

BUILDING UP A CHURCH BODY IN Cambodia

Years ago, the Rev. Bun Sopheap met a foreign missionary while on his way to the local market. Sopheap had never met a foreigner before, and certainly not one who spoke the local Khmer language. He invited the man over, and the man gave him a Gospel tract. Sopheap read it eagerly.

After this brief interaction, Sopheap wanted to learn more about the Word of God and to share it with others. He found the LCMS Recognized Service Organization Garuna Foundation and its ministry, the Luther Institute Southeast Asia (LISA), which teaches God’s Word to pastors, deaconesses and laypeople in the region.

Now, Sopheap is pastor of Prech Lutheran Church in the small town of Chhuk, Cambodia, as well as presiding pastor of the Cambodia Lutheran Church (CLC). The CLC currently has 42 congregations, house churches and preaching stations scattered around the country. It’s a small church body in need of care in its ongoing formation.

The Rev. J.P. Cima, LCMS missionary to Cambodia, walks alongside Sopheap and the church workers of the CLC, offering mentorship and theological education. Cima and his wife, Aimee, have spent more than 15 years serving with the LCMS Office of International Mission, the last five of which have been in Cambodia.

On a Saturday in September, Cima traveled to Chhuk to meet with Sopheap, Deaconess Neak Mao and other staff members. Mao read from Luther’s Small Catechism while guests sipped coconut water from freshly macheted coconuts. Cima added explanation from the catechism, and Sopheap led the group in prayer. They all sang Khmer Christian hymns and encouraged each other in the faith.

The next day, after worship and a fellowship meal of noodles and broth, Cima led a seminar on sin, starting in Genesis and tracing his way to Christ’s work on the cross. This is just one example of how Cima walks alongside this burgeoning church body in a country where nearly 98% of the people are Buddhist.

“God has called His people here to be the ones to carry forth His Word, to proclaim the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Of course, I’m going to help. I’m going to encourage. I’m going to be there. I’m going to cheer for them,” Cima said. “But ultimately, I want to give them the opportunity to do what God has called them to do.”



Clockwise from top: The Rev. Bun Sopheap, pastor of Prech Lutheran Church and presiding pastor of the Cambodia Lutheran Church, leads children in prayer during worship at Prech in Chhuk, Cambodia. The Rev. J.P. Cima, LCMS missionary to Cambodia, teaches during a devotion for local staff. Deaconess Neak Mao of the Cambodia Lutheran Church sings during a devotion at Prech Lutheran Church.

Give God Glory...

... for Beautiful Savior Lutheran Home, an LCMS Recognized Service Organization located in Belton, Mo. Beautiful Savior is an assisted living community that provides skilled nursing, rehabilitation services and care for senior citizens in need of supervision. It also offers on-site church services and Bible studies. Learn more at beautifulsaviorhome.com.



churches, supports mercy outreach projects, partners with local church leaders to develop self-sustaining congregations, and teaches

... for the Rev. James and Angela Sharp, LCMS career missionaries serving in Uruguay. James plants new

theology courses. Angela teaches English-as-a-Foreign-Language classes to people of all ages and conducts workshops for training new teachers and educational leaders. Together they seek to build relationships and share the Gospel. Learn more at lcms.org/sharp.

... for Emmanuel Lutheran Church and School in Kahului, Hawaii, which has been on the forefront of the response effort following the Maui wildfire in August. The congregation has been involved in facilitating the training and deployment of volunteers, collecting and distributing supplies, assisting with housing needs for the displaced, and distributing \$100,000 collected from people across the Synod for the families of those who died. Learn more at reporter.lcms.org/2023/the-lord-is-near-maui-fire-recovery-continues/.

One of the priorities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is to reach out in mercy and compassion to those in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, according to the Lutheran confession of the faith. This is accomplished under the familiar name of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, which the Synod uses to describe the mercy work directed by the policies of the Boards for National and International Mission and implemented through the programs of the Offices of National and International Mission.

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You Make the Difference through LCMS World Relief and Human Care

You make the ministry described in this newsletter possible! Your prayers and contributions to World Relief and Human Care “Where Needed Most” help deliver our Savior’s mercy to people in need. You bolster tightly restricted donations from others to help fully fund important mercy projects, allowing us to report here the impact you are making in Christ’s name. The courtesy envelope in this issue allows you to send a future contribution as the Holy Spirit leads, when He leads.





Raising Up an Immigrant Pastor in Indiana

A diverse group of people gathered beneath a tent outside of Southwest Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Ind., on July 22, 2023, to celebrate a momentous occasion: the ordination and installation of Soe Moe, an immigrant from Burma and the first Lutheran pastor from their community.

Soe Moe's story begins in the jungles of Thailand, although he is not exactly sure where. When he was born, his parents were living in a refugee camp on the border between Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Thailand. Soe Moe comes from the Karen people, who have faced persecution due to a combination of religious belief and political circumstance.

In 2008, Soe Moe's family relocated to the U.S. and settled in Fort Wayne. Soe Moe struggled in school, so he started attending a homework outreach program offered by Southwest Lutheran Church. Southwest also provided a Bible class for the children and invited them to church.

At church, he heard about a summer camp for refugee children put on by the Lutheran Agency for Mission to the Burmese (LAMB) in collaboration with Camp Lutherhaven in Albion, Ind.

Soe Moe attended the camp and was amazed to find that everyone was "free to talk ... and



Above: Soe Moe plays on a waterslide while serving as a camp counselor at Camp Lutherhaven in 2017. Below: Soe Moe and guests wait for the ordination service to begin on July 22, 2023.

get to know Jesus." He continued, "When we share our faith [in Burma], people thought that we're crazy because how could you believe in a god when you've never seen him?"

He later served as a camp counselor at Camp Lutherhaven and received encouragement to consider a vocation as a full-time church worker. With his pastor's help, he enrolled in the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The program specializes in preparing pastors and deaconesses in immigrant communities in North America.

The EIIT course of study takes place over four years, and Soe Moe acknowledges that the work stretched him in new ways. But his instructors were "gracious and merciful to help me become a pastor. ... It has been amazing."

His age helped him connect with the children and youth of the Karen community. Now that he's ordained, he has taken up additional duties as the youth pastor at Southwest, focused especially on teaching and preaching to the Karen youth.

The opportunity to share Christ's love with his own people fills Soe Moe with joy. "It's been a blessing to learn and to grow in this community," he said.

Overflowing with Thanks and Praise

"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Cor. 9:10-15).

Luther said that the Gospel passes from a people for thanklessness. He'd come to that conclusion by studying the history of the course of the Gospel from ancient Israel, Rome and Greece, and he (correctly) predicted the same fate for Germany. Thankfulness is a consequence of God's gifts believed and received. Think of Jesus healing the 10 lepers. Only one came back to thank Him — that is, to acknowledge and confess Him as Lord and Christ.

God has forgiven me my sins in Christ. Thanks and praise be to Christ! God has "given me my body and soul ... and still takes care of them" (Small Catechism, First Article of the Creed). Thanks and praise be to Christ! Paul says that when the Corinthians gave for the needs of others, this caused an "overflowing" of praise and thanksgiving. "Your confession of the gospel" causes the recipients to thank

and glorify God. And those who receive the gifts "long for you and pray for you." When we give, we rarely think of the thousands upon thousands of individuals all over the world who thank God for you and pray for you.

I'll never forget a young African boy living in one of our boarding facilities. During my visit, he said to me, "Tell your people that we thank God and our Lord Jesus Christ for you." I have no doubt the Gospel is remaining even among us because of such prayers unknown to us.

In Christ,

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison

President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

