

## Mission Accomplished

ASIA FOCUS' Cambodia expedition an outstanding success

To gain recruits for the venture, this was the kind of message that went out: "Wanted, 10 people to join a Mission Trip to Cambodia. However, this is no holiday. In fact, it may be hard work. You need to cover your own costs in full. And one more thing: Please raise at least \$800 towards the Project." Who would respond to a less-than-attractive deal like this?

18, not 10 people responded and signed up – and money came in big, beyond all expectations. Early on a faith commitment of finding very quickly \$20 000 had to be made in support of our Project, which was to help the fledgling Christian community in Tbeng Meanchey, Preah Vihear Province, to come into joint ownership of a suitable property that would serve as a Community Centre – a place for worship, meetings, rallies, youth activities, a building with room to establish a library and accommodation facilities.

In the end not \$20 000 was raised but more than \$31 000. There were no appeals, no impacting on congregational commitments. People just gave from inside or outside our church, whether friends, family members or, at some cases, strangers.

Our brother-and-sister team from Brisbane, Tim and Lara Schier, alone raised close to \$6000, with the help of their church school etc. Yet everyone was told, "Don't stress about money. That's not what the trip is all about."

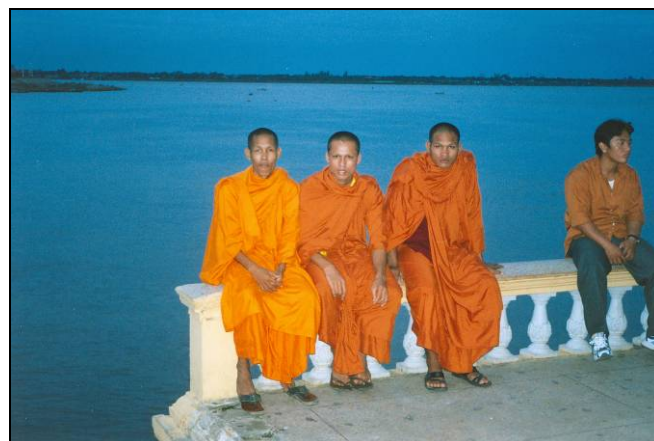
And what a strange, mixed lot of travellers we were! University students from Qld, farmers from Vic and SA, pastors from the Barossa, Gympie and Gladstone, educators (teachers), a pharmacy assistant, a midwife, a housewife, a Bible College student and what have you. Ages: 21 – 72.

Two issues of ASIA FOCUS could be filled with reports on this trip alone but this will not happen. The September issue of THE LUTHERAN will run the main story. The Cambodia venture creates the impression that ASIA FOCUS is awash with money which is not true. Cambodia funds are a separate issue. ASIA FOCUS is blessed in that, while the support base is small, some individuals support ASIA FOCUS in an amazing way.

The lesson of Cambodia is this: Giving makes rich, not poor, also in non-financial terms. We received much more than we gave. Our hard work was our joy and our reward. Mere holidays, armchair-Christianity, do not satisfy. The joy and fulfilment *is* in the commitment, the sacrifice, the engagement, the exposure to the needs of the world. The privilege to be able to work is pure grace undeserved. *(continued p.2)*

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**Cambodia with its 12 million people is a Buddhist country with powerful river systems like the mighty Mekong.**

## ASIA FOCUS

### Mission 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 program 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 if possible. Multiple copies are available on request. Please see back cover for contact details. While most supportive of the LCA Mission Board, ASIA FOCUS has no official status.*

## Cambodia Mission Trip Reflections

**Absolutely Fantastic:** "Absolutely fantastic. If my wife was given half a chance, she would be back there by Christmas ... We'll be back. It's just a matter of when."  
*Pastor Noel Noack, Gladstone*

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**Journey of A Lifetime:** "What an experience! A journey of a lifetime – never to be forgotten as I felt so humbled and moved by the witness of these young Christians seeing their deep love and devotion to their Lord and Saviour. The harvest is ripe but the labourers are few."  
*Team member, SA, who then proceeded to personally donate \$500 to the cause, on top of everything else...*

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**Coming Home Inspired:** "We have come back inspired by the love that people there have for their Lord, and many of us want to return."  
*Lois Whittal, Light Pass, SA*

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**Receiving More than we Gave:** "It has struck me how the Word that we went to sow among those people went to work immediately, growing its blessings among both speakers and hearers. In fact we have all commented on how we received as much as we gave, and more besides. That's how God always works, and we should not have been surprised to experience this even among those "new" Christians! It is really us "old" Christians who need the harvest blessing, just as much as they do."  
*Pastor Roger Whittal, Light Pass SA*

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**A Unique Experience:** "A unique experience. While initially we had visions of doing more physical work in renovating a building (nice to see the good work that had already been done by the Cambodians), what transpired was much more rewarding: the capable welding together with Christian instruction of the locals that took place, the renovated and strengthened spiritual building that will grow and grow and even reach the borders of Cambodia.

I feel that the group brought together many talents, was well organized and capably led. The whole venture has to continue and will do so to arouse interest in foreign mission among our church in Australia."

*Hedley Krieg, Gawler*

*(Ed... Hedley also said that, unlike before, the people in his church are now talking about mission).*

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**Spiders and Crickets:** "Rhoda Schiller's experience could be described as hair-raising. While visiting local markets she sampled deep fried spiders and crickets, a delicacy to Cambodians."  
*"Barossa Herald"*

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### "Why did you come back to Australia?"

"Why did you come back?" was the question one of my members asked me after I told them how the people there in Cambodia loved God and responded to the Gospel so fully and wonderfully with hearts and minds and voices. Maybe we should go to countries where the

fields are so visibly ripe for harvest as a matter of priority. There was a general view among us that a ministry of a Lutheran pastor here in Cambodia would not only be welcome but would be blessed in a way that, humanly speaking, would have few parallels on earth.

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## Responses from Cambodia

**God, you're so good!** "The presence of your team at Tbeng Meanchey really showed us the heart of Christian people. This world would be great if everyone were like you and your team. We here have to learn to make ourselves sharper, like you are. God, you are so good! We remember all your faces, looks and love. On behalf of the poor communities of Preah Vihear Province, I would like to say thank you so much."

*Leng Vireak, Co-ordinator, also local World Vision leader*

**Highlight of the Year:** "Our World Vision staff have gained so much. I personally feel also very blessed and encouraged. Somehow the Mission Team visit became a highlight for the year.

The use of the Catechism (Luther's Small Catechism in the local language) was also very positive. Someone said that this is the best book explaining the Bible and our faith in an understandable way.

The big Christian gathering with its various training events and the many discussions and activities have had a great impact on all who attended. Many people are hoping that such a 'Kirchentag' assembly (a kind of 'festival of faith') may become an annual event. It was a blessing and still is."

*Reinhard Tietze, Preah Vihear, Cambodia*



**"Age shall not weary them and youth shall not stop them."**  
**L to R: Bruce Hulme, Jessica Berndt, Tim Schier, Rhoda Schiller, Collin Krause and Julie Nietschke (hidden) on a mission.**

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*(continued from p. 1)*

One outcome of our trip is that it connected people with people across the barriers of race, culture, even religion, in a venture that is continuing still. Some group members are already plotting their return to Cambodia while others are now raising funds for their own mission-trip related causes. Everyone seems to ask, "When will the next ASIA FOCUS trip take place?" The answer is, "No idea but hopefully 2006, maybe even more than one trip, maybe a trip to Sumatra and/or Thailand (too) but there are no guarantees yet." If you are interested, you are invited to register that interest from now on. But also remember, no two trips are ever the same. Another trip, another world, another challenge.

## Indonesia struck by Blindness

### So much hidden pain and cruelty

Did you know that 1 440 000 people in Indonesia are blind or heavily vision-impaired which means that they cannot see further than 6m? Yes, nearly 1.5 million – 0.6% of the population of 240 million!

These figures are conservative estimates. The real number is likely to be higher because many Indonesian people do not own up to the fact that a family member is blind because of fear, shame and social stigma.

Three further factors should alarm us: 1. There is anecdotal evidence that the situation is getting worse rather than better. 2. The overwhelming cause of blindness is poverty and all that goes with it. In other words, blindness in most cases could have been easily prevented. 3. The level of public response to this intolerable situation, in our age of HIV and terrorism, is totally inadequate both in Australia and Indonesia.

The number of blind and vision impaired people in the Province of North Sumatra with its 15 million people (centred on the 3-4 million city of Medan) is estimated to be 90 000. North Sumatra, just south of Aceh, is "the Christian province" of the island, with some 40% of the people being Christian. It's the Batak heartland that is largely Lutheran.

Here at the outskirts of Medan is Yapentra, a leading Blind School and Institute, run by the GKPI, one of the local Lutheran Churches. It is supported by the Lutheran Church of Australia through its Mission Board while ASIA FOCUS enables one of its graduates to study theology in Medan. It is hoped that Ida Rosari Siagian will become the first blind theologian in an Indonesian Lutheran Church.

"You are our friend in our struggle against visual impairment," writes the Director of Yapentra, Rev. Abdul Hutauruk, to ASIA FOCUS. He is also thankful for the support he receives from the LCA. Yapentra is an advanced modern facility whose funding comes primarily from Germany.

"Very few children are born blind," says the Director, "Most become blind when they are between two and five years old as a result of a Vitamin A deficiency, measles or eye diseases like glaucoma and cataract. However, the invisible causes are lack of education, poverty and misery." He adds that some people also become blind as teenagers as a result of the impact of technology and 'modern diseases'.

We in Australia will have difficulties understanding the extent of the plight of the blind in a country like Indonesia. For blindness there is for many a virtual death sentence still, the relegation of a child of God to eventual street-beggar status. For numerous parents, particularly in remote villages, feel the shame of having a blind child so much that they hide "it" from the outside world to the point of denying that "it" exists.

Such a child's life is like a shadow, just doing chores at home, never being introduced to anyone who visits the

family, maybe being taught to play the harmonica or guitar so that later on "it" can stand on some street corner – unloved and unwanted - to beg for a living. To have to write this makes me cry. Can you imagine? There is no compassion, only pity which kills all compassion.

Blindness is considered a humiliation for the family, sometimes even a judgment from God associated with sinfulness. Blindness is accepted stoically in homes as fate or destiny which is much the same as punishment.

All the while the blind child lives a living death, sentenced by society, its soul shrivelling up. Those who 'come out' and can attend normal schools or blind schools are the lucky ones. Some of them nearly had to be rescued from their home environment. For parents believe that a blind child has no future, nothing to give and no role to play in society. Some families, of course, hold more enlightened views and change is slowly coming through education programmes.

Not that education in an excellent place like Yapentra Blind School solves all problems. Society keeps discriminating against the blind by keeping the doors to many employment options firmly closed. In Sumatra, even very able blind university graduates may not be able to find work. By comparison, Jakarta and Java are more advanced.

However, Rev Abdul Hutauruk and many others are working for change. He starts with his own back yard, the church community, writing articles and making submissions. For even the church has not always reached out in love to its own blind people. For prejudice is far spread. Last year a leading Lutheran theological training institution in Sumatra rejected Ida Rosari's application for enrolment on the basis of her blindness. In spite of the Principal's urging the majority of the faculty were against it.

Let's pray for the blind in developing countries everywhere, especially in North Sumatra. Let's pray for Rev. Abdul and also Ida Rosari. As Rev. Abdul writes, "We proclaim that there is no darkness in Christ." (John 8, 12) May the blind see the light of life. May we help to light within them a light that no ill wind of outrageous fortune can extinguish.

#### **Christian Blind Mission International (CBMI)**

works in 108 countries and is involved in more than 1000 projects. Partnering with governmental health services, it is also initiating 'light-' and 'life-giving' eye surgery in the Sumatran cities of Medan and Padang.

"CBMI focuses on the poorest of the poor," writes Jonathan Krause. "We witness by our actions, not by words."

Jonathan, a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lilydale, Victoria, is CBMI director of Marketing. CBMI is very active in Australia and well known to some of our congregations.

For more information call 1800 678 069 or visit their website [www.cbmi.org.au](http://www.cbmi.org.au).

## On Luther's tracks in Cambodia

Most Lutherans are not aware of any kind of a Lutheran presence in Cambodia but we discovered:

**1. The existence of Lutheran Churches:** There are large numbers of fine Christians in church leadership positions which depend on Gospel ministries originating in the Lutheran Church. In Cambodia's third largest city Battambang there is a Lutheran Church.

Then there is the Abundant Life Christian Church in Preah Sdach near the border to Vietnam. The name sounds charismatic and the church is registered as an independent body but its pastor, Rev. Juanito Basalong from the Philippines, writes bluntly, "Of course we are Lutheran." And so they are. After all, he is a Lutheran pastor working for ICC (International Cooperation Cambodia), a relief group. His church works in many villages over a large area having an active Bible Study, youth and Sunday School programme.

This church's greatest need is trained personnel - leadership, like with nearly all Cambodian churches. So they have decided to employ two semi-trained evangelists (who are ready and waiting) at \$US50 a month each the moment funds become available. But of course funds are not easily available in this poor church. So ASIA FOCUS was approached to sponsor these two people. Writes Pastor Basalong, "Please consider this."

After assessing the situation, meeting the people and preaching in their church, Pastor Fricke replied, "Yes, we'll do it. We know the need is real and urgent. You are our brothers. But please understand that ASIA FOCUS can never guarantee anything for the long term. Month by month we depend on the continuing flow of donations."



Pictured here are some members of the "Abundant Life" congregation in Preah Sdach. They worship in the downstairs section of this building and the chief elder lives upstairs.

**2. Lutheran Media Ministries:** THE CAMBODIAN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY CENTRE, Phnom Penh, is a Lutheran Hour Ministry running Bible Study courses, promoting Christian music and distributing Christian literature free of charge. It has translated Luther's Small Catechism into Khmer, the Cambodian language. Unmistakably Lutheran in character and outreach, it serves the wider Christian community.

Pastor August Fricke passed on a copy of the Lutheran Catechism to Pastor Im Chrorn, a leading independent local minister serving in a slum area of Phnom Penh with no connection to anything Lutheran. This is what he later wrote, "The Catechism is good and suitable. The content of the book is easy to understand and the doctrines are also suitable to Christian belief generally. So I was really blessed..."

## The Cambodian Church

From a report by Pastor G. Chipps, an Australian Protestant minister working with ICF in Phnom Penh

"The Body of Christ in Cambodia is experiencing first generation growth and trials since freedom of religion was restored in 1990. Church watchers place the growth by as much as 30% annually. Though enthusiastically overt in verbal proclamation of the Gospel, it remains short in addressing needs beyond conversion. This is so because most of its leadership received little or no training and is relatively young in the faith.

There are several serious concerns in the Cambodian Church: the 'poisoning effects' of inappropriate attitudes and practices in finances; the recurring conflicts and continuing disunity ... a sometimes narrow (not holistic) application of the scriptures and gospel to life. In short, the usual immaturities of a very young but rapidly growing church.

Yet there are also many encouraging developments. The number of Cambodian leaders who see these issues and want to work towards a healthier church is increasing. "The Church is now hungry to come together, to sit together, to talk together", says Soun Both ... Church members and leaders also often show great commitment and endure discrimination and exclusion in (their local) communities. There is a hunger for effective training and a searching for better training delivery systems that what has been typical to date. Finally, increasing numbers of Cambodian youth show great interest in Christianity... "

**Relevant Comments,** "We don't necessarily need a (separate) Lutheran Church in Cambodia but we do need Lutheran pastors there."

**R. Tietze, Cambodia, Lutheran Mission Veteran**

## Laos Calling

### A personal story: Three days in Vientiane

While on mission in Cambodia with 17 other Australian compatriots, I thought that I really should pop across to Vientiane, Laos, just for a couple of days because a door had been opened for me... Unpredictable like the whole country, the flight from Phnom Penh took two hours rather than one hour as per schedule. Without apologies, Lao Airlines had simply replaced a jet with an old-time propeller aircraft which had seen better days. Not that I knew at the time... I expected to land in China any minute.

At the airport I was greeted by Voni (not her real name) and daughter, a Laotian-born American Lutheran pastor's wife who had postponed her return to the USA by a couple of days for my sake, I think. Just like everyone else in Australia and Laos, she had not told me anything by email and not answered any of my probing questions.

Someone had enlightened me months earlier, "Don't you know that all communications to Laos are being strictly monitored? Emails go through four separate monitoring stations. Don't ask questions, don't mention church or relief organisations by name, don't identify Christian groups working in Laos. Otherwise you may endanger the very people you try to help."

Voni – a complete stranger to me but not a stranger in the Lord – had only written, "I cannot say much in writing but we are excited about your coming. Don't forget, I'll pick you up at the airport." I had found her name and email address on The Net by accident even though I hardly surf The Net. Voni insists, "August, that was no accident. And you know it. God has brought us together."

Western church and relief groups work in Laos but just about in clandestine fashion. An air of mystery surrounds everything. Actually, the Communist Laotian government wants our tourists, our money, our humanitarian programmes but wants to keep everything else strictly out of the country.

Thanks to Voni, another world was now opening up for me. I didn't care about the many famous temples and other beautiful sites in Laos, all I wanted to do was meeting my Laotian brothers and sisters of whom I knew nothing.

It was terrific. I met the people who one month later were to be interrogated and detained by police, seven Christian leaders. Some of them were quite young, most were professionals including a couple of university lecturers. I also met an extraordinary Laotian businessman, a convert to Christ, who owns shops right through Laos and wants to set up a "Lao International Academy" in the capital and a Vocational Training College in the country. He wants our support, our prayers and in due course English teachers from us. "Please be my partner in Australia."

The following is public knowledge: The only three Christian churches recognised in Laos are the Catholic Church, the Adventist Church and the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC). Everything else is illegal though some other groups may be tolerated in some provinces. However, even many LEC churches (80 000 members) were also closed down quite recently.

Protestant groups in Laos are advised to operate under the umbrella of the LEC, even Lutheran groups. The Northern Illinois Synod of the Lutheran Church in America is doing some work in Laos and so is the Missouri Synod through its Lutheran Hour Ministries. Yes, the fields are ripe for harvest. The church is growing fast also in Laos.

"Geng", a Lao musician and evangelist told me of his vision. "I want to see the country of Laos full of Christians. I pray that God will free the poor of their poverty and give the poorest the best life. Pray for me to be successful in the training (of Laotians). Pray for my plans for Laos. Also pray for the funding of a Christian songbook. My intention is to go around the Lao countryside and reach the communities with the Gospel and to teach songs for worship..."

## The Perils of LAOS – "Please tell the world!"

It happened on Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2005

Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2005 was a dramatic and terrible day for some of my Christian friends in Laos. A large group of young Christians had gathered to praise and worship God and to receive training in Gospel ministry when the police broke in at 9am in the morning raiding the premises, interrogating the 30 plus people present – and detaining most of them.

My mobile rang hot with sms messages from Laos all day. "Please pray for us," was the repeated, urgent plea as no one knew what would happen next. Would some of the Christian leaders and friends I know be taken away, possibly never to be seen again? A real possibility in a land like Laos. Then this email arrived signed by "Roy" who, for obvious reasons, couldn't give his real name,

*"On this day, August 8 2005, the government took more than 25 Christians to prison in Vangvieng Resort, in Vangvieng district, Viantine province, Laos, without reason, during Bible Study and the worship of Jesus. Please send this to CNN and let the UN know. Maybe then every country will see what is wrong with Laos. I am just one person who raises the problem of the freedom of human beings in Laos, especially what the Government is doing to Christians in Laos. They catch them, put some of them into prison and kill some others but never openly."*

"Roy" had sent this email immediately after his release at night. Finally, not long before midnight that day, more good news, a sms from "John", who wasn't directly involved, "Thank you, Lord, they are all free now. The police let them go." Of course I know "Roy" and "John" and their real names.

At the height of the days' drama, when nothing was certain, the same "John" had written, "I am sure that God always has a wonderful thing in his mind when he does these things in our lives."

This is the land of Laos with its 6.5 million people. On the Open Doors "World Watch" List of the top 50 countries in the world where Christians suffer the most, Laos is listed as number three, following North Korea and America's friend, Saudi Arabia. By comparison to Laos, oppressive Burma is a garden of roses though not quite...

# Glimpses of contemporary Indonesia and Indonesians

## Indonesian Christian Women

DEWI OF MEDAN

### A Gem for Jesus

Dewi attends the University of North Sumatra, a very Muslim kind of a place, studying management. She is a bright and gifted Batak woman, who has already felt the pain of life. Not long ago her father died and that, in Indonesia, means hardship. Listen to Dewi:

**A woman with a mission.** "I always pray for the Gospel and all the pastors who preach it around the world ... I want to make my mother proud of me and do great things for the people around me..."

**Desire to be an evangelist:** "When I read your magazine (Asia Focus), a desire arises within me to serve the whole body of Christ. (From Lutheran stock, she now attends a Methodist Church.) But I need to know how to be an evangelist and how to preach the Gospel if only to my own people ... Please pray for me that I understand how to be a servant of God. May God bless you and your world mission."

**Her Pain for the Nias People.** "Even though I am still young, one thing is for sure: I want to know more about God's Kingdom. Christians in Indonesia are a minority. That is why in many sectors our government gives more attention to the majority. We have seen the proof in the disaster we have had in Nias... (hit by earthquake Easter Monday 2005). The people on Nias Island are Christians ... Our church has sent volunteers there and they found that Christians are neglected. I cried and prayed wondering what I can do for them. I wish the pain of the Nias people will be seen by those who have money to give. I want to give them hope and support ..."

ALPHINE OF THE NEVER NEVER

### Sacrificing all for the Family

Alpine, a young educated Christian Batak woman, lives a lonely life in inland Sumatra away from family and friends. She does it tough. Early this year she had live in a near-empty room. She couldn't even afford to buy a mattress for herself to sleep on. Then, on top of it all, her family asked her to look after her young brother. Writes Alpine,

"It's hard for me now. Do you remember my little brother who has a problem? Now he becomes my responsibility. My family wants me to teach him to become a good man keen to work. My mother has asked me to take care of him. I have tried to find work for him. Now he works but his salary is not enough, not even for eating. So I must help him. I want to help my parents. I use my salary for me and my brother. I must struggle. It's o.k. even though I live with nothing. I also try to save money so that I am able to buy something later. Experience is a good teacher for my future life."

Alpine can teach Australians many things, especially the young people. She gives us deep insights into the lives and struggles of Indonesian people – also, for example, in the area of workers' rights.

## Workers have no rights in Indonesia

Let's explain. Rather than being unemployed in the city, like 30% or more of the young people, Alphine, a trained teacher, took an office job in the jungle, cut off for six months from the rest of the world – no phone, no mail service, no recreation, no friends, nothing, only work six days a week. Later she said, "It was hard there but I had to be there. I must work. I cannot sit around at home doing nothing." She still works for a timber company that plays it tough. Eventually transferred to a place with phone contact, she texted one day, "Two of my friends lost their jobs today and that is not fair. Some workers in my Company made a mistake that made the owner very angry. They were dismissed without any payment. The wife of one of the workers is pregnant. The one man cried when my boss told him that he cannot work here any longer. Tomorrow they will leave. My heart cries to see them like this. I like them."

In response to a question as to what could be done to help, she simply said, "Nothing. No one can do anything. No workers' rights here. Indonesian law is bad. Whoever has money can buy the law." In other words, those with money always win – like in court, because the judges can be bought with money. Talk about exploitation...



Maya Manurung from Medan, a Christian lawyer fighting against discrimination, exploitation and corruption.

INDONESIAN SOCIETY –

### The Curse of Corruption

About corruption in Aceh in particular, we read this in an authoritative article by Andrew Thornley in the respected magazine "Inside Indonesia", July 2005:

"As a local teacher expressed it, 'We want a clean government that is free from corruption. For we know what is really going on here in Aceh. As an educator, I know very well that corruption is widespread in this country, from the lowest level to the highest level.

They are all corrupt. If I may say so, they are 'licensed thieves'. If God made Mount Seulahah (a local mountain) from gold, it would be gone, stolen.' Corruption in Indonesia is so widespread that ordinary people say they tolerate it because it is inevitable..."

Unfortunately it is clear that forms of corruption have also entered many levels of church life in Sumatra, not everywhere but in many places. Many practices are no longer seen as corrupt or inappropriate because they are so common but nevertheless bring the church into disrepute and produces cynicism in its own ranks, the faithful in the pews. We have to be very careful with judgments but the Batak Churches will have to deal with this problem in their own midst.

It is rampant corruption, also in mainstream Islam, alongside of poverty and hopelessness as well as the invasion of Iraq which is fuelling Muslim radicalism and terrorism everywhere.

These factors are also fertile breeding ground for the spread of Sharia Law, the strict Islamic moral code. Sharia Law is seen as the solution to a country's problems and as a means by which to combat the evils of society.

Corruption is not simply "Asian", something to be tolerated therefore. Saying this would condemn Indonesia's people to exploitation and poverty for ever. No, look at Singapore, in many ways cleaner, less corrupt than Australia!

### Corruption worse since Tsunami

From a confidential report from an Indonesian Social Worker:

"The corruption is worse here since the tsunami ... It's very, very bad ... How can we develop our country if we still kill our own people ..." Killing here means killing tsunami victims by means of misappropriating the funds that should have given new life to these desperate people.

"I heard that ... (a certain well known agency) received a lot of money from donors particularly in Germany. Some of my friends called me and told me that ... (this agency/NGO) is rich now. They do nothing while ... (their executive director, well known to editor) always claims that they have already done many things for the survivors ..."

"And today I also heard that their office looks like a Hotel now. They also have many motorcars now ... It makes me angry in my heart. As you know, that most of the money that was sent to ... and other organizations came from Europe and America. It was money from churches and other people ... I don't know what will happen in the future ... and how they can send an audited report to Germany."

This is confidential information from a former long-term employee of that organisation. Local whistleblowers like this person are heroes that risk a lot. There are countless Indonesian men and women full of courage, principle and integrity – in spite of everything.

There is no suggestion that money, sent through Australian Lutheran World Service, has been similarly ill fated. Our own Ken Semmler, on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, is presently in Aceh doing his best to

maximise the benefits of our tsunami donations to surviving victims.

## A look at three ASIA FOCUS activities in Sumatra

### 1. Support for the Nias People

**The plight of the Nias People** has been highlighted in previous issues of ASIA FOCUS. Nias off Sumatra with its 700 000 people is a largely Christian and Protestant (Lutheran) island. But more Nias People now live on the Sumatran mainland than on the island itself. They are driven there by sheer poverty and lack of work opportunities at home only to work in large oil palm plantations as one of Sumatra's lowest paid peasants, often in dismal conditions. On top of this, the tsunami hit Nias, and even worse, the Easter Monday 2005 earthquake devastated nearly the whole island with great loss of life. So the exodus from Nias accelerated – and a tragic story continues.

In September ASIA FOCUS hopes to visit Nias Island as well as have a look at the conditions in which 20 000 Nias People live in the Pangkalan Kerinci District of Riau Province, Sumatra.

According to our friend and church worker among the Nias people GAN SENG BUN – who himself lost nine members of his wider family in the earthquake – the Nias people on the plantations worship "wherever possible, in small huts, houses and company rooms." They need a church, a place to meet where they can cry and laugh and encourage each other in their daily struggle. As Gan says, "The Nias people are nobodies. Please help us to help the poor." Hopefully ASIA FOCUS can make a significant donation.

### 2. Support for the printing of more literature

ASIA FOCUS has so far financed the successful printing in Medan of three tracts in the Indonesian language. Their topics: Justification by faith alone, Lutheran worship and the Lord's Supper. One of them is a small 16-page booklet that is now being distributed in many places.

The printing of at least two more tracts is being planned now. The likely themes are "INFANT BAPTISM" and "GOOD WORKS in the understanding of Martin Luther and the Lutheran Church". \$1000 or less is needed in order to print 5000 copies of each tract. While this is very cheap, the money needs to be there first.

Writer of most of the tracts and facilitator of this venture is Rev Mangisi Simorangkir who will come to Australia in November this year in order to do library research at the Australian Lutheran College in Adelaide for his doctorate studies now in progress. He is a LCA scholarship holder. We thank the LCA Mission Board for financing him. Rev Mangisi has also accepted the invitation by ASIA FOCUS to visit Southern Qld on his way home in December.

"Rev Mangisi is a breath of fresh air," Rev Stephen Nuske in Brisbane once said. His ambition is to establish the teachings of the Lutheran Reformation firmly in the Protestant churches of his homeland. These huge bodies are Lutheran but in a rather vague sense only.

### 3. Support for the poor

The financial struggles of countless people in Indonesia are immense. As someone said, "How some don't die, I will never know." The plight of quite a few families in a number of churches has come to the attention of ASIA FOCUS. The churches are too poor themselves to be able to help. It remains to be seen what can be done but one idea is to help set up a revolving fund, "a church bank". Some people may receive gifts and others loans. Gifts, even loans, of \$100 can be a huge help for some. People will proudly pay back once they can. For such a bank you first need a reasonable capital to start off with.

## The Thailand Report

In Pastor Simon Mackenzie the LCA now has its own missionary in Thailand. Please remember the expense involved in such ventures and do support our church's mission program.

ASIA FOCUS this year has invested some \$5000 in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT), maybe about half its income for 2005 so far, not counting separate projects. We had agreed to sponsor the evangelist Mr Tawee (see previous ASIA FOCUS issues, also photo) and also a second evangelist, Mr Keng who was sent out recently.

However, an emergency arose in the ELCT and part of the money for Mr Keng is being used otherwise. In Thailand's north among the Lua People among whom the ELCT works diseases broke out in near-epidemic proportions and the needs of the sick, even dying, had to come first. There simply weren't enough funds available for the purchase of the extra medicines required, for transportations to hospital etc. So ASIA FOCUS agreed to help out while Mr Keng is presently being supported through other means.

Here is an update by Rev Tawee Oiwan, General Secretary of the ELCT, on God's work among the Lua.

*"Tawee and Taworn (another evangelist), they are happily working (among the Lua), especially Tawee. He enjoys it very much. He spends a lot of time taking care of the members and visiting their homes. If some of them get sick, he takes them to the hospital. He is a true evangelist. He serves the Lord. He is a very good team worker.*

*I've sent a student from our Bible school to help him as intern, his name is Mr Keng. Now we have three evangelists working there. Last month two of our members died. One was a lady, 73 years old, baptised 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2005 at Napong village. She passed away on 17<sup>th</sup> of May. The other one was Mr Pink, 110 years old! He was a member of Banden Village Church. He died on 20<sup>th</sup> of May. This guy, last time you (Pastor Fricke) and I visited him at his home.*

*Now, our team wants to start working in two more villages."*

Praise the Lord, in spite of many problems, things are moving. There are numerous adult baptisms monthly. There is growth, expansion.

### A Big Thank You to All Donors!

ASIA FOCUS does not appeal for money but its projects depend on a continued flow of donations. The treasurer is the treasurer of Zion Lutheran Church, Gympie.

## Mission-giving now core business

A Sunshine Coast hinterland congregation of the LCA is now, for the first time, proposing to make mission giving directly part and parcel of their annual budget. To start with, 1% of their members' offering to the church is to go to local mission and equally 1% to overseas mission projects of their own choosing. These 2% to mission are not to effect the congregation's budget contribution to the general church (LCA), a portion of which of course ends up in mission also. The church hopes to increase this percentage for mission in the future. After all, in some denominations it is not unusual to give 30-50% of offerings to mission.

### Current ASIA FOCUS projects in brief

- Indonesia: Literature initiatives - printing and publication of important tracts to teach the Faith.
- Indonesia: Library support for the purchase of books, etc. (Too poor to buy books, unemployed youth educate themselves in libraries).
- Thailand: Sponsorship of two Thai evangelists to share the Gospel in remote parts of the country.
- Indonesia: Support for the Nias people.
- Indonesia: Sponsorship of Ida Rosari, a blind theological student in Sumatra, for ministry among the blind.
- Indonesia: Support for some schools, students, Sunday schools and poor people.
- Cambodia: Sponsorship of two evangelists in Preah Sdach.
- Indonesia: Sponsorship of Luther Saogo, Mentawai Islands, for his education in Java. He studies church music.
- Responding to other needs as they occur.

## ASIA FOCUS website

Please visit the ASIA FOCUS website found at [www.asiafocus.org.au](http://www.asiafocus.org.au). Check out our home on the web for news and updates that may not be included in the ASIA FOCUS newsletter.

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**Donations** go in full to projects supported by ASIA FOCUS. Administration and printing costs are not paid from donations. Cheques can be made out to 'Asia Mission and Relief Fund'. Direct deposits and transfers are also welcome.

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