



No. 17, Spring 2005

# The Hearth

A Newsletter for the Friends of OMSC



**BREAKING BREAD:** (Left to right) OMSC senior resident host and hostess **Philip** and **Vicky Gerenia**, who retire from OMSC in June; **Therese Tinkasiimire**, a Catholic sister from Uganda who has been researching AIDS; and **Percival Lynch**, the residents committee chair and the rector of Anglican congregations on Jamaica's northern coast, share a meal together in October, at the community's monthly potluck dinner.

## From the Executive Director

### A Time for Farewell

By Jonathan J. Bonk  
Executive Director

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. . . ." Ecclesiastes 3:1-2*

Another program year has ended, and we have begun to say goodbye to our beloved residents as they return to their places of service in Congo, Korea, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, The Netherlands, South Africa, Indonesia, the Philippines, Ecuador, Jamaica, India, Taiwan, Myanmar, China, Zambia, Laos, Denmark, and yes, even the United States! How we will miss them!

OMSC is a place where much of life's *everything* is compressed into a few months of *time*. Since January, several hundred men and women have participated in our seminars and lectures; travels have taken

me to Egypt, Norway, Denmark, and Scotland; the Swahili translation of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*



has taken tangible form; our Asian residents were the honored Lunar New Year guests of Gordon College's East-West Institute; the art of Wisnu Sasongko has been widely exhibited and highly acclaimed;

Nalini Jayasuriya's *A Time for My Singing: Witness of a Life*—the first of an annual succession of books featuring the work of OMSC's artists in residence—has been published; our three Myanmar residents have tutored two Yale Language Partner students in the Burmese language; five Berkeley Divinity School mission colloquia have featured OMSC residents; and three of OMSC's women have conceived—in two instances "miraculously"—and now anticipate the arrival of their newborns later this summer. If this all sounds a little breathless, know that we are filled with joy!

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### Residents Leave New Haven with a "Greater Desire for Missions"

By Meredith A. Farmer  
Yale Divinity School Intern

When missionaries and church leaders stay at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, they do not cease their ministries. The 2004–05 residents came to New Haven seeking rest and rejuvenation, which they found while here. However, they also continued their ministries in a new context, allowing every aspect of their time at OMSC to be seasoned with both wisdom and faithfulness.

This year's residents are not only saying goodbye to the OMSC community; they are also saying goodbye to friends made in New Haven and beyond. They are saying goodbye to their American mission field.

Methodists in **Ruth Daniel's** home country of Myanmar have set ambitious goals for church planting. Every congregation is expected to plant a new church within the next ten years, and Ruth hopes the strate-

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### Philip and Vicky Gerenia Welcomed Hundreds of Missionaries to OMSC

By Dan Nicholas

For more than a dozen years, **Philip** and **Vicky Gerenia** have been on the front line of OMSC, welcoming weary missionaries and professors as they arrive on the doorstep of 490 Prospect Street from distant points around the globe. The Filipino couple, who greet and orient many new residents and guests to life in the dynamic mission community that is OMSC, will retire June 30.

"We will be leaving with a heavy heart because we will be missing all of you here. We have learned to love this place," says Philip, 69, a United Church of Christ ordained

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## “I like living here. It’s a very nice place,” says third-grade resident.

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gies she has developed at OMSC will help her denomination meet its goals.

In addition to reflecting on approaches to mission, Ruth has worked hard to improve her English language skills while at OMSC. As a student in the English as a Second Language course, taught by Jean Bonk, Ruth and other residents learned how to navigate cultural differences by working on writing and speaking.

Outside of OMSC, Ruth has been active in her roles as a minister, teacher, and friend to people in the wider community. She has been involved in Branford United Methodist Church, where she works with small groups and assists church leaders. And, together with **Phyu Phyu Aye** and **Nant Hnin Phyu**, also from Myanmar, Ruth has been tutoring two Yale Divinity School students in Burmese.

Phyu Phyu Aye, Nant Hnin Phyu, and Ruth also have been actively connected this year to the larger Burmese community on the East Coast. The three women celebrated Thanksgiving with fellow Burmese in Washington, D.C., and Christmas in New York City, enjoying fine hospitality and fellowship.

Staying at OMSC has been a rejuvenating experience for Ruth. She says, “I have really benefited from life at OMSC and will go back with new insights—refreshed and with a greater desire for missions.”

**Michael L. Lolwerikoi**, a Kenyan who joined the community this spring, has plunged into his role as an OMSC intern working on the Swahili translation of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. The opportunity to learn more about the history of Christianity in Africa has been a particular benefit of his work. “The stories themselves are a legacy of missionaries from the West and indigenous missionaries,” he says. For Michael, this vibrant legacy is “a sign that the church in Africa was planted in fertile soil.” In his Ph.D. studies, Michael will be particularly interested in indigenous African Christianity.

Michael sees translation as crucial to the *DACB* mission, as the dictionary assures that the collected biographies will become what he describes as the “African church’s story for both the global South and the global church.”

In addition to work on the *DACB* translation project, Michael has also contributed much to community life. He particularly appreciates that the diversity at OMSC mirrors the rich variety present



**SPRING TOUR:** (Left to right) **Seong-II Lee**, an Air Force chaplain at the Ministry of Defense in Seoul, South Korea, his wife, **Mi Ok Kim**, and their children **Hye Young**, **Chan Young**, and **Jun Young Lee**, along with **Young Jin (Andrew) Kim**, a missionary serving in Bolivia with *SIM International*, were part of a group that visited the birthplace and other New England sites important to the life of theologian and philosopher Jonathan Edwards. **James Phillips**, OMSC’s former associate director, led the tour, which included stops in Northampton and Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

well. This year, OMSC counts nine children among its residents.

As a third grader at Worthington Hooker Elementary School, Rachel Marie is active in New Haven life. When the school day is done, she likes to explore the natural history exhibits at the Peabody Museum and participate in activities at First Presbyterian Church in New Haven.

Rachel Marie enjoyed the seasonal activities planned by the OMSC staff this year. She particularly liked celebrating Halloween and Valentine’s Day with the other children. For Halloween, younger residents were invited to attend a party dressed up in their most creative costumes; Rachel Marie came disguised as a sleek black cat.

At the party, each child picked up a treat bag filled with candy before adult residents **Laura** and **Jeff Meitzner Yoder** escorted the band of excited children through the apartment complexes, helping them gather more treats from residents.

On Valentine’s Day, Rachel Marie and other OMSC children celebrated by decorating cookies and cupcakes.

Rachel Marie will miss OMSC, but she admits that the bright sunshine of the Philippines, where her parents teach, gives her something to look forward to. When asked what she would like to change about her time at OMSC, she concedes after a thoughtful pause: “The weather.”

While **Atula Jamir** is relatively new to her role as an OMSC intern, she and her family are no strangers to the community. OMSC provided the perfect place for Atula’s family to live this year. She was able to finish her Master of Sacred Theology degree at Yale

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**Atula Jamir and Mangyang Imsong**



Residents and staff surprised with a baby shower (from top) Vanlalthawmi and Lalbiakhluna, April and Nathan Hedman, and Laura and Jeff Meitzner Yoder.

## A Time for Farewell

*Continued from page one*

For this has been a season to celebrate the joyful exuberance of life!

But death, too, arrives in its season. For Judy Stebbins, our director of finance and housing, and her husband, Robert, these past few months have been a time to weep and mourn the loss of Cameron, their only son. On February 22, at the age of twenty-seven, he departed this life in his sleep. As a community, our longing has been to enter fully into the grief of his parents, somehow to alleviate the crushing weight of their sorrow. We are only too well aware of our limitations, of course—rendered dumb by the recognition that even the most empathetic among us but dimly comprehends the overpowering finality of the parents' loss. Cameron's farewell reminds us that death, too, with its wrenching ambiguities, is woven into the warp and woof of every family, stirring our yearning for the day when "[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:4

## Community Grieves Following Death of Cameron Stebbins

Cameron Dickerman Stebbins, son of Robert and Judy Stebbins, died at home February 22, 2005. Judy is director of finance and housing at OMSC.

Cameron is survived by grandparents Frank and Lois Stebbins, grandmother Emalois Icenhour, aunt Linda Icenhour, aunt and uncle Sharon and Gary Dickson, cousins MaCall and Chase Dickson, aunt and uncle Sue and Brian Morrison, and cousins Kaitlyn and Kyle Morrison.

He was born in New Haven on February 3, 1978; attended Foote School and graduated from Hopkins School, both in New Haven; and graduated from Boston College (2000).

Many OMSC staff and residents attended the funeral, at which executive director Jonathan Bonk presided. A memorial garden will be created outside Judy's office window in Cameron's memory. Those who wish to contribute financially for this garden may send a designated gift to OMSC.



*In Loving Memory  
Cameron D. Stebbins  
1978–2005*

## Trip to Egypt and Scandinavia Promotes Arabic DACB

By Michèle Sigg, DACB Project Manager

DACB Project director Jonathan Bonk traveled to Egypt in February this year to seek a home and a sponsor for the Arabic-language version of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* ([www.DACB.org](http://www.DACB.org)). In Cairo he made several significant contacts, one of which was with Andrea Z. Stephanous, executive director of the Dar al-Thaqafa Publishing House, an arm of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS).

Stephanous was enthusiastic about the project and offered his collaboration. Bonk also met with Maurice Assad, former secretary general of the Middle East Council of Churches and general editor of volume four of the Arabic-language *Coptic Heritage: An Encyclopedia in Six Volumes*. Assad gave permission for the DACB to use the biographies of Coptic Christian leaders contained in the encyclopedia, once the Arabic translation center is set up.

During his visit to Norway and Denmark, Bonk discovered that, because of their ongoing missions involvement in Kenya, Tanzania, and Madagascar, Scandinavian churches are open to considering financial support of the Swahili translation of the DACB and might also facilitate the French translation. Jørn Henrik Olsen, associate professor in the Department of Systematic Theology at Copenhagen University, has agreed to become a member of the DACB Advisory Council, serving as the consultant for the Swahili translation.



*Jonathan Bonk "on the move" in Egypt.*

As OMSC's academic year draws to an end, preparations are being made to set up the DACB francophone coordination office in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Fohle Lygunda li-M, one of the Project Luke fellows in residence this year, will be the regional coordinator for francophone Africa and director of DACB office operations. The *Instructional Manual for Researchers and Writers* and all other DACB materials have been updated and revised in French. Fohle will lead a DACB-sponsored seminar at the Kinshasa office in October 2005 to which francophone contacts from several countries will be invited.

## “We will try to enjoy our retirement life and still be useful for the Lord.”

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minister who works part time at the study center. Adding her agreement, Vicky states, “OMSC is a part of my life. I love this place. I love the people. Everyone is so nice and very supportive.”

The senior host and hostess now live in Doane Hall in a spacious, three-bedroom apartment that overlooks the center’s parking lot, but for many years they resided in an apartment, no longer there, on the third floor of the administration building. Life in Cebu City, in the Philippines, will be quite different for the couple, who plan to remain active in ministry when they return there later this summer.

“When we retire we will try to enjoy our retirement life and still be useful for the works of the Lord,” says Philip, who is often asked to preach at various churches when vacationing in the Philippines. He will assist younger pastors as needed, preach when invited, and lend his personal library to church leaders who lack sufficient resources to advance their ministries.

Vicky, 70, dreams of the day when she can keep a garden and volunteer in the gift and flower shop of a church-related hospital.

With the steady pace of arriving residents, eager to learn the ways of American culture, and of short-term guests and seminar participants, who want keys to their rooms and details of local resources, Philip says, “There was never a dull moment for us during almost 13 years here. We have enjoyed serving the guests and resi-

dents. It has been our privilege to associate with and help them in any way.”

The Gerenias joined the OMSC team in December 1992. When then-director Gerald Anderson interviewed them for the position, Vicky says he asked an essential question that has guided their experiences since: “Are you flexible?”

In addition to orienting residents, Vicky prepares coffee breaks during seminars, answers the telephone when the receptionist is on a break, and cleans guest rooms when the housekeeper is busy elsewhere. Philip also drives residents to doctor appointments or for grocery shopping, empties office trash, and makes security rounds many nights.

Philip just completed four years as senior pastor of Filipino-American United Church of Christ in Queens, New York. Before that he was the pastor, for nearly nine years, of Asian-American United Church of Christ, in New Haven.

He expressed appreciation for the cross-cultural learning opportunities at OMSC that are “rich and varied when compared to our culture in Philippines.

I have learned much humility while living here, that it does not matter what kind of job you are doing as long as you are doing it for the Lord. That’s what I learned here—humility and industry.” Africans at OMSC have been among those who have modeled this servant humility, Philip says.

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*Philip Gerenia drives residents on grocery shopping trips each Friday afternoon.*

## Preparing to leave OMSC, family is thankful “from the very depths of our hearts.”

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Divinity School this fall while her husband, **Mangyang Imsong**, studied mission and culture at OMSC and their children, **Lensanok** and **Alimen**, benefited from living in a loving Christian environment with energetic playmates.

This spring Atula began her work as an OMSC intern. Working with staff members Pamela Sola and Judy Stebbins, Atula sees her work as an opportunity to brush up on some administrative skills, providing a nice change of pace from her intense academic program. Atula’s tasks have included bookkeeping and data management, but she has been available for almost any other task imaginable.

Ever the scholar, Atula integrates her divinity school education into her internship responsibilities. “I try to put a little bit of theology into everything I do,” she says. Mangyang also makes life at OMSC go more smoothly by regularly assisting OMSC maintenance supervisor, Sam Sigg.

Atula and Mangyang have found that OMSC provides a wonderful environment for their children. “The commu-

nity atmosphere is so good for them,” she says. In particular, the Doane Hall playroom has been as important to Mangyang and Atula

as it has been to their children. The playroom provided Atula with much-needed quiet time when she needed to study and to complete Th.D. applications.

Atula’s hard work has paid off, as she recently was accepted into Boston University School of Theology to study toward the Th.D. degree. While acceptance at Boston University is a blessing, Atula and her family cannot help but feel some sadness about leaving OMSC.

“We don’t want to go away from this place,” she says. She and her family take some consolation in the fact that Boston is just two hours away, hopefully allowing them to make an occasional visit. She and her family thank all OMSC residents and staff “from the very depths of our hearts.”

The OMSC staff, in turn, expresses thanks for Atula and for all of the other 2004–05 residents. We are grateful for their ministries.

*Photos by Dan Nicholas*



**HERITAGE LESSON:** (Left to right) **Karl Dadulo**, who leads Christian Heritage Homeland Ministries, in the Philippines; **Wisnu Sasongko**, OMSC’s artist in residence, a painter from Indonesia; **Jeff and Laura Meitzner Yoder**, American Mennonites working in Indonesia; **Xiaomei Zhang**, a professor at the Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China; and **Ruth Daniel**, pastor of Telugu Methodist Church and dean of studies in the Methodist Theological Institute, Myanmar, were among the residents who walked the decks of the *Mayflower II*, docked in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

## News in Brief

**Nant Hnin Phyu** of Myanmar spent about a month cross-stitching an intricate and colorful likeness of OMSC's three buildings. She learned a computer program that guided the design and then framed the creation before presenting it to OMSC in May as a gift.

Nineteen residents received a Certificate in Mission Studies during OMSC's **commencement celebration** May 12. Anyone who attended at least fourteen seminars and wrote a final paper on his or her experiences became eligible for a certificate. In addition, eleven residents received certificates for completing the English as a Second Language classes, many completing the ESL pronunciation, writing, and listening courses. Residents presented OMSC with two tokens of their appreciation that will enhance community life for future residents, a DVD recorder and a guitar.

With the commencement formalities ended and departure dates looming, the atmosphere changed dramatically later that day as residents and staff enjoyed **Cowboy Night**. The second annual cookout featured a country Western sing-along, a horseshoe tournament, and a "chuck-wagon menu" featuring Polynesian pork, buffalo-meat chili, and fajitas.

Jonathan Bonk has been named an adjunct professor in the Department of Missions at **Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary**, Seoul, Korea. Kwang Soon Lee, a former OMSC senior mission scholar in residence who is director of the seminary's Center for World Mission, visited OMSC in March and conferred the honorary professorship on the OMSC executive director.



Fourteen OMSC residents were guests of honor February 9 at the Pan-Asian Lunar New Year celebration (the Year of the Rooster) sponsored by the East-West Institute for International Studies at **Gordon College**, Wenham, Massachusetts. (Left to right) Xueqing Kan, Gordon College president R. Judson Carlberg, Xiaomei Zhang, institute associate director Dong Wong, and Aiming Wang.

**Jeff Yoder** returned to OMSC April 2 from ten weeks working as a public health and water engineer with Oxfam Great Britain in Lamno, a town in Aceh on Indonesia's west coast near an area that was devastated by the December 26 tsunami. He lectured at OMSC on his experiences. His wife, **Laura Meitzner Yoder**, received a Ph.D. this spring from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. They work with the Mennonite Central Committee in Indonesia.

**Matthew K. McCreight** was elected in December to the Board of Trustees. He is a partner in Robert H. Schaffer and Associates, a management consulting firm based in Stamford, Connecticut.



*Vicky Gerenia helps in the kitchen when special meetings and receptions are held.*

## **"OMSC is a part of my life. I love this place. I love the people."**

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The Gerenias have also benefited from the faithful example of Koreans. When Vicky shows a family arriving from Korea to their new apartment, the entire family gathers to offer thanks for safe travel, a prayer habit that has especially impressed Vicky.

She has also been touched by the many residents who say they will "return home to share everything they have learned" while at OMSC. The Gerenias plan to follow that example when they return to the Philippines.

"It has been a privilege and a wonderful ministry to be here serving missionaries and international leaders," Philip observes, reflecting on their many years of service.

### **With Appreciation**

*"Vicky and Philip have been an integral part of our community since December 1992, when they joined the staff as senior host-hostess couple. The genuineness of their welcome and the warmth of their hospitality have blessed the hundreds of men and women who have come to OMSC for renewal. People of sincere integrity, their lives have borne quiet testimony to their inner faith and strength of character. We will miss them, but we will not forget them! And we pray with all our hearts that God will give them a long and fulfilling retirement in their home and with their family in the Philippines."*

—Jonathan Bonk, Executive Director

*"Over the four years I have known them, I have appreciated the strong OMSC welcome Vicky and Philip have offered to all who arrive. Cheerful and smiling, they have worked to set guests at ease and to assist them in any way needed during their stay. I wish them bon voyage as they return to the Philippines and trust they will find, in turn, a welcome with open arms as they renew connections with family and friends there."*

—Dwight Baker, Program Director

*"The epitome of steadfast faithfulness and devotion to the life and work of the OMSC community, Vicky and Philip Gerenia will be sorely missed as they continue their journey as true and faithful servants. OMSC has been truly blessed with their presence over the past twelve and a half years, and we say, "Thank you and best wishes."*

—Judy Stebbins, Director of Finance and Housing

## Sasongko's Art Infused with a Global Perspective

**Wisnu Sasongko**, the 2004–05 Paul T. Lauby artist in residence, feels that life at OMSC encouraged him to think broadly about the themes in his art and infused his new creations with a global perspective. “We are talking about the whole world here at OMSC,” he says with his arms outstretched.



*Wisnu Sasongko (center) was honored by (left to right) Martin Jean, director of the Yale Institute of Sacred Music; Jaime Lara, associate professor of Christian art and architecture; Jonathan Bonk, executive director of OMSC; and Harold Attridge, dean of Yale Divinity School.*

Living in the OMSC community also has given Wisnu hope that people can love each other in spite of cultural particularities. Some of his most moving artwork is born out of meditations on peace in a world of difference. As one familiar with cultural and religious conflicts, the Indonesian painter says living at OMSC has given him hope that people can live “together in harmony.”

In October Wisnu displayed his creations as part of the City-Wide Open Studios event, organized by Artspace, a contemporary arts nonprofit. The event annually draws more than 15,000 people to New Haven and is the largest such exhibit on the East Coast. It provided significant exposure for Wisnu's art.

Wisnu exhibited forty-three paintings at the Yale University Institute of Sacred Music from March 7 to April 27. With the theme “Think on These Things,” the exhibit also included a colorful reception. His art was also displayed at Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts, and the Black Rock Arts Center, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

—Reported by Meredith A. Farmer

**\$29.95**  
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**A Time for My Singing:  
Witness of a Life**

by Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya  
*New from OMSC Publications*—a 128-page book that displays the paintings of Nalini Jayasuriya of Sri Lanka. Known around the world, the former OMSC artist in residence offers richly diverse and evocative expressions of faith from an Asian perspective, in full-color paintings and in poetry. To order with a major credit card, call (203) 624-6672, ext. 315, or visit [www.omsc.org/books.htm](http://www.omsc.org/books.htm).

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