



## The greatest challenge yet: halting the global attack on the Gospel

*The Gospel is only liberating Good News if it saves by grace through faith alone. Today people everywhere seem to wage a war against this fundamental pillar of the Reformation. Can we stem the tide? If we fail and water down grace (the Gospel), Christ died for nothing. Gal. 2, 21.*

Grace has been “dis-graced” throughout the world. God’s grace, that is. For the most part grace is the deadly enemy of religion, even of much of the church on earth.

Don’t get me wrong: They all talk about grace. They all want to co-opt God’s grace. They all know that we humans need God’s grace but rather than receiving it for nothing out of our Father’s hand as the real thing, all kinds of elaborate schemes are devised for selling, appropriating and maximising that grace divine.

From ancient times the religions of the world promote to this day recipes of salvation that offer an intricate mix of divine grace, good works and human effort. *I do my best, pay my dues, do my sacrifices, do my penitence in whatever shape or form, and then God the merciful will do the rest and see me through.* This is the religion of the human heart. Tragically, much of Christianity, over the centuries, has also followed suit. So we are witnessing the heart-breaking spectacle of grace being “dis-graced” all over the world.

*Above picture: A modern Buddhist sculpture at a just completed temple in northern Thailand – gods with the fierce faces of executioners threatening mortals with spiked clubs and sending them to hell unless they repent and do good. How the world needs the Gospel!*

### The annulment of grace in the non-Christian world

Let’s look at the religions. The very moment the teaching of salvation by divine grace alone were to penetrate Hinduism and Buddhism, hundreds of thousands of priests and monks would be out of a job. Whole temple-based religious empires would crumble.

Nearly everywhere you go in South Asia you witness what really is the peddling of grace and good luck to humanity in all its daily struggles, with all its weakness and vulnerability. It’s a huge industry - a craft of that attempts to free guilt ridden mortals from guilt and fear and in many cases from the wrath of evil spirits, all in the interest of greater health and happiness for this life and the life to come.

The priests and monks may be wonderful people of good character but they also are misled – victims of belief systems that do not bring ‘liberty to the captives’ but can enslave people even more - no matter how many good things these religions teach as well.

Look at Islam. If the preaching of pure grace according to Christ would take root here, the results would be breath taking: not only would that be the end of Islamic terrorism but Muslims themselves would be freed from the harsh condemnations of their own law. And their persecution of Christians would stop.

Religion on earth as practiced in real life by the multitudes is tainted, even exploitative. For too many people religion is the ‘opium of the people’ (Karl Marx), a kind of drug numbing fear and pain. We are not talking here about lofty spiritual ideals as expressed by people like the Dalai Lama – most of them are both Buddhist and Christian! - but about the way religion is practiced by the masses in Asia today.

Australians too don’t know about grace. They live in bondages of their own making. Among us individualism, self-worship and self-atonement seem to have taken over. The Throne is empty. *My philosophy of life consists in me doing my best, living a good life, following the Golden Rule, do to others what I want others to do to me.* Yet our people are as superstitious, irrational and fearful still. In spite of all kinds of peace and happiness pursuits in our country so many still feel as guilty, empty and unfulfilled as ever.

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## The greatest tragedy of all: The annulment of grace - the corruption of the Gospel - in Christianity

The greatest tragedy of all is that divine grace is being distorted and corrupted in the Christian Church itself to this day. Church history makes bad reading. Today it is happening in new ways - covert, hidden ways -, through the backdoor. The attack on true grace suffocates the Gospel and is the scourge of contemporary Christianity.

The surviving power of paganism is obvious in some Roman Catholic practices even now, especially in countries like the Philippines and in Latin America. We must ask: are not the universally practiced readings of masses for the deceased (for money), the cult of saints and all the papal beatifications against the Gospel of free and pure grace for all believers?

However, let's not point our fingers self-righteously at anyone! Protestantism too is in danger of falling for the pervasive influence of the work-righteous mindset of humanity: In our ranks a curious mix of a good-works/grace theology has penetrated much of the Lutheran, evangelical and generally Protestant world by stealth!

A Thai friend with theological education had worked in various mainstream Protestant churches for many years and found that nowhere was salvation by grace alone preached clearly. That's what made him look towards to the Lutheran Church. The present bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Thailand had to travel to Adelaide to study at Australian Lutheran College to fully understand salvation by grace through faith. That wasn't an academic-theological exercise for the bishop, Dr Banjob Kusawadee. Rather it was a matter of life and death, of the Gospel itself. Only now Dr Banjob could live with himself in peace. Previously he had felt like 'never quite making it', always falling short, not managing to live up to divine expectations.

Understanding Law and Gospel properly is at the heart of this issue. Yet today we no longer value sound and clear teaching and we rarely see Bible studies on it.

Grace-compromising law preaching today is as popular as ever but it is done in new ways. After all, as Friedemann Hebart writes in ONE IN THE GOSPEL, *Secretly, we like laws. Do we not secretly think that the person who keeps five of the Ten Commandments is better in God's sight than the person who keeps none? Besides, deep down we prefer Moses to Christ. Laws give us security; we know where we stand. A person who spent much of his life in prison is often helpless on release. His new freedom frightens him ...*

We find it hard to appreciate that Christ is the end of the law (Romans 10, 4) and that ultimately only one thing is left: love – divine love, the beginning and end of everything. Of course we still stress the Law as it fulfils other important functions. Read the Catechism.

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In this famous painting (Weimar Altar, Germany, nearly 500 years old) Martin Luther points to the Bible, the Word of God whose ultimate intention is to help us see Jesus only. Lucas Cranach, the artist, shows humanity under The Law condemning us to death and hell while the crucified and risen Christ alone brings hope and salvation to all who believe. The Law is the background to the Gospel, like in this photo. In the distance we see people chased into hell (flames or no flames) by the Law (notice Moses) while the Gospel (Christ) is everything. The staff of the near-transparent flag of victory of the risen Christ (left) is pushed into the devil's mouth. →

### In danger of losing the Gospel?

Sure, the Law might bring results, also in terms of improved giving, but the results would not be lasting and it would be all for the wrong reason.

Looking at the large churches of Europe (Lutheran, Anglican, whatever) we have to say that the Gospel is largely lost already. At best it is maneuvered to the sidelines. Exceptions notwithstanding the modern pastor talks about all kinds of other things. When I served as a pastor in Northern Germany the people were glad to hear the Gospel again.

Even in North America the trend is the same. Surprisingly the strongly evangelical Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) is not exempted. Confided recently a top leader in what used to be the powerful LCMS, *Even we are in danger of losing the Gospel*. Well, if the LCMS is losing the Gospel, there is even less hope for America's largest Lutheran Church, the ELCA.

After the Gospel is lost or sidelined many fellow Christians are still keen to do good, of course. Often they give generously to help the poor, blind and hungry. But in our life of good works the Gospel is seen as dispensable. The feeling is that we give for giving's sake and *that* shows that we are Christians. We forget that good works, without faith, are dead and that atheists too do many good and praiseworthy things. We also forget that holistic humanitarian aid to the poor involves the Gospel even if only indirectly or 'silently' so. For our aid ventures want to enrich and heal body, mind and spirit. The Good News of Gospel is always the ultimate in everything. It changes lives and makes rich those who are poor.



## The world needs grace alone, Christ alone - the Gospel undefiled

Yet the Gospel is a scandal on earth, in religion and everywhere as we have seen. In Thailand and other Buddhist countries the Gospel is a scandal because the whole society is built on good works, 'doing merit', bringing sacrifices in order to gain a better future. The Gospel is a scandal in Muslim countries because here everything is submission, prostration, law. The Gospel is a scandal in Australia because here too the people are busy working out their own salvation.

The Gospel is in peril in countless ways everywhere. Even church law, church councils, synods and traditions can obscure it. It is under assault from the 'prosperity Gospel' and the 'theology of glory' - *what I can do in Christ* - that can quickly sideline the 'theology of the Cross' which is the Gospel's first and final centre piece.

Only the undefiled Gospel sets people free and is *the* power of God (Romans 1, 16-17). The Law focuses on me, my duties, my victories and my failures. It builds me up and then tears me down. The Gospel, by contrast, focuses on Christ alone. Under the Gospel the 'me' no longer counts, neither the good nor the bad in me.

Fortunately the good doesn't count either. For even my unselfish deeds are coloured by secret pride. My very humility is suspect, and so are all my confessions. I learnt this from St Paul, and modern psychology as well.

My only hope is throwing my self into the dustbin of time and looking as far away from me as I possibly can until I see Christ and his Cross alone. Only at the foot of the Cross is the wellspring of life. THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. AF

**Ed. To avoid misunderstanding we must point out that here in the west we also face the opposite danger: the expectation to receive 'cheap grace', forgiveness for everything no matter what, with or without Christ.**

## Radical Christianity

Radical Christianity is a Christianity that goes back to its roots, its origins. That's exactly what the word 'radical' means coming from the word 'root'. Christ was radical - taking religion back to its roots in God cutting right through the distortions and heresies of Hebrew religion. Luther was radical in the essentials of his so-called 'Conservative Reformation' cutting through endless religious red tape, traditions, practices and demolishing the most hallowed institutions of his day. Maybe some of us are radical in claiming that to be Lutheran does not mean to be bound by any particular Order of Worship whether traditional or contemporary. We want to honour and respect all good church traditions and liturgies and we want to learn from them but we are driven to become Jews to the Jews, Greeks to the Greeks, in order to save some. We are radical, above all, in the proclamation of the Gospel in uncompromising manner as the first and the last thing we want to do on earth.

## Willing to take a bullet for Christ?

There was a packed congregation when in rushes a man with a black balaclava over his face pointing a gun. The gunman shouts, *Stand up anyone willing to take a bullet for Christ*. Reluctantly a few people in the crowd stand up, just a few. The man takes off his mask. Fortunately it's an actor who goes on to say, *Ok, the rest of you seated hypocrites can leave now*.

This story may be exaggerated and over the top maybe but makes me wonder what I would've done.

- Kylie Sheafe, Gympie

## LEGALISM OR GRACE?

A well known contemporary preacher and writer in Texas USA by the name Max Lucado wrote, *All religions can be placed in one of two camps: legalism or grace. A legalist believes if you look right, do right, speak right and belong to the right group, you will be saved ... his outside sparkles but something's missing: joy! - What's there instead? Fear that you won't do enough, arrogance that you've done enough, failure because you've made mistakes. Legalism is the slow suffocation of the spirit, the amputation of one's dreams. Legalism is a diet that is rules and standards. Legalism ultimately doesn't need God. It's a search for innocence, not forgiveness. It's a systematic process of defending, explaining, exalting, justifying.*

*[Legalism] turns my opinion into your burden. There's only room for one opinion ... and guess who's always wrong? [It] turns my opinion into your boundary. It turns my opinion into your obligation. Under legalism Christians must toe the company line. Their job is not to think, it's to march.*

Frankly, parts of the Bible certainly seem to fly into the face of 'God's boundless grace', at least for the uninitiated reader. We have to make this basic decision: either we interpret the Gospel in the light of the Law or we interpret the Law in the light of the Gospel which really is the only way.

Legalism has left whole churches and countless congregations with dreadful legacies. It continually causes divisions. By contrast, it is the Gospel that unites the church under grace and welcomes a multiplicity of opinion, under The Cross. There I become quiet. There we all stand as equals, whether priest, pope or candlestick maker with all our different views, united as one. *Welcome to the new life under the Gospel!*

# Christianity in Bali

- Pastor Peter Geyer, Fassifern Lutheran Church, S.E. Qld.

## In the face of adversity - the fascinating story of the Church's growth on this holiday island

**M**y wife and I have travelled to Bali many times over the past 30 years as a cheap and exotic tourist destination. As a Pastor of the LCA, I've followed the progress of the churches there with keen interest. At the end of May 2011 we lead a group of 10 people from our parish on a spiritual retreat to Bali to experience the religious and cultural life there, which is vastly different from anything we might encounter here in Australia.

Highlights of the tour were visits to Buddhist and Hindu temples, Moslem mosques, Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. We were inspired to see the outreach ministry of the GKPB – the main Protestant Church on the island with 15,000 members in over 70 congregations - as we witnessed it in the capital city of Denpasar, for example, a street kids' ministry to Moslems and Hindus kids alike. We visited Church supported orphanages and day care centres as well as taking note of the tremendous growth and new wave of acceptance Christianity has gained in the predominantly Hindu society even though Christians still constitute less than 1% of the population of 4 million.

At one time Christians were persecuted but today Christianity is gaining in acceptance and popularity. The Balinese pastor of a city church told me that this year he actually had to turn people away from their Easter services because there simply was no room for anyone to squeeze in and stand up in their building. *Next year we plan to meet outside in an open parkland*, he said.

Christianity was introduced to the island by the Dutch in the 1800s, but disallowed by the Dutch government after the assassination of a prominent Dutch clergyman in 1881. After a 48 year ban the Dutch allowed missionaries from America to enter the island and in 1931, 12 Balinese were baptized. Problems arose however when Christians no longer followed the prescribed Hindu rituals, and were blamed for any misfortune which was seen as punishment from the gods. Hostilities increased and in 1939, the Dutch government acted by gathering persecuted Christians and moving them to an area of land to the west of the island. It was a place of swamps and forests, where mosquitoes and wild animals lived. It was hoped that they and Christianity with it would slowly die out.

The Balinese Christians weren't sad at all, and saw this move as a way of gathering together the people of God and giving them their own Promised Land, much like the Israelites in Moses' day.

The village of Blimbingsari was established in the shape of a cross to remind the people of the central importance of the redeeming cross of Jesus. Each family house today has a cross above its front door. Today a large Balinese style church stands at the centre of the cross roads of the community.

Blimbingsari Christians pride themselves on their 'contextualized worship', where their Christian faith is



**Here an example of the typical Balinese blending of culture and architecture with Christian symbols. One way forward for authentic Christian witness in non-Christian countries? Here we see Pniel Church at Blimbingsari Village. Remember Pniel ('Pniel') was the name Jacob gave to the place where he wrestled with God. Genesis 32. Like Jacob the early Balinese Christians wrestled with God, were exiled but prevailed.**

expressed through traditional Balinese architecture, art and cultural forms. The Church is open on all sides and has a place for the traditional Balinese gamelan orchestra who play xylophones, drums and gongs in accompaniment to the singing. The first Sunday of each month all the people worship in traditional dress. At other times they dress in regular clothes and employ more western instruments. By expressing their Christian faith in the context of the Balinese culture, the people feel that it has gained them both acceptance and a distinct identity.

One cannot help but notice just how clean and tidy the village of Blimbingsari is kept. The Christian message preached includes an environmental message to care for this Promised Land that the Lord has provided for them. The church supports a large orphanage, runs programs for the community and has its own private school. Each Sunday it is filled with grateful and vibrant worshippers.

My concerns about syncretism, or the blending and confusing of religious identity were put to rest when I heard the vital message of the Gospel being presented not only here in Blimbingsari but also in a leading Denpasar church.

Our party also visited another church complex near the tourist destination of Nusa Dua. It's at a place called 'The Hill of Prayer'. Indonesia gained independence from the Dutch in 1949, and the new government gave a parcel of land to five different religious groups in an attempt to emphasize religious harmony. Worship places

were built side by side for Buddhists, Moslems, Roman Catholics, Hindus and Protestants, with each place sharing the same car park area. The Protestant Church is led by volunteer pastors from overseas, including Lutherans, and the services are in English and Indonesian. Perhaps the general perception of non-Christian people is that all of these religions are different roads to the same destination, but that's certainly not what is preached in the Bukit Doa GKPB Church. Although relationships between the religious groups are good, Jesus' claim "No one comes to the Father but by me" is certainly expressed.

I praise God for the growth I have seen in the Balinese Churches. Christians there are actively involved in the

life of their communities, feeding the poor, providing homes for orphaned kids, and providing education and skill based training for the disadvantaged. This is precisely the way the early church gained acceptance and grew, when in love, it started to reach out and meet the needs of the people around them. They earned the right to be heard, and then the Holy Spirit was able to do his work of bringing people to Christ.

It was encouraging to see Moslem and Hindu parents standing in a room at the Denpasar Church, dressed in their distinguishing clothes, watching their kids praising Jesus and hearing the message of the Gospel. Thank God that the Spirit "poured out on all flesh" at Pentecost is alive and well in Bali.

## Malaysia

### Sabah News

#### *I did not dare to turn down God's calling to me*

**By Isabel Yong Vui Yun, Sabah, an ASIA FOCUS scholarship recipient**

I'm Isabel Yong Vui Yun, the student of Sabah Theological College (STS) who received your sponsorship. I was happy to receive such good news from Principal Dr Thu that you are willing to sponsor my studies here at STS.

I'm married with a six year old daughter. My lovely husband is a young pastor who graduated from STS last year. He is now serving as a youth pastor at Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, Kota Kinabalu. For the past four years while he studied at STS, I had been the sole bread winner of the family.

It was very hard for me to support my family as well as my husband's study. I trusted in Him who is my Shepherd that I shall not be in want. Hence I took up the challenge that Lord has called me to fulfil.

I know my husband has just started his ministry, and his earnings are very little even as compared to my previous job. My daughter's education fees also burden us. But I did not dare to turn down God's calling to me. I prayed and prayed for financial support, and He is the

trustworthy one. I thank Him for bringing ASIA FOCUS into our family life and become our sponsor. I can only say, my days are brighter now and my journey can go further.

Dear Australian friends, I sincerely wish to say a big Thank You to you. I hope to meet up with you if there is a chance. I will keep in touch with you. Please do pray for my family as well as my studies at STS. And I will keep you in my prayers also.

**Isabel Yong Vui Yun**  
June 2011



## Christianity and Bibles Booming in China

It is estimated that one in ten people are Christian now in some provinces and cities of China – with numbers growing and growing even though the population growth is slow because of the one-child policy. Even the western media takes notice now. The printing of Bibles is also booming business in China. The 80,000,000<sup>th</sup> Bible produced under Communism in the last 20 years recently ran off the printing press. All Bibles are printed by one government controlled business. It employs 600 people most of whom are non-Christians and members of the Communist Party. These Communists can hardly keep up with the demand for Bibles! Even the persecuted house churches have to buy their Bibles from them. That means, the government profits financially from the very people it persecutes. And there has been a major crackdown on Christians right now in 2011! – I believe that our churches and congregations too would spring into new life if they were persecuted!

## Lutheran Renewal in North America

It seems that the largest Lutheran Church in North America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), with its 4.5 million members has lost its way. Too often discussions get bogged down on things like gay marriage, homosexuality and climate change, with the Gospel pushed right back.

Now there are two major renewal movements that have largely emanated from the ELCA. They have founded their own church bodies but are influential far beyond their actual membership. Their focus is on mission, the authority of the congregation and clear Lutheran Reformation teaching. Here they are:

### 1. Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC)

LCMC is a vibrant and faithful association of congregations, rather than being just a denominational church body. But it is a church as well. The LCMC executes its ministries through congregations. It has a traditional denominational structure to assist them in their mission and ministry.

*LCMC has over 600 congregations in the US. We are in 42 states and 11 countries. We have a 10 year history of growth. Having been formed in 2001... we continue to grow. 12% of our congregations are new ministries and we expect that trend to increase. Our structure is horizontal with two association wide boards - the Board of Trustees and the Board of Ministry. We are also*

*developing more and more geographical districts, numbering 12 at this point.* Rev Mark Vander Tuig

### 2. The North American Lutheran Church (NALC)

Its website says that the *NALC embodies the theological centre of Lutheranism in North America. It is a church body committed to the authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life. In keeping with the Lutheran Confessions, we believe all doctrines should and must be judged by the teaching of Scripture.*

*The NALC is committed to shaping its life around four attributes: Christ-centred, mission-driven, traditionally-grounded, and congregationally-focused. The NALC is a renewed Lutheran community moving forward in faith and mission, focused on living out Christ's Great Commission to go and make disciples.*

Let's not forget that there is still the LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI (LCMS) with its 2.3 million members, the eight-largest Protestant denomination in the USA, also an evangelical and orthodox body and not in the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. The LCMS has lost a little of its cutting-edge mission spirit – also battling a slightly declining membership - but is still vital and dynamic.

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## Sumatra

### Our Sanggar in Medan: good Progress at this Street Children's Centre

Children from poor families are disadvantaged worldwide, especially in places like Indonesia. Struggling to make a living and working long hours, parents are never home and the kids roam the streets going to school only irregularly, learning little and really being in moral danger daily. This is why five Christian young women opened this Sanggar ('street children's centre') a while ago with the help of ASIA FOCUS. It provides after-school care and teaching on various fronts: school subjects, health and hygiene, and Christian living.

Since early this year much improvement has been noticed: higher daily attendance (25-30) and happier and better behaved children. Comments Hotlin Sitorus, a supervisor, *I am really amazed. [These rough kids from poor backgrounds] start to talk politely now. They have a fresh appearance. Generally they look much better now.* Being either Lutheran, Methodist or Catholic, the staff of five is doing an excellent job. Only two staff members receive a salary.

Three of their best students have now finished with Primary School and we managed to get them into a good Junior High School. But it all cost money - money the parents didn't have it. The Sanggar costs ASIA FOCUS around \$8,000 a year.



**Some of the children at the Sanggar collected from the streets. Life is difficult for them but they are being given a chance now.**

Photo: May 2011

## Liberia

# Amidst Pain and Struggle: the Dawn of a new Day

*I have a dream that one day Liberian Refugees will live in peace and joy. Something keeps ringing in my ears that all those in exile will one day return home ... For years they dreamt. For years their dreams kept them alive. Now at last the time has come for their dreams to become true. These are the days of miracle and wonder.*

They are not there yet. It's rainy season right now. Daily the water buckets down spreading disease and causing the work to slow down to a trickle till October when the dry is expected to return. The first 10 houses are already built and occupied by the workers. According to the Stage I planning guide, 100 houses are yet to be built in 2011 as much as possible.



**Mary Warner, leader of the women, hard at work at LGV.**

Then most of the Lutheran refugee community of Laine and Kouankan Camps and in Nzerekore City in Guinea should be able to go home - home at last after 15 or 20 years of suffering in exile. Many other refugees may want to join them but that may take a while. In principle the doors are open to all.

Since the gospel helps and heals body, mind and spirit, the pastors are seen as the leaders in everything – in conducting the worship and building the houses. Pastors Siaffa and Brownie are now responsible for building 50 houses each. They spearhead the work. They are mostly on site in the Lutheran Global Village (LGV) while occasionally having to go back to Guinea to liaison with their people and bring them up to date.

Can you imagine? Pioneers working deep in the jungle starting with nothing. *We are working deep in the forest, writes Wilson, there are a lot of dangers among us at night. Scorpions and snakes appear frequently among us while we sleep. We trust God to protect us also while we work. Our hope and everything rests in ASIA FOCUS too. Believe me that if it were not for your continuous words of counsel, we would have never seen our native land again. You are creating for us a never ending love.*

They really should have one big truck at least but they haven't. All they got is a second hand Toyota Land Cruiser bought with our funds that is used for everything – for taking people to and from the camps, patients to doctors, transporting planks, sand, cement and all other buildings materials. Of course they have to be their own mechanics and have to fix everything themselves. These

are not 'primitive' people. They are our brothers and sisters. They are skilled, talented, inventive and energetic!

LGV is now their permanent home. Most activities back in Guinea have now stopped – the classes, the courses, the aid programs while the school in Kouankan Camp has been closed down by the authorities. But basic emergency relief needs to be maintained in Guinea for the time being.

The news back from the Camps is not good: *In Kouankan and Laine, women and children are living through some hell, everyone now has to take responsibility of his or her own health care costs, but the bigger question is, how, what with? They have no money for seeking treatment, and deaths have occurred over the past months in the Lutheran Church in Laine. 15 year old Togbah, a boy, died a miserable death in his mother's arms due to a severe sickness. Or there are people like Martheline from another church coming to us pleading for help. How can we refuse? In Kouankan too there are many emergencies.*

*The truth is that God has appointed us to serve but the suffering is massive, and the weight, the burden is getting heavier. I want the world to strengthen the efforts of ASIA FOCUS to continue to help us massively.*



**The first 10 houses have been built for under \$1,000 each. The total work force on site for village development is 45. This includes local and casual labour. Now during the wet season many workers are often sick with malaria.**

### Dubious Fame in Africa

*The name Fricke and Betty are now more celebrated in the congregations here. Young Betty – the name of your wife - is growing up in Laine Camp and is now two years old, while a boy named Fricke has just been born at Kouankan Camp. I mean Pastor Fricke and Mother Betty are now famous people in Africa. This really brings me joy and hope that through Christ we are all one forever.*

*Wilson, early 2011*

*Comment by Betty Fricke, I feel so sorry for that poor boy!*

## Myanmar

### How the Kids are growing up!

Nothing ever stays the same on earth. No one does, children least of all. Four years ago the 20 children of IMMANUEL CHILDREN'S HOME (ICH) were plucked out of the obscurity of remote villages. They were orphans or came from poor and dysfunctional backgrounds. They were taken to the capital Yangon (Rangoon) many miles away and gathered up in ICH. They were given a new life. ICH now is their life, their family, their security, their hope, their future.

Now look at them! Self-respecting and even cheeky young people, yet so sweet and obedient! In Australia children are encouraged to talk, to express themselves. In Myanmar the prevailing wisdom is that the perfect child is quiet and does not ask any questions but only answers them if asked. ICH is one of ASIA FOCUS' lead projects made possible by 20 sponsors and other donations. Some 60% of costs are covered by the sponsorships.

Here Lalzathanga, Vanlalhraia and Lalrinawma of Immanuel Children's Home, Yangon. They have finished Primary School now and are becoming big boys. They have just been enrolled at a High School.



### **Hope Education Centre: An expanding, vital ministry**

*Hope Education Centre (HEC) is becoming more and more popular and widely accepted in the area in which it is situated. Why? Because of our commitment to teaching and caring for the children. That's in spite of the fact that it is Christian, not Buddhist. Our commitment is indeed to education, health care and nutrition. HEC has currently an attendance of 50 students of which about 35 are regular. 90% of them are Buddhist, five are orphans.*

*Furthermore Pastor Martin Lalthangliana tells us that most of the children are coming from very, very poor backgrounds and their parents work as bus conductors, roadside traders or rickshaw drivers. Or they are simply drunk, gamblers or prostitutes. Prostitution is illegal but common. Prostitutes earn well but income is irregular and they take many risks. Bus conductors (unlike bus drivers), for example, earn only \$1 a day or so.*

*HEC is in the process of publishing a small booklet called "Basic Ethics for Children". It includes stories, short articles and principles that our staff compiles for the children's ethical guidance.*

*HEC gives its students supplementary education in after-school hours free of charge. On Saturday mornings we teach nutrition. We plan to extend the ministry to Sunday by inviting the children to Sunday School, praise and worship.*

*Recently we installed a new teacher who will also work as missionary. His responsibility is to show the love of God to the children and their families and to share the Gospel. Please pray for him, the whole staff and all the children.*

### **Tahan Agricultural Project successfully completed**

The deal has been done. The land has been secured. The seven-acre rice paddy has been bought. Because it is well situated, very close to the administrative centre of Tahan, the land will hopefully serve in due course as the district headquarters of the Lutheran Church of Myanmar. For the moment it will give employment and income to one or two peasant farmers and benefit the church financially every year from now on – part of the drive to help it become more self-supporting.

This was made possible through the TAHAN AGRICULTURAL PROJECT launched last year and now completed raising \$22,500 in total, the cost of the land exactly. The chief drivers of this project were Ian Kluge, Taillem Bend SA and Corinne Heintze, Minyip Vic. We can't thank them enough for their energy and tireless efforts. They have travelled to the Tahan area in Myanmar regularly and also initiated other small projects there, at times with the help of their congregations. The personal involvement of Ian and Corinne, and others like Jan Jenner, Angaston, has been an inspiration to us all!



## Luther Seminary Thailand (LST)

ASIA FOCUS is privileged to sponsor four of the 43 students at LUTHER SEMINARY THAILAND in Bangkok. Three of them are sponsored directly by our supporters. These are their names:

1. Mr Santi Piriya, 1st year student, age 19, from a Chiang Rai hill tribe, doing the full five year course (B.Th.);
2. Mr Reepaw Saentawedech, 2nd year student, age 19, also from a Chiang Rai hill tribe;
3. Ms Therissara Wuimae, 2nd year student, age 23, a Thai from Chiang Rai;
4. Mr. Kiattisak Boonman, 4th year student, age 25, a Thai from Korat, North East of Bangkok, presently on internship (like vicarage) at Fahuan Lutheran Church, Ubon Rachathanee.



**MYNANMAR:** Here recently ordained Rev. Lalpeksanga with children and adults from Letpanchaung Lutheran Church with a membership of around 70. This village with its 1,500 families is one of the largest in the Tahan region. It is hoped to start a church preschool here soon. Rev. Lalpeksanga is sponsored by ASIA FOCUS for further theological studies.

**TAHAW VILLAGE, NORTHERN THAILAND,** with its Lahu tribe people from Myanmar. They cannot live here permanently. That is why we hope to buy land for them nearby. See below. Here we see them welcoming us with dance and song in their beautiful traditional costumes. Their religion is animist-spiritist but many are becoming Christians. Note their little church in the background.



## Disturbing, Sacrificing Religion

I really resent having to talk about money. It would be wonderful to follow a religion that involves no money, no organisation, no meetings and that just makes us pray and worship and praise God all day long if we want, but asks for no more! That's my dream, or at least the lazy person's dream inside of me. The fact is that the true Christian Faith has us busy, engaged, involved all year long. The fact is that money fired by prayer and living faith has the power to change the world! Therefore reluctantly we decided to engage in two big new projects for 2011, projects that are different from the others, projects that have to stand on their own feet and cannot be subsidized from ASIA FOCUS general funds. Here they are:

### 1. Myanmar - ICH Land Purchase Project

Immanuel Children's Home (ICH) survives in rented premises that are far too small. Land for a permanent site needs to be bought urgently. \$60,000 is needed with \$8,255 in hand now. The costs for the building of the future Home seem to be covered already. For details contact our South Australian friends P. & M. Battye (08-8356 2939, [pbattye@adam.com.au](mailto:pbattye@adam.com.au)) or I. & D. Kluge (08-8572 3823, [i.kluge@bigpond.com](mailto:i.kluge@bigpond.com)). A brochure is available. We hope that SA and Victoria will focus on this project.

### 2. Thailand - Tahaw Village Resettlement Project

Tahaw Village near Chiang Rai in northern Thailand is a place of refuge for refugees of the Lahu tribe coming from Myanmar. They need land to call their own, a place to rebuild for the long term to give them and their children a future, to establish a church, clinic, Christian Education Centre and maybe a Children's Home. More than 300 people are involved. The Ev Luth Church of Thailand has urged us to take on this project. For more details contact Jenny Challenger (07-5525 3783, [jennychallenger@southernphone.com.au](mailto:jennychallenger@southernphone.com.au)) from the Gold Coast. Needed: 'only' \$50,000 with a little over \$10,000 (mainly from two donors) being in hand. This project will be promoted in Queensland in particular.

Information can also be requested from ASIA FOCUS directly and donations are to be made in the usual way to ASIA FOCUS (see page 12) but must be clearly earmarked! Enthusiastic supporters are leading both campaigns. We know the challenge is enormous. It is hoped that many new donors can be found so that all the other important ASIA FOCUS projects will not suffer.

## Cambodia

### Official Registration of Church achieved – a gift from heaven

#### Abundant Life Church News, Preah Sdach, Krasang Tang, South East Cambodia

While officially there is freedom of religion in Cambodia the reality is often different. Indirectly there is plenty of discrimination and sometimes even persecution. For example, it is hard to register churches and make congregations legal entities. There are long delays and large sums of money (bribes) must usually be paid. But our friends from ABUNDANT LIFE CHURCH (ALC) were fortunate early this year. They had looked at ways of becoming an officially recognized church for a long time. By coincidence they met a fellow Christian from another town who told them *I know someone in the government in Phnom Penh from the days when I was a soldier*. The Christian brother offered to get in touch with his contact in the Ministry for Cults and Religious Affairs in Cambodia and sure enough, within a very short period of time and only a token amount of money paid, official church registration was approved on 5 January 2011. That was cause for celebrations! God himself had helped to bring about what to them was a small miracle at least. Now the church no longer needs to fear harassment and rejection when it shares Jesus Christ in the region.

## The Philippines

### Plans for City Mission in Luzon

An energetic Lutheran pastor in the Baguio City area shares the following vision with us: *I believe that we need an emphasis on urban mission and ministry in the Lutheran Church. Though we have some urban ministry going I think we have to do much more. One reason for the loss of members is that when our members move into the city they cannot find a Lutheran church. I don't know how we can start but I know God will lead us. He will teach us how, and He will lead us to the right place and the right people.*

*The urban area we consider is BAGUIO CITY. It's a strategic place for starting mission work. We have one church there already but sad to say the church is stagnant. It's not growing numerically. From Baguio City as centre, we can penetrate other places. If we want to start city work the best thing to do is to make our work a real landmark, that is, to have our own plot, a property where we can build our own city chapel, a place to magnify the Lord.*

*We are praying for God's leading. We have plans but it is God who directs.*

**Pastor Cresente Faustino, La Trinidad**

**Some people in South Australia show a lot of interest in the Philippines and this work in particular. Is anyone else interested?**

### New Evangelist Appointed

Mr. Try Chhaly has now been commissioned as evangelist of ABUNDANT LIFE CHURCH. Baptized in 2001 he has been a Christian for ten years now. ASIA FOCUS made this possible by offering an annual sponsorship of \$750. Try Chhaly lives in his home village of Krangsvay, 10km from the church. He monitors three Bible Study groups and started to share the Gospel in a another village as well. One day a week he also works as a motorbike-taxi driver. We pray that God will bless him, his wife, their grown up three daughters and his whole ministry. If anyone, or any one group, were to offer to take over this sponsorship, we would say, *You are most welcome!*

In June we also contributed \$200 towards building a little cottage on the church grounds. The person who lives there now acts as caretaker. Twice all the chairs in the little church have already been stolen!

### News from Roussey Chok Village School

The school building is the impressive legacy of a work team from IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH, Buderim Qld, that erected its basic structure in January 2009. Team leader Frank Muller reports that financial support has continued and that big improvements have been made to the building ever since. *It is used twice a day by about 50 students per classroom or around 200 students all up. The kids come from the three villages nearby. On weekends the ALC church runs Sunday school and English classes here. This is a wonderful asset for the community and a great witness to the locals with all those children benefiting.* Note: A Buderim team plans to visit again in January 2012 and this time hopes to help improve their church building plus engage in plenty of other activities.

### Mission Trips

Ever since our last Mission Trip there has been increased interest in further trips. Keep enquiring. This is what is planned:

**1. Trip to Myanmar and Thailand  
16-26 January 2012.**

It will be a variation of this year's very successful trip but will have other features.

**2. Trip to Mongolia  
6-16 September 2012**

This is fairly definite at last. There have been many enquiries. This trip is likely to take in KOREA as well.

**For updates and details: Stuart Betlem, Integrity Travel, Brisbane, or ASIA FOCUS editor.**

Stuart, committed to ASIA FOCUS, is a professional travel consultant and offers his services for all other travel as well and can be reached at 07-3103 3923 or [betlem@completetravelsolutions.com.au](mailto:betlem@completetravelsolutions.com.au)

## **LETTERS FROM EVERYWHERE**

*The lead article in the last issue, "Mission and Conversion in the modern World", IS probably the most balanced article I've read on the subject! Thank you.*

**Tim Oestmann, Pastoral Care Coordinator & University Chaplain, Adelaide**

*Ok. Finally we've made a decision. I so want to do a mission trip BUT I do not think the time is right at this moment. I feel (against my 'will') that the money at this stage would better be sunk into missions, rather than me do a trip ... I have prayerfully decided to wait for a while. In the meantime I will donate towards Asia Focus. God bless, and God stop me from being envious of you all who do the hands-on work!!! Take care, and I look forwards to getting your next magazine. Yours in Christ forever!*

**Karen, Central Queensland**

*I would like to receive an issue of ASIA FOCUS that stirs the hearts of its readers not from the perspective of the needs in the field but from the perspective of what an individual or a few individuals can do and how to go about it. I would like to receive an issue of ASIA FOCUS that bares the heart of its author and in the process can teach us how to emulate (not necessarily copy) to be better disciples.*

**Wong Hui Keat, Malaysia**

*I opened my emails today and was so very happy that I have an email from you. Indeed God is a great provider, our Jehovah-jireh ('the Lord who provides'). So happy that you could send an amount to help me start the food store at our College. Please help me pray that this will more and more meet the health needs of the children. Thank you indeed for the 55,000 PHP you gave us. You know, the new chaplain of our school is a tribal pastor, a widower with six kids. He is a fruit of our orphanage which sustained his physical needs some years ago.*

**Lucia Banac, Rock Valley College, Mindanao, Philippines**

*In the May issue of ASIA FOCUS you had a brief article under the headline "Shame Australia". Students come to our beloved Australia not only from SE Asia but also from India and many other countries. It is true that students and others are alarmed when they observe the excesses in drinking, sex and drug use here. O Lord, forgive us, all our sins of thought, word and deed. Yes, we must share the Gospel of Christ but our daily living in obedience to God's Word should also be seen before others, wherever we live and work and play.*

**Pastor Paul Albers, Hope Valley SA**

*Just read the latest ASIA FOCUS Newsletter. Very overwhelming.*

**Wendy, Bundaberg**

*I am writing to ask for some help. Our church is financially down in terms of our general operational expenses. Three of the evangelists in a town called Darhan have not been paid for the last six months, plus we could not go to the countryside to help our brothers and sisters who are quite new believers. Also our building project in Ulaanbaatar needs some substantial help. But of course I would not expect you have endless resources! Please pray for us and help if possible.*

**Pastor Puje, Mongolia**

*The children are very happy to hear about this. They already imagine how big and beautiful their house will be. We pray for this project and are also worried about the value of the US dollar going down day after day. If it goes on like this, then we might need more dollars to buy the land. For all the projects ASIA FOCUS runs in Myanmar the exchange rate is not good. It is hard to manage everything within the constraints of the budget we've agreed on. Because you have to raise more funds for the land purchase project, I don't expect that you can add a bit more to the general budget. Is this right?*

**Pastor Martin Lalthangliana, Myanmar**

**The church also looks for a photocopier (\$1,000) and projector (\$800). Even in Asia this is basic equipment today.**

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## **Editorial Notes**

The world is our parish. It starts next door and ends nowhere. We must think globally and act locally *and* globally. We are the world! Big things happen every day both good and bad. We think of Pastor Simon McKenzie, LCA missionary, in North Eastern Thailand and the floods that have caused much damage there. We think of the tragedy unfolding in Somalia. We think of Southern Sudan, the world's youngest nation that has just become independent on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011 with fighting continuing in some areas – and of the still devastated villages and churches there. Through our friend Kaway Nok, Geelong, we donated \$1,000 in May to a struggling Lutheran parish in southern Sudan.

I found the following story inspirational: A Queensland family would have loved to come on one of our Mission Trips. After a long time of inner struggles they finally decided *no, the time is not right*. Instead of going, they made \$5,000 available for ASIA FOCUS. Totally amazing!

I want to remind donors to be sure to use our relatively new account number in bank transfers. It is printed on the Response Form and on page 12 in current editions only. I also need to mention that many a donor cannot be identified from bank transfers because no name accompanied the donation. That applies to gifts via the LLL as well. We would love to thank you but sometimes cannot! Thanks to all who contribute separately to production and postal expenses of

ASIA FOCUS. It's mostly in the red but it's ok. I will mention that I was upset to find that some people think that travel expenses are being taken out of ASIA FOCUS funds.

I believe that living is giving, and giving is opportunity and grace. But on the other hand we gladly make the ASIA FOCUS Newsletter available as a service free of charge. Countless hours of enthusiasm and volunteer work in a number of states goes into this ministry week after week by more than just a few people. It is encouraging to see how many laypeople have caught the ball now and run with it under their own steam!

Please consider the lead article in this issue ('Halting the global Attack on the Gospel'). Among other things it sets out the philosophical-theological base of ASIA FOCUS. We deplore that much Christian activism does not seem to stand on a firm foundation. But as always: feel free to disagree.

In a major development we are about to become a recognized charity and are setting up a more proper organisation without becoming bureaucratic.

It is great to be alive amidst all the pain and challenges of this day and age. Yours in friendship,

**August Fricke**

## ASIA FOCUS Projects

### Myanmar

- Support for the building up and nurturing of the body of Christ through the ministries of the Lutheran Church of Myanmar, with the help of some congregations.
- Key projects: *Immanuel Children's Home* and *Hope Education Centre* in Yangon.

### Cambodia

- Abundant Life Church at Preah Sdach.
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cambodia – various projects.

### Mongolia

- Support for three pastors/church workers bringing the Gospel to the unreached – and more.

### Indonesia

- Various sponsorships of promising young people including a blind student - Riana Simbolon.
- Street Children Project in Medan.
- Support for work with street children in Medan.
- Post tsunami trauma keeling support in Banda Aceh, Sumatra.

### Thailand

- Sponsorship of evangelist Mr Tosapol Lapimol in the north and aid to some needy people.
- Sponsorship of four theological students at Luther Seminary Thailand (LST), Bangkok – and more!

### Philippines

- Support for mission and programs in the Cordilleras, Northern Luzon – and more!

### Africa

- Liberia, West Africa – helping more than 600 refugees to survive in Guinea and then resettling them back home in Lutheran Global Village.

### Vietnam

- Support of work among the blind and forgotten

### Malaysia (Sabah)

- Sponsorship of two indigenous students for theological education at Sabah Theological Seminary, one co-sponsored by Noosa church.

## ASIA FOCUS Mission Statement

ASIA FOCUS aims to be a source of information on Asian Christianity from a Lutheran perspective. It endeavours to promote friendship and true dialogue between individual Christians and churches beyond cultural divides. ASIA FOCUS supports holistic mission and support ministries hand in hand with our Asian brothers and sisters.

## A big **thankyou** to all donors!

ASIA Focus hopes to help revive the mission spirit in the church. We believe that it should be possible to make available greater resources for mission and relief through official LCA channels and congregational and other independent ventures such as ASIA Focus as well.

Obviously ASIA Focus projects depend on the continued flow of donations. We know that the Spirit guides and provides.

**ASIA Focus wants to say 'thank you so much' to all donors. We thank you for your engagement in this rewarding venture of faith and mission.**

ASIA FOCUS is a free publication distributed in printed and electronic format. Unless otherwise indicated, Pastor August Fricke ([fricke@netspace.net.au](mailto:fricke@netspace.net.au)) is the author of all items.

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