

Dear Sisters,

Happy Feast of Mary of the Incarnation to you all.

Actually deep in my heart, I do not know what to share to you all about our living here in Cambodia. Firstly, because of the limitation of my English. Eventhough we speak English in the community, but I feel that I still have not made a good progress in English speaking until now. Secondly I am not good in writing, even in my own language.... So, I ask your pardon not to write sooner. However, time runs so fast. Well, just start.....

I got inspired by one of my saved items, stayed in my mobile, sent by Mr Paulus Hidayat, a psychologist, who lives in the same compound in Angrek's street, Bandung, Indonesia. I copy what is written, so that I can start to write this News.

GOD IS TRULY PRESENT IN THE WONDROUS BEAUTY OF THE UNIVERSE, IN THE SKIES, SUN AND STARS, IN ALL OUR NOBLE ACTIVITIES. AND YET, GOD IS TRULY PRESENT IN A VERY SPECIAL WAY, IN ALL THAT IS APPARENTLY UGLY, ALL THAT STINKS AND IS BROKEN, AND ESPECIALLY SORROW AND SACRIFICE. H A P P Y E A S T E R .

"YES, GOD IS TRULY PRESENT".

I am here in Battambang, Cambodia, on my own request, responding to the newsletter of the Indonesian Provincial. I have been waiting for an answer long enough, until finally I was called to Java from where I was on duty in East Timor. I felt I was not "Ok" to be sent at that time. But, how then? I kept asking my inner heart and said in my prayer: "Please God, give me a sign if I am not the right one to be sent to this foreign land". Feeling not sure about myself, I kept asking 'a sign' from God, but nothing happened with me...

As I arrived in Jakarta, I visited my family. My two sisters were surprised, because I am not young anymore to be sent. I only have good health and good will to go. I have told them about my prayers, but God did not give me an assurance. When I arrived in Bandung, all the sisters assured me that they would keep praying for my new mission in Cambbodia. I just smiled and expressed my gratitude to them.

"**Be Present**" is a very important stage for the time being. It is our main mission to start as a group. Battambang is the second big city after Pnompenh - the capital city of Cambodia. Some shops and houses for rent are around. We have been living here for 7 months.

Every morning we go cycling to Church for daily Mass. Each of us is getting used to it. It is the easier, cheaper and simpler way to go around or to do some errands. We live here in a comman way of living as most people in our neighborhood do. We do not know them, but they see and know us. We take turn each week to do our daily tasks, such as preparing meal, cleaning the house, looking after our garden, paying water and electricity, preparing community liturgy/prayers, and doing some errands.

Ursuline

KHMER Newsletter



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Live & Learn

We learn the Khmer language in private. Our young guy teacher comes regularly every day, unless Saturday or we have other important things to do. Learning the Khmer language is the hardest time for me, especially since I use my poor English as a transition language in my mind. Moreover, the alphabet is not the same as the Roman alphabet. As a student who wants to take easily and avoiding to learn the difficult Sanskrit alphabet, I asked to be taught only to speak. But you know, it won't helped me without knowing and getting through the alphabets, the vowels etc. Some steps for learning this language must be done for making a good progress, but my little heart could not accept it. I did not feel "OK". Since I started to learn, I have made a collection of some vocabularies in writing. I try to catch by listening carefully how my teacher pronounced a word, then put it in writing. I did make a little progress in speaking, but truly, I have not been able to speak easily.

Since two months ago, I made a schedule to be with the villagers in Chrab Wiel twice a week. Some mothers, children are always around. I was present in their midst, just sitting with them, and also doing what they do. I learned how to plant mushroom after rice field harvest. I helped picking up and collecting tomatoes from their garden, peeling garlics'skin and entering 4 – 5 pieces of garlics to a very small plastic bag for selling. People in the village always have time to get together. They do not seem to be in a hurry. They also raise chickens or ducks. By just sitting, being with the people in the village, doing things with them, speaking a little or much, I experienced something valuable from them. I got courages from them.

Present in the midst of them with heart and mind as you are, is also one of our primary mission at this time. We present with our own passion, characteristics, weaknesses, the way of speaking and expression, as "me" not as "you". We try to get used to one another by living face to face, then you will be known right away without cover. Moreover when you are only with small number, with three or two sisters only. We cannot run away, we just stick on it. Life can be very heavy or too serious when we are worry about so many things. We cannot enjoy the moment, we cannot draw the wonderful lessons that life brings us. Let it be, let it go, learn to pause, learn to walk without the feeling of Jesus' presence.

'YES,' God is truly present in the wondrous beauty of the universe, also in a very special way, in all that is apparently ugly, all that stinks and is broken, sorow and sacrifice. God has called me to enter this holly week with clean heart and taste the great gift of God 's loving Son, the risen Christ. Amen.

Paulina Gani, OSU

CAMBODIA AND THE CHURCH

Cambodia is a Buddhist country (90%). The population of Cambodian is around 14.45 million, 32% of them are under 14 years old. Cambodia is also a young country, 75% of population is below 25 years of age. I can see the young people everywhere, not only in schools or internet cafe but also in the church.

This Easter 2011 there were 100 young people baptized in Battambang prefecture. This is a small number because the Church lacks qualified catechists to teach catechism and prepare them for baptism. The bishop also would like to take a longer period of preparation in order to deepen the faith of both the ones to be baptized and their godparents. When I look at their godparents, they seem to be the same age, friends of the baptize more than parents.

The Church in Cambodia is divided into one Vicariate (Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh) and two Prefectures (Apostolic prefecture of Battambang and Kampong Cham). The Ursulines chose the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang for their inter-provincial apostolate last September 2010. We were the 12th women's religious congregation to take up work in the Prefecture. Most of other women's religious congregations emphasize the pastoral and social services. Only a few groups focus on education.

The reason might be recent national history. These past two decades, the Khmer people had been through great suffering and various conflict within the country. Therefore Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang decided their primary apostolate should be directed towards community development and health programs, especially for the most in need without considering their religion or ethnic origin.

Today, all over the country, there is only one Catholic secondary school, five primary schools and six vocational training centers run by Salesian Fathers and Sisters. The Salesian family was invited by Cambodian government to work as an NGO eighteen years ago. A few years ago Battambang Prefecture initiated a Kindergarten Program. They opted to set up Kindergartens in all the villages near by churches. Now there are Kindergartens in fifteen places. Jesuit Service (JS) as an NGO, also supports education in this area. It is done by cooperating with the education officers in remote villages; answering their needs in terms of construction a teacher training facility and providing extra salaries.

The students go to school for basic education without cost but in the city, every students needs to attend extra classes, for which they must pay, in order to pass from one level to the next. It is also common for girls to drop out of primary school in order to help their families.

We had a chance to talk to three Marist Brothers (FMS). They live as an international community. It is their 4th year working in Cambodia. Their mission in Pailin province, provides a computer center for 200 students (an hour/day) and library service. They do not want to have any school now because of Cambodian bureaucracy. Next year they will run student hostel service for boys and girls.

I agree with the Brothers that Cambodian bureaucracy is quite strong. Moreover the very real threat to the teaching profession is the low salaries of teachers (\$30-40 /month), causing low quality education and leads to corruption between teachers and students. New teachers, (1st year) cannot receive their salaries until the end of school year (around \$250). The Cambodian government is quite open to private schools and universities being set up, whether they are well qualified or not! In my opinion, education is the most important area to be emphasized in order to improve society and the community.

Battambang Prefecture has begun a strategic plan (2010-2015) to develop the youth in 4 aspects: values formation, education, faith formation and leadership training. As a daughter of Angela, I can see that these four aspects are integrated as one in the Ursuline philosophy of education. I would like to find more information in order to know whether formal education or informal education is suitable for the Ursuline charism to bare fruit in this country.

Bishop Kike has just proposed for us a further step in preparation for our apostolate: to have personal immersion program at least 3 month to better learn the language and customs, by living closely with villagers. We know that our Saviour is Risen, and he says to us, "Go, fear not, I am with you." So, we hope that our fledgling Ursuline Cambodian mission will rise with our Risen Lord, some time, some how. Happy Easter to you all.

Jantana,osu