



Bringing news of Cambodia and Cambodian Communities out of Crisis

May 2005

## The Changing Face of the Cambodian Church

In the previous issue of the *Cambodian Herald*, CCC Director Rev Ross Rennie reflected on some of the changes he had noticed taking place over a decade of visits to the country. In a second article he concentrates on developments that he has observed in the church scene.

When I first visited Cambodia in 1994, only four years had elapsed since the Cambodian church had received permission from the government to function openly. The new constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion was only a year old.

For the ten years prior to the granting in 1990 of the decree permitting churches hold public meetings the Cambodian church had consisted of a handful of groups meeting secretly. Even in 1992 the Phnom Penh house churches were still subject to surveillance and infiltration, and rural church leaders were being imprisoned.

### Honeymoon

But by 1994 the church was in its honeymoon phase. Thousands of new Christians who had been converted in refugee camps had returned to Cambodia. Expatriate staff members of Christian development agencies were sharing the gospel in word and deed with their Cambodian colleagues and the beneficiaries of their projects. Cambodians who had resettled in the USA, Australia and elsewhere and had become Christians there, in some cases founding Cambodian churches, were keen to return to evangelise their compatriots.

I witnessed and experienced personally an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cambodia in 1994 that gave a fur-



*The room where the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Cambodian church was witnessed by Rev Ross Rennie*



*Pastor Barnabas Mam with some of the 43 converts he baptised in Prek Tnot River, Kampong Speu Province*

ther impetus to church growth. Furthermore, God had given to the church 'some as apostles, some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4:10,11). It was my privilege at that time to meet three of these men, including Pastor Barnabas Mam, now honorary chairman of Cambodian Communities out of Crisis.

By 2002 the number of evangelical churches in Cambodia had exceeded 2,000 and there were estimated to be more than 100,000 Christians, approaching one percent of the population.

But today I wonder whether the honeymoon is over. In its period of rapid growth the Cambodian church experienced many divisions of congregations. Although some may have been painful, many were a by-product of growth, as gifted leaders emerged and sought ways of planting new churches. But division, competition, jealousy and suspicion have not ceased to afflict Cambodian churches and church leaders, even to the extent of disputes being taken to court.

Cambodian Christians I have spoken to have looked back longingly to those heady days in 1994 and 1995

when miracles and healings took place on the streets. It was hardly necessary to preach the gospel because people would seek out Christians asking, 'How can I know Jesus?' It was normal to close each Sunday meeting with an invitation to receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and there would always be some eager to respond.

'Why do we not see these things happening today?' my Cambodian friends ask. 'Have we grieved or quenched the Holy Spirit? Have we lost our first love?'

I wonder whether the answer to both questions is 'yes'.

### Rice Christians

When I hear of church leaders involved in sexual immorality, when someone tells me that a church has lost most of its members because another church is sending a bus to the village to collect people, take them to its meetings, hand out rice and take them home again, my heart grieves. How much more must the Holy Spirit be saddened.

Have we in the west infected the newly reborn Cambodian church with our hypocrisy, materialism, denominational competitiveness, immorality, lukewarm spirit and 'instant success' mentality? Or have we failed to equip our younger brothers and sisters to withstand the principalities and powers that unleash spirits of division, corruption and immorality on the people and hence the church of Cambodia?

Of course there are exceptions to this bleak picture. God is still at work in Cambodia. People are still being saved. New churches are being planted. Khmer Christians are reaching out to the unreached people groups living in Cambodia. CCC has the privilege of being in partnership with a man, Pastor Barnabas, and an organisation, Ambassadors for Christ Cambodia, through whom the Spirit of God is still moving powerfully.

Moreover, if I compare the average UK church with a typical Cambodian church, many Cambodians are still streets ahead of us in terms of zeal for the Lord, hunger for His word and faith in His miracle-working power.



*Cambodians worshipping in a Chinese temple*



*"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."*

But if energies are being diverted into inter-church feuds, if church leaders are falling into the enemy's traps, if churches are only interested in making 'rice Christians' so that they can send favourable reports to denominational headquarters, then the Cambodian church risks being afflicted with the same decline experienced by churches in the west at various times in the history of Christendom.

### Wake Up

I believe the Holy Spirit is issuing a wake-up call, not only to the Cambodian church itself, but also to us in the west who seek to support it.

Will you join me in prayer for:

- the 99% of Cambodians (13 million people) who are not yet Christians;
- the pulling down of strongholds that have been erected in Cambodian culture, society and religion;
- the raising up of many more intercessors for the nation, peoples and church of Cambodia;
- church leaders – for humility, moral purity and repentance from self-seeking and competitiveness;
- a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Cambodian church;
- a seeking first of the Kingdom of God, rather than personal or denominational priorities?

I would not dare suggest that the Cambodian church is lukewarm like the church at Laodicea described in Revelation 3, but I am encouraged that the Lord Jesus' word to that church was a promise of renewed fellowship. May He come again in His power and be made fully welcome in every church in Cambodia.

*'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.'*

Rev Ross Rennie

## CCC and Education in Cambodia

### The Story So Far

CCC has been sponsoring students taking courses at Cambodian colleges, universities and vocational training centres since 1966. Last year we sponsored 14 students in subjects including Management Information Systems, Economics, English Language, English for Academic Purposes, Management, Accountancy and International Relations. Our aim is to help students in genuine need, whose families cannot afford to pay college fees. We use recommendations from pastors, missionaries, etc. to help us decide whether a student really needs our help, but ultimately we depend on discernment from the Holy Spirit to assess applications for grants. Last year we extended the sponsorship programme to children of school age. We are currently part-sponsoring two Cambodian pupils at international schools.

### Big Vision – Bigger God

Our vision is to go much further than this. Just as the church played such an important part in shaping the education system of the United Kingdom, we believe that the Cambodian church can be instrumental in helping to improve academic and ethical standards in education in Cambodia. One of the ways we see this taking place is the establishment of a Christian college that would both serve the church by providing training in Christian leadership, and provide courses to the gen-



*What hope does she have of receiving an education?*

eral public (of any religion or none) in subjects appropriate to Cambodia's continuing need for development, provision of employment and general increase in skills and knowledge.

**Timothy Leadership Centre Cambodia / Timothy College** will require a huge investment over a long term. The vision is big, but our God is bigger. We trust in the same God as Hudson Taylor, pioneer missionary to China, who proved that 'God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's resources.'

### One Million Affected by Drought

Climate change and deforestation are causing a reduction in water supplies in several parts of Cambodia, according to the representative in Cambodia for the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. FAO is trying to help farmers diversify farming systems and improve their management of scarce water supplies.

Meanwhile, the first vice-president of the National Committee for Disaster Management claims that one million people are in immediate need of emergency water and food supplies following last year's drought.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has reported that rice production fell by 14% in 2004. The Ministry is concerned that production will be insufficient this year, following four years of droughts and floods.



### Bird Flu Claims Third Life

An eight-year old girl from Kampot province in southern Cambodia has become the third Cambodian to die from avian influenza.

The H5N1 virus has killed 36 people in Vietnam and 12 in Thailand since December 2003. The three Cambodian victims were all from Kampot province, which borders Vietnam.

A local health official claimed that although chickens had fallen ill in a village there, villagers were reluctant to let the authorities cull their birds.

The European Union has banned imports of poultry products and pet birds from Cambodia and seven other Asian nations until they can be certified as disease-free.

### She Was My Mother; Now She's My Granddaughter

In a speech marking his 54th birthday, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen announced that he firmly believes that his deceased mother has been reincarnated as his newly born granddaughter.

# Please Pray!

## The Cambodian Prayer Council asks us to pray...

### ... for the Cambodian church

- That the Gospel will be preached all over the nation and people will turn to the Lord.
- For all church leaders, that they will delegate some of their responsibilities to others so that new leaders will be raised to help spread the Gospel around the country. Pray that the church leaders will not be power-hungry.
- Pray for the Ministry of Cults and Religions to grant permits to new churches. It is currently very difficult to obtain permits for new church plants. If this continues, it will hinder the spread of the Gospel in Cambodia.

### ... for national issues

- For King Sihamoni to have wisdom to solve all the problems in the nation; for the blessing of God to be upon Prime Minister Hun Sen and all members of the National Assembly.
- Pray that God will change the situation in Cambodia, that evil will turn to good and that people will change and receive Jesus as Saviour.
- Many provinces have been affected by famine (including Kampong Speu, Kampot, Svay Rieng and Prey Veng). Pray for NGOs to provide food and other aid to the people who are starving.

The latest prayer requests from the Cambodian Prayer Council can be found on the Prayer page of the CCC web site at [www.cambcomm.org.uk](http://www.cambcomm.org.uk).

## Give thanks with CCC

We thank the Lord for:

- supporters who have committed themselves to sponsoring students throughout degree or diploma courses;
- our partnership with Ambassadors for Christ Cambodia;
- funds coming in to buy land for Timothy Leadership Centre Cambodia / Timothy College.

## Please Pray for Student Sponsorship

Pray for several students taking degree or diploma courses over four years, that they will persevere and be successful in their studies.

Pray for students who have to work as well as study in order to support themselves or their families.

Pray that students who have completed their courses will find good jobs.

Pray for the children being sponsored to attend school.

Pray for funds to meet our commitments for 2005.

## Timothy Leadership Centre Cambodia

Please pray for the Council of CCC and the Board of Ambassadors for Christ Cambodia as we continue to seek the Lord for the way forward in implementing this vision.

Pray that the Lord would lead Ambassadors for Christ Cambodia to a site that is of the right size, in the right place and for sale at the right price.

Please ask the Lord to provide funds as quickly as possible.

Pray that the whole enterprise, and the long-term work of the college, will be led by the Holy Spirit and will bring glory to God.

<b>Contact Us</b>	<b>My Response</b>
<p><b>Cambodian Communities out of Crisis</b></p> <p><b>Our Address:</b></p> <p>PO Box 7591, Loughborough LE12 9WN, United Kingdom</p> <p>Telephone / Fax: +44 (0)1509 507402</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:info@cambcomm.org.uk">info@cambcomm.org.uk</a></p> <p>Web site: <a href="http://www.cambcomm.org.uk">www.cambcomm.org.uk</a></p> <p>Registered Charity number 1062205</p>	<p>Name .....</p> <p>Address .....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Email ..... Telephone .....</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I enclose a gift towards the purchase of land for Timothy Leadership Centre.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would like to sponsor / part-sponsor a student.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would like details of giving through Gift Aid and / or by standing order.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would like to set up a group to pray for Cambodia and CCC.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would like someone from CCC to give a presentation at my church.</p>