

THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIETNAM (NORTHERN REGION) FROM 1975 UP TO NOW

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The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) was established in 1955 with its tradition “*worshipping God and serving the Homeland*”. Our country was unified in 1975; our mountains and rivers have been into unity. Along with the development of our country, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam has many changes, opens a new period and marks a red landmark in history.

On training staff of pastors and missionaries

In December, 1987 the School of Bible and Theology of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North) enrolled students for the second course². It was the essential job because the staff of pastors and preachers of the Evangelical Church was undergoing some loss at that time. The students who were enrolled for the second term were recognized to be enthusiastic and faithful students to God by the Evangelical Churches; at the same time, local governments also confirmed their qualities and conducts.

The Management Board of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) entrusted Secretary General Bùi Hoàn Thử with headmaster of the school. Student Âu Đăng Cường was expelled from the school because he followed other religion

On teachers: at first time, pastors Hoàng Kim Phúc, Bùi Hoàn Thử and Đào Xuân Minh took turns to teach. One year later, the staff of teachers had two new teachers. They were pastor Nguyễn Hậu Phương (former teacher of the Institute of Bible and Theology in Nha Trang) and pastor, Dr. Phạm Xuân Thiều (graduated from America) from the South.

On finance: Headmaster mobilized financial source form loyal believers. Some believers in Đà Nẵng sent their money to support school. The Evangelical Churches of many countries as The Democratic Republic of Germany, The Democratic Federation of Germany, Korea, and Japan... also sent their goods and money to support school. So that school provided complete foodgrains, foodstuffs and subsistence fee for students.

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² The first course enrolled students on 15th August , 1962

At the end of the second year, students did their training at churches and about one thousand people followed Protestantism. In the summer, school opened catechism –teaching classes for wives of students so that they could carry missionary work with their husbands.

The second course was ended in June, 1993. This course was supported by State. One preacher and two excellent students were ordained to be pastors by the Evangelical Church of Vietnam³. New preachers and pastors were assigned as follows:

Pastor Phùng Quang Huyền was chairman of Hoàng Nhị chapter (Nam Định province)

Pastor Vũ Hùng Cường was chair man of Hải Dương chapter (Hải Dương Province)

Pastor Vũ Quang Huyền, chair man of Nam Định chapter

Preacher Âu Quang Vinh came back Hà Nội chapter

Preacher Nguyễn Gia Huân came back Hà Nội chapter and preached in Phúc Yên church and he was treasurer of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (the North)

Preacher Nguyễn Đức Đồng came back Hà Nội chapter. He took part in clerical work of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam.

Preacher Hoa Văn Trục chair man of Nghệ An chapter.

Preacher Nguyễn Hữu Mạc chair man of Khả Cảnh chapter (Thái Bình province)

Preacher Hoàng Đức Luân chairman of Hoàn Dương chapter (Nam Hà province)

Preacher Bùi Văn Triệu chairman of Hải Phòng chapter

Preacher Bùi Văn Sản chairman of Kiến An chapter (Hải Phòng city)

Preacher Bùi Văn Nghĩa, chairman of Thượng Trang chapter (Hải Phòng city)

Preacher Lý Tiến Lưu chairman of Bắc Sơn chapter (Lạng Sơn province)

Preacher Đào Văn Thắng came to Khả Cảnh chapter (Thái Bình province)

Preacher Bùi Bình Thoại did in office of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam

Almost pastors and preachers who came to regions were supported by the Evangelical Church of Vietnam and local governments.

³ This suggestion overcomes the regulations of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) because preacher wants to be ordained as pastor he has to chair chapter for three years.

Because educational facilities of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam did not meet the standards of university, so in 2005 the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) sent 14 students to learn in the Institute of Bible and Theology of Vietnamese General Confederation of the Evangelical Churches (Southern region). The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) enrolled 20 additional students for the 4th course; 10 Hmongs and 5 Daos were sent to learn in the Institute of Bible and Theology⁴

Because of the development of Protestantism in the Northern mountain provinces, from April, 2007 the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (northern region) has opened in –service training courses on catechism so that leaders of groups can understand deeply Bible and they have abilities to lead other believers. Now the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) has have opened 4 courses. The first course had 60 students. This course ended on November 26th, 2010. From February, 2011 the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) has opened the continuation class on theology for 29 voluntary missionaries and officers who were responsible for chapter and refresher courses for pastors. The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) invited two pastors Nguyễn Anh Tài and Hồ Thế Nhân of the Institute of Bible and Theology in America to teach.

2- On international relation:

In integrative and developmental tendency, the international relation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) is increasing more and more. Many foreign delegations visit Vietnam, they are surprised when the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) has existed in the socialist country.

From 1973 to 1987 pastor Bùi Hoàn Thử, vice president and Secretary General of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) went to foreign countries many times. He went Russia, Democratic Republic of Germany, Italy, Pakistan, Thailand, India, France, and China.... and took part in international meetings. These meetings dealt with problems as anti-war of aggression in Vietnam, defense of world peace, expanding friendly relations with other countries, calling for humanitarian aid....

In November, 1978 World Council of churches invited the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) to take part in Conference

⁴ The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region): *The recapitulative report on the situation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam of the Management Board in term 2004- 2008 and Line of action in term 2009-2013*, p.8

in Geneva (Switzerland) in order to raise money for building of Protestant churches in the North, which were damaged by natural calamity, and war. The Management Board of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) appointed a delegation to participate in Conference. The head of delegation was pastor, vice president Vũ Đan Chính. When answering interview, pastor Vũ Đan Chính told uprightly and faithfully about the situation of our country and present condition of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region). His answer made a strong impression on international friends. The representatives of other countries admired when the Evangelical Church of Vietnam has actually existed in the communist country and overcome war period. Conference decided to help the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region). Pastor Vũ Đan Chính died on 2nd March, 1979. Pastor, Vice –President Bùi Hoàn Thử was appointed to receive aid.

During 8 years (1980 -1988) thanks to aid, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) built and restored church in 2 Ngõ Trăm street (in 1984) and 6 other churches as: Sở Thượng church (Hà Nội), Nam Định, Hải Phòng, Kiến An, Hoàn Dương (Hà Nam), Phúc Yên (Vĩnh Phúc). Thanks to aid, people in the West South region were received thousands of pieces of sheet iron; pupils were received many teaching instruments; two consulting-rooms and one hospital were established. In 1986, the Evangelical Church of the Democratic Republic of Germany offered the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) 5000 meters of oil cloth. Pastor Bùi Hoàn Thử offered government these 5000 meters⁵. In this time through the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) Protestantism of Korea gave 200 million Vietnamese *dongs* to Xã Đàn Deaf and Dumb Children School, the Committee for Children Care and Hòa Bình leper's hospital.

To respond the appeal of World Council of Churches in 1981, the Evangelical Church of Eastern Germany and the Evangelical Church of Western Germany the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) with thousand books of the Bible and hymnbooks. In 1991, the Evangelical Church of Hong Kong sent 10.000 Bibles and 10.000 hymnbooks to the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region). The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) used half of those books and sent the rest to the Evangelical Church of Đà Nẵng and the Evangelical Church of the Central provinces.

⁵ The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region)- Hanoi chapter The celebration of 85 years of Hanoi Chapter's foundation (material for private circulation) p.10

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) is related to the Evangelical Churches of the World in activities. Many pastors are sent to visit foreign countries. Pastor Bùi Hoàn Thử visited and worked with Association of Catholic Charitable of Korea (August, 1992). In 1994, Pastor Bùi Hoàn Thử attended at the Evangelical General Assembly in Korea. In 1995, the Conference of Asian Christian Churches in Korea dealt with Protestantism in Vietnam.

The Association of Catholic Charitable of Korea financed the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region), at the same time it helped to restore following churches: Hoàn Nhị church (in Nam Định province), Khả Cảnh church (in Thái Bình province), Thượng Trang church (in Hải Phòng city). Many places of worship were built and restored. In 2011, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) will build about 200 chapels in mountainous provinces⁶.

In recent years many dignitaries of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) and of local chapters go abroad for attending at international conferences and workshops as The Missionary Conference of Protestant Hmongs in America; The Religious Conference in Southern Africa. Many dignitaries go to see the sights and visit relative in America, Korea, Thailand, and Canada...

3- The development of believers

After 1990, the amount of believers in provinces and cities has been increasing more and more. Many Vietnamese people who live abroad follow Protestantism and they write letters to advise their relatives to follow Protestantism since then many Vietnamese people follow Protestantism. On the other hand, some people went to abroad and followed Protestantism when they return to our country they take part in missionary work and developing Protestantism in our community. The amount of Protestant believers is increasing more and more in following places: Bắc Giang province, Thái Bình province, Hạ Long city, Móng Cái city (Quảng Ninh province), Thủy Nguyên, Đồ Sơn, Kim Côn (Hải Phòng city), Thái Nguyên city (Thái Nguyên province), Sầm Sơn, Quảng Phú, Nông Cống, Đông Sơn (Thánh Hóa province) ect⁷.

From December, 1992 some people of ethnic groups as Hmông, Dao, Sán Chỉ, Nùng, Pà Thẻn in Northern Mountainous Regions listened to the

⁶ The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) . The draft on the history of The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) Hanoi November, 2010 (document for private circulation), p. 33

⁷ The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region): *The recapitulative report on the situation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam of the Management Board in term 2004- 2008 and Line of action in term 2009- 2013* p. 7-8

programme of FEBC (Far East broadcasting) (it has been established by missionary society and in Manila Capital of Philippine) so they followed Protestantism. The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) accepts and preaches them. Up to December, 1992 the amount of Protestant believers has been 125.000 believers, they worship God in 133 places which are recognized by the governments of cities and provinces. In Cao Bằng province there are 29 chapters; in Bắc Cạn province there are 23 chapters; In Lào Cai province there are 18 chapters; in Thái Nguyên province there are 14 chapters; in Hà Giang province there are 12 chapters; in Tuyên Quang province there are 12 chapters; in Thánh Hóa province there are 5 chapters; in Lai Châu province there are 8 chapters; in Yên Bái province there are 3 chapters; in Quảng Ninh province there are 3 chapters; in Điện Biên province there are 2 chapters; in Lạng Sơn province there is 1 chapter; in Hải Phòng city there is 1 chapter⁸.

Almost chapters have sections that manage the activities of believers. Depending on age these section organize many useful and pleasant activities for believers

4-The Vietnamese General Confederation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam strengthens chapters

From 30th November to 2nd December, 2004 the 32nd Congress of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) held in Hanoi. Congress adopted new Regulations but persevered guideline of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) including 2 points:

“Worship Trinity whole-heartedly”

“Love of Homeland, defense of peace, implement of justice, liberty, equality and labor”⁹.

The new regulations define concretely the responsibility of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam towards society:

The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) operates in accordance with Constitution and laws of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.”

“It regularly educates its followers about patriotism, civic obligations, the observance of law and the spirit of solidarity among the population in

⁸⁸ The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region): *The recapitulative report on the situation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam of the Management Board in term 2004- 2008 and Line of action in term 2009- 2013*, p.9

⁹ The Regulation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) 2004 article 4

order to contribute to national construction of the Homeland, national defense and peacekeeping¹⁰,

On the dogma: 9th chapter defines that all believers have to defend environment¹¹ and have responsibility to society: “Every *Christian respects God and loves Him*”; “*You should have responsibility to society. You should love and help others in difficult condition*”; “*You should participate in social work in your locality, keep the solidarity and serve social welfare wholeheartedly and pray peace for every people* (Genesis 1: 26-28/ Hebrew Bible 12:14/Timothy 2: 1-2/ Matthias 22: 37-39)

At the same time Christians have to discharge their duties: “*they should obey authorities because they were created by God*”; “*You should pray for authorities so they can carry out order and social justice*”; “*You should respect the current laws and fulfill their civic duties in accordance with dogma*”(Roma 13: 1-7/ Matthias 17: 24-27)¹²

This is surpassing progress of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) in new stage because at present there are some religious organizations, which want to exceed the regulations of the law. They want to be in the same rank of State in correcting social community.

The 32nd Congress elected the new Management Board with 13 members

President: Pastor Phùng Quang Huyền

Vice-President: Pastor Nguyễn Gia Huân

Secretary General: Pastor Âu Quang Vinh

Treasurer: Pastor Nguyễn Đức Đồng

Permanent member: Pastor Vũ Quang Huyền.

The Management Board decides that: Pastor Bùi Văn Triệu came back Khả Cảnh chapter (Thái Bình province); pastor Nguyễn Hữu Mạc held office as the president of Hoàn Nhị chapter (Nam Định province) and Pastor Phùng Quang Huyền came back Hà Nội to hold office as president of The Management Board.

Immediately after Congress, Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng received pastor, President Phùng Quang Huyền and he expressed government's support to the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region). In 32nd term, the Management Board of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) was granted permit for publishing *Thong cong* review. Editor in chief of this review was writer Bùi Bình Thi, the member of the

¹⁰ The Regulation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) 2004 article 8

¹¹ The Regulation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) 2004 article 70

¹² The Regulation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) 2004 article 69

Management Board of 32nd term. This review was the first formal publication of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region).

33rd Congress of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) held from 24th- 25th February, 2009 in Hoành Nhị chapter, Giao Hà village, Giao Thủy district, Nam Định province with 250 formal representatives. Among them, there were 130 representatives of ethnic groups.

In this Congress 8, newly appointed pastors were ordained to be pastors. They were pastor Nguyễn Hữu Mạc (Hoành Nhị), pastor Bùi Văn Sản (Kiến An), pastor Bùi Văn Nghĩa (Thượng Trang), pastor Bùi Văn Triệu (Khả Cảnh), pastor Âu Quang Vinh (Hà Nội), pastor Nguyễn Đức Đồng (Phúc Yên). The list of pastors has Pastor Lý Tiến Lưu but he died before Congress.

The 33rd Congress elected new Management Board with 13 members

President: pastor Nguyễn Hữu Mạc

Vice –President: pastor Phùng Quang Huyền

Secretary General: Pastor Bùi Văn Sản

Treasurer: Pastor Nguyễn Đức Đồng

Permanent member: Pastor Hoàng Đức Luân

Congress adopted 8 duties in the term 2009- 2013. Among them, there was a problem on coordinating and reuniting the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Southern region) (this content was dealt with in the 32nd Congress).

From the past until now, dignitaries, pastors of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) always have led and reminded believers to carry out civic obligations well and combine with local community.

In countryside, there are many typical believers in the emulation movement for productive labor, hunger erudition, poverty reduction ...

In cities believers do well in office, enterprise... they are praised.

In the mountainous regions: Under the leadership of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region), many new chapters do well both Church's jobs and society's jobs. The awareness of community of religious faith in the mountainous region has gradually improved.¹³

Local governments often commend moral lives of believers. Many families are recognized as “a cultural family” by precinct or village. Believers carry out a way of life “for better secular and religious life”.

¹³ The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region): *The recapitulative report on the situation of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam of the Management Board in term 2004- 2008 and Line of action in term 2009- 2013*, p.11-12

In last years, almost chapters organized to learn and study the Ordinance on Belief and Religion; Regulation 22/2005/ ND-CP of Government. Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg of Prime Minister on some tasks regarding Protestantism. Chapters respond movements launched by Fatherland Front.

Some chapters combined with Fatherland Front and charitable societies in region to respond the movement of “*humanitarian blood donation*”. They diagnose and heal the poor regardless of Christians or non Christians.

Almost pastors and newly appointed pastors are members of Vietnam Fatherland Front from local level to Central level. They make a bridge between Church and administration. They help chapters in social work and propagation of policy line of State.

The Management Board of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) of 33rd term supported much money to people in flooded area. Through the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region), Christian Association of Korea supported 5 billion dongs to build charity hospital in Nam Dinh province.

After 1975, especially Vietnam began to implement its policy of Reform and Renewal, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) develops strongly both in width and depth, in plain, midland and mountainous region. The organizational system of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) is strengthened more and more. The rank of leaders, dignitaries are increasing more and more. In developmental process, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) shows its independence, self-control in international relation. At the same time it contributes actively in cause of building and defense of Homeland. The history of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) affirms its motto “*Living the Gospel, worshipping God, serving the Homeland and Nation:*” to be magnetic needle and only right way for the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region) that can exist, develop, go with nation and build a comfortable and happy life ¹⁴

¹⁴ In this article writer uses some documents of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (Northern region).
Thank you very much

