

Lao and Vietnamese Christian Leaders learn about the United Methodist Church



Seventeen persons from Laos and Vietnam are attending a school for Christian Leaders at the Cambodia Methodist Bible School which began on September 2 and will end on September 13. The two week school for pastors and lay leaders is being led by General Board of Global Ministries Staff, GBGM missionaries assigned to Vietnam, as well as members of the Hmong Association of United Methodists. The students have come because they have indicated an interest in establishing the witness and ministry of the United Methodist Church in their home countries.

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Cambodia was chosen as the site for the school for three reasons:

1. Christians in Vietnam and Laos are still not completely free to witness and teach openly.
2. The United Methodist Mission in Cambodia has a teaching facility available.
3. The students are able to study mission and ministry in a context similar to their home countries.

There are currently more than fifty established United Methodist Congregations in Cambodia and, in addition, forty preaching points.

Eleven men and women traveled by air from Vientiane, Laos to Phnom Penh, while six men and women endured a ten hour bus ride over rough roads from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Courses have included introductory courses in Bible, Preaching, and Wesleyan Theology. In addition to formal classes, the students have been introduced to the United Methodist Mission in Cambodia. They have visited ministry sites, such as a women's shelter and a school for children as well as attending worship with Cambodian United Methodists in their congregations. One afternoon was spent visiting the infamous Killing Fields just outside Phnom Penh where more than one million persons were killed during the reign of the Khmer Rouge.

Presently, the students are at work among themselves in planning for the development of United Methodist Ministries in their own countries. On the final day of class, the students from Vietnam and the students from Laos will present *Directions for Mission*. These documents will be used by Evangelization and Church Growth staff in guiding the development of General Board of Global Ministry Mission Initiatives in both Vietnam and Laos.

One young university student from Ho Chi Minh City, offered, "In Vietnam we have the proverb, 'The more we travel the more we learn.' This is my first time to leave Vietnam and during these two weeks I have had a chance to visit the Cambodian people and have fellowship with Lao people, and get to know their ministry. I saw their spirit and I hope I

have the same spirit. In Vietnam I have heard many people say that they want to study in the US, but the students came here to the Cambodia Methodist Bible School to study. I thank God for their spirit, and it encourages me a lot. When I study here I feel confident and comfortable and not afraid that the police or government people will come like I do in Vietnam. I thank God for the opportunity to study. I like the way Rev. Clinton Rabb teaches about the ways of the United Methodists. I have had the opportunity to learn from about the United Methodist tradition and I wish to serve God in the tradition of the Methodists."

Another university student in Ho Chi Minh City, stated, "This is the first time I have traveled from Vietnam. I have met many Cambodian United Methodists and have had the chance to connect with Lao students. I also give thanks for all the pastors who taught me about preaching, John Wesley, and how God gave us the Bible. From Pastor Ut To, I studied much that helped me to improve in English language and Bible. I hope that, in the future, God will open for us the opportunity to build the church and establish a Bible school like the one in Cambodia. I also have many difficulties in my village near Dalat, Vietnam so please pray for my village and my family. I hope there is a chance for many others to travel to another country to study together."

A pastor who leads a congregation in Vientiane, Laos, and serves as the chairperson of a group wishing to register the United Methodist Church in Laos said, "I appreciated very much the teaching about Baptism. Babies can be baptized and it can be done with a gentle sprinkling!"

A women's Christian Teacher in Vientiane, Laos said, "I have lived with the Lord for many years, but as a woman, I have never had the opportunity to preach the word, but have only listened to others. When we came here we learned the process for preaching. I was so excited to preach for first time. I hope that I will continue to grow in the future. Thank the Lord for the opportunity to come here, and for the lessons we have learned here. I will use my gifts at home."

Rev. Randy Day, Deputy General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries and nominee for General Secretary, participated in the school. Rev. Day worked with students, giving feedback during the preaching practicum as well as participating in a discussion of the sacraments. He said, "The students are so eager to learn. They are constantly engaged with each other, wrestling with new ideas. It is great that the United Methodist Church in Cambodia, which is so very young itself, can serve as a model for ministry for their neighbors in Laos and Vietnam."

The General Board of Global Ministry Missionary community in Cambodia has extended generous hospitality in hosting the school and providing administrative support. Lenita Tiong, Dean of the Cambodia Methodist Bible School and Mike Collins, Director of the United Methodist Mission in Cambodia have spent many hours in support of this effort. Rev. Day hosted a dinner for nine of the GBGM eleven missionaries and their children as a way of expressing thanks. Two of the missionaries were traveling outside Cambodia.

Rev. Tsuker Yang, chairperson of the Hmong Association of United Methodists in the United States said, "This is the first time any of these students have had a chance to travel and study outside their country. This training gives them a fresh understanding of the Christian faith and tradition. It has given the women students the confidence to express their faith openly in writing and in speaking."

Rev. Clinton Rabb a GBGM Executive Secretary in Evangelization and Church Growth said, "The students have been working, praying, and studying each day. They have a heart for souls and a deep concern for the poor. They are the seed of a new church in Laos and

in Vietnam."

Congregations or others wishing to support the development of United Methodist Mission Initiatives in Laos, Vietnam or Cambodia may contact Rev. Clinton Rabb at CRabb@gbgm-umc.org.



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