

Esther Gitobu Missionary Newsletter

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"I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."

— John 10:10 —

Dear Friends, Family & Supporters,

We bring you Christian greetings from Cambodia, where we continue to witness God's faithfulness in our lives and in those of the people whom we serve.

We are so thankful for the prayers and financial support that you continue to provide for my family and Cambodia mission. We could not have achieved so much without your support.

In this newsletter, you will be able to learn how your gifts are changing lives and giving hope to so many people.

Young people have been able to go to college, women have been able to provide for their families through the livelihood projects, children have received scholarships to be able to continue with their education. The list is endless. Thanks for all that has been and for being God's hands and feet.

Sincerely,

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.



Lessons in Servanthood

Mariko Seo, 17, of Tokyo secures a piece of metal fencing March 21 on a piece of church property in Roveang, Cambodia. Seo and five other youth traveled to Cambodia for a mission trip just a week after a devastating earthquake and tsunami hit their country.

Japanese youth volunteers stick with mission in Cambodia despite disaster in their own country

It was just over a week after a devastating earthquake and tsunami had hit Japan. The death toll was still rising, and thousands of families were struggling to make sense of the disaster even as fears of nuclear catastrophe gripped the nation. And amidst this chaos, six Japanese youth left their Tokyo homes to minister to the small village of Roveang, Cambodia.

Anyone would have understood a decision to cancel or postpone the trip, but the team's commitment to stick with the mission turned out to be a ministry in an of itself, said Pastor Lok Vanarith of Roveang Methodist Church, where the youth spent three days building a fence.

"I really appreciate that they spent their time and money to help us. Even with an earthquake, tsunami and other disasters in their coun-

try, they helped us because of their great love of Christ," Lok said. "This sets a good example for our congregation and youth, that they were so committed to their mission."

From a purely physical standpoint, that mission involved constructing just over a half kilometer's worth of fencing (about 1/3

mile) to encase a piece of church property soon to be the home of a communal orchard for mango, cashew and banana trees.

"They were very humble, and they worked with their hearts, trying very hard to get the job done," Lok said.

But their real job involved much more than just fence-building, the pastor added.

The team spent its three days in Roveang working with youth from Lok's congregation to build the fence. Between digging post holes and rolling out heavy bundles of metal fencing together, the Japanese and Cambodian teens formed fast friendships, learning from one another and sharing their faith struggles with their fellow minority Christians.

"The team communicated very well with the local youth," Lok said. "They worked together very closely. They still keep in touch using email and Facebook."

The six Japanese teens and their two adult leaders from Tokyo Union Church spent March 21-23 working in Roveang. They also spent time in the capital city of Phnom Penh and seeing the Cambodian national treasure of Angkor Wat before returning to Japan.



The team from Tokyo Union Church poses with the pastor and youth from Roveang Methodist Church March 22 after a long day of fence-building in Preh Vihear Province, northern Cambodia.

Youth scholarships aid promising Christian students in studies

Education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty endemic in Cambodia today. In particular, youth scholarships for university study change lives forever, and give real hope for the kind of systemic change this country so desperately needs.

That's where the Methodist Mission in Cambodia's Youth Scholarship Project comes in. With a goal of awarding 20, \$450 scholarships to worthy young people each year, this project is already churning out college graduates who have a brighter chance of finding employment in this country's stagnant economy, where the youth unemployment rate stands at just over 15 percent.

One such graduate is 23-year-old San Sok Pisey, who graduated in January with a degree in accounting from Vanda Institute in Phnom Penh. San Sok is still looking for employment within her field of study, but remains hopeful that she will



A Methodist Youth scholarship helped allow San Sok Pisey, 23, pictured here with her mother, to graduate recently with a degree in accounting from Vanda Institute in Phnom Penh.

find it says her mother, Ouk Socheat, who works at the General Board of Global Ministries' Phnom Penh headquarters as a housekeeper.

The youth scholarship project is part of the larger Cambodia Children & Youth Scholarship Advance through GBGM and has a goal of awarding a total of \$13,000 in scholarships annually. However, the project is currently underfunded, hav-

ing only received donations worth about 19 percent of that goal this year to date.

The project has been helped along, though, by a group of crafters from First UMC, Baton Rouge, La., who dedicate part of the proceeds of monthly craft sales to scholarships for young girls.

Donations can be made to the Youth Scholarship Project by designating Advance #3020791.

Member of GBGM family is latest youth to benefit from scholarship fund

At 22, Seng Kompheak, the latest recipient of a scholarship for Methodist youth pursuing university studies, is no stranger to the Methodist Mission in Cambodia.



Seng has worked at the GBGM office in Phnom Penh for almost a year as the desk assistant in the office of women's ministries.

She is pursuing a degree in Banking & Finance from the Royal University of Law and Economics, one of the top universities in the country.

The Phnom Penh native is currently in her third year of university study and is on track to graduate in 2012.

Seng thanks God and the Methodist Church for this opportunity to continue her education.

Family Corner

I remain busy hosting teams and mentoring our young people as an adviser on the Youth Committee. I've served as the Chair of Youth Committee for three years and had the opportunity to hear and be inspired by their stories of struggle and hope.



Jeanette will start her senior year in August. She was awarded 2011 East Asia Regional Council of Schools Global Citizens Award, which comes with \$500 to support community service activities in which she is involved. She is spending the summer interning with the youth program at First UMC in Baton Rouge, La., and helping with a mission trip to repair tornado damage in Alabama.

Nicole will move on to 8th Grade soon. She continues to be involved in Solar Youth activities at her local church.

Michelle will start 6th grade and is looking forward to being in middle school.

Please keep our children in your prayers.

Cambodian Methodist Youth prepare for busy summer of fellowship and leadership training

The national leadership of Cambodian Methodist Youth have been keeping busy preparing for what promises to be a pivotal summer for the church's youth movement here.

With a Youth Rally planned for July 10-16 in partnership with the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church and another Youth Camp scheduled for August 1-6 with youth from the United Methodist Church in Switzerland and France, this summer has the opportunity to be one of great growth for the church's youngest leaders here.

During the July rally, youth from Ohio will join youth leaders from each of Cambodia's ten districts for three days of Bible study and devotion, with a particular emphasis on justice and compassion, in adherence with the theme, "Called to Love and Justice, Freed to Be God's People."

The Youth Camp in August will be



CMY leaders worship during a national training event held recently.

held in conjunction with a separate youth gathering of the Swiss-French United Methodist Church, the organization sponsoring the Cambodian camp. A team of youth from Switzerland will make the journey to be at the Cambodian camp in person, but video conferences will be held throughout the week to connect attendees at the two camps. The theme for the week will be "To Know Christ and Make Him Known."

Churches put on medical clinics with help from US volunteers

More than 1,000 people in Prey Veng and Svay Rieng Provinces received free medical care during clinics hosted by Methodist Mission Cambodia in February.

The clinics were staffed by medical professionals and volunteers from the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church and included a triage area, diagnostics, basic eye glasses exams and a dental clinic staffed by local dentists and orthodontists.

The medical team set up camp at three rural churches over the course of their six days in Cambodia, converting each of the sanctuaries into a makeshift combination exam room, pharmacy and dental clinic.

They spent two days seeing patients at each church. And every place they went, demand for their services was high, with hundreds of people cueing up to seek



A medical student volunteers his time to count out pills during one of four clinics hosted by the church Feb. 13-18 in Pray Veng and Svay Rieng Provinces.

medical care each day. On the first day of clinics, at a church outside the city of Svay Rieng, more than 100 people were cued up to see the doctors long before the team even arrived.

Diagnoses ran the gamut from the benign — prescribing cough drops for a scratchy throat — to life-threatening, with several patients receiv-

ing referrals for treatment at Phnom Penh hospitals.

Patients who were referred to hospitals will be visited by staff with Community Health and Agriculture Development (CHAD), a Methodist initiative in Cambodia involved in helping villagers secure access to medical care, among other development and agricultural ef-

forts. The clinic was a joint effort between the Volunteers in Mission and CHAD, and CHAD staff will ensure those in need of further care will know how to get it.

But as with all church programming, the goal of the clinics is more than just medical, said Irene Mparutsa, missionary and CHAD staff member.

"We also hear reports from pastors of what happens after the medical team has gone back home. A lot of times we hear pastors say so many people have started coming to church because they heard, they saw, and, as we have morning devotions, people begin to experience Christianity, and they will follow to the church after the medical team has gone," Mparutsa said. "So I think ... it's breaking down walls."

Written by Amanda King for the Methodist Mission in Cambodia.

New York teens teach Bible school, build fence alongside local youth

Nine youth from the New York Annual Conference spent a week in rural Kampong Thom Province, central Cambodia, working alongside local youth to construct a fence Feb. 21-25.

The work was grueling: Digging post hole after post hole using only the equipment available — short spades for loosening the dirt and halves of coconut shells for scooping it out.

But the New York and Connecticut teens were aided by some of their Cambodian peers from the congregation, who were on-hand all week to show the young Youth Ambassadors in Mission (YAMs) the ropes.

The YAMs also got a chance to fellowship with the congregation's large children's group, leading a Vacation Bible School program for the kids in between fence-building sessions.

By week's end, most of the teens emphasized the cultural exchange component of the trip as the most meaningful to them. Whether sweating alongside their fellow youth, making arts-and-crafts creations with the congregation's children, or exploring the Cambodian national treasure of Angkor Wat, the youth spent their entire time in Cambodia learning to appreciate the culture.

The YAMs program is an

initiative of the New York Annual Conference that annually sends youth from across its six districts — which include areas of Connecticut — on weeklong international mission trips. The ethnic minority Kuy community of Okrot in Kampong Thom Province was the destination for this year's YAM trip as part of that conference's continuing mission partnership with the Methodist Mission in Cambodia. In fact, the fence the youth spent the week working on is the boundary line for a new piece of church property, which was purchased with the help of donations from the New York Conference.



A Youth Ambassador in Mission (YAM) from the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church digs a post hole Feb. 21 for a fence his team was helping construct in central Cambodia.