

LET PEACE BEGIN WITH ME!

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The Challenge of 2010 — Can we live in Love?

Iraq, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Gaza, Israel/Palestine, Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Greece, Kashmir — these hotspots around the world make daily headlines; so much so that we often become numb to the news of strikes, civil unrest, fresh casualties, mounting deaths, increasing violence and destruction. We've learnt the art of skillfully skimming the newspaper for anything more than the usual depressive columns of financial ruin, political negotiations, the lack of aid, the lack of solutions to the many complex problems facing so many today.

As of last month, Thailand joined the list. The Bangkok stand-off between the government/army and the 'Red-Shirt' demonstrators took an ugly turn as force, violence and the resultant mayhem of arson, chaos and deaths ensued. There is an unsettling peace in the capital now, as though the streets are cleared and clean, it is said that an uneasiness, an unrest remains in the hearts of many who question why it happened and what can be done?

Whether it's here in Bangkok or in Baghdad or right here at home, between siblings or friends in an office, the answer seems the same. We all need to take individual responsibility for peace. Stepping off our pedestals of pride and self-justification, we allow ourselves the privilege of humility and hence, the ability to say 'I am sorry; I was wrong'. This will usually open doors for any other reasonable opposition to do the same; to agree to sit down and talk things out; to see how differences can be worked out.

The power of one. Each individual can contribute to changing the world by changing one heart at a time.

Let There be Peace in Thailand and Let it Begin With ME : What we say to our children, to our spouse, to the next-door neighbor, to our office colleague can either douse or stoke the flames of hatred in a crisis. What we want to do is to spread the message of love, peace, forgiveness and understanding. It begins by having enough love in our hearts, trying to see the good in others and in seeing the positive in the circumstances we're in. Positive thinking only breeds positive activism. We add value to the lives of others when we help them see the positive, when we inspire them to rise above the crisis or their problems, when we help them realize that love, hope and prayer are powerful forces that can change lives and make a difference. Can we give peace a chance?

IF YOU'RE sometimes discouraged with the world and the way it is, don't give up! Sometimes we think, "Who am I? What can I do? It all seems so hopeless and impossible! It looks like there's nothing that one person can do to change things for the better, so what's the use of *trying*, what's the use of doing *anything*?"—And we're tempted to just give up and let the world go to Hell, which it sometimes seems to deserve!

True, you may not be able to change the *whole* world, but you *can* change *your part* of the world. Even if you only change *one life*, you have changed a part of the world, and you have proven that there is hope that it can all be changed! If one life can be changed, it shows that there's a possibility that *more* lives can be changed, many lives can be changed, whole regions can be re-deemed and the *world* can be changed, starting with just *one person*—maybe you!

Just try changing your part of the world. Why don't you start with your own heart, your own mind, your own spirit, your own life? If you even change *your life*, you've changed the entire sphere in which you live. The place and the very atmosphere around you will be changed if you change yourself by the power of God's love!

You can change not only your own life but those of your own family, of your home! You'll then have a *new home*, a *new family*, with new lives, new minds, new hearts, new spirits, filled with love! Change the world in which you live, your life, your home, your family, and you've changed the world—your world! Then your little family can start trying to change the neighbors and your friends, business associates or schoolmates, visitors, the people you come in contact with from day to day.

The results may seem only a tiny little bud at first, just a little sprig, an insignificant little green shoot. What is that to a great and mighty land? What is that to the forest that's needed? Well, it's a *beginning*. It's the beginning of the miracle of new life, and it will thrive and grow and flourish and become great and strong, turning into a whole new tree, a whole new life, and maybe a whole new world! Why not try it? — DB Berg

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be.
With God as our father
Brothers all are we.
Let me walk with my brother
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now.
With every step I take
Let this be my solemn vow.
To take each moment
And live each moment
With peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth,
And let it begin with me.

— song by Jill Jackson &
Sy Miller

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Out of this world!

A trip to another realm!

The children, teens and HIV women at the Shelter (Emergency Home for Women) rarely get to go out. We have often hosted programs and parties at the Home, but this Children's Day, we decided to go 'out of the box' literally, of their world and take them for a mind/eye-opening trip!

Stepping out of the Shelter to go out is one thing, but going to the heart of the city and Bangkok's largest, most expensive & fashionable mall is another. Then to top it all, watch a movie that takes you out of the realm of the normal into the planet of Pandora, with 3D vision, that's pretty much a major experience!



---an unforgettable experience

This was exactly what happened when we organized this one-day outing to the Siam Paragon, in Bangkok's Rachaprasong district.

A couple of sponsors – one who runs McThai, McDonald's Thai venture as well as his friend who runs a chain of cinemas – played a big part in this, enabling us to organize this trip to downtown Bangkok where 22 adults, teens and kids from the Shelter were treated to a McD lunch and a 3D version of the blockbuster movie 'Avatar'.

The kids were awed to say the least and on top of the socialization aspect, they were just plain happy to have a giant sized bag of popcorn and a nice drink served right to them during the movie.

Thank You Mr Hester Chew, MD for McThai, for the McDonald treat and Khun Vichai Kuntah-watchai, Senior Marketing Manager of Major Cineplex Group for movie contribution.



With the help and support of friends, we have been able to regularly provide our projects including the Home for the Blind and Multiply-handicapped (pic on the right) as well as the Abused Women's Shelter with fresh fruits, vegetables, rice, snacks and other food essentials.



Self-sufficiency at work



Left: The labors of both staff and kids in caring for their vegetable & fruit garden.



Right: One of the workers happily carrying the farming tools, seeds and other gardening equipment that we bought for the school.

The children at the United Christian School of Mae Sot feel privileged to have one good meal a day at their school.. Having escaped the persecution in their homeland by the Burmese army, these children have made it over to Thai soil often with just one parent, grandma, or a relative. A Thai lady and her Karen husband opened up a small house when the need arose to provide education for these children who have no other options. From a mere 50 kids, they now serve 180 children. As they soon found out, the children were not just there for school but were even more thankful for the food served at lunch. They realized that for many of the children, this school lunch was the only major meal of the day for them. It was hard for the school to keep up with the food expenses. When we heard about this, we offered them a program of self-sufficiency. Thanks to a grant from Family Care Foundation as well as contributions from Khun Meena, Khun Mehta, Khun Santosh & Mrs Johansson, we were able to build three ponds for fish-farming as well as initiate vegetable and fruit-farming. The fish-farming not only provides some food for the school but more importantly, generates income so that the school will then have funding for the basic essentials of food and educational supplies.



Upcoming Projects

We are looking into a lot more self-sustainable projects for the disadvantaged schools and displaced people/refugee communities that we can help with. For a start, we have provided support and materials/equipment to start a bakery near one of Mae Sot's largest refugee camps where the idle youth are being tempted to work in the opium farms nearby; or get involved with those trafficking drugs.

By providing employment and training skills, we will engage these youth in a beneficial occupation. Our Karen co-ordinator reports that they have successfully been baking and selling cookies, and are now venturing out to make other foods for sale.

We hope to be making a trip to Mae Sot in the very near future to bring supplies of flour, sugar as well as rice, snacks and other food essentials. Many thanks to Kerry Flour Mills, Mitr Phol Sugar, Patum Rice Mills & Tong Garden.

We will also hopefully be embarking on some long-term projects in organic farming. The vision is to provide the materials and expertise to rural schools to set up their own vegetable/fruit gardens in order to supply i) food for the school ii) food for sale in order to raise funds for the school & students' needs. To this end, we hope to connect international hotels which see the value of organic foods to the schools, where they will agree to buy their 'all-natural; pesticide-free' produce from the nearby schools. If this takes off, we'd like to invite YOU to participate by either sponsoring the seeds, farming materials needed or refer us to those who may be interested in purchasing organic foods.

