



# *buzz*

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## Reflections from Thailand

by Sophie Miller

I recently traveled to Thailand with a group from Hesston College for two weeks at the beginning of June. The group consisted of students, faculty/staff, alumni, and friends of the college, ranging in age from 19 to over 80. Led by President Joe Manickam and faculty Tony Brown and Kyle Hesed Miller, our trip took us all around the country from Bangkok to Chang Mai in the north, to Mae La refugee camp on the Burmese border, to the deep southern provinces of Pattani, Songkhla, and Yala on the border of Malaysia.

The trip, which focused on interfaith conversations and the interaction of peace and the arts, can be divided into the following three segments: conversations with those of other religions in the north, the refugee camp, and continuing interfaith discussions on the conflict in the deep south. Hospitality was a key learning for many in our group.

Over 90% of the population of Thailand is Buddhist. The second most prevalent religion is Islam, with small percentages of Christianity and other religions. We visited with Imams at mosques, monks at Buddhist temples, and Sikhs at their Gurdwara (temple). Since many of our local guides were Muslim and we visited mosques the most, Islam became the religion I understood the best. Each Muslim group we visited shared a common message of how their religion has been misrepresented in the media with their faith portrayed as a basis of terrorism when they are actually a peaceful faith group that does not identify with the so called “Muslim” extremist groups. One of the prime examples they gave us was the word “jihad.” It has been contorted to have a violent connotation, but in reality, is an Islamic term for an inner struggle against sin and towards peace. While visiting with them, their hospitality amazed me as they went beyond what was



Sophie Miller with Sofeeyah and Kholeema, two English students who showed her around Fatoni Univeristy.

necessary and served us food while they were still in their time of fasting.

The second part of the trip was at the Mae La refugee camp, which sits on the border of Burma/Myanmar and has been there since the early 1980s. The people in the camp are primarily Karen, an ethnic group found in eastern Burma and western Thailand. We visited the main part of the camp, where many residents are Baptist. There they have an established college of theology, where we met with some of the students. Despite the undesirable circumstances, the camp truly is a beautiful place, situated in the mountains among the dense jungle and the fog, and surrounded by the powerful singing of the school’s choir. I was amazed by the hospitality of people who have so little, providing us with lodging and their best food; it was hard to accept.

On the third part of the trip, we looked at the conflict occurring in the deep southern provinces. While Thailand is predominantly Buddhist, the southern provinces are majority Muslim. The people are also ethnically Malay and culturally relate to Malaysia more

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than Thailand. These both serve as roots of the conflict. We visited several different artists who use their paintings and pottery as a peaceful way to speak out against the violence in their community.

The two experiences that impacted me the most were building connections at the refugee camp and with Muslim students at Fatoni University, a newly founded Muslim university in Yala province in the deep south. These connections built a bridge between the groups and allowed us to stand in solidarity with them. The hospitality that we received throughout the course of the trip was a blessing that has made me reflect on my place in the world and the amount of hospitality I can give to others.

### Thank you from Casa Mariposa

This spring, funds were granted to Casa Mariposa through Waterford's Endowment Fund. A detention visitation program in Tucson, AZ, volunteers connect with immigrant detainees in southern Arizona throughout their detention and after their release. The full letter is posted on the bulletin board.

*Thank you for your recent donation of \$1,000. We are deeply touched by your generosity! Your support will help individuals being released from Eloy Detention Center receive the basic items they need as they begin life again on the outside. Food, clothing and bus tickets to family and friends remind each person that they are not alone as they adjust to life post-detention. Your donation will also help many individuals who remain detained to make phone calls to their loved ones. Thank you for this vital gift of connection.*

*—Rocio Calderón and Elizabeth Smith  
of Casa Mariposa Detention Visitation  
Program*

### Supporting a Young Adult in Service

Be looking in your church boxes this Sunday the 30th for a letter seeking your support for Sophie Miller for her upcoming service and learning assignment in Guatemala. Our financial and prayer support will be crucial for Sophie during this 11-month assignment through Mennonite Mission Network.

*—Pastor Neil Amstutz*

### MYF Summer Intern: Introducing Matthew Damer

It is such a gift when our young adults step into church leadership. Throughout the past year, Matthew Damer, Waterford MYF grad and current student at Grace College, approached me about becoming a youth sponsor. We brainstormed ways he could practice leadership and faith through a summer MYF sponsor internship. Matthew has shown enthusiasm for building community among the MYF, and has displayed a passion for youth ministry. He wanted to be intentional about the MYF community being active during the summer and volunteered to plan and lead activities on Wednesdays throughout June, July, and the beginning of August. I am grateful to have Matthew come along with us to MennCon and to take the lead with MYF this summer. Our college and young adults are a great blessing to Waterford with incredible gifts for leadership. Thanks for stepping up, Matthew!

*—Katie Misz and the MYF sponsor team*

