

World Mission

NEWSLETTER

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Most Thais consider themselves to be Buddhist, but their religious practice and belief can be a mixture of Buddhism, Brahminism, animism, and materialism. Such a complex worldview can make it difficult for Thais to believe in the uniqueness of Christ. The Thailand Covenant Church, Covenant missionaries, and our partners in mission in Thailand are working to reach the Thai people through holistic ministries that seek to minister to their physical and spiritual needs. Covenant missionary work has been carried out in Thailand since 1971. Here are just a few examples of this work.

Wise Counsel in Thailand

By Randy Bevis

When missionaries face problems and need someone to talk to, where do they go?

Tim Friesen was working as a psychologist in Michigan several years ago when he found himself counseling missionaries who had returned home from the field because of difficult issues. He was moved by the unique struggles that missionaries experience. One woman told him she was worried that if her church knew about her problems she would lose their support.

Tim believed that if missionaries could receive member care on the field they wouldn't have to return to their home countries feeling ashamed and guilty. Instead, they could receive the care they needed and continue ministry in their countries of service.

When Tim told Bruce Narramore of the Narramore Christian Foundation of his vision, he found someone who shared his passion for serving missionaries in their countries of service, and a partnership was formed.

Tim and Tammy Friesen, along with their children, Abby and Paul, went to Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2002. Their first assignment was to serve as dorm parents for Covenant missionaries in the region. During this time, Tim provided counseling for missionaries in



Tim Friesen (left) and the architect check the progress on the Cornerstone building.

Chiang Mai as well as training for mission organizations. Over the next two years, Tim worked to create a network of supporters and colleagues, and by October 2004 the first Cornerstone Counseling Center was up and running in a rented space. The center was staffed by Tim, another professional counselor, and a psychiatrist.

Following the devastating tsunami of December 26, 2004, Tim's gifts and skills as a counselor were especially needed. He and his daughter, Abby, left their home in

northern Thailand to fly to the southern province of Phuket to help relief workers process the trauma they had experienced. Tim later traveled to Indonesia and the Andaman Islands to help victims and relief workers there.

As the Cornerstone Counseling Center grew in staff and clients, Tim recognized the need for a new space with room for continued expansion. Again, he worked with the Narramore Christian Foundation to raise support for this project.

On May 30 of this year, the new Cornerstone Counseling Center was dedicated, and



Covenant missionaries Randy and Cheryl Bevis (left) and Carl and Karen Groot (right) join Tim and Tammy Friesen (center) at the center's dedication.

Tim praised God for the many seemingly impossible obstacles they had overcome as the building was being constructed. The tears in his eyes were evidence of his gratitude to God and of his passion for serving missionaries.

Cornerstone's staff has provided critical counseling help for our family as well as member care services for our entire Thailand mission. Other Covenant missionaries in the Asia region have benefited from the services of Cornerstone as well. We are very grateful for the listening ears, wise counsel, provocative questions, and encouragement toward emotional, spiritual, and physical wholeness that we have received. The staff at Cornerstone has time and again demonstrated the love and care of Christ for us in tangible ways.

Tim and Tammy Friesen are now completing their time as project mis-



Tammy and Tim Friesen

sionaries. Tim will join the staff of Thornapple Covenant Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Tammy will continue to work as a teacher. Although the Friesens will now be centered in the United States, Tim plans to continue to serve missionaries. He will remain on the Cornerstone board of directors.

Kathy Allen of Mercer Island (Wash-

ington) Covenant Church joined the staff at Cornerstone when she and her husband, Avril, moved to Thailand last year. Kathy already had a history in Thailand, having made several trips in the past years to provide member care services to Covenant missionaries.

Even though numbers don't truly represent the value of a ministry, they can provide an informative view of what goes on within the walls of Cornerstone. In the first five months of 2008, Cornerstone counselors served 365 cross-cultural workers from nineteen countries, represented ninety-one organizations, and served in twenty countries.

Because of the Friesens' obedience to God's call, many are finding healing and renewed hope at Cornerstone. □

[Randy Bevis is a Covenant missionary to Thailand.](#)

Experiencing God's Grace

By James W. Gustafson

I sat with a group of people on the concrete floor in a home in Songkhla province in south Thailand. I was team teaching with Nujon Singpila, president of the Sustainable Development Research Foundation (SDRF), on the topic of new life in Christ. As I sat listening to the members of the group—more than fifty-five people affected by HIV/AIDS from five different provinces in south Thailand—I was moved to tears of gratefulness for the grace of God that had brought this group together.

They shared how they had discovered new life in Christ and what that meant to them. They referred to the group as their new family, and there was a powerful sense of love and unity in the room. Most of the group have been rejected by their own families and have come together through the work of the SDRF, a Covenant related indigenous Thai organization. As they came to know each other, they came to know and believe in Christ. I was sitting in

the middle of a community of people who are the core of a movement of the grace of God in south Thailand that is expanding through communities of AIDS-impacted people.

The leadership of the SDRF and its related organizations is composed of people who have been serving in a cooperative relationship with the Department of World Mission for more than thirty years. Working throughout



This group of people with HIV/AIDS traveled to southern Thailand to tell of God's work in their lives.



The group celebrates the Lord's Supper.

Thailand, the SDRF focuses on holistic ministry to marginalized and at-risk communities, providing both physical and spiritual care. It has recently established an organization that focuses on the growing church planting and church leadership development needs of local communities of believers.

I recently sat listening to group of new believers in north Thailand as they worshiped together. They were part of the Lua ethnic group, who traditionally are animists or spirit worshipers and live in villages in the mountains of Nan province. As these new believers finished their worship service I asked them why they had chosen to believe

in Christ. Several of them answered that they had formerly lived a life of bondage to the spirits. They had given everything they had to the spirits but had received nothing from the spirits in return. Yet as they believed in Christ, they experienced the grace of God, which gave them everything the spirits had taken away. The transformation in their lives has been enormous: they have more food to eat, more economic stability, more family, and social stability.

For the past two or three years, I have been experiencing the fact that God is able to touch the hearts, minds,



Nujan, left, president of the SDRF, and Srinuan, center, coordinator for the SDRF HIV/AIDS work in south Thailand, pictured with Srinuan's two daughters

and bodies of people without my help. He is always ahead of me, and I find him over and over again in the different contexts I enter. I do not bring God to those places; he is always there work-

ing to meet the needs of people in the context. All I have to do is see that he is there and have the desire to join him in his local movement. It is an exhilarating experience to walk with God and see the evidence of his grace meeting the needs of at-risk communities in Thailand. □



Traditionally animists, the Lua people of northern Thailand are becoming Christians.

James Gustafson served as a Covenant missionary to Thailand from 1971 to 1998, and as executive minister of world mission from 1998 to 2002. He is currently the executive director of Global Development Network and coordinator for international relationships for the Sustainable Development Research Foundation in Thailand.

Thailand Facts at a Glance

More than 65 million people live in Thailand, the vast majority of them Buddhist (95 percent Buddhist, 4 percent Muslim, and 0.5 percent Christian). The country's area is slightly more than twice the size of Wyoming. Thailand was known as Siam until 1939.

The Thailand Covenant Church (TCC) has been working since 1971 to encourage and enable Thais to use their own cultural and musical forms in worship. The TCC has many livelihood projects such as fish farming, cross-stitch, and textile work to help people meet physical needs and to create relationships where the gospel can be lived out. Ministries include the Abundant Life Center and the Faith and Music Foundation in Bangkok, and the Foundation for Enablement in Chiang Mai and Roi Et.

Covenant missionaries serve in a variety of ministries and roles, including mission business development, fish farm consultation, speech and language therapy, community development, and evangelism. □



2008/09 EDITION

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Covenant Project and Short-term Missionaries 2008-2009

PROJECT MISSIONARIES

Project missionaries serve three to six years, are project-focused, and raise their financial support.

BRAZIL

Wainer and Magui Guimaraes

The Bridge Covenant, Riverbank, California

CENTRAL ASIA

Bob and Grace Shim

Parkwood Community, Lombard, Illinois

EAST ASIA

Dennis and Heather Choate

Life Covenant, Edmond, Oklahoma

Peter and Anna Kim

New Community Covenant, Chicago, Illinois

GUAM

Brad and Cheryl Boydston

Cornerstone Covenant, Turlock, California

Eric and Karyn Sorenson

Crossroads Covenant, Concord, California

MEXICO

Nils and Erika Clauson

Edgebrook Evangelical Covenant, Chicago, Illinois

Jo Ellen Reaves

Faith Evangelical Covenant, Wheaton, Illinois

Lisandro and Patricia Restrepo

Berkeley Covenant, Berkeley, California

MONGOLIA

Jim and Liz Sedore

Grace Covenant, Olympia, Washington

RUSSIA

Leonid and Leanna Regheta

Interbay Evangelical Covenant, Seattle, Washington

SPAIN

Andy Larsen

Quest, Seattle, Washington

COVENANT MERGE MINISTRIES

Dale Lusk

Foothill Covenant, Los Altos, California

Dolores Park, San Francisco, California

SHORT-TERM MISSIONARIES

Short-term missionaries serve one to three years in various capacities and ministries, and raise their financial support.

BELGIUM

Jared and Hannah Baker

Grace Evangelical Covenant, Chicago, Illinois

Johnna Hayward

Immanuel Covenant, Chicago, Illinois

Decorah Covenant, Decorah, Iowa

BURKINA FASO

Ben Steel

Mercer Island Covenant, Mercer Island, Washington

CAMEROON

Janelle Johnson

United Covenant, Clear Lake, Wisconsin

Karl and Mary Noren

Brookwood Covenant, Topeka, Kansas

Faith Ev. Free, Manhattan, Kansas

EAST ASIA

Chris and Diane Wiebe

Hillcrest Covenant, Prairie Village, Kansas

ECUADOR

Joel and Kim Delp

Northwest Covenant, Mount Prospect, Illinois

Chris and Jenny Hoskins

First Covenant, Omaha, Nebraska

Yonchu Song

Parkwood Community, Lombard, Illinois

Paul and Joan Spjut

Community, Golden, Colorado

MEXICO

Bruce and Katy Dockter

Cornerstone Covenant, Turlock, California

Jim and Barb Mikrut

First Evangelical Covenant, Rockford, Illinois

Laura Rodriguez

Arvada Covenant, Arvada, Colorado

NIGERIA

Tom Halgren

Fruitland Evangelical Covenant, Whitehall, Michigan

OTHER

Amy Mullin

Hillcrest Covenant, Prairie Village, Kansas

SPAIN

Nate Finch

Faith Community Evangelical Covenant, Houston, Texas

Jorge and Noris Maldonado

Redeemer Covenant, Downey, California

Jessica Tracy

Hillcrest Covenant, Prairie Village, Kansas

SUDAN

James Tang

Fridley Covenant, Fridley, Minnesota

SWEDEN

Aaron Thompson

Karmel Evangelical Covenant, Princeton, Minnesota

THAILAND

Kara Maus

Evangelical Covenant, Alexandria, Minnesota

COVENANT MERGE MINISTRIES

Tammi Biggs

Saranac Community, Saranac, Michigan

Kjel Larsen

Mercer Island Covenant, Mercer Island, Washington

Several of these missionaries are still raising financial support. If you are interested in supporting any of these missionaries, please contact Covenant World Mission at 773/907-3316 or email world.mission@covchurch.org.