

Laos Mission Initiative

June 2023



Prayer of Thanksgiving

- I. **We thank God for -**
 - a. Our mission partners for their constant prayers, presence, and love gifts;
 - b. The local pastors and church leaders' faithfulness & commitment to God's work;
 - c. Our church members who continue to be steadfast in their faith in the midst of uncertainties.
- II. **Prayer requests for-**
 - a. A safe and spirit-filled Annual Meeting;
 - b. Safe travels of our mission partners to Laos;
 - c. God's provision in this time of economic hardships;
 - d. BOH MOU approval and MOES recognition of the SLVC;
 - e. Search for new Country Director

Sabaidee!

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ! The Lao mission team is elated and inspired to share with you some stories and updates of what God is doing in the lives of people through the mission and ministries of the Lao Samphan Methodist Church.

What are we doing?

Rev. Israel M. Painit, the Laos country director was elected the new bishop of the Philippine Central Conference

Last November 26, 2022, the Philippine Central Conference elected Rev. Israel M. Painit, our very own country director during its special session held at Wesleyan University of the Philippines, Cabanatuan City. Bishop Painit was the new resident Bishop of the Davao Episcopal Area, which covers the Bicol region, the islands of the Visayas, and the whole of Mindanao. It consists of 5 Annual Conferences.



(Bishop Israel M. Painit of the Davao Episcopal Area, Philippines. Photo credit: DEA fb)

Bishop Painit has served as a global missionary in Laos for 4 years as the Country Director. As he steered the direction of the Lao Samphan Methodist Church, he initiated the registration process of the INGO in Laos through the Bridge of Hope (BOH) with its head office in Korea.

Currently, the Global Ministries has assigned Bishop Painit as its presiding Bishop of the Lao Samphan Methodist Church.

The Lao Samphan Methodist Church family will surely miss the presence and leadership of Bishop Painit and his family.

2 Global Ministries staff initiates a consultation process with the LSMC Council and LMI staff

APRO Executive, Rev. Paul Kong, and Dr. David Scott, the Global Ministries mission theologian visited Laos from March 1-4, 2023 to conduct a consultation process with the LSMC Council and LMI staff as they commence the search process for a new Country Director.



Likewise, the aim of the consultation is to learn and listen to the Laotians as they articulate their concerns and hopes for the United Methodist Church in Laos as they journey together in the next years to come.

LMI staff was also gathered to give their views, updates, and hopes for the church in Laos. The missionaries and the Global Mission Fellows also joined in the conversations and studies.

(Rev. Paul Kong & Dr. David Scott during the LSMC Council Meeting. Photo taken by: Angie Broncano)



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The highlight of the visit was Dr. David Scott's sharing about doing missions in the context of religious diversity. Important questions such as: "How can we interpret religious traditions and festivals as opportunities for God's mission where people of other faiths can also participate?" was theologically and biblically addressed. The sharing was very helpful and enlightening to all the participants.

Laotian students start their academic journey in the Philippines

For the first time, five (5) of our Laotian students from 2 ethnic groups have made their way to the Philippines. Mr. Vath Boualapha from the Khamu tribe is now enrolled at the Union Theological Seminary for his Masters in Divinity Program. Ms. Mor Alomsone, also from a Khamu tribe made it to the Philippine Christian University- College of Nursing. Mr. Yeryang Tiongkou, Mr. Meng Her, and Maivang Yang, all from the Hmong tribe are now studying at Harris Memorial College. Yeryang and Meng will take their Bachelor's Degree in Christian Education while Maivang will take her Early Childhood Education.



(3 of our Laotian students now studying at Harris Memorial College - Philippines. From left: Maivang Yang, Yeryang and Meng Her on the far right. Photo taken by: DEA staff)

This effort is part of the program of the Lao Mission Initiative to boost the leadership needs of the Lao Samphan Methodist Church as we prepare young leaders in various fields. Despite their language

difficulties and other cultural adjustments, the five of them were set to face all those challenges and be of service to the church and their communities when they come back to Laos. We praise God for the ILDG, the Linworth UMC, and other mission partners' support, without which, this vision would be a far fetched reality for these young students. (**Advance #3021548, for "International Scholarship Support"**)



(Ms Mor Alomsone at the PCU Campus. Photo taken from Mor's file)



(Mr. Vath Boualapha, our seminary student at Union Theological Seminary, Philippines. Photo taken from Vath's file)

How Can You Get Involved?

Please support our ministry by giving through the Advance

- Laos Mission Initiative Projects that includes congregational development **#14927A**
- Laos Church Buildings **#14926N**
- Women, Children, & Youth Ministries **#3020470**
- Vientiane Language Center (After School & Summer English Classes in Public Schools, and Scholarship Support) **#3021548**
- Laos Nationals in Mission **#3021202**
- Women's Seed Project **#3020462**

Go to umcmmission.org/give

to learn more!



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Forty four (44) local pastors attend the pastors' course of studies

Last April 18-28, 2023, the Lao Samphan Methodist Church held our two weeks Pastors' Course of Studies, involving 44 local pastors. 17 of them joined the Introductory Course, 22 in the Basic Course, and 5 in the Advance Course. Added important topic was Lao Law and Religion.



(Students in the Basic Course of Studies as they took their written exam. Photo taken by Angie Broncano)

For this year we will be ordaining one local elder in mission and 5 will be commissioned as local pastors. The LSMC is faced with multiple challenges as we make our course of studies appropriate, relevant, and contextualized to the needs of our local pastors. Many of our candidates for the ministry in the Southern part of Laos are elementary or secondary undergraduates and yet house churches are flourishing in this province.

We are challenging our local elders to mentor new recruits to prepare them for the ministry.

The seed project helps women's groups and their families to augment income

After the long hiatus brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and the review of the policies of our seed project. Finally, in 2023, we have revived the release of loans to women and their families to help augment their income to mitigate the impact of economic hardships. To date, we have at least 10 groups of women with a total of 93 families who have availed of the loans and they are involved in a variety of economic activities such as: planting cassava, corn, green rice, betel nut, and rubber tree and are raising animals such as goats and pigs.

The women's groups represent the 4 provinces of Odomxay, Paksong, Luang Prabang, and the Vientiane Province.

We are expecting a good harvest of cassava this coming December. We are praying and hoping that climate change will not affect their harvest tremendously. (Adv. # 3020462 Women's Seed Project)



The women from Paksong who received the seed project for their cassava production.

Below is the dried cassava sold by the women to flour company. Photos taken by Angie Broncano)





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Wesleyan University Philippines academic consultant and staff explore a future partnership with SLVC for the micro-credential certificate courses

Who Are We?



D. Yang

#3022186



A. Broncano

#3022166



(Prof. CJ Fausto of the WUP-CGILL as he explained its programs while Dr. Greg Pawilen, the Academic Consultant listens. Photo taken by Angie Broncano)



(The WUP Team with the missionaries and local staff. Photos taken by Joan Nartea & Chan Thao)



Prof. Christian Jan Robert Fausto, the director of the Wesleyan University-Philippines Carolina L. Gozon Institute of Lifelong Learning, together with Prof. Katherine Jane Sawi, Director, Office of Instruction, and their academic consultant, Dr. Greg Pawilen visited the Sunstisouk Language and Vocational Training Center last February 24-26, 2023. Objectives of the visit were: 1) To possibly explore some collaboration activities in terms of offering micro-credential courses especially in the professional development program for early childhood education teachers and school administrators; 2) to identify some short-term courses needed by the Laotians that would fit into a ladderized micro-credential courses customized and contextualized according to the needs of the potential students/learners.

Rev. Daniel Yang, provided the team an overview of mission and ministries of the Lao Mission Initiative.

The consultation with the missionaries, Global Mission Fellows and the local staff provided us with good insights into the potential of the programs to reach out to students and different groups of people including our Lao Samphan Methodist Church constituents. This is an entirely new area where it can provide the sustainability component to our Center.

The President of the WUP, Judge Benjamin Turgano supports the team's visit to Laos, PDR.



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Who Are We?



M. Kulongwe

GMF

#3022706



A. Kamara

GMF

#3022710

Stepping out of our comfort zone to witness the grace of God.

Going on a mission trip takes us out of our comfort zone. It calls for us to dig deep into our courage bag and pull out a big handful of it, especially when we can't speak the language, and



(Pastor Anna, Mike, and Joel of the Linworth UMC mission team tried the Lao musical instruments while the Lao staff watched..Photo taken by Daniel Yang)

their lifestyle is completely different from ours. Last November, the key leaders of Linworth United Methodist Church in Columbus Ohio visited the Lao Samphan Methodist Church in Laos. Our staff welcomed them with a gift of a traditional bamboo flute and a fishing bamboo basket Bamboo is very important to the Laotian people because they used it to build houses, roofs, panels, mats, ladders, furniture, fishing tools, and musical instruments. They visited Luang Prabang and toured around the Vientiane Capital.

The team had the opportunity to visit our congregations in the south. It was a great experience for them since it was their first time visiting the South. We rode in an unreliable

pickup truck where some of us sat at the back of the truck which you can't do in the US. We joined in the church members' worship activities, which gave our partners an understanding of the way our local people worship. We had no seats; the praise band was standing up and the congregation sat on the concrete floor. We also visited the Ted Champee and Bolaven Plateau waterfalls.



(Children's special song during the worship service in Paksong. Photo taken by Daniel Yang)

A lifetime experience for a Hmong local pastor to travel to the US

Pastor Lee Yang, a local pastor from Laos, was very fortunate to be able to attend the Leadership Summit of the National Hmong Caucus in the US as their main speaker. This was his first time stepping out of his small village and traveling by airplane for 25 hours. He can't speak English, so he held a sign "**Need Help to get to my next gate.**" Fortunately, he only missed one flight. He was assisted in a wheelchair from Korean Airport to Detroit Michigan airport so that the airport assistant can take him directly to the next gate. Pastor Lee said, "**Being in the US is just like a dream.**" Never he thought that one day, he will land in the United States. Through his participation in the Leadership Summit of the National Hmong Caucus, we now have a better relationship and hope to build more cross-country sharing missions together. Financial support is a great way to support our mission here, but your presence is more important. We want you to experience the life and ministry of the Laos people. They have a very rich heritage, diverse



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(Pastor Lee met with Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the WI Episcopal Area, and the Hmong National Caucus Leaders. Photo taken by Pastor Lee Yang)

culture, values, and ethnicity. If you are planning to have a group visit to Laos, we would love to welcome you and have a first-hand experience of the mission that we seek to be salt and light to all kinds of people here in Laos.

A young Hmong Lady immerses herself in the life of the rural youth

An active and dynamic young Lady, Ms. Leenee Lee who came from Los Angeles, California made a great decision to leave her job and her youth ministries in the United States to spend a few months living with the Hmong communities in the Vientiane Province to experience the life of rural youth in far-flung villages.

It is a blessing to have Leenee Lee stay with us in our home and do most of her volunteer mission work in Vientiane province. She helped the young people initiate fundraising activities by collecting water bottles, farming, cooking, and needlework. She has touched many young people's lives and is a faithful role model for young people. On June 2, she led and joined provincial-wide activities planned by the provincial youth leaders, which includes lectures- workshops, worship, and a mini-concert, which drew more than 88

youths from 9 local churches. We would love to have youths and young adults from other countries serve as worship leaders, trainers, and resource persons for our youth ministry.



Leenee led the youth in a fund raising event through the farming activities in Vientiane Province. Photo taken by Daniel Yang.)

Seven (7) more water well projects were built in the South

Due to your strong support of the Water Well projects, we were able to build 7 water wells to the South.

Brao ethnic group lives in the mountains of Savannakhet Province. Most of them are new Christians who have little access to rivers and ponds. Normally water will only last 9 months out of 12 months. They must travel far to get their water for cooking, drinking, and sanitation. They live in rice farming and raising a few animals.

Having access to clean water makes them feel like heaven. We need your prayers and support, as we continue to share the grace of God with the Lao people through the water well projects. **(Adv #14927A for Water Well Projects)**



Water drilling activity in Savannakhet Province.. Photo taken by Pastor Khamma)



Water coming out from the installed pipes. Praise God! Photo taken by Daniel Yang)



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YOUTH UPDATES

Mindset change: a key to leadership development

The journey of the Lao Samphan Methodist Youth has mainly focused on building organizational structures and leadership development. This follows the impact of the Covid pandemic which greatly affected the implementation of the youth activities. In terms of organizational structure, the organization has worked on having a simple but workable structure in order to work together as one and letting goals and objectives be reflected in the activities of the local chapters as they address their needs in their respective communities.

In building relationships, the organization has set and/or strengthen the existing youth officers at the national, provincial, and local levels. It has also been providing training to the officers to equip them with leadership skills, mindset change, spiritual and values formation, and educate them on the big role that they have in their churches and community. The aim is to build young leaders who will be visionary enough to grow and sustain the Lao Samphan Methodist Church.

- Approximately, there are more than 500 youths according to the number sent from the provinces. The organization has managed to receive and record only 200 youths through the membership profile. The results (attached in the appendix) show a high rate of school dropout (52%) among the youth. This is a poor indicator of the future for Lao Samphan Methodist as far as the growth and sustainability of the church are concerned. Therefore, the or-



(Modester facilitating leadership training with Luang Prabang provincial officers in Hoitak Primary School. Photo taken by Lerseng)

ganization needs to implement mindset change programs to open their level of understanding towards the importance of education in their social and spiritual life.

(Adv. #3020470 for Youth Ministries)



(Modester, Thamnong, and the National youth officers doing needs assessment during the youth workshop at SLVC. Photo taken by Angie Broncano)



The Youth in Phattana church doing their community mapping during the Vientiane Capital Youth Workshop (Photo taken by Angie Broncano)



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GLOBAL MISSION FELLOWS UPDATES

Doing God's mission in more challenging ways

I am Modester Kulongwe, a Malawian Global Mission Fellow, serving with the Laos Mission Initiative as a Youth Program Coordinator. Organizing and planning for developmental youth programs, conducting training with local youths coming from different provinces, and teaching English to more than 40 kindergarten children have been part of my service. In addition to that, I have had the opportunity to attend council meetings with local church leaders and other partners to the organization.

My first-week experience, upon arrival in Laos, is one of the most amazing things in my life. I remember being obsessed with too many thoughts of how it would be like being far away from home, meeting new people, and experiencing different cultures, languages, weather, and food. However, the warm welcome I received and being introduced to the local church brought relief to my heart and I have always felt at home.

Overall, the journey has been of learning and growth. I have had an opportunity to learn how people live, their culture, language, and places where God has spe-

cifically called me to serve. In addition to that, the adjustments and experiences have helped me step out of my comfort zone and learn to flow with the course of events. I have also been reminded that we actually have little control over life circumstances, but God does. Carrying 1st John 3:16 in my heart to Laos, I see the youth and I growing personally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually during my stay. I hope and believe that God will lead me through to the end. To God be the glory for I am a Global Mission Fellow. *See differently and serve differently.*



Modester facilitating a youth bible study in Phonsoumbon Church. (Photo taken by Thamnong)



Afiju teaching basic English class at Phonsoumbon Church. (Photo taken by Nyai.)

My teaching ministry in Laos

Laos is a beautiful country and full of kind-hearted people. I engage myself with the local people who are very kind and hospitable to strangers. I am proud to have many Lao friends.

As a teacher, I should be prepared when it comes to meeting the needs of English language learners, to ensure they at least get the basic requirement of "reading, writing, and speaking. It's always a blessing to serve humanity, by engaging with local communities through teaching.

At the Suntisouk Language and Vocational Training Center, I have been engaging and encouraging young people to learn basic English to help them in their university classes while giving them also the opportunity to look for scholarships. It is interesting to see how happy these students are in learning English, as they appreciate the importance of this in their career path.

It gives me joy in helping many other people in Laos get to understand, read, write, and speak in English. It is my priority to help these young people in learning and building their capacity and self-confidence.

THE CHALLENGE OF OUR FAITH

The first half of the year 2023 brought us a lot of challenges. While we rejoice with the election of our former Country Director, Bishop Israel M. Painit, the Lao Mission Initiative team has realigned some of our tasks to fulfill the demands of the mission.

These were the times when we encouraged one another including the staff and the Council Officers to be more intentional with our work, to act professionally, and to demonstrate dependability during stressful situations at work. Being all part of the bigger organization, the Lao Samphan Methodist Church, means cooperating willingly on projects and putting our efforts into making group projects successful. Being innovative in our approach has helped us to find efficient ways to implement our program and ministries. Thinking outside the box is something that propels each one of us to be more creative and cost-efficient.

There is this desire to continuously learn and grow as we journey together to make our Church a vibrant one, more responsive and relevant to the needs of our constituents and the neighboring communities that we serve.

And as we prepare for the 13th Annual Meeting this coming August 11-14, 2023, we are constantly reminded of God's faithfulness through the years. And because of this, we always strive for excellence, welcoming new challenges and ready to conquer all obstacles for we know, we are not alone in this journey of faith and our God deserves the best of our service.

Finally, as Romans 5:3-5 says: *"There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience, in turn, forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit! (The Message)*

Grace & Love,

The Lao Mission Team



How to Give : Please give your love gifts and donations thru GBGM advance giving. For further information, please visit the umcmmission.org/give.

Give Online: You can give to any of the ministries, missionaries, and projects currently supported by The United Methodist Church through Global Ministries.

By Phone: Credit card gifts can be accepted by phone. The telephone number is: 888-252-6174 toll-free

By Mail: Generally, make your check payable to ADVANCE GCFA. Write the name of the ministry and the Advance code number on the memo line of the check. Send your check to Advance, GCFA, 458 Ponce De Leon Ave. NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30308.