

Missions Trip to Chiang Mai, Thailand 2008

Jason & Maridel Liang

This was our first missions trip and God had called us to Chiang Mai. I had never heard of the place and prior to getting there, I couldn't find it on a map. Today, I know it as a small city near the northern corner of Thailand between Laos and Burma.

The religion there is primarily Buddhism, but the people there will tell you that they are also Taoist and sing songs to a river god. Aleck Lee and his wife, who are the full-time overseas missionaries there, really have a heart for the Thai people. They have established a Christian Missions Overseas (CMO) church there near Chiang Mai University to serve the students. Aleck works as a guest lecturer at the university, and together with the faculty of engineering organized an English Camp for the students. We were there as English teachers and at the same time, we were there to share our faith with the people of Chiang Mai.



Our missions team was led by Pastor Eugene and Priscilla from CCIC-NV. Besides us, we also had Gordon from CCIC and a team from the Mandarin Baptist Church in L.A. (Tim & Carol, Yen, Donald & Lynn, and their 17 month old daughter, Lauren). In Chiang Mai, we added a few more workers, Ann and Simon who lived there, and Mona who came from Hong Kong. Everyone was really nice and we worked well as a team. No one got sick through the entire trip. Praise God and thanks to all of you at home praying for us.

We left on a Thursday night and arrived on a Saturday morning. The flight on China Airlines was long and grueling with a 3 hour pit-stop in Taiwan. When we landed, Maridel said now she knows what it feels like to suffer for Christ.

The dorm rooms were not available so we stayed in the Best Western near the campus. Every morning, a van came by to pick us up and take us to class. The people in Chiang Mai were very hospitable, serving us hand and foot, and they didn't even expect a tip.

On Sunday, we had worship service with the small Thai congregation at the CMO church. They sang many of the same worship songs as we do but with Thai lyrics such as "Give thanks"

and “Lord I lift your name on high” so we were able to join them. Pastor Eugene gave the sermon which was translated into Thai for the congregation. It felt like we were on vacation up to this point and in the afternoon, Gorden and I even logged onto Battlenet for a while to see if anyone was playing Starcraft.

During the week, we woke up every morning at 6:15am. We met for devotions and prayer before going to breakfast and class. On Monday, Maridel and I were assigned a class of 11 students. They were made up of college students, students graduating from high-school, and a grad student. They spoke and understood English at various levels.

We spoke no Thai, had no experience teaching anything, and had no clue how to share our faith. We were constantly thinking about what to teach next, and at times we looked more lost than the students did. But what we lacked in abilities, we made up for in our genuineness, I think. We were fresh off the boat and it showed. For instance, the Thai people put their hands together and bow to their elderly and upper class as a sign of respect. We were bowing to every-



one left and right. Our students felt awkward seeing us, their teacher and elder, bow to them and had to correct us. In another instance, I was taught that to greet someone politely in Thai was “Sa-wat dee krap” . Well, apparently, I was saying “krap” like an English profanity than something respectful so a student felt compelled to teach me to pronounce it more like “krup” . It was this kind of naiveness and borderline idiocy that made us feel approachable to the students. God was using our weakness to build relationships with them. While we were teaching them English and Bible stories, our students were sharing with us their customs and culture.

On the third day, our students invited us out to lunch. They took us to their local hang-out and bought us food. We were deeply touched. It was amazing how God was working to give us opportunities to share with them. That night, the L.A. group put on a Game Show night at the CMO church as an outreach event. Over 60 of the 90+ students showed up including many from our class. The sanctuary was packed spilling out onto the streets. After a dinner of hotdogs and Thai food, Yen and Gorden shared their testimonies with them. Many were moved. Then, Tim and Carol prepared a game of Wheel of Fortune for them. It was an amazing night of fun and fellowship.

On the fourth day, we deviated from our handbook exercises and decided to teach our students how to sing "Amazing Grace". We were not sure how they would receive it. But not only did they love the song, they loved the meaning and story behind it as well. We filled the halls of the school with music over and over again. Afterwards, many students even came up to us and asked for copies of the song. That night, we put up a Hawaiian night at the church as an outreach event. Again, over 60 students showed up. It was as if God was telling us, "Build it and they will come." Maridel and I shared our testimonies with them. They were well received. Afterwards, we led the students in the singing of some Hawaiian songs and Gordon showed them how to do the limbo. Everyone had a good time.



On our last day of class, many of us did not want to say "good-bye". Maridel and I took the students to a sukiyaki restaurant for lunch, and in turn, they surprised us by taking us to a karaoke place during the afternoon. We sang songs and danced. It felt more like we were friends and family than a class. Before we parted that day, we all hugged and exchanged emails. A survey was taken later to see how much the students enjoyed the class and whether they wanted to learn more about Christianity. We were much encouraged to see that everyone said they enjoyed it and would come back again next year, and more importantly, almost everyone wanted to receive a Bible and learn more about Christ. It is amazing how God can use people like us who have so little experience and ability to reach out to so many people.

This was our first missions trip, but it will definitely not be our last.