

Good news in brief

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [September 5, 2012](#) issue



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Art and Helen Romig were memorable people in my life. Art's parents were Presbyterian missionaries; he grew up in China at a time when the Presbyterians alone had 500 missionary workers in China. He studied at the College of Wooster in Ohio, then attended Princeton Seminary. Art courted Helen, a social worker in New York City, and they married and returned to China as missionaries. Helen and the children were evacuated to the U.S. during the Japanese occupation; Art was held in a prison camp for several years. After the war the Romigs returned to China but were sent home again, this time by the new communist government.

Art continued his ministry as a pastor and presbytery executive before "retiring" to central Ohio, where I met him. He joined the staff of the congregation I was serving, and we worked together until he retired again, this time to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Helen, an accomplished artist, had a collection of ancient Chinese gravestone rubbings that were of interest to Chicago's Field Museum. They were invited to visit the museum, and my wife and I hosted the Romigs during their stay. One night we ate dinner at a Chinese restaurant. Art ordered for us in Chinese, of course, and before we knew it he was engaged in a lively, animated exchange with our waiter. The young man hurried off, and Art said, "Wait till you see this!"

Suddenly the wait and kitchen staff had gathered around our table and were engaged in an enthusiastic and increasingly chaotic discussion. Art explained to us

that the entire staff, all students at the University of Illinois at Chicago, were from the village in western China where Art and Helen had lived and served years before. Art was inquiring about people he'd known there, some of whom he'd baptized. It was an unforgettable reminder of the reach of the global church.

Whenever I preached a sermon that was a little dense, with one too many references to illuminate an obscure point, Art would gently explain that one of the skills mission workers had to learn was to articulate the gospel simply. The proclamation of the gospel, Art said, should never be intellectually anemic but simple and direct enough that anyone could understand it.

In this issue we asked a few of our favorite authors to proclaim ["The gospel in seven words"](#) (or fewer). The pithy responses remind me of Art's wise advice. In our culture, the basic Christian vocabulary is increasingly esoteric to many. It's a useful exercise to say it simply, in a way anyone can understand.