

# Esther Gitobu Missionary Newsletter

JULY - DECEMBER 2011



## In This Issue:

### **New Samreth Church Dedicated**

Members of First UMC of Baton Rouge, La., travel to Cambodia for the dedication of their sister church's new building, which their congregation financed.

(see page 2)

### **Youth Events Equip Young Leaders**

Training events held on the district and national level this summer prepare youth to take on leadership roles in their congregations.

(see page 4)

### **Tall Tales Abound at Pastor Retreat**

Team of Biblical storytellers teach their trade to pastors from across Cambodia at first-ever Pastor's Retreat.

(see page 5)

### **Lay Training Inspires Church Leaders**

Volunteer in Mission team from Louisiana teaches leadership skills to church lay leaders from across Cambodia.

(see page 5)

### **Scholarship student has a dream**

English student eyes missionary career in gratitude of others' generosity.

(see page 5)

### **Family Corner**

Updates and greetings from all members of the Gitobu family.

(see page 6)

**"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, Your God reigns!"**

— Isaiah 52:7 —

Dear friends and supporters of Cambodia Mission,

Grace and Peace to you!

As I reflect on the highs and lows of 2011, I am so moved by all we have accomplished. New churches have been planted, permanent church buildings have been constructed with support from partner churches, sick people were healed, pastors and laity trained, youth programs held, new women's groups formed, young people enrolled in college — and the list goes on.

We want to thank our supporters who have faithfully met the needs of the Cambodian people by denying themselves in order to give of their resources because they love God and have chosen to obey His call. It is our hope and prayer you will continue to partner with us as we make a positive impact, transforming lives by sharing the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this newsletter, you will see some exciting developments that you have faithfully supported. May the Lord continue to bless all of you who pray and share your gifts of love to reach out to your sisters and brothers in Cambodia and throughout the world.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas!!

In Christ's Amazing Love, Esther Gitobu

---

*Esther Gitobu is a United Methodist missionary commissioned by the General Board of Global Ministries and serving in Cambodia as Coordinator of Fundraising, Volunteers in Mission and Cambodian Methodist Youth. You can donate to Esther's mission using Advance Number 13959Z.*

# Dedication:

## A Louisiana church sees its commitment to Cambodian missions come to fruition

More than four months of construction, three years of planning and \$40,000 of fundraising culminated Oct. 2 in the dedication of the new Samreth Methodist Church, as congregants from churches throughout Kampong Thom Province gathered to celebrate with their supporters and partners in ministry from The First United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge, La., which financed the new church building.



Team leaders Judy Foust, left, and Cooky Coffy, participate in the dedication ceremony for the new Samreth Methodist Church, which their congregation at First UMC Baton Rouge financed.

Nine members of the Baton Rouge UMC made a sojourn to Cambodia to witness the dedication as emissaries from their home congregation, which donated \$35,000 to construct the new church. Team leaders Judy Foust and Cooky Coffy helped cut the ribbon to mark the official church opening.

The day was full of excitement, as 300 Methodist church members from across the province gathered to sing hymns, watch traditional Khmer dances, eat a fellowship meal together, and most importantly, pray for the future of the new building and its congregants.

The new building sits on land donated by Missionaries Marilyn and Joseph Chan as well as U.S. supporter Barbara Aitken and comes in at just over 1,700

square feet, including space for a pastor's office and a music room. The sanctuary itself takes up the bulk of the three-room church and can hold upwards of 300 people.

That new sanctuary was filled to capacity for its first official service on Oct. 2, as the crowd of members from Samreth and other area churches, along with curious spectators, clapped and sang to the rhythm of favorite Khmer hymns played on traditional Cambodian instruments — the roneath, khum, and trouh. The sounds of plucking and strumming, drumming and clapping resonated off the tile floors and walls as the congregation's musicians used their gifts to consecrate the building.

The children and youth of the church

also contributed their talents to the dedication ceremony, with children singing a special song and the youth performing several traditional Khmer dances, complete with the ornate costumes befitting such an occasion.

Many of the youth participating in the dances stand to benefit from the church's newest ministry, which its partners are facilitating in conjunction with the new church building. In addition to financing the church and parsonage, First UMC, Baton Rouge also raised funds to support the construction of a youth dormitory that will allow students studying at the high school next door to the church — the only school around for kilometers — to lodge at the school during the week.

The scheme facilitates the youths' education by giving them away around the long and arduous daily journey home by foot or bicycle, an undertaking that would prevent many of them from going to school in the first place.

In fact, the delegation from Baton Rouge pitched in on the construction site during the week they spent at the church prior to the dedication. Team members sweated alongside local youth, hauling dirt, mixing cement and laying bricks. By week's end, the foundation and two walls were standing tall at

the dormitory site directly behind the church. The building was completed shortly after their departure.

Others from the Louisiana team spent their week putting on a Vacation Bible School program for 40 of the church's children. Laughter filled the sanctuary of the church each day as the kids partook the traditional VBS activity genre — arts and crafts, group games, and singing and dancing — providing their own consecration of the new building.

The children capped off their week by learning a special dual language English-Khmer version of "I Love My Jesus Deep Down in My Heart," which they had the chance to perform at the official dedication service on Sunday.

Also during the dedication ceremony, Pastor Roth Oung made it clear to church members and guests

that the new building will open to the public for

the service of the community. It's a promise the congregation has already made good on, opening its doors to host a government-funded mosquito net distribution program not long after the dedication, and serving as a conference hall for a meeting of World Vision representatives recently as well as a distribution center for flood victims in this community, which has been devastated by this year's flooding.

▼ **BUILT BY A PARTNERSHIP**  
Samreth Methodist Church, below, was built thanks to a \$35,000 donation from its sister congregation in Baton Rouge, La. The building is the result of almost three years of planning.



### ◀ YOUTH DORMITORY

Delegates from Baton Rouge arrived a week before the dedication to help build a youth dormitory, also funded by their congregation, at Samreth Methodist Church. Here, a team member taps a brick into place on a wall of the dormitory.

### VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL ▶

The Baton Rouge team also organized a Vacation Bible School program for the Samreth Church's children. Here, some of the VBS participants give an enthusiastic send-off to their new Louisiana friends at week's end.



### Samreth Methodist Church BY THE NUMBERS:

**3** Rooms in the new church building, including the sanctuary, pastor's office and a music room

**12** High school students expected to be lodged in the youth dormitory

Donation from First Baton Rouge UMC to build the new church **\$35K**

**1,700** square feet in the church

Approximate number of people in attendance at the church dedication **300**

**4** Buildings on the property. The church sits next to a parsonage, dormitory and bathroom facility

# Youth events equip young leaders

## VIMs, youth take lessons on servanthood to villages at district rally

**O**n a steamy July day typical of the wet season here, about 30 Cambodian youth crammed into a small bus alongside a handful of American volunteers to participate in a day of community service.

Despite the heat and jostling along the long and bumpy ride down a pitted dirt back road, the bus was filled with an air of excitement.

"This is my favorite part," one teen informed one of his American counterparts in nearly perfect English.

The team was bound for a small village about 20 kilometers outside the city of Battambang to do a hygiene clinic for children at a local church as part of a lesson on outreach during a districtwide youth leadership rally sponsored by the West Ohio Conference.

The afternoon ahead of them was filled with laughter and soap-suds, hand-washing and hair-washing, fingernail clippers and hair combs, with the team of Ohioans and Cambodians treating more than 30 children and about a dozen adults for head lice while reinforcing basic hygiene skills.



A VIM works alongside local youth leaders to rinse the hair of a girl treated for lice in a village outside Battambang in northeastern Cambodia during a hygiene clinic put as part of a community service day for the district youth rally.

The picture was repeated that day in four other villages throughout the northwestern province of Battambang, as the 200 youth attending the rally fanned out over the countryside along

with the 11 young adults and sponsors from the West Ohio Conference, armed with lice shampoo, combs and fingernail

see **SERVE** pg. 6 ▶

## National camp gives youth place for learning, fellowship, fun in sun

**M**ethodist youth leaders from across the country had the unique experience during this year's summer Youth Camp of interacting with their Swiss counterparts, who were participating in a similar event in their home country even as a delegation of Swiss leaders traveled to Southeast Asia to help lead the Cambodian camp.

One hundred Cambodian youth participated in the annual leadership camp held Aug 1-5 in Sihanoukville, on the country's southern coast. Over the course of the week, they danced to hymns of praise, got serious at training workshops, played on the beach and exchanged regular updates with the youth at the Swiss camp.



Youth run toward the finish line in a beach wheelbarrow race.

This year's leadership camp was sponsored and led by the Swiss-French United

Methodist Church.

Two youth from each of the Methodist Mission in Cambodia's 10 districts were selected to participate in the camp as a means of equipping them to tackle the ever-increasing leadership roles available to youth within the Cambodian church.

This country experienced a baby-boom in the early nineties, as the political instability first wrought by the Khmer Rouge in the '70s came to an end. The resulting demographic imbalance is blatantly obvious in today's church, where the first of those baby boomers have achieved teenage status and often make up the majority of their local congregations.

By sheer numbers alone,

Cambodian youth are the de-facto leaders of their churches, and preparing them to take on that responsibility has been central to the mission of Cambodian Methodist Youth in recent years.

That's why leadership training events, like the Sihanoukville Camp or the earlier district training in Battambang, are so important to the Methodist Youth movement in Cambodia. Not only do the events provide youth with the skills they need to be active leaders in their congregations, they also connect the young leaders with others throughout the country, providing a support

see **CAMP** pg. 6 ▶

## Storytelling on agenda at first-ever pastor retreat

Pastors from across the Methodist Mission's 10 districts gathered for the first time ever with their families in the popular beach getaway of Sihanoukville this summer to fellowship together and hone their storytelling skills.

Aiding them in the latter pursuit was a group of dedicated Volunteer-In-Mission storytellers representing the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church who spent the week hosting workshops about storytelling via gestures, visualization and picture drawing.

Storytelling is vital, VIM and founder of the Network of Biblical Storytellers Tom Boomershine told his audience of over 300 pastors and family members, because it builds community.

"When the stories of God are told to everyone, people will come to the community. So tell the stories all the time — to everyone in the community," he said.

The pastor's retreat marked the first time in the history of the Methodist Mission in Cambodia that all the clergy from throughout the conference were able to come together. Even during the mission's annual conference, clergy have to



A Methodist pastor, standing at center, engages his fellow clergy in a dynamic storytelling session during the pastor retreat.

receive sponsorship in order to travel to the capital and participate, so many are unable to do so.

The joy that the clergy and their families felt at being able to gather together for the first time was evident throughout the week's activities, which, in addition to workshops, also included fellowship meals, a skit night, and free time on the beach.

And that joy spilled over into their storytelling, as pastors learned to use their words and actions to tell the compelling stories, not just of the Bible, but also of their own lives.

Though nervousness about the acting aspect of the new methods they were learning had some clergy off to a slow start at the beginning,

the theme of storytelling resonated with most, who come from a country rich in its oral storytelling culture. By week's end, each of the pastors stood up in front of his or her peers and recounted with vivid detail and actions a story learned by heart during the week.

At the closing ceremony, when pastors performed an epic telling of the book of Mark, Boomershine reminded them of the importance of their new storytelling mission.

"Remember the women at the tomb," he said, speaking of the women who found Jesus alive on Easter. "They had the best story in the world to tell, and they said nothing because they were afraid. So don't be afraid. Tell the story."

## Church scholarship recipient sees missionary career in his future

For Pov Phearun, one of the Methodist Mission's scholarship recipients, university is about more than education — it's about finding a way to give back to those who made it possible.

And Phearun, a 19-year-old pastor's son from Kandal Province, says he has found the path to achieve that goal in missionary service.

"I look in my country,

or other countries that have the poorest people in the world, and I want to (become a missionary) to help the people — to show them the love of God by sharing my knowledge



Pov Phearun

with them," Phearun said.

The teen is in his fourth year of English studies at Build Bright University in Phnom Penh. He has received Methodist scholarships throughout his university career and was a recipient of tuition assistance when he was in high school. His father is pastor of Chheur Teal Methodist Church.

## Young leaders have strong showing at lay leader training

The ever-increasing role of youth in the Cambodian Christian church was evident at a recent lay leadership training event held by the Methodist Mission recently, where youth made up almost one-third of the participants.

In total, 90 lay leaders attended the event sponsored and led by members of the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. The training was themed "Called to a Life of Prayerful Contemplation and Spiritual Formation."

Workshops on prayer, stewardship, service, scripture and worship were led by lay leaders and conference staff from across Louisiana.

In sessions throughout the week, participants were urged to own the ministries of their churches, learning that outreach and evangelism are not the tasks solely of the pastor, but of everyone involved in the life of the church. Each of the lay leaders, even those just in their teens, committed to start small groups meeting in or near their homes.

Lay leaders were also encouraged to share their testimony, which they did bravely, telling of the promises and struggles they face in spreading the Gospel in their home villages, and in turn, encouraging one another.

The training is expected to have a widespread effect, as one lay leader from each church in the mission's eight southernmost districts was able to attend, meaning the event will affect almost 100 local churches, and by extension, thousands of church members and even more non-Christians living in their communities.

## Family Corner



**Nicholas** began his theological studies at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, in July. He is adjusting well and commutes back and forth during short breaks to visit us here in Cambodia.

**Jeanette** (17) is now busy sending applications to various colleges. She will graduate high school in May 2012. Please uphold her in your prayers as she goes through preparations to get admission to a US college as an international student. It is quite a tedious process but necessary. **Nicole** (13) is in 8th grade and continues to have lots of fun in school. She is into basket ball, volleyball, drama and singing in the school choir. **Michelle** (11) is in 6th grade and loves nature and animals.

I have enjoyed my time with VIM teams. God continues to use VIMs to serve His purpose among the Cambodian people as more and more come to know Him and honor His ways. What always impresses me with VIM teams is that they are not "hit and run." The people they serve and minister to are left in the very capable hands of the local pastors and missionaries for follow-up teaching. Most teams come back to strengthen their relationships with their new Cambodian friends.

God is good all the time. Thank you for all your prayers and support for the Gitobu family. You are greatly appreciated-Always.

Together in His service,  
Esther, Nicholas, Jeanette, Nicole and Michelle

## Give a Gift of Love this Christmas

An Alternative Giving catalog released by the Methodist Mission in Cambodia this Christmas season features opportunities to support Cambodian youth in their pursuit of higher education. Donate a full-ride scholarship (\$400) or provide textbook assistance (\$40) to one of our youth in the name of a loved one as a meaningful Christmas gift.

See the full catalog at: [www.scribd.com/altgiving](http://www.scribd.com/altgiving)

## SERVE.....continued from page 4

clippers.

The West Ohio team donated the hygiene items, which also included kits of soap, shampoo, toothbrushes and towels for distribution, for the outreach segment of the weeklong district youth rally held in Battambang July 11-15. Youth from the northwestern provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap and Palin attended to learn lessons in leadership and outreach that they could apply at their home churches.

These types of youth training sessions are especially important to the growth of the Cambodian Church because youth and children comprise a majority of the members at many local Methodist Churches here, making these teens their congregations' de-facto leaders.

Over the course of the week, the teens had the opportunity to attend workshops focusing on topics from Biblical history to testimony to sexual purity,

most of which were taught by members of the West Ohio team.

Participants also had plenty of time for worship and fellowship throughout the week. A youth band led their fellow teens and young adults in three praise and worship sessions each day, filling the new sanctuary of Battambang Methodist Church with pounding bass lines and cymbal crashes and getting their peers singing and dancing in praise.

By the end of the week, even the Ohio delegation was singing the now-familiar Khmer choruses of the youths' favorite songs.

Sponsorship of the Battambang Youth Rally is part of the West Ohio Conference's longstanding commitment to the youth of Cambodia — a commitment which also extends to scholarship assistance for university students and support of the Faith 'Engine' Ministry youth mechanic school.

## CAMP .....continued from page 4

network they can turn to for strength, advice and camaraderie as they take on the weighty task of shaping the future of the church.

The seriousness and difficulty of achieving that mission in an overwhelmingly Buddhist-majority country where Christians are often persecuted was made clear during an emotional fireside closing ceremony Thursday night. As part of the ceremony, youth were blindfolded and asked to grope their way through a series of obstacles until they reached the end

and removed their blindfolds to face the bonfire — the symbolic Light of Christ. Leaders from each district were then commissioned in an emotional service, each of them given a candle lit from the bonfire — the Light for them to take back to their home churches.

The camp ended on an energizing note, though, as the youth transformed the bonfire arena into a giant party, dancing to traditional Khmer songs late into the night alongside new and old friends.