



LEGACY INSTITUTE

P.O. Box 575, Monrovia, California 91016
www.legacyinstitute.org
mail@legacyinstitute.org

11 April 2010

Dear Fellow Laborers,

I was not able to be at our graduation and awards ceremony this year, because I was in Bangkok on the way to Burma (Myanmar); so I asked Erika Pedersen, our Deputy Principal, to step in and conduct the graduation ceremony. We had one graduating senior this year, LaNuNan, from the China border of the Upper Shan States in Burma. I asked Erika to write about the ceremony. Following is her report:

“On March 7, Legacy Institute held its graduation ceremony. This year was a bit different than the past couple of years. We had one graduate who will continue his education at Payap University nearby and will stay here at the school.

“We decided to have graduation at what we call ‘The Farm’ (Legacy Institute- owned property where the office building and vegetable garden are located). The Legacy students spent much of the day getting the sala (Thai-style gazebo) at The Farm ready. They created the backdrop, set up equipment, and practiced songs. Our ceremony began in the early evening in the sala, which overlooks the river. The very hot day had begun to cool down and all the students were assembled and ready!

“We honored three of our students for excellent work this year. Uaorawet Aimu received the Spirit of Excellence award. This award goes to the student who demonstrates the highest ideals of the institution during the past academic year. Uaorawet is the student who was in the really bad motorcycle accident and, despite that huge setback, he came to class, finished his work, and had a great attitude. We really learned a lot from him. Samuey Pabeu, a first year student, received The Academic Improvement award;



Graduating Senior, LaNuNan, with Legacy teachers.
L-R: Elainea Spivey, Erika Pedersen, and Nathan Kimmons.



Teachers, student body and guests attend ceremony.

and second year student DaNi received The Academic Excellence award. Samuey had his breakthrough with the phrase ‘What happened?’ Of course, when he first started saying that, he actually meant ‘What’s happening?’ or ‘What’s going on?’ His understanding of the idiom was not complete, but he was starting to talk. And from there he quickly started to talk *a lot!* I love seeing students get to that point.

“We also, of course, honored our graduate LaNuNan for finishing his full three years and really making the most of them. He is an incredibly motivated individual who is always ready to learn and do more.

“Nathan Kimmons, from Mississippi, a volunteer teacher at Legacy, was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation for his two years of service at Legacy Institute. Nathan will be returning home this Spring.

“LaNuNan gave a short speech about his time as a student here and encouraged his fellow students to work hard.

“The awards were handed out and music was performed. Then it was time for food! LaNuNan (along with everyone else!) loves pizza, so that’s what we had. Also, Elainea Spivey, another volunteer teacher from California, put her baking talents to work and produced an amazing array of desserts.

“The night went on for awhile as the students took advantage of the sound equipment and the fact that the farm is far from other inhabitants! They put Chiang Mai’s karaoke clubs to shame!

“As we all left, the farm seemed a little sad and empty—that’s usually a sign that a good time was had!”

BAPTISMS AND PASSOVER IN A REFUGEE CAMP

Gloria counted over a dozen river and stream crossings as we traveled the dirt road through the mountain jungle to reach Mae Surin Refugee Camp. We were very grateful that the monsoon (rainy) season hadn’t started yet, because the clouds of dirt kicked up by the four-wheel drive pickup we were traveling in would quickly become a quagmire of mud at the first heavy rain.



A fallen tree blocks our way.

Mae Surin is a United Nations camp located in the mountains near the Burma border to house mainly Karen and Karenni tribal refugees from the fighting in Burma. The Karenni are a related tribal group sharing similar dress and customs with the Karen, but the language is completely different. There are over eight major ethnic races and numerous tribal subgroups living in Burma and many of the refugees now living in border camps in Thailand come from one of more of these tribal groups. Most will go, under United Nations’ sponsorship, to another country and start new lives. Almost all of the Church of God members from Burma (called into the Church as refugees in Thai-

land) have emigrated to Western countries such as the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, and Norway.

Westerners are not permitted to stay overnight in the camp, so we arranged to stay in a little guesthouse in a small village about two hours from the entrance to the camp. Our driver, a former Karenni soldier, made the trip into the camp several times a week hauling supplies.

We went in on the Sabbath, the next day for Passover, and again on the first Holy Day of Unleavened Bread. We had to make our trips into the camp every morning and come back out every evening.

There was heavy smoke throughout the mountains, because this is the season that people burn off their land to prepare for planting crops at the beginning of the monsoon. Burning is also done by those who use this time as a chance to encroach on National Forest land. Most of the fires are started after dark. Burning off forest land is technically illegal in Thailand, but the law is largely ignored as more and more land is cleared for plantations. It is the same pattern as in other parts of the developing world. Large tracts of forest lands in Papua New Guinea and the Amazon have been largely cleared of natural forest and replaced with plantation crops of one kind or another. In Thailand, I have even seen forest land cleared of valuable teak and other trees in order to plant plantation trees such as rubber and oranges. It seems ludicrous to clear trees to plant trees, but that is sometimes what is done.

King Bhumibol has warned time and again that the clearing of forests will bring devastating mudslides in the rainy season, but few listen. The smoke is so bad that we must close the windows of our house in Chiang Mai and sleep with an air cleaner running. The people continue burning with impunity, even though they will eventually pay a dear price with dwindling water resources—already a local and international problem.

The streams and rivers of northern Thailand are getting smaller and shallower as the mountain forests are destroyed. The trees and other vegetation of the North act as sponges to hold the water, which is then slowly released down the mountains to provide a steady water source for lowland rice production. With the trees gone, the water simply will not be there.

In the future, water will become a prized commodity, perhaps even more valuable than gold or oil. In Asia, the countries of Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia all depend on the Mekong River water for irrigation. These Southeast Asian countries have been very concerned by China's plan to build a series of dams and reservoirs, which will take the Mekong's water, effectively leaving the downriver countries "high and dry." So far, China is unrelenting; and, this will become an increasingly serious political and economic flashpoint for Southeast Asia.

Gloria prayed that God would command it to rain on the fires to put them out, but not give too much rain as to cause the road to turn muddy. The day before the first Holy Day, it did rain—just enough to put out the forest fires, but not enough to turn the road into a mud track! Such is the power of prayer.



The three girls receive last-minute instructions before baptism.



Say Nee Htoo, Hpoo Hpoo, and Say Nee Say



Leon Sexton baptizes Say Nee Htoo as LaNuNan translates.

I counseled four young people for baptism. Three were ready, so we prepared for their baptism Sunday morning before the Passover. The river that courses through the center of the camp was the logical venue for their baptisms. With the other COG members and a small group of spectators in attendance, I baptized three young Karen ladies in the cold running waters of the Mae Surin River. The girls only speak and understand the Karen language; so while I asked them the necessary questions in English, LaNuNan translated my words into Burmese, and Naw Mya—a Karen Church member and mother of a set of twin girls I was baptizing—then translated into Karen. I had baptized Naw Mya in Kalaymyo,

Burma, seven years ago. Now her twin daughters were making their commitment to God and His Son Jesus Christ. It was really an emotional time for all of us, especially watching a mother seeing her own daughters bury their worldly lives in the cool waters of that distant mountain river.



Singing a hymn after the baptisms: L-R: NawMya (Mother of twins), Saw Sey Htoo (Father of twins), Mya Shwee (brother of twins), Kachin teacher in camp, LaNuNan, Say Nee Htoo and Say Nee Say (twins), Hpoo Hpoo, and Leon Sexton.

Before we left, we were asked to anoint and pray for a refugee who had a terrible skin disease. I asked him if he believed that Jesus would heal him. He said yes he did. The Bible tells us that it is faith that heals the sick. Please pray for Jaw Min's healing.

I asked LaNunan to stay and give Bible studies every day and conduct services on the weekly Sabbath and the last Holy Day of Unleavened Bread.



LaNuNan assists Leon Sexton back over the river after baptisms.

Meanwhile, I asked Nathan Kimmons and Jay Pabolo (a Karen and another of our Legacy graduates) conducted the Passover ceremony and first Day of Unleavened Bread for our church members in another refugee camp about three hours away.

Gloria and I were both concerned about this trip because of my health. The trip in and out of the camp by four-wheel pick-up was quite arduous, and we had to climb up and down the side of a mountain inside the camp. But God was with me and I was able to accomplish all that we set out to do.

Jesus sent us here to do His work. That is exactly what we are doing. He did not promise a rose garden. Nor did He guarantee I would have perfect health. What He did promise is that He would never leave nor forsake me until the End of the Age (or until my part in His Divine Plan is finished.) The Gospel is being preached in the mountains of Southeast Asia. Young people are being baptized. God is glorified.

BLOODSHED IN BANGKOK

Yesterday, armed protesters belonging to the United Democratic Front Against Dictatorship (UDD), better known as the “Red Shirts,” provoked the military security forces who had been ordered to clear them from several major intersections where they blocked traffic. This led to running gun battles up and down several prominent avenues, close to Parliament, in the old city of Bangkok.

Below is the Reuters report of April 10th:

BANGKOK (Reuters)—“Thai troops fired rubber bullets and tear gas at thousands of demonstrators, who fought back with guns, grenades and petrol bombs in riots that killed 12 people, Bangkok's worst political violence in 18 years.”

Ultimately, the security troops pulled back and there is a temporary truce. All of us are safe as we live in Chiang Mai in the North.

I called the palace and the King and Queen are safe at the hospital where the king is still recovering from a previous lung infection. They both are extremely saddened by the bloodshed. Over 500 people were wounded and 18 were killed, including 4 soldiers that had served the King and Queen.

This has gotten extremely serious and I want to call on all our fellow laborers to pray to our Almighty Father to intervene and bring a halt to what is turning into a revolution.

Many in the north and northeast of Thailand support former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who fled Thailand in 2008 after the courts convicted him of corruption and abuse of power. He has become a cult figure among the uneducated country people who see him as some kind of "Messiah figure." The Red Shirts want him back in power. This is not going to end soon. The fact that the Red Shirts are willing to resort to bloodshed demonstrates their resolve. I am very concerned.

We are here in Thailand to do the Work of God. We are permitted to exercise our religious freedom and perform our evangelistic activities without interference. Our right to religious freedom is protected and guaranteed by the person of King Bhumibol himself. We need peace and stability in Thailand to continue to do the Work we have been given by Jesus Christ. We all need your urgent prayers on our behalf to end this attack on the peace and safety we have been blessed with up until now.

Please continue to pray for the King and Queen. They both have been good friends of God's people for many years, and I have known them personally since 1979.

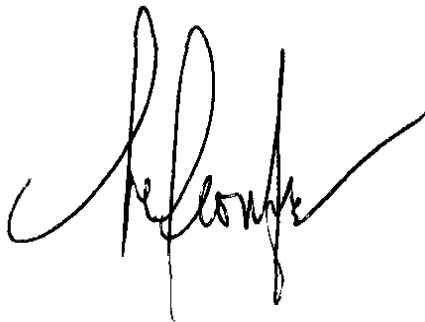
I will keep you posted with any further developments.

CALIFORNIA TRIP

Gloria and I will be in California from May 6th until May 27th. I do not look forward to the long flight, but my health has improved enough to take this more rigorous flight back to the U.S.A. We need to get back for a board meeting and take care of other important business that just cannot wait any longer. Please pray for us that God blesses our flight and time in California. I am also supposed to get cataract surgery the week of April 19 in Bangkok before the trip back. Please pray for our safety and a successful surgery.

Please pray that the Lord of the Harvest send workers into His harvest fields. We are training young men and women at Legacy Institute in Chiang Mai to be leaders in His Church. Pray that God choose those He wills to enter that harvest.

In our Lord Jesus' service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Leon Sexton', written in a cursive style.

T. Leon Sexton

© Legacy Institute 2010

P.S. Please remember our NEW mailing address which you can find at the top of this letter.