



A Dying World tortured by countless Silent Tsunamis

The Australian public's response to the tsunami was both magic and awesome as well as frightening – frightening in the sense that "the power of pictures" and the power of the media became, in this case, wonderfully apparent. The media was the key for the phenomenal success of all the tsunami appeals in Australia.

The same media, of course, also crucifies innocent people and keeps silent on so much other daily suffering and dying – silent tragedies that eclipse the worst tsunamis. But because we are not reminded and don't see the pictures, we don't respond.

Example: Dafur, at the moment a largely silenced horror story, the accumulated death toll now estimated at 300 000. There is also the silent dying of up to 90% of the children in many an African and Asian village community on account of malaria alone. Since the Asian tsunami killed up to 300 000 people on Boxing Day 2004, three million people or more have most likely died in developing countries of preventable causes – disease, fever, malnutrition, neglect, in short, poverty.

But human suffering is much broader than the hardships just described. Suffering has many faces. Suffering is essentially threefold: physical, emotional (mental) and spiritual.

1. Physical suffering (tsunamis, earthquakes, malnutrition, sickness, poverty, tragic dying): This moves us deeply. Lutheran World Service spends around \$US2.5 million annually in Cambodia alone.
2. Emotional or mental suffering (lack of opportunities or education, life on the dole, loneliness, discrimination, abuse): This suffering is less visible, less dramatic but can lead to lifelong unhappiness or even despair.
3. Spiritual suffering (not having peace, fear of death, punishment, demons, not knowing the Gospel of grace – the Good News): This is very real, especially in other countries, as countless testimonies affirm. In latter years, the mainstream churches have scaled down their mission work dramatically. In Cambodia Lutheran Gospel witness barely exists and our relief work, excellent though it is and support though we must, on a practical level, seems to lack reference to the Gospel, even the Gospel as basis.

While these three different faces of suffering are interlinked and both 1 and 3 impact on 2, in today's climate, there seems to be a one-sided focus on physical suffering. Or will the day come when we can raise \$1 million for missions and inter-church aid within a three month period as so beautifully happened with tsunami relief? I believe that this is not impossible! God can do greater things than this – through YOU!

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Getting to know Jesus and personal prayer ministry relieves many tsunamis of the soul.

Photo: Northern Thailand (ASIA FOCUS)

ASIA FOCUS Objectives

- To promote world mission throughout the Lutheran Church and beyond so that it receives regular and prominent attention.
- To give full support to the mission programme of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA).
- To encourage and help facilitate additional parish-based overseas mission initiatives.
- To invite support for ASIA FOCUS mission and humanitarian relief projects.

ASIA FOCUS is a free publication distributed bi-monthly. Multiple copies are available on request. Please see back cover for contact details. Funds should never be diverted from the LCA in favour of other causes.

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Striving for Balance:

We need to restore a healthy balance. World relief, detached from the Gospel, is like feeding the body while letting the spirit starve.

I think of the countless people in Asia who lead unfulfilled lives because, in spite of talent and ambition, immense effort and sacrifice, they will never quite make it because no one gives them a chance. They cannot attend this or that school or university or training course because the money just isn't there. For everything costs and they are mostly poor. They simply cannot reach their God-given potential on their own. Theirs is likely to be emotional distress, sadness and inner pain for much of their lives.

We must help. ASIA FOCUS strongly supports the mission programme of the LCA, particularly also with regard to the scholarships we provide for selected applicants both here in Australia as well as their home country. We are called to help train future leaders of church and society. This is investment in lives.

How about working on sister congregation relationships? Or inviting Asian church workers, teachers and others to visit us? \$1500 or less could get mutually rewarding exchanges going across the seas.

In principle, we would only need a church half our size to be twice as effective.

Think of the world in need at our doorstep - the countless 'silent tsunamis' of the material, mental and spiritual nature. Think of all the dashed hopes, all the silent sighs, all the unfulfilled, wasted potential among God's people.

Do support the LCA's mission and aid programme. Let's expand it. Remember the ASIA FOCUS projects as well.

Mission is church in motion, love in action.

Unleashing New Love – think 'person', not 'project'

Our mission budgets should only be one way of many in which we reach out to God's children worldwide. There are other important ways as well.

Many wonderful men, women and children in places like Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia live with physical disfigurements, diseases, infections, bad teeth, skin complaints day after day because they don't have the money for an operation, or for the doctor, hospital or dentist etc.

ASIA FOCUS Jan. 2005 mentioned Jenni (not her real name) who was troubled by her debt (\$300). She didn't know how to repay the money. Friends and family had advanced her this "large amount of money" because she had had an accident and had to pay the hospital and the doctors. Doctors in some countries are known to let their patients bleed to death if they are not paid first.

ASIA FOCUS made no request to help her but one reader rang and simply said, "I'd like to send Jenni \$300 so that she can clear her debt." That's what happened and we established a personal contact between Jenni and one of our church members.

Another reader was touched by something else on the same page; by the fact that \$70 a month could possibly buy some unemployed teacher a job at a Christian School. She wanted to make that commitment right away "to give a teacher a job for 2005." "We wouldn't even miss the money," she said, though not being rich herself. I had to tell her that things weren't quite as simple as that. I'm sure though that we can do something on a larger scale if we really care.

Teachers' pay in Sumatra is ugly. Everyone knows it, over there too. Ideally with the help of Lutheran Education Australia, some scheme could be devised along the lines of "Teachers helping teachers" without causing any stress to church or school budgets. Personal interest and a little creative thinking can work wonders.



ASIA FOCUS has sponsored Thai Evangelist Tawee Boonrasee (pictured with Sudajit Sornpan, another evangelist).

Or meet Sudajit, a Thai Lutheran evangelist of 20 years, who has dental problems. "There is always something more important to spend your money on than going to the dentist," she says and then sends some of her miserly pay to her Buddhist Mum. I am nearly angry at her for this and feel like telling her, "Sudajit, I ask you to look after yourself. You are hurting. Please go to the dentist and send me the bill." A noble thought but will I ever do it?

Margaret Mayer, Adelaide, who had exposure to Thailand, agrees with the sentiments expressed and writes, "There are so many different ways in which our Australian Lutherans could be involved – to OUR very great advantage!"

She mentioned a girl in a Thai parish from a poor farming family who will "possibly never be able to afford to have her unsightly facial birthmark removed – no matter how hard they save." Margaret met her, apparently a lovely young woman.

I must think of Rosanti, a young evangelist in Jambi, Sumatra, a sweet person with a distorted face. I believe it is quite possible that a relatively simple operation could restore her beauty but who cares enough to even investigate? I have been too busy, of course...

By the way, her pastor has a kidney complaint that only an operation across the Mollaca Straits, in Penang, Malaysia, could fix. Here in Australia they would have fixed him up routinely at the Nambour or Buderim Hospital. I am ashamed of how spoiled we are, how rich, and how much money we have.

If we were to open up 'a new front of helping and healing' individuals, this should never go at the expense of our support for the less moving official projects and mission budgets.

One-sided focus on emergencies can cause problems. With all eyes on the tsunami in January, support for ASIA FOCUS temporarily dropped. But somehow ASIA FOCUS finished up with over \$7800 for Sumatran tsunami relief work – money from all kinds of people mostly from outside our church.

The Australian Lutheran World Service Tsunami Appeal raised the amazing amount of nearly \$1million – more than the total annual budget of the Queensland District of the LCA.

There are immense resources in our church waiting to be released! We simply need to motivate and inspire our people.

Doing new things and getting engaged more personally is not without pitfalls. Some caution is necessary and experience essential. Things can be messy. We can't solve every problem or meet every need. But all this is no excuse.

The time has come to open up a new front in Christian ministry – caring also as a church in new and personalized ways for many more people, something to be practiced with regard to your next-door neighbour as well!

What good will helping this or that individual do in a sea of suffering? A lot of good! Humble beginnings, by God's grace, can eventually turn into great tides of love.

Don't think so much institution, programme, budget, or project; but think people – people first and foremost. That's where it begins and ends.

FAITH - a cure to loss, loneliness and unmet need

Our brothers and sisters in Asia make *us* rich. Their example inspires us. We are poor without them. We

send them some money but our engagement with them makes *us* winners.

Their attitude to life and its problems makes me ashamed in view of my own selfishness by comparison. We here in Australia, even we Christians, generally are far more selfish, materialistic, impatient and demanding. We talk about our needs. When we don't get what we "need" (want!), we get depressed.

Meet **Melva** (photo AF Jan. 2005). I love the quiet, graceful witness of this Batak woman. She is about 27, capable, educated, vibrant, and good looking. The subject of her getting married came up. In her society single women have no easy life and no secure, respected social standing but what she writes is wonderful.

"About getting married: Actually I don't worry about getting married, and I am not afraid, because I believe that my future is in God's hands... I really enjoy my life. I enjoy my life as a daughter of my parents, as a member of my society, as a member of my church, as a youth leader, as a teacher of my lovely students (at a Christian school), as a friend of yours, of course, even though I am no one's sweetheart. I'm happy because I have myself and life which is grace from God. Married is not a main goal of my life even though my parents want me to get married. I thank God for my lovely family. On the other hand, yes, I am not just waiting around at home. I am also trying to find a good man who later could become my husband. Actually, there are some men who want to be my boyfriends and marry me but, you know, for me marriage is only the second most important decision in my life after accepting Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. As long as I do not love a man with all my heart and as long as I am not sure that he is the right one prepared by God to be my husband, I will say no. The Bible said, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.' That's why I usually try to enjoy my life and thank the Lord for the life He gave me. I believe that God loves me so much more than anyone in this world. He knows me, my weakness and my strength."

Send this letter to every young person in our church! Melva's faith is her therapy - an answer to the unmet needs, problems and sadness's of life. The best psychiatrist or counsellor in the world cannot give to Melva what her faith and her God give her!

The Ministry of our Members Worldwide

Mate, this latest ASIA FOCUS (Jan. 2005) is a corker. I love what you write and it's a very stimulating publication.

Two of our members went to the **Philippines** this year to teach translation to prospective Bible translators. Another two members are currently in **Addis Ababa** teaching at a Christian school where their son works. We are raising money to help them build a public toilet in front of their school as a witness and service to the local community.

I love the mag! Keep it coming. Keep up the good work. Keep challenging us with the truth.

Pastor Matt Thiele, Townsville

Note: ASIA FOCUS receives a lot of encouraging comments. Now and again it should be permissible to publish one or two of them.

Fascinating Indonesia - an Overview



Beautiful Lake Toba and Samosir Island with family burial site on rice paddy.

With its 240 million people, Indonesia is our neighbour colossal as well as our bridge to mainland Asia. It is high time to acknowledge that geographically Australia is part of Asia and that our future is bound to be intertwined with Indonesia, the fifth most populous nation on earth and the country with the world's largest Muslim population. In this age of globalism, our very riches and their very poverty are a cause of resentment, friction, hurt, even terrorism. No one nation is an island to itself. We are neighbours. It is crucial, for selfish reasons alone, to get to know each other, to befriend and to help each other.

I love Indonesians and hate some of the institutions there, like the military. I consider the military as one of the chief criminal elements in Indonesian society (involved in murders, illegal logging, wildlife smuggling, graft, drug trafficking etc.). It's not a professional Army.

In themselves Indonesians are wonderful people, good and bad like you and I. Some of the 14 000 islands are tropical paradises. Indonesia really forms a multicultural United States of Indonesia with many different ethnic groups. **Java** is like a beautiful garden landscape. Mountainous **Kalimantan** (Borneo) has a fierce and threatening feel. **Sumatra** is the Green Island with many small islands around it. At 900m above sea level, beautiful **Lake Toba** is staunchly Christian (Lutheran) territory with a lovely Mediterranean climate. Why not holiday there ...? It's safe too!

The whole country is ruled by a Javanese- and military-based administration which of course everyone can join. The Javanese have spilled over to the rest of the archipelago in ever increasing numbers, even by officially orchestrated and subsidized transmigration programmes. For example, 40% of all people living in **West Papua** today are migrants, chiefly from Java.

History

The Dutch have ruled parts of Indonesia for 350 years until 1949, often with great brutality. For 50 years in the 19th century, close to one third of the entire Netherlands Budget was met by imports from Indonesia (nutmeg, cloves, pepper, later sugar, coffee etc.) – pure exploitation. Very little was done for the locals, for health care and schooling. Resistance was squashed with great ruthlessness by the power of the gun, the only thing that ultimately mattered.

Bali was only fully subdued around 1910 when some of its last independent Kings committed mass suicide with their troops by having them march directly into the Dutch gunfire to be slaughtered, up to 10 000 at a time. These people preferred to die rather than submit to Dutch rule. **Aceh**, on the northern tip of Sumatra, too has always been fiercely independent minded but eventually gave up the fight against the Dutch around 1905. Nor did they really want to be part of the new Indonesia in 1949 when the country gained its independence. They are Acehnese, different, influenced by Arab culture with a more puritan, rigid brand of Islam typical for Aceh only.

Indonesians are always smiling but, culturally, there is also a very cruel streak in them, described by the word *amuk* (mad), something that can lead to killing frenzies. This seems inherited both from their own practices and traditions as well as from the Dutch. Years ago, after a failed attempt to dislodge Dutch troops, an army commander in the Javanese kingdom of Mataram simply executed 800 of his hapless soldiers. Things like that.

Did you know that Indonesian is essentially Malay, also the language of Malaysia? For centuries the Malay people with their traders and sultans (religious and political rulers) had penetrated the islands of what was to become Indonesia. **Malay Islam** pushed back the local Buddhism and Hinduism and eventually replaced these religions over a wide area. Hinduism had been rather class- or caste-orientated. Islam, by contrast, was and is egalitarian. Today Bali alone is left a Hindu island.

Until the missionaries came in the 19th century, most tribes on many islands had remained animists or spirit worshippers. Today large sections of the population in the Spice Islands (the Maluku, Sulawesi, Ambon) are Christian. West Irian is largely Protestant, Flores largely Catholic - like East Timor, Indonesian for 24 years till 1999.

Australians are not aware of the large number of **Christians** that live in Indonesia, at least 30 million. Church statistics are often understated (deflated) in order not to alert the authorities.

In Java many Muslims become Christians in these very days, in spite of much pressure to the contrary. In Sumatra this is not so as Christianity there is more ethnically based and linked to five Batak tribes who have been converted as tribes, not individuals, long ago. But here too stories of grace and faith abound.

Sumatra



Indonesia's second largest island is populated by Malays, Javanese, Acehnese, Bataks, Kubus and other native tribes. The most famous of these Indonesia-wide are the **Bataks** – proud, educated, bright, independent in spirit, successful –, not smooth like the Javanese but a little rough, rugged and confrontational with a fiery, cannibalistic past.

The **Province of North Sumatra**, the economic and political centre of the whole island, is their homeland. With its 15 million people, it has its own governor and parliament. North Sumatra is 45% Christian (!), mostly Protestants who could be called Lutheran (about 5 million). **Nias Island** (part of North Sumatra) too is largely Lutheran and has its own language. Its people work on plantations all over Sumatra as a social, uneducated underclass.

The fundamentalist Muslim Acehnese "at the top end" of Sumatra can only be kept within the Indonesian republic by brutal military force. With the introduction of the Muslim "Sharia Law" there, Aceh's few Christians really do it tough.

All the other provinces of Sumatra too (like Riau, West Sumatra, Jambi, South Sumatra) are vast, open areas with a largely Muslim population. Christians here are small, embattled, disadvantaged minorities, some 2% overall. *These areas are a real 'foreign' mission field for anyone!*

The church in North Sumatra, like Papua New Guinea, is largely fifth generation. We discover a very traditional, often legalistic Christianity that contrasts sharply with many young and new Asian churches. This doesn't mean to say that inspirational, living faith is not found in our sister churches of North Sumatra. Read ASIA FOCUS!

Western foreign policy, like the Iraq war, has set back relationships with Indonesia and closed many doors. A huge tragedy. President Bush has single-handedly made an enemy of himself to millions and

millions of people from Morocco to Indonesia. It's all so sad.

The church is very much under pressure from Islam. Many Christians daily face discrimination. But never put 99% of Muslims into the terrorist category. Personally they are good people. I am proud to have excellent Muslim friends.

However, our Christian brothers and sisters need us desperately. Please don't forget them. By comparison to them, we here are living in paradise!

Nias – Devastated Twice

Nias Factsheet. Nias with its 700 000 people is well known to surfers worldwide for its beaches. In contrast to Aceh, 80% of the people are Christian. Nearly 400 000 people belong to the BNKP and AMIN Churches, members of the Lutheran World Federation. Nias is a poor and backward island with a fascinating ancient culture and its own language. Most islanders don't speak Indonesian.

Rev. Abdul Hutaaruk, director of Yapentra Blind School, near Medan, returned with unsettling news from a visit to Nias in March *prior to the recent earthquake*. "The people of **Sirombu** and **Mandrehe** (on Nias) live in sadness," he writes. "They have no houses to live in ..." Reestablishment help is promised but [by end March 2005] nothing had materialized yet. They were still in the emergency phase. "All of the action is still Stage One." Now "the local churches make an effort to build housing themselves for their congregations."

And now a worse catastrophe! The tsunami-earthquake had killed 340 at the time making 23000 homeless. *The new death toll now, according to latest figures (5/4/05), may exceed 2000.* Can you imagine? **Gunung Sitoli**, the island capital, and **Teluk Dalam**, like some other places, have become ghost towns.

The Nias Earthquake

Virtually all of North Sumatra now traumatised

You are grieving. You are bleeding. Your husband has recently died. You have gone through days of utter hopelessness and despair. You are bleeding and grieving still and your wounds haven't healed yet. Just as you are mustering all your emotional resources trying to live again the news breaks that, yes, your daughter has died.

This is the absolute nightmare and mental devastation presently experienced by the approximately 20 million people of the region. Now nearly the whole population is in panic and shock mode.

The Nias Easter earthquake shook the whole island much more than the Christmas tsunami earthquake.

In fact, unbeknownst to many, there is much damage, even some dying, right through Northern Sumatra. *Two of the world's 10 worst earthquakes since 1900 have now hit Indonesia within the last three months.*

These SMS messages from Medan, received in a 24-hour period, 28-29th March 2005, speak for themselves.

"I want to inform you that we had an earthquake last night in Medan. 8.7 Richter scale. It was very awful. My sister and I ran out of the room and woke up everybody. All people sat down in the street because the earthquake was very strong. Thank God my family and I are o.k. In some places people ran to higher ground because they panicked and thought there would be a tsunami."

Linda, Church Youth Worker

"Nias destroyed. I am o.k. We were in panic last night. My brother-in-law has many relatives, sisters in Nias. I am so sad. Still trying to contact them."

Pina, social worker

"I was about 11.30pm when the earthquake hit North Sumatra strongly... I and my parents were sleeping and my little sister woke us up by shouting "earthquake, earthquake" loudly in fear. We were so afraid and in a great hurry ran and I saw all my neighbours having run out also. We were all so afraid but after 5 minutes the conditions became alright."

Melva, teacher

"I am fine but panic. We cannot sleep even a few minutes after the earthquake. My brother's family lives near the sea. They are all crying, afraid of tsunami. People in Medan get panic but in Nias, that is too bad."

Maya, lawyer

"The lights of Medan City are not burning. Monday at 11.10 pm, when I was asleep, suddenly the earthquake came. I'm so surprised and very afraid. And then my family left our house. Thank God that everything is alright but we hope that there will be no earthquake anymore. We just pray that God will protect us and never leave us... Maybe God is angry with Indonesia, I don't know... But I believe that Passion of Christ never leave us and always surround us."

Imelda, Life Insurance, Sunday School teacher

What would these people be without their faith and their God?

Nias - A Tragedy Unfolds

This startling SMS from Sumatra received 6am on Tuesday, 29th March 2005 started everything off:

Our family's house in Nias collapsed last night due to an earthquake. My brothers, sisters and their children are being evacuated. Don't know whether they are alive.

It's **Gan** from Riau, this vast Central Sumatran province, far away from anywhere. While ethnic Chinese, he hails from Nias where most of his family still live. Gan is a bright young Christian church worker, committed to support the Nias people working on mainland Sumatra on plantations, often under slave-like conditions.

30 h later at 12 noon the next day, Wednesday, 30th March another SMS arrives from Gan who is now on the way to Nias, a 2-day trip by car including eight hours on a ferry:

Some of my sisters and their family members found dead. Please pray for the rest. Not all have been found yet.

At 9pm that night our time (6pm there) I phone Gan who was waiting for the ferry at Sibolga to cross over to Nias, the island of tears. He told me that

ten minutes ago it was confirmed that two of my sisters and their husbands and four children have died. Other family members have survived.

I am stunned. What can I say? How can I comfort him? Is his faith in God shaken? Has God let him down? Will he crack up? Yet Gan tells me,

Of course it's hard to accept this but I believe that God's grace is behind it all. God has a plan. We are in his hands. Life has to go on.

Gan will take some surviving family home to Riau and settle others in Medan – and God will do the rest.



Gan Seng Bun, from Riau, Central Sumatra, a tireless advocate for the Nias people.

The Nias Diaspora

"Please pray for us so that we're able to help the poor." These words sum up the ministry of **Gan Seng Bun** of Pelalawan, a new plantation district 70km from the provincial capital of Pekanbaru, Riau, Sumatra. A higher-level company official and educated layman, he is a true minister of the Gospel.

Gan tries to serve the 20 000 Nias people, mostly Christians from the BNKP Church, who live in the Pelawan region. Most of them live "in the jungle", work on rubber and oil palm plantations, and earn a pittance. They are an often exploited, uneducated, largely illiterate Sumatran underclass at the fringes of society. And yet they are our brothers and sisters.

Every month hundreds more leave Nias in search of work ... now after Easter probably thousands ... Gan visits them in the jungle, conducts services, prays with them, gathers them - and helps them in many practical ways, like defending their rights when abused or unjustly sacked from work. His plan is to enable them to purchase of block of land on which to build a house of worship. For this is their dream - to have a church as a symbol that God lives in their midst and will not forsake them. A church will give them a home and improve their low self-image.

It would be wonderful if ASIA FOCUS would be able to contribute \$3000 to their project.

Tsunami Victims Support through ASIA FOCUS

Prior to the Easter Nias earthquake ASIA FOCUS received nearly \$8000 for tsunami victims. The funds came from individuals (Catholics, Pentecostals, Buddhists, non-religious), an ecumenical social justice group in Brisbane, a charismatic church in Kenilworth as well as from the local Lutheran Parish and some other Lutheran sources.

It was made known that ASIA FOCUS was sending some funds directly to Sumatra but it did not request donations. Other Lutheran parishes have done similar things. None of this should be understood as competing with the terrific efforts of Australian Lutheran World Service. It is good, however, for parishes to have options. Furthermore, the LCA should be encouraged to engage in direct support of sister churches we have a special relationship with.

The recipients of ASIA FOCUS funds were (a) the HKBP, the largest Lutheran Church in Sumatra, (b) two parishes on Nias of the BNKP and ONKP churches (c) a long-term programme for tsunami-refugee youth, chiefly in Medan, not receiving other funding.

There is more to report on these things later but it can be mentioned now that Rev. A. Hutauruk personally handed over ASIA FOCUS funds to the two Nias congregations for "medicine, building temporary housing, and a pastor to replace lost valuables."

ASIA FOCUS News in Brief

1. Christian Youth Library in Medan: Successfully established and now operating though yet in infancy and needing additional support. The local young people have raised a lot of money themselves towards it also, always an excellent sign that *they* are the driving force.

2. The Printing of pamphlets in Indonesian has taken place. The money we sent (\$1300) was enough for the printing of 3 tracts, not 2, as envisaged. These are on the Lord Supper (Rev. Simorangkir), Justification by faith (Rev. Simorangkir) and Worship in the Lutheran Church (another pastor, "an expert").

3. Placing of evangelist in Northern Thailand through the Thai Lutheran Church. We have covered the cost (\$2500) for the stationing of Tawee Boonrasee (see photo) in the remote North of the country where he is now doing very good work. Report later. We would like to find the money for the stationing of *another evangelist* in the region.

4. Mentawai Island Scholarship holder Luther Saogo, now studying music in Java, sent a personal letter of thanks. We have sent \$800 and promised \$1000 - \$1500 by mid 2005. He is a little homesick. Later he would like to help improve the quality of church music in his island church. The LCA sponsors two other Mentawai students.

None of our projects seems to have failed. There are warm responses all around coming back to us from Asia.

Cambodia Mission Trip

A team of 16-17 Lutherans from Queensland, South Australia and Victoria will participate in a 2-week "**Asia Focus**" Mission Trip to Cambodia late in June 2005. Team members will not only have the privilege of covering their own costs (around \$2000 in total) but will also try to raise \$20 000 for the project - the providing of a **Worship and Community Centre** for the fledgling Christian Church in the poor and remote Cambodian Province of Preah Vihear. This facility will benefit the whole local community but the church community in particular. ASIA FOCUS general funds will not be used for this venture of faith(!).

The church in the region is new and was unknown there only five years ago. 99% of the people are Buddhist. Cambodians are keen not to find out about the Church but about "the Good News" which is spreading fast throughout the country.

The eight small house church groups that represent the body of Christ in that region at the moment will be the joint owners of this Centre. It has just been purchased for \$US11000 and renovation and refurbishment works are about to start. Australian friends from World Vision will give some logistic support initially but will not be involved later on. It's the people's project.

Here at the frontiers of Christian mission denominational thinking barely exists. The evangelistic work is done by Cambodians, not missionaries. While none of the Cambodian Christians there hail from a Lutheran stable, they seem to be happy for us to introduce Luther's Small Catechism as a basic teaching tool for young Christians. We will make the Catechism available to them in Khmer, the local language. Missouri Synod sources just released it six months ago.

For a week we will work with our Cambodian brothers and sisters side by side and help to put the finishing touches on the multipurpose building. We will also relate to the locals in various other ways - like teaching some English, visiting schools and villages, sharing in devotions etc.

At least four congregations from Queensland, one from Victoria and four from South Australia are represented. Pastor Noel Noack is the tour leader, Pastor August Fricke the overall co-ordinator. The three pastors and others will also lead spiritual teaching sessions for the local church leadership.

The group of travellers consists of all kinds of people aged 21 to 72 but all are keen and committed. We possibly could take another one or two along. Qualifications are not required. Some special prayers for this venture would be most appreciated!

SISTER CONGREGATION

Is there a congregation in the LCA that would like to correspond with a congregation in the Jambi district of Sumatra, Indonesia and possibly become its **sister congregation**? This would be a challenge and could be a great blessing to all parties. For more details please contact the editor.

Donations in Round Figures

Income 01.01.2005 - 31.03.2005

Special Fundraiser: Mango Sales Gympie - \$2500
Donations otherwise: around \$2500

Plus the large Tsunami Relief "income" previously mentioned

ASIA FOCUS never appeals for funds but offers everyone an opportunity to share in overseas ministry, relief and mission work

Current ASIA FOCUS projects:

- Various Indonesian literature initiatives (library project, publication and distribution of important Gospel tracts)
- Sponsorship of two Thai evangelists to share the Gospel in remote parts of Thailand
- Training of evangelists in Jambi, Sumatra, Indonesia
- Sponsorship of Ida Rosari, a blind theological student in Sumatra, for ministry among the blind

- Sponsorship of Luther Saogo, Mentawai Islands, for education in Java and support for some others
- Support of the Nias people, especially on the Sumatran mainland (not earthquake related); see this issue
- responding to practical and spiritual needs as they occur
- Financial support for the Church School and Sunday School of the GKPI congregation in Padang Bulan, Medan

Tsunami and Earthquake Relief is not our brief but funds received for this purpose will be distributed in the most effective way possible.

A Call for Help: A pastor in a remote mission region of Sumatra needs a fax machine (\$600 - expensive there) to communicate efficiently with the outside world (including us) and more importantly, a motorbike to serve his far flung parish better (\$1300). ASIA FOCUS will not cover things like these from regular funds, at least not now.

Next ASIA FOCUS Issue..!

is already in preparation and should be posted in May.

It will be a special '**multi-national Issue**' with reports on:

- the Lutheran Church in Malaysia
- the amazing work of the Thai Lutheran Church
- the persecuted underground church in Malaysia
- the church in China, Laos and Burma

Website

Our website www.asiafocus.org.au is up and running. Please check out our home on the web and get updates. There is a lot of material on the web that will not be printed as part of this newsletter.

ASIA FOCUS is a free publication distributed bi-monthly if time permits in printed and electronic (PDF) format.

ASIA FOCUS is a 'voice from the parish' encouraging comments, openness and honest dialogue.

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