

THINKING AHEAD

The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada



Burmese Refugees Not Forgotten

SANDRA REIMER

A Burmese refugee family in Mai La camp on the Thai border with Burma (Myanmar) before they were resettled in the United States. © Brennon Jones/IRIN

“**I** HAVE SO MANY FRIENDS AND RELATIVES who are still suffering. Even though I live here [in Canada], how can I forget them?” asks part-time VMC staff member Indy Cungcin.

Cungcin fled to Thailand from his home in Burma in 1988. In 1997, he was sponsored by the Maples Community Church in Winnipeg to come to Canada. He now pastors at City Church, helps lead City Connexions, a ministry to Winnipeg immigrants, and leads the Canadian Chin Christian Fellowship in association with VMC.

In November 2010, Cungcin attended a three-day international gathering of Chin Christian leaders that was held in Malaysia, where many Chin refugees live. This was the first meeting of the newly formed Global Chin Christian fellowship (GCCF). The

Chin are one of several minority ethnic groups from Burma that are being persecuted by the majority Burmans who want one language, one culture, and one religion—Buddhism—in the country.

Cungcin also visited four refugee camps in Thailand that are along the border with Burma. Thousands of Chin and Karen (pronounced KA-ren) refugees live in these camps. The Karen are the largest of the minority Burmese ethnic groups. Some Karen are Christian while others practice Buddhism or Animism. The Chin are mainly Christian.

Worldwide there are approximately 700,000 Burmese refugees—the largest group of displaced persons from Southeast Asia. Many have taken refuge in India and Malaysia. About 140,000 live in nine camps in Thailand and another 200,000 live in that country with no official recognition from the government. As well,

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an estimated one to three million people have been displaced within Burma over the last decade.

Canada is one of fifteen governments that provide funds to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), a collection of organizations that look after the essential needs of Burmese refugees in the camps. Cungcin says the TBBC provides the people with salt, rice, fish paste, oil, and paper for their daily needs. The consortium also supplies basic health care, though Cungcin says, "In refugee camp, there is never enough medicine."

"Most people want to go back to their country, but there is no chance. The best solution is to go to another country," said Cungcin. Refugees who return to Burma often face religious persecution, forced labour, forced relocation, and



Indy Cungcin visited with Burmese pastors in four refugee camps in Thailand in November 2010. Pictured here with pastors from Mae Ra Moo Camp are Greg Klosse (back row, first on left) and Indy (back row, fourth from left).

Burmese refugees in Thailand face ration cuts

BANGKOK, 24 January 2011 (IRIN) - Rising food prices may prompt the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, an umbrella group of 12 humanitarian organizations working with more than 139,000 Burmese refugees in Thailand, to cut rice rations by up to 20 percent. Additional cuts will be made to salt, sugar, oil and chili rations.

imprisonment. Since 1984, the country has been ruled with an iron fist by a military dictatorship. Elections held in November 2010 are widely thought to be fraudulent and did not result in a change in leadership or improvements in living conditions.

The situation is especially bad for young people living in the Thai refugee camps—many of whom were born in these "temporary" villages. "The thinking of the young people is that they have no hope at all. They cannot go back to their country. They cannot get out from the camp. If they leave the camp, they will get caught from the Thai guards and sent back to Burma," said Cungcin.

The TBBC does run schools in the camps but after youth finish high school there is nothing for them to do. The Thai government will not allow the refugees to work, cultivate farms or do anything that would make their settlement too permanent—even though some of the camps have been in existence for 27 years. "The young people can only stay home to eat and sleep," Cungcin said. Drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex can all be problems.

Some youth give up completely and commit suicide.

In this darkness, there is some hope. According to Cungcin, each camp has at least ten churches comprised of 300 to 500 adults per congregation. Cungcin met with the pastors in each of the four camps he visited to find out what their needs are. "The most they are asking for is education for their kids, a roof for their church, and Bibles," he said. The Thai government forbids the refugees from cutting down bamboo, so the roofs of the churches are made of leaves which need to be replaced every few years. They also desperately need NIV Bibles and hymn books.

On this trip, Cungcin brought freelance technical producer Greg Klosse, who formerly worked for the CBC. Klosse captured eight hours of footage, which will be edited into shorter presentations highlighting the desperate needs of the refugees. Cungcin hopes to show the documentary pieces to Christians as well as immigration officials in Canada.

In 2009, Cungcin and some Chin Christian leaders living in Canada, along with Gord Martin from VMC, met with Canadian immigration officials to advocate on behalf of Burmese refugees. In light of more restrictive immigration legislation, Indy wants to meet with representatives from Immigration Canada again to ensure his people are not forgotten. In 2006, Canada opened the door to 2,600 Karen refugees and another 1,300 in 2008.

Cungcin says, "If we don't speak it out, who is going to do it?" ■

WORLD PROBLEMS like displaced men, women, and children from Burma can seem far away and overwhelming. VMC's connection with Indy Cungcin puts a face and a name on the issue and provides a pathway to make a difference. Here's what you can do:

YOU CAN HELP

- ▶ **Donate Bibles and other English books** to help establish a Bible school library for late teens and twenties. Bible commentaries, theological texts, Bible themes or doctrines, Christian living, global missions, and Bible surveys would be helpful. Send new or used books in good condition to City Connexions c/o Indy Cungcin, 602 Ellice Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 0A3
- ▶ **Join a mission trip** from Canada going to the Thai refugee camps in 2012 with an eye specialist. Contact Indy Cungcin via VMC for more information.
- ▶ **Pray** for the establishment of righteous, fair leaders in Burma who will grant freedom to all who live there.
- ▶ **Pray** for an end to the cruel torture, imprisonment, and killing.
- ▶ **Pray** that Jesus would redeem Burma for himself.
- ▶ **Pray** that Indy would find a Canadian educational partner who could provide accredited high school education in the camps, so that young adults coming to Canada could have a smoother transition.

Would North Park be Missed if the Church Closed Down?

SANDRA REIMER

From all outward appearances North Park Community Church was thriving five years ago. Two thousand people attended the non-denominational congregation in London, Ontario. They had multiple pastors and many programs. But the leadership team decided to go deeper after reflecting on the question “If your church closed down would your city miss you?”

“Back in 2006, as a leadership team we were struggling to figure out what it meant to impact our city,” says Matthew Eckert, Pastor of Ministry Engagement at North Park. Eckert led the charge when North Park launched “Engage” in the fall of 2007.

“We decided to partner with non-profit organizations in the city,” said Eckert. To

than offering specific help like painting a building. He found that most organizations wanted people to build relationships with their clients. For example, Chesire supports adults with disabilities and wondered if volunteers would take people grocery shopping and spend time with them. Teen Challenge asked families to invite young men fighting addictions into their homes for dinner and to do things like play games so they could experience a healthy family.

As a way to go deeper with Engage, North Park launched “Engaging Journeys: An Eight-Month Experience of Learning & Serving” in the fall of 2010. Participants pay \$100 tuition for the program and choose a learning/serving track from:

Assisting those with Unplanned Pregnancy, Serving those with Disabilities, Welcoming Refugees to London, Serving on a Non-Profit Board of Directors, or Engaging with Homelessness in London. In addition to attending a monthly teaching session featuring experts from the community

and a facilitated small group time, participants agree to volunteer at least once per month in the area they are learning about.

Some of the 28 participants in the first Engaging Journeys session started out scared. But Eckert finds that about four months into the program they are appreciative and say their lives are being changed. “People just need to get their hands dirty and be in the middle of it. It changes them in ways they didn’t expect.”

Though Eckert is pleased that Engage is successful, he is even happier that the program initiates connections with agencies that volunteers continue on their own. So far at least 400 volunteers have been mobilized to serve the community.

These days it’s pretty safe to say that if North Park closed its doors, the people of London would notice. ■



The Engage initiative mobilizes volunteers at North Park. Some choose to help at the church’s Life Resource Centre which operates in a low-income area of London. The centre hosts three bike clinics a year to help people fix their bicycles. They also collect used bikes. “Every year we go through 200 bikes that we sell at low cost, or give away,” says pastor Matthew Eckert.

learn about issues like homelessness, unplanned pregnancies, and addictions, the church seeks input from and works alongside Christian and non-Christian agencies that are experts at tackling community problems. “We don’t understand the issues so who are we to try and solve them?” he says.

Initially, representatives from agencies came to speak during a Sunday service and set up a display at the church. Currently Eckert speaks once per year about the Engage ministry and opportunities are highlighted through the church’s monthly newsletter and on their website. When someone expresses interest, Eckert connects the person with a compatible organization.

Agencies were pleased when Eckert asked them what they really needed rather



More Flourishing, Effective Churches

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THINKING AHEAD is published four times per year in an effort to connect like-minded Christians and their local churches and encourage them to work cooperatively, especially in evangelism, through church planting and church extension.

Subscriptions are free, but VMC encourages supporters to send \$15 per year to help cover costs (no tax receipt given for subscriptions).

Spending of funds received by VMC is confined to board-approved programs and purchases. Each gift designated toward an approved program will be used as designated with the understanding that when any given need has been met, designated gifts will be used where needed most. Gifts of \$20 or more are acknowledged with an official tax receipt.

VMC is committed to financial accountability; all accounts are audited by an independent auditing firm; financial statements available on request.

We appreciate notification of double mailings, names for our mailing list, or if a name should be deleted.

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ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Friends of VMC,

God's word to us in Hebrews 11 is that by faith ordinary people did things that God took note of in heaven. He loves it when people who can't see Him trust and obey Him.

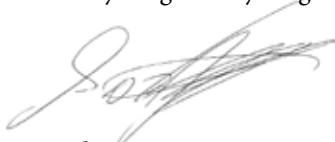
And so, by faith our staff at VMC and the leaders of the churches and church plants among whom we serve did things in 2010 that we believe God has taken note of in heaven.

I am greatly encouraged by:

- ▶ The ministry of many individuals and churches to refugees and other newcomers to Canada. God has heard their cries.
- ▶ Leaders of churches that have resolved to help their people make a difference in every strata of their communities. They are determined to extend the Kingdom of God in every possible way.
- ▶ The ministries of compassion, grace, and Christ-like patience that have risen to reach out to the broken and broken-hearted of our society.
- ▶ Many of you who have participated by encouraging us and giving financially to make our ministry possible. Thank you!

We wish to press on in doing great exploits "by faith." Of concern to us is that our donation income for the first six months of our current fiscal year is behind where we were last year at the same time by a significant amount. So please pray with us about that.

Thank you again for your gracious support and encouragement,



Gord Martin
Director of Vision Ministries Canada

At the fourth Thinking Shrewdly conference, Quincy Bergman (standing) communicates his passion for inner city youth and families in Toronto where he and his wife Duanne are planting a church with the help of VMC and the 12:12 Network. Gord Martin (VMC), Nigel Paul B. (MoveIn), and Jay Gurnett (VMC) look on. The conference, held in May 2010, was an ideal time to let people know about some of the great ministries connected to VMC. Attendees enjoyed the display boards about church plants and ministry initiatives, a magazine filled with stories, and people sharing testimonies throughout the weekend.



THINKING SHREWDLY IV: A ROBUST FAITH FOR DANGEROUS TIMES

2010 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Very positive conference and connection time in Quebec with the leaders of Le Réseau in February.
2. Time with many pastors and elders to encourage, strengthen, coach and advance their ministries. This is a very important part of our ministry.
3. Our most successful Thinking Shrewdly conference ever with Michael Frost in May.
4. Finishing our June 30th fiscal year end in a positive financial position.
5. Three-day Chin conference in Winnipeg with around 250 in attendance.
6. An innovative approach to supporting new church plants by having them do their accounting on our website and also be covered by our insurance policy until they become registered charities.
7. The number of signed VMC Church Partnerships grew from 25 to 40.
8. Mentoring younger leaders and seeing about 150 participate at dynamic ministry events.
9. Fall meeting with pastors and elders in ten cross-Canada regions in preparation for spring events.
10. New church plants started in six communities.
11. International dialogue with people that are forming or are interested in forming VMC-like ministries.

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



I have been connected with Vision Ministries Canada for over ten years, about half that time as a board member. Last year I assumed the role of Board Chair.

When I first connected with VMC, my sense was that they primarily focused on church planting. But we do much more than church planting. We help equip existing churches and church leaders for greater impact. Whether it is seminars and conferences like Thinking Shrewdly or personally walking along side leadership teams, we help to build relevant faith communities that have a missional, kingdom-focused mindset.

VMC does its work in a collaborative manner, exploring and developing strategic partnerships with other Christian organizations and individuals both nationally and internationally. They continue to do ministry in traditional ways as well as through new and diverse methods.

Gord has continued to provide visionary leadership and has surrounded himself with a great staff team. Together they seek to understand and find ways to respond to changing cultural realities.

As we look to the future, VMC just might be one of those key catalysts in Canada that will help the church to have its greatest impact. —*Dave Ralph*

VISION MINISTRIES CANADA
2010 ANNUAL REPORT
YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2010

	Audited 2010 \$	Audited 2009 \$
REVENUE		
General contributions	333,213	302,409
Conference, event fees and other revenue	89,012	77,041
Investment income (loss)	19,395	(5,052)
	441,620	374,398
EXPENSES		
Salaries and benefits	245,753	259,115
Travel	37,490	25,707
Leadership development and conferences	59,222	52,074
Newsletter "Thinking Ahead"	21,051	15,800
Administrative and office expenses	57,115	46,295
	420,631	398,991
Excess of revenue over expenses for year	20,989	(24,593)
Project funds disbursed during the year	244,745	144,750

Donations from individuals and churches

Collected for and given to church plants and ministry projects

VMC Network News

Help Canada Reach Millennium Development Goals

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is encouraging Canadian churches to advocate on behalf of the world's poor by highlighting the Millennium Development Goals at an event held with other faith groups and political leaders. In 2000, 191 countries agreed to focus on eight target areas called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Canada is not on track to meet its commitment to fulfilling the MDGs by 2015. We can speak out on behalf of our brothers and sisters in poverty and hold our Members of Parliament accountable. Access an event planning resource kit at www.FaithChallengeG8.com under "Resources."

Millennium Development Goals

1. End Poverty and Hunger
2. Universal Education
3. Gender Equality
4. Child Health
5. Maternal Health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS
7. Environmental Sustainability
8. Global Partnership

Welcome to Our New Pastoral Support Person



Former VMC board member Doug Loveday has started two days per week as a part-time staff member with VMC to be a "pastor to pastors." Prior to this Doug was senior pastor at

Community Bible Church, Lucan, Ontario for 23 years. He has recently stepped down to a three-day per week position at the church.

I have had a burden on my heart for some time whenever I see a pastoral leader going through a time of struggle and difficulty... I will be trying to bring the encouragement of the Lord to my brothers and sisters who are in leadership positions throughout the VMC network...

This shepherding of the shepherds will involve personal conversations and visits with pastors and church planters and other leaders, as well as some pulpit supply, prayer and counsel.

—Doug Loveday

MOVING YOUR CHURCH'S MISSION FORWARD

*For people who care about what their church is accomplishing.
A half-day Vision Ministries Canada event for men and women of all ages
in pastoral leadership or volunteer leader roles.*

OVERVIEW

Mission of God, Missional Church and the Mission of "our Church."
A presentation by Gord Martin of VMC.

Assessment of your commitment to the mission of God: personally, the people in your church as individuals, and your church as a community. A guided discussion facilitated by Mike Stone of ForestView in Oakville, Ont.

Church-Based Missional Ministries - five short video presentations on reaching people: in a *nice* neighbourhood, a *socially diverse* neighbourhood, a *poor and dangerous* neighbourhood, *across cultural/racial/linguistic barriers*, and *incarnationally*.

Considering your next steps — a coached discussion with Mike Stone:

Realignment? Revamping? Prayer like Koreans and Africans?
Adopt new "missional ministries"? Deploying people better? Plain old persistence? What will it take for us to move this forward in our church?

DATES

March 26	K-W / Guelph	April 13	Calgary
April 2	Montréal	April 14	Edmonton
April 3	London	April 30	Toronto
April 11	Vancouver	May 7	Peterborough
April 12	Victoria	May 28	Halifax

Plan Ahead!

THINKING SHREWDLY CONFERENCE in Waterloo or Guelph, May 10-12, 2012

Working theme: Gospel & Church in Words & Action

Committed presenters to date:

- ▶ **Gary Nelson**, President of Tyndale – University College & Seminary
- ▶ **Greg Paul**, Founder & Director of Sanctuary Ministries

We are continuing dialogue with other well-known presenters about the possibility of coming.

Leader Lab Resources Available to You

If you live within driving distance of our office in Waterloo, why not make use of our resource library? We have more than 200 books on a variety of topics including: Worship, Mission, the Poor, Evangelism, Leadership, Christian Living, Church Resources, and Church Planting. A complete list of titles is posted on our website under Church Leaders > Leadership Resources > VMC Leader Lab Book List.

Some recommended titles from our collection:

Introverts in Church by Adam McHugh
Sticky Teams by Larry Osborne
Lost and Found by Ed Stetzer
True for You but Not for Me by Paul Copan
AND by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay
Leading from the Second Chair by Bonem & Patterson
Leading Spin Off Churches by Harrison Cheyney & Overstreet

LIGHTHOUSES IN WINDSOR

SANDRA REIMER

After being away for twenty plus years, Bob and Margo Cameron returned to their hometown—Windsor, Ontario—to start the Downtown Windsor Community Collaborative.

“The strategy is to have a ‘lighthouse’ in every neighbourhood in the downtown,” said Bob Cameron, who served as a Community Pastor in Mississauga and completed studies focused on urban ministry at Tyndale University College & Seminary before starting the collaborative. According to Cameron, a lighthouse is a home that “seeks to be the centre of its neighbourhood, where the Christ community gathers and cares for each other but also turns around and cares for its neighbours.”

The Cameron’s home has become the first of these lighthouses. Neighbours know they can approach the couple when they are in crisis or if they just want to connect. About 40 Christians and “not yet” Christians gather at their house on Sundays. “Folks come and watch football on Sunday afternoon. At 6:00 pm we stop and have a potluck supper. At 7:00 we hang out and do some spiritual formation—a bit of music, simple prayer, simple listening,” said Cameron. After reflecting on Scripture and talking about neighbourhood projects in the works, they join hands and end the meeting by saying the Lord’s prayer together.

A neighbour recently called Bob from jail and thanked the group for accepting her as she was. The young woman often dropped in at the Cameron’s for coffee during the week and attended the Sunday gatherings. She wasn’t comfortable with the “God talk” so she cleaned the kitchen during that part of the meeting.

Before returning to Windsor, the Camerons took time to discern where God was already at work in the city. “We identified a small, passionate group who are doing work in the downtown core. We have become the network hub for those relationships,” he said. Working alongside ten other Christians who live and work in the downtown, plus another dozen from the suburbs, the Camerons

Amy Cameron, who is part of the Downtown Windsor Community Collaborative, connects with a rapper in her neighbourhood.



follow God’s lead as they reach out to business people, artists, homeless people, immigrants, as well as those with addictions. “We have identified a specific geography and are using the old language of *parish*,” said Cameron.

The group is about to launch another lighthouse home within the boundaries of that downtown parish, and has two more in the planning stages. Each lighthouse will have a different focus, depending on the main need of the neighbourhood—such as immigration issues, homelessness, or addictions.

As they build relationships with their neighbours, Cameron says, “we see where is God at work in people’s lives and where is he calling us to participate in the reconciling work that Christ has done and is doing in the person’s life.”

See more at www.bettertogetherwindsor.ca ■

How VMC churches can help:

- ▶ Ask God to protect each lighthouse home and the Camerons as they lead the group
- ▶ Pray for wisdom as the group discerns who to get involved with and which projects to undertake
- ▶ The Downtown Windsor Community Collaborative has projects that need outside support including: Community Housing, Neighbourhood Gardens, Harambee Bakery (a social enterprise). Donations can be given at www.vision-ministries.org under Church Planting > Donate > Current Initiatives.



THE MISSION OF GOD

GORD MARTIN

and the mission of his people

In the nineties I was starting to hear the word *mission* used in a new way. At first I wasn't sure what I was hearing. People said things like: "It's not about getting together and doing church, it's all about mission." What did that mean?

The word *mission* means an assignment, a delegation or a calling. The Bible contains the stories of lots of men and women who were assigned to particular tasks, who were delegated to do a certain thing or were called for life-long commitments to the service of God.

Author and speaker Christopher Wright illustrates it this way. When we speak about *science* (singular), certain ideas come to mind; but when we speak of *sciences* (plural), a whole other range of possibilities occurs to us. So then the word *mission* is like the singular term *science*: it refers to all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation

In the last ten or fifteen years a whole range of new ministries has emerged; ministries of compassion with a major focus on the poor and marginalized, random acts of kindness, justice ministries of all kinds ranging from freeing modern slaves and child prostitutes, to political action. New debates have risen about how evangelism fits in such ministries. Or does it fit at all? Shouldn't our Christ-like actions speak for themselves?

There has been a new focus on the missional church. And what is that? If you've followed this dialogue at all you know that churches that are said to be missional are more engaged with the people in their com-

munities with few overtly evangelistic elements. Their intent is to bring the life and values of Jesus to the heart of everyday, ordinary living. They want to live out the life of Jesus in their community by doing good like he did. Sometimes missional people say that living out the life of Jesus in this way is a lot more important than getting together to sing songs and listen to a talking head.

Is this conversation heating up a little for you?

Into this discussion of *proclaiming* the gospel versus *living* the gospel by serving the way Christ did, we brought Michael Frost to speak at our Thinking Shrewdly conference last spring. He inspired us powerfully to go out, be on mission, get involved in living like Jesus in our communities. Lay down your life in missional obedience for the people in your neighbourhood so they can see in you the life of Jesus. He said all this while continuing to uphold the centrality of Christ, the cross and the essential witness of the church.

But debates continue. Is the mission of God wide and all encompassing? Or is it narrow and specific? Christianity Today devoted a whole series of articles to this subject a few years ago.

With all this debate, it can be difficult for church leaders to know how to respond, who's side to be on or how to take action.

After having Frost with us, VMC staff felt the need to encourage and help churches find their next steps in advancing their mission.

As I began to snoop around and listen to what was happening out there, I kept bump-

ing into articles about a book called *The Mission of God* by Christopher Wright. He heads up the Langham Foundation, established with the royalties from John Stott's books, for the purpose of advancing Biblical preaching, literature and supporting Biblical scholars internationally. I heard him speak at Tyndale in Toronto in November and was thrilled with the breadth and depth of his teaching, which includes a significant focus on how unity can be created by focusing on the whole mission of God as it is communicated in Scripture.

This spring we are planning to conduct a series of leadership development gatherings in ten regions across Canada. For more information see page 6, and visit our web site or call our office to register.

The focus of these events will be to present the broad over-arching mission of God from His creation, His redemption all the way through to the new creation. We will be in awe of Him! We will assess, as well as we can, the missional impact of: our own lives, the weekday lives of our church members, and of our congregations. We will hear inspirational and imaginative stories of what others are doing, and will consider how the Spirit of God may be speaking to us about our own next steps.

We'd love to see you this spring at the location nearest to you! ■

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www.vision-ministries.org

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