

One MISSION, N

A journey with Covenant churches of Asia

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I can't get her out of my mind—that little girl with the dark eyes, sitting amidst the incredible squalor of the slums of Bangkok.

I wonder what will become of her—and the tens of thousands like her—trapped by a seemingly endless cycle of poverty.

I was in Bangkok with a group of Covenant leaders to visit some of the projects sponsored by the Department of World Mission. We had been to Japan, Taiwan, and Laos. Our last stop was Thailand.

It had been an exhilarating trip. For most of the time we had talked about contextualized ministry in mission—ministry that fits into the local culture. I saw firsthand what it means to live out one's faith in obedience to God under difficult circumstances, caring for others as a powerful demonstration of God's love for them.

In Bangkok, we visited the Thai Music and Faith Foundation and worshiped together at the Klong Tan Church, a local Covenant congregation. I didn't expect what came next.

We drove to the Cement Factory Community, so named for a cement factory located at the end of a street that winds through a maze of small wooden shacks with tin roofs. It's only a few minutes from the Klong Tan Church. We were met by the leader of that community who escorted us through one of the most impoverished areas I had ever seen. Tiny, littered rooms house entire families—perhaps more than one. A small wooden walkway winds unevenly through narrow passageways with no apparent organizational scheme in mind.

The shacks are built on stilts that separate them from putrid, foul-smelling, stagnant water below. A few dogs and chickens wander about. Barefoot children scampered as we approached. The community leader pointed with pride to one small opening where a shack used to stand, noting the concrete piers that had been installed and explaining it as the future home of a new two-story government-financed building that will house a sewing center—part of a Covenant-affiliated economic devel-



A young girl in a Bangkok slum not far from the Klong Tan Church, a Thai Covenant church, sits on a wooden table as her mother weaves heart-shaped rugs to help make money to feed her family.



Companion editor Don Meyer takes a few minutes do an interview between stops during the tour of World Mission projects in Laos.



A Thai village near a cardamom-growing project sponsored by Friends of the Upland Farmer, a Covenant-affiliated development organization

Traditional Thai instruments used in worship



Many CULTURES



A Thai woman reads her Bible during a worship service in the Udon Thani province.

A local Thai farmer presented the World Mission team and visitors with these bananas, which grow around their fish pond.



opment project. The sewing center will give young women a chance to make a living without being involved in the local sex trade—one of the few options available to them.

We crossed over some elevated railroad tracks, which provided an impressive view of Bangkok's prospering business center skyline, and descended a small path to another cluster of shacks—and that is when I saw her, the little girl. She was perched atop a crude wooden table where her mother was hand-weaving red and white heart-shaped rugs made from scraps of cloth. She sells the rugs to secure the money needed to buy food and help her family survive another day. I was filled with a sense of sorrow—and anger—that human beings have to live this way.

I am reminded of God's call to obedience for each one of us to respond in whatever way we can.

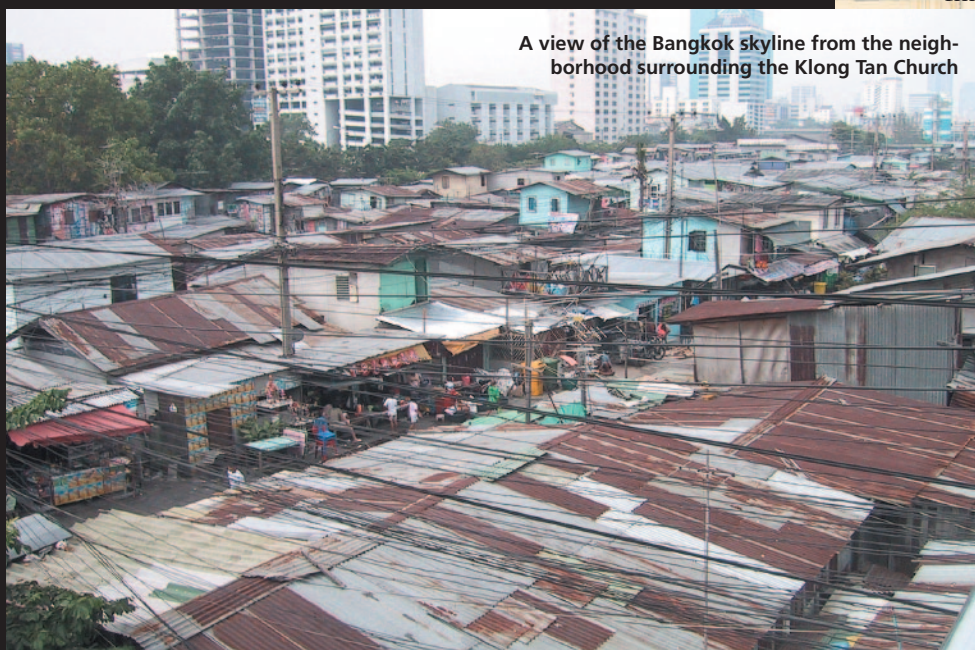
Where's the justice? What kind of chance does this little girl have? What can I—or anybody—do to make a difference?

Dedicated members of the World Mission staff invest their lives trying to make a difference, caring for people's physical and spiritual needs. I think of all the Covenanters back home who raise funds and provide other services in support of these ministers of grace. And I am reminded of God's call to obedience, for each one of us to respond in

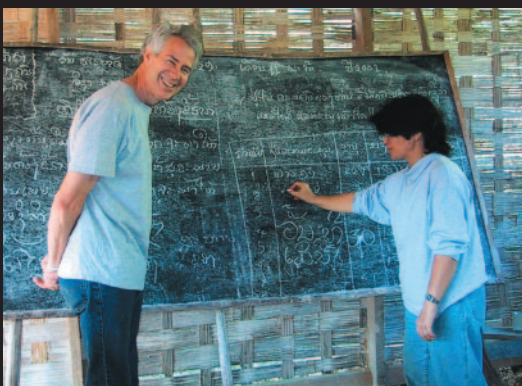
whatever way we can. I still wonder what I can do, here in my part of the world.

I hope I never forget that little girl. □

EDITOR'S NOTE: A three-member delegation from the Evangelical Covenant Church visited various Covenant ministries in Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, and Laos during late November and early December. The group included Donn Engebretson, executive vice-president; Don Meyer, executive minister of the Department of Communication; and Rose Cornelious, East Coast facilitator for the Department of World Mission.



A view of the Bangkok skyline from the neighborhood surrounding the Klong Tan Church



Donn Engebretson, executive vice-president of the Covenant Church, and Covenant development worker Ruthie Dutton visit a village school in Laos.



A view from the neighborhood outside the Covenant church in Taiwan pastored by the Rev. Nathan Chang

Donald L. Meyer is the editor of the *Companion* and executive minister of communications.

An example of a fish pond in the Udon Thani province of Thailand, where fish are raised for commercial sale



Donn Engebretson holds a bag of talapia fry. The fry, baby fish, are sold to Thai farmers, who raise them for food, as well as an additional source of income. The project is sponsored by the Issaan Development Foundation, a Covenant-affiliated organization in Thailand.



Jim Gustafson, executive minister of Covenant World Mission, explains how local farmers in Laos grow cardamom in partnership with the Friends of the Upland Farmers.



A young girl carries bamboo sticks in a village in Laos.

Rose Cornelious, East Coast facilitator for World Mission, bows to a member of a local Thai church during a tying ceremony, which is an expression of welcome and love.



These grain bins were donated and built by the Covenant Church of Pomeroy, Iowa, at the Friends of the Upland Farmer, a Covenant-affiliated development project in Laos.



This young boy and a group of his friends were very concerned when Don Meyer first asked if he could take their picture. Don then took a shot with his digital camera and showed the image to the boy. The boy and his friends then insisted that Don take all of their pictures.



A group of Thai women kneel and present their alms to a group of Buddhist monks who chant a blessing as they pass.



A scene from a slum area near the Klong Tan Church, a Thai Covenant congregation, just outside of the downtown business district of Bangkok



This Thai woman gave the team a lesson in how silk is produced. She boils the silk worms and extracts the silk thread, which she collects on a spool. The spools of thread are woven together on a loom to create cloth. The silk worms are then eaten and are considered a delicacy. Don Meyer and Donn Engebretson report they are quite tasty.



Donn Engebretson with the Rev. Masami Katsumoto, president of the Covenant Church of Japan, during a worship service celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Covenant Church of Japan



This Thai woman participates in a sewing project sponsored by the Issaan Development Foundation. The women sew clothes for companies in America and earn enough money to help support their families.



A Buddhist temple in Thailand

A Thai woman returning home after shopping

