longer endorse the May 26-28 inter-Mennonite women's conference called "Unity and Uniqueness in Christ", which is being held at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, B.C. The endorsement was withdrawn after questions were raised by local Mennonite Brethren and Conference of Mennonites in Canada church leaders about the theological views of one of the conference's keynote speakers, Elizabeth Tapia of the Philippines.

Tapia, an ordained United Methodist minister and professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary in Dasmariñas, Philippines, is the author of *On Philippine Spirituality: A Liturgy Arising from Our People's Struggle for Life and Wholeness*. The liturgy, which includes Bible readings, hymns and prayers, also includes a "ritual of cleansing smoke", incense, the ringing of bells or a gong and references to Mother Earth. There is also a call to come into the presence "of Bathala, our God, Creative Power and Love".

Despite MCC's decision to withdraw support, conference organizers say they plan to go ahead with the conference.

Dave Giesbrecht, chair of the MCC B.C. Board, says the agency's decision to withdraw its support from the conference is "a matter of accountability to our supporting churches".

Vange Thiessen, a member of the conference's planning committee and chair of the MCC B.C. Women's Concerns Committee, says it's a case of misunderstanding, cultural misperception and prejudice based on inadequate information. "Some church leaders leapt to the conclusion that it [the conference] is radical feminist and New Age without ever getting adequate information," she says.

The conference is one of a series of inter-Mennonite women's conferences

which have been held around North America over the past 20 years. Two years ago, the conference was held in Kitchener/Waterloo, Ont.; the conferences are organized by ad hoc committees in host communities.

According to Thiessen, the purpose of this year's conference is to "worship God and celebrate a global sisterhood with Christian women around the world, to be challenged by the way the Bible speaks across cultures and to support and encourage women to use their gifts at home, in the church and in their communities".

Before Tapia's authorship of the liturgy was known, the B.C. Mennonite Brethren Conference Board of Family Ministries had supported the conference with start-up money.

In a May 3 letter to Dorothy Martens, chair of the conference's planning committee, Giesbrecht indicated that MCC B.C. had become aware of "a high level of discomfort" regarding the conference and had decided it could no longer "give its blessing to this event. . . . MCC B.C. cannot endorse a particularly controversial event that threatens to erode constituency confidence and support for the wider ministries of MCC."

In an interview, Giesbrecht said that "MCC is accountable to the supporting churches and conferences. We ignore their concerns at our peril."

According to MCC B.C. Executive Director Ed Janzen, the conference was beginning to "take on huge implications for MCC". Although the agency initially supported it, he says the implicit threat from some local church leaders that support for MCC would suffer if sponsorship was continued "forced the agency to respond. Some pastors were even suggesting that their conference officially disassociate itself from MCC."

The controversy began soon after brochures about the conference were sent

ily cancelled its 8:30 service.

Pacific Grace Chinese Church has a single deacons board, and David Chan serves as senior pastor of both parts of the congregation. On the first and third Sundays of each month, he greets people coming to Sunday school at the South location, then goes to the North site to preach both the English and the Cantonese sermons. On the second and fourth Sundays, he is at Sunday school, preaches in the morning service and leads a cell group at the South location,

then travels to the North location in time to pronounce the benediction at the close of the Cantonese service. He preaches the same sermons in both locations. Communion is served on the first Sunday of the month at the North location and on the second Sunday in the south.

Chan says that the two groups may eventually decide to become separate congregations but that for now the arrangement is working very well. *JC, from reports by Keynes Kan, Grace Wong and David Chan*