

The Bridge Builder

Year in Reflection

A year in reflection is normally experienced in January. However, it was just over a year ago on Sunday, June 14, 2009, that I was ordained, called to serve at New Life Lutheran Church, and assigned to work for LAMB during a worship service held at White's School of the Arts. The celebration was one to be remembered as many languages were spoken, and the group was comprised of Buddhists, Muslims and Christians.

Later that week, Pastor Keller took me out to one of the apartment complexes I had been helping in for the past year while on vicarage. Many changes were taking place within the Burmese community in Fort Wayne, and I was to be part of it. I was instructed to look out over the entire complex and all who lived there as he introduced me to my congregation, a congregation made up of families that I would build relationships with and assist in their assimilation to American

culture and way of life. Almost all of them are Muslim and continue to practice their religion and way of life. Many of these same family members continue to observe the daily scheduled time of Islamic prayer within their apartments and the two prayer rooms set up within the apartment complex itself. Yes, my main focus is to share the Jesus we know with the Burmese Muslims, and to share his love and forgiveness with them that they may experience true peace.

Indeed, I already had built some close relationships within the community, but little did I know that these relationships would continue to grow and expand to include their extended family both here in Fort Wayne and across the country. I would assist these Burmese refugees by helping with appointments, navigating the benefit system, applying for permanent residency, and sitting with them talking about their life and sharing about mine. These

friendships and building of relationships allow for the opening of doors to discuss their faith and relationship to Allah.



During these discussions I have the opportunity to bring in the Christian faith and what we believe as it applies to the topic and their life. Additional opportunities arise with the sick and injured either in the home or hospital where we have the opportunity to pray for them in the name of Jesus.

As one might imagine, this past year brought new opportunities and experiences. I began to learn the Burmese language and am still an infant or young child when it comes to conversing with them. There are

words and phrases with which I am familiar, and I can pick up the meaning in their conversation. However, I still rely on a translator which for me can be anyone within the community. This is another avenue for the building of relationships, but I still need to find the time and resources to learn the Burmese

language.

Over this past year more and more Burmese Muslims came to Fort Wayne to the point that the one apartment complex could no longer house them all. The new families arriving in Fort Wayne began settling in two other apartment complexes giving the opportunity to work with more people in a larger area. One interesting point is that many of these families are related or lived in the same refugee camp while in Thailand.

While meeting new

Year in Reflection cont.



Pastor Dave distributing prizes among Burmese Muslims

people and building relationships is a wonderful feeling, this first year of ministry within the Burmese community brought its challenges as well. The Burmese living here in Fort Wayne are struggling to find viable employment with which to support their families. Many of them want to work and become productive, but there are few jobs here in Fort Wayne, especially if one is still struggling to learn the language. The reality of the situation is that many men and women are leaving their families behind and heading off to various parts of the United States to work in meat packing plants. The work is hard, and they are not with their families, creating a new kind of stress and tension within their lives. In some situations the remaining family will go live with the working parent once the job is secure, and a place to live is established. This creates unbalance within the community and difficulty with the relationships that are established. A positive side to this transition is that I get to meet new families, and the ones moving to a new state stay in contact and share our work with Burmese refugees there.



Pastor Dave with a young Muslim couple on their wedding day.

Furthermore, all of this work and ministry has not been resistance free. Any time you are teaching God's truth, you will be met with resistance and hostility. My work is no different among the Burmese Muslims. As I begin to make inroads within the community and with various families, the Imam or other religious teachers will step in and chastise them for associating with me. I see and feel the difference as I talk with people and continue to make a presence within the community. At the same time there are many within the community who will stick up for me, continue to seek help, and listen to what I have to share. As we continue to plan events for the children and families the Imam will find out and make alternative plans requiring their presence. It is also very interesting that I have had several opportunities to sit with the religious leaders this past year and talk about their community and hopes for the future.

In review, many of the blessings of this past year include the opportunity to observe and participate in baby naming ceremonies and Burmese cultural weddings. As the couples wed, I bless them, share in their special day, and discuss the advantages of a legal wedding. Sadly, there have also been several funerals within the community, offering their own set of challenges as I work with the families. And most of all there is always food. The Burmese are a people that like to share that which they have, especially their food.

This past year has been a blessing to me and my family. We pray that the work within this community has the opportunity to continue, building a bridge from Burma to Christ. This can only happen with your continued help and support. There is a continued need for prayers, volunteers, and financial support. Allow the Holy Spirit to work within your life and assist in whatever way you are led. The need is great, and the workers are few. Consider becoming a worker and share in this ongoing ministry.



Baptisms! by Gwen Keller

Gathered together in the open pavilion of Camp Lutherhaven on September 5, over 150 people sat on the hard wooden benches and listened as Pastor David Strable and Pastor James Keller of New Life Lutheran Church led nine people through the renunciation of the devil, his works and ways. One mother with her two young children, two sisters, and four teens stood and confessed faith in Jesus and asked for baptism.



This mother of two is baptized, followed by her children.

After the confession, a processional led the way from the pavilion to Lake Muncie, where the crowd stood on the sea wall and watched those being baptized walk on toward the lake. The pastors waded out into the lake and welcomed the members into baptism. As the newly baptized walked out of the lake, they were handed white robes to wear. The baptism robes were the labor of love of the Sewing Circle of Zion Lutheran Church, Bull Rapids. The robes had been dedicated and presented to the Burmese and Karen elders of New Life on August 29.

Baptism in a public body of water follows the tradition of the first Burmese converts baptized by Adoniram Judson, first American missionary to Burma, according to Golden Foot by J.R. Batten, a biography of Judson's work.

The mother was a convert from Buddhism. Both Buddhist and Muslim seekers were present at the baptism and asked many questions about the sacrament.

Earlier this summer a Burmese baby and two teens were baptized at New Life Lutheran Church, 2424 S. Coliseum Blvd. One of the teens is a student at Lutheran South Unity School, and the other was a student at Suburban Bethlehem Lutheran School.



All those who were baptized are wearing white robes. The elders and pastors are standing with them on the beach while the words of Revelation 7:13-14 are read in three languages!

Vacation Bible Schools

LAMB participated in 3 VBS this summer. The first was at Emmanuel, Soest, in the evening, and the next two were held simultaneously at Suburban Bethlehem Lutheran Church and Bethlehem Lutheran Church.



September/October 2010 Prayer

Please pray for ...



LUTHERAN AGENCY FOR
MISSIONS TO BURMESE

Rev. James Keller (260)385-0683
Rev. David Strable (260)416-4990

**LAMB monthly cash
needs: \$17,000**

LAMB is a nonprofit 501c agency. We receive no government or synodical funding. LAMB relies on the donations of partners like you. Please feel free to share this newsletter with others who may be interested in partnering with us to bring Jesus to the peoples of Burma.

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Facebook!

September

- 3-6 Labor Day Retreat at Camp Lutherhaven.
- 8– Sally Strable celebrating a birthday today!
- 9 – LAMB board meeting tonight.
- 12 – Boy Scouts from Troop 32, whom Pastor Dave has been teaching as they receive their God and Church Award.
- 14 – Pastor Jim presenting to Suburban Bethlehem's Women's Group.
- 18 – Pastor Dave as he presents at the Indiana LLL convention.
- 20– 16-month-old Burmese baby having kidney surgery in Indianapolis. Pray for Sally Strable as she ministers to this family.
- 29 – Pastor Jim leading chapel at Central Lutheran School.

Thay Lar Htoo as she has her baby this month.

October

- 17– Gwen Keller celebrating her birthday today.
- 18-19 Pastors Dave and Jim attending the Indiana District LCMS Pastor's Conference.
- 30 — Pastor Jim celebrating his birthday today.

- Good health for all our staff, their families and all our volunteers.
- Pregnant Burmese woman receiving pre-natal care.
- For new born babies that they might feel of the presence of Jesus in their lives through work of staff and volunteers.
- Christ - centered discussions with the Burmese Muslims.
- For all those that have lost loved ones that they may experience the healing touch of Jesus.
- Coordination and expansion of homework help efforts to meet the needs of the Burmese children and youth.
- For the expansion of efforts in reaching out to the Burmese Muslims.
- Comfort to those families separated due to employment.
- For Pastor Dave as he continues with his Burmese studies.
- Development and growth of our Sunday School program.
- For our fragile Burmese friends as they prepare for a cold winter.
- Our Burmese and Karen elders as they continue to grow in their faith and responsibilities.
- LAMB finances.
- More speaking/preaching opportunities for LAMB staff and board members

LAMB is now on the internet! Our website is

www.newlife4burmese.org

We are now also able to receive donations online!