



To the Ends of the Earth

February 10, 2017—Vol. 11, No. 6

I'm tired but my heart is full today. I was not fully prepared to take in all that I experienced over the last week or so.

I've just returned from my first trip to one of the CGGC mission fields in Asia. I'm not going to identify the specific country here because this blog/news piece is online and there is the potential that anything that I share specifically (names, places, etc.) could be used to deter the great work happening in this field. I won't be able to share any photos here either as that might draw unwanted attention to their work (ask me sometime in person, I'd love to share more about what I experienced). While Christians are allowed to worship and express their faith, there is strong resistance to the idea of evangelism, particularly evangelism that is supported by western influence.

I spent the majority of my time with a group of community development leaders. We would probably call these folks evangelists or church planters, but in their context, those titles or descriptions would be a hindrance to their work, so they are known as community development workers or leaders. I had been told that we would be visiting their network of house churches in a particular area of the country, but I was overwhelmed by what I experienced as we visited these brothers and sisters.

First was the remoteness of the villages we visited. There were several times when I was reminded of Jesus' final words to the disciples in Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Many times I felt like we were driving to the "ends of the earth" as we traversed the difficult roads and paths to these various villages. In the rainy seasons some of these roads would certainly be nearly impassable.

The community development workers live in some of these remote villages. As they have shared their faith, others have turned from their tribal animism and embraced Jesus as the one true God. As others turn to Christ in these villages, new congregations are established to help encourage and disciple those who have come to faith in Christ. Many of these gatherings met in a room attached to one of the members' homes or outside a member's home, while a few had a church building (ranging from small, tin shacks to larger concrete buildings with tin roofs). The smallest gathering was probably 20-40 brothers and sisters while the largest was over 100 gathered together for worship, teaching, fellowship and prayer.

Again, I was struck by the remoteness of these villages. These were not high traffic areas. These were

not areas where there was a church on every corner. If the Church of God “community development worker” had not brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to these villages, there would be no Christian witness there. There are literally thousands of these small, rural villages throughout this country, representing millions of people, many of whom have not been reached with the Good News of Jesus yet. At the end of our stay, we asked the community development workers if there were other villages in the area that they would like to go to and they responded in unison: YES!

My second impression was their posture toward their villages. These men had a heart for the peace and prosperity of the places in which they lived. When we asked about their needs, they shared the needs of the local village: healthcare, education, and job training. It wasn't just about the church and its needs, but rather the needs of the larger community. In a context where Christianity is under the watchful eye of the powers that be, some of this is strategic: they must demonstrate their work benefits those outside their Christian circle. It's also strategic in another sense by putting their faith into action and demonstrating their love for others through service.

One final impression that I'll share here, although there are so many that flood my mind at this moment, is the impact that our ministry workers are having on their communities. We visited one of the schools associated with our mission work and the teachers shared that many mothers of the students seek out the teachers for counsel and wisdom on a variety of life issues. What struck me most was the fact that many of the students at these schools are coming from different faith backgrounds: primarily Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu. They send their children to our schools because they respect the quality of the education that they're receiving along with the scarcity of education options. These teachers are not only educating students, equipping them with skills for life, and introducing them to the Bible and to Jesus' great love for them; but they are also ministering to families and their influence reaches far beyond the local school.

God is doing a great work in this country and we all have an opportunity to be a part of it! If you or your congregation have never partnered with one of the CGGC works elsewhere in the world, I'd encourage you to do so and be a part of taking the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Christ's Peace,

Lance

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