



minister

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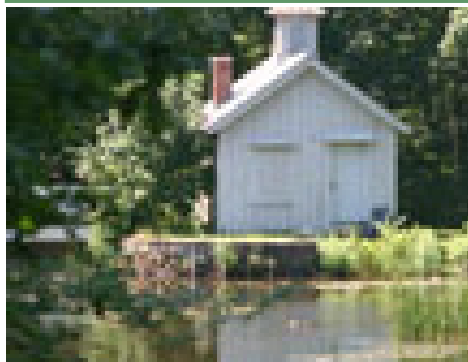


Photo Credit: Michael Sayer

Self-care

Vegetarianism by Faith

Don Ng



Growing up in a Chinese-American home, there was always some kind of meat dish. Even if there wasn't enough money to buy a prime cut of beef, there was always *lop-cheung*, sausages that came tied in bunches with the string used to dry them in the butcher shop. After a pot of white rice was washed and the water had been boiled off, you put a *lop-cheung* in the pot for each person eating that night and covered it. After a few minutes, the rice was fully soaked in the fat of the *lop-cheung* and the

aroma filled the house. Then it was time to eat. It is said that Chinese eat anything with four legs except the kitchen table.

In 1998 I was called to serve as the Senior Pastor of the historic First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco. At the other end of our street stood a restaurant, Uncle's Café, that still serves one of the best tasting ox tail stews in town. Instead of *lop-cheung* over rice, the ox tail stew, mixed with potatoes, carrots, onions, and celery in a thick gravy, is poured over the rice. This is a big step from what I had at home. For about \$5, you get the stew over rice, a dinner roll, a cup of coffee, and a piece of apple pie. I ate with no guilt or self-consciousness. And for such a price, it's cheaper than a Big Mac!

As Senior Pastor my weekly responsibilities included preparing a sermon and a Bible study. Every week, I sought to interpret the Scriptures in a way that had relevancy for our congregation. During one season my personal study led me to read Genesis 2, and I learned how in the original creation God planned for us to eat food that grew from the ground. I read Isaiah 11 and discovered how, in the future, God wants us to live peaceably with all living things, including cattle, pigs, chickens, turkeys, fish, and shellfish. I began to experience an inner struggle that questioned why God's plan for creation was not being made evident in my personal lifestyle.

Every time I stood behind the pulpit I called people to be more giving knowing that they would still hold some back. I called people to be more kind knowing that they still had prejudices. I called them to act and live as the Body of Christ knowing very well that there were still gossip, backbiting and squabbles in our church. I began to understand that I would always be calling people to be more than they are able to be until the age of Christ's reign. I came to the realization and then the conviction that I am a vegetarian not by birth in a Chinese-American home, but by faith, so that I may model for the *not yet* and for the *is to come*. For me, being a vegetarian is a matter of personal and spiritual integrity.

My eating decision opens discussions about other lifestyle issues. It's no longer possible for me to eat vegetarian and not look into every other aspect of living more wholistically. Physical exercise becomes important and essential and now occupies two time slots for playing tennis in my weekly day-timer planner. When tennis is not possible, I substitute gardening and housework as alternative forms of physical exertion. Following recommended physical check-ups and taking vitamin supplements provide the confidence that my health is on the right track.

As the result of my conviction, multiple circles of life and relationships are also affected. While my wife is not a vegetarian, when we eat at home together we both eat vegetable-based meals. We shop at markets that have more vegetarian products and fresh fruits and vegetables. Last year I even started a small planter-box garden that has yielded heirloom tomatoes, string beans, and strawberries.

Perhaps the most significant transformation of what started as my rediscovering the meaning of Scriptures and how that has affected my lifestyle is how my church has responded to my decision. While I haven't converted as many to vegetarianism as God has transformed lives to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in the past 11 years, I have made a small impact. Our congregation is more aware of having a vegetarian option when I come over for dinner. They make the dish and try it for themselves and on many occasions, they even like it.

When I was first called into Christian ministry way back in 1975, I never thought that I would not be eating anything with four legs except the kitchen table. But what I do know now is that God has called me to be faithful, both when I stand behind the pulpit and when I pick up a fork.

Don Ng is the Senior Pastor of the First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco since 1998. Previously, he was on the staff of American Baptist Educational Ministries in Valley Forge for over 20 years and grew up at another historic church, the First Baptist Church of Boston.

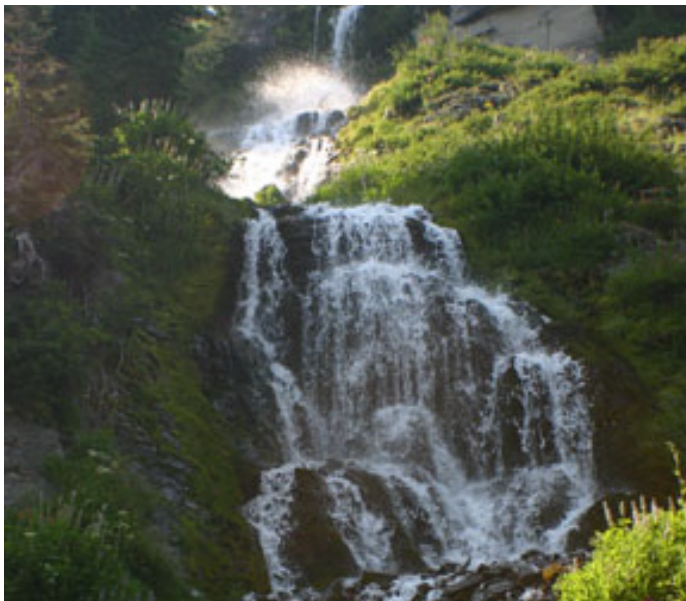


Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

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- Offers leaders opportunities to articulate a distinct ministerial viewpoint, among the many denominational perspectives that need to be voiced and heard, as we work together for the growth of Christ's kingdom;
- Serves as an advocate for its members in times of difficulty and conflict;
- Is solely focused on the well-being of clergy as they engage in the ministerial calling in all of its dimensions.

www.ministerscouncil.org



Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

The Ministers Council Provides a Community for its Members:

- To assume responsibility for the faithful practice of the ministerial calling;
- To develop and promote ethical standards that both guide and shape the way in which the vocation of ministry is performed;
- To assume personal responsibility for and to encourage physical and emotional well-being in the practice of ministry;
- To inform, support and encourage one another in the deepening of personal and communal spiritual life;
- To work together to develop the skills necessary to become effective servants of Christ's church
- To encourage growing friendships that inform and correct the leader as she or he seeks to faithfully respond to the call of God in Christ Jesus.



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mission

The Ministers Council is the professional association of ministerial leaders within the American Baptist Churches USA. We are working together to:

Connect colleagues through Together in Ministry groups and Communities of Practice

- Establish and maintain professional and ethical standards of the Christian ministry
- Give support to the members of this body and be an advocate for them in their professional relations
- Resource ministry through our web site at www.ministerscouncil.org
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- Encourage the recruitment and nurture of candidates for the various church vocations
- Provide a means of expression and debate by members of this body on issues that affect the professional ministerial leadership of the American Baptist Churches USA
- Cooperate with the appropriate units of the American Baptist Churches USA in matters of mutual interest and concern, including recruitment, placement, compensation, continuing education, and counseling



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