

FUTCH FAMILY UPDATE

July 7, 2020

Dear friends and family,

What a crazy year 2020 has been! Thailand has weathered the COVID-19 storm better than most. Economically, many Thai people are suffering because tourism has stopped and the global economy is very sluggish. But in terms of disease control, Thailand did great in spite of being the second country in the world to record a COVID case. Here in Chiang Mai, life is pretty much back to normal, though there are a few restrictions still in place. Only 58 deaths were attributed to COVID-19 since the outbreak began, and we are thankful for that.

Because of the pandemic, Grace International School had to move its instruction online in the 4th quarter of last school year. In spite of all of the challenges that arose due to last minute implementation of online learning, things went pretty well. Emily finished eleventh grade at the end of May, and Angie helped her first graders complete their year successfully. Though they could not finish the year with a classroom celebration, Angie and her fellow teachers found creative ways to say goodbye to their first graders in person.

The government of Thailand has given the school the green light to open school with students in the classroom on August 6th. Emily will be starting her senior year, and Angie will be a second grade teaching assistant. She had planned to step down from working at the school next year to give her more time with the family and to allow her to get involved with other ministries, but God closed that door when it became impossible for her to leave Thailand to change her visa. So, she will continue working at the school one more year, but in a different capacity.

I have not been able to travel internationally since my trip to Kenya in March, but I have been able to keep up with my ministry partners in various nations via video chats, emails, etc. Many of the nations I serve in have had much worse fallout from the virus, and the Philippines and Indonesia are still in a bad state. In spite of that, I have been encouraged to hear how God has opened doors for the gospel in these nations. While churches were closed for a few months during the height of the outbreak, our ministry partners continued to make disciples one on one and in small groups in the community. I have received numerous reports of people coming to Christ, growing in their faith and serving their communities. While I look forward to being able to visit my ministry partners in person again one day, I am thankful for technology that allows me to keep in touch with them and celebrate what God is doing in their midst in spite of the significant challenges they face.

Here in Thailand, my ministry was never really restricted. The social development foundation I work with here was allowed to operate about 80% of its ministry even during the worst of the outbreak. In my role as leader of strategic development, I have been able to equip, coach and encourage leaders of various ministries as they have shared the love of Jesus in many Thai communities in practical ways. One of our newest ventures is a food distribution program that has provided food boxes to some of the most impoverished people of Chiang Mai. We have distributed food to over 800 people so far, and expect to serve over 1000 more families by the end of this month. The gospel is advancing as well. As people experience the unconditional love of Jesus through His Thai followers, many are being drawn to become disciples of Jesus.

As the pandemic has hit, one of the biggest concerns our partners have faced is providing for their families. The pastors I work with have found their salaries decrease or even disappear as

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the poor, unemployed members of their church no longer have anything to give. Other disciple-makers who were employed in businesses have been laid off. So, one of the things I have been working on a lot recently is helping these men and women launch small, sustainable, local businesses that will support their families and ministry. I have been doing this for some time, but the demand has really increased this year. At present, the program has three active businesses in Myanmar, five in Thailand, one in Vietnam, and four in the Philippines. We are about to launch two more businesses in the Philippines in the next month. We have also helped expand one business in Nepal.

The wonderful thing about these businesses is that they facilitate disciple-making. They give our ministry partners new relationships and opportunities to share the gospel and walk alongside new believers. Each business tithes to their local church. As they repay the funds, an average of 20% of the repaid money is invested in regional or national discipleship ministry, and the other 80% is reinvested in new businesses.

This program is different from a lot of microloan programs in that the loans are not "micro" and the program is not sustained through interest. All loans are interest free. To set up a successful business in South East Asia, the minimum investment is \$1500 and sometimes up to \$6000 is needed. I only issue loans to ministry partners who we have worked with for some time and in whom we have full confidence. As a result, the repayment rate is very high. To date, each dollar donated to this project has turned into \$1.58 of investment and ministry funds. That rate of return is increasing rapidly as businesses continue to repay their loans.

I have shared about this program in our updates before, but I am sharing it again here because I would like to invite you to be part of this. There are more good opportunities now than I have the funds to support. So, if you feel led to give a gift of any size towards this venture to empower national disciple-makers in Asia, we would appreciate it.

You can donate online here:

<https://wpartners.org/ministries/projects/shaun-southeast-asia>

Or you can send a check (designated to "Shaun's UXA04 project") to:

World Partners
PO Box 9333
Fort Wayne, IN 46899

April is continuing her PhD research in Urbana, Illinois. She and her husband, Ted, just celebrated their first anniversary. Jacob is keeping busy working at a company in the same area that provides internet services. We had planned to visit our kids this year, but we had to abandon those plans. Again, we are thankful for the many online platforms that allow us to keep in touch with our family, friends, supporters and ministry partners as global travel has ground to a halt.

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Here are some prayer requests:

- 1) Angie has been suffering from arthritis and other physical issues that have caused her to be discouraged at times.
- 2) Shaun will be traveling to Kalasin province (NE Thailand) from July 14 to 17 to encourage and train local leaders and business owners
- 3) Shaun will be preaching at a church in Lampang and leading a workshop for leaders on July 19th
- 4) Shaun will be leading a workshop for ministry leaders in Indonesia via Zoom on July 21st.
- 5) Emily and her friends will be leading a Vacation Bible School for missionary kids from July 22-25
- 6) Shaun will be facilitating training and evaluation for a ministry in Chiang Rai on July 24th.
- 7) Shaun will be leading a workshop about strategic planning for a Thai ministry in Chiang Mai on July 28th
- 8) Angie starts work on July 29th - it will be a challenging start to the school year as new teachers have not yet been given permission to enter the country and a few returning teachers are stuck outside of Thailand as well.
- 9) Emily starts her senior year on August 6th
- 10) Shaun will be visiting World Partners staff and Thai ministry partners in Phang Nga (southern Thailand) from August 21-24
- 11) Pray for our ministry partners throughout the region that they will be strengthened and encouraged as they follow Jesus and reflect his glory and love in their communities.

Thank you for your prayers and financial support for our ministry. We really appreciate you, and we thank God for your partnership with us!

Shaun, Angie & Emily