

## Issan: Birthplace of Daughters; Supplier for Prostitution

October 12, 2010

We just returned from a great trip to the Northeast of Thailand. I hope you will be inspired by what God is doing.

### **Issan, The Source**

The green rice fields of the Northeast are enough of a reason to leave Bangkok for a weekend, but we had another goal in mind. NightLight in partnership with Step Ahead and CBN Siam have begun to seek churches in the Northeast of Thailand to join in raising awareness of the true reality of prostitution and in strategies for prevention. The Northeast of Thailand, otherwise known as Issan supplies over 90% of the women that we meet in the bars and on the streets of Bangkok.



In Thailand the daughter carries the burden and obligation of caring for her parents. Most of the women we meet have 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> grade education and come from agricultural families. Most married young and were abandoned by their husbands or boyfriends when they were pregnant or their children still very young. When the young woman returns home with children but no support, she increases the burden on her parents.

Thailand is a country of honor and saving face and so when the daughter returns home in this condition she feels the shame she is bringing on her family.



Faced with insurmountable challenges compounded with shame and obligation, young women from Issan begin to listen to their school day friends who tell of rich foreign men visiting the bars of Bangkok. The lure of quick money to erase the shame is enough to convince the woman the sacrifice is worthwhile for her family's future security. She chooses what seems like the best and quickest solution among only bad choices, leaves her children behind, makes promises to her parents, and determines to make it in the bars.

Many families these days are aware that their daughters, sisters, mothers are working in the bars and even in prostitution. The women send large amounts of money home sometimes 10 times what could be made in rural areas. When they visit they come with gifts, cash, and even a "rich" foreign boyfriend and the village admires her success. Other women and/or their parents begin to dream of a similar outcome and the floodgate opens. Now there are villages where most of the daughters are working in the bars of Bangkok. Teenagers are evaluating the benefit of staying in school when they could make more money in the bars than if they finish school and get a regular job. It is becoming all too acceptable to work in the bars.



What people don't know is the harsh reality that women face in prostitution. They don't know the arguments that take place between a foreign man and a Thai woman when communication and cultural values clash. They don't know the physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse that takes place to reap the rewards of a cash flow to the village. They see the glory; they don't see the pain and sacrifice that for many leads to self-destruction and even death. As one of our women testified, "I've been to hell and I don't want to go back."

### Bringing the Light



NightLight, Step Ahead and CBN Siam have joined together to go the rural areas of Issan and raise awareness to prevent the trendy flow of women and girls into prostitution. In October we went on our third trip to meet with churches and leaders and

tell the stories which expose the harsh reality. This trip was outstanding. We visited two of the women's families, shared a meal and prayed for them.



### Exposing the Darkness



On Sunday afternoon 350 people gathered from 20 churches to learn and to express support of the campaign. After a powerful worship time we began with an activity to sympathize with those who wear

labels. Everyone was given a sticker on their back identifying them as either "policeman," "mamasan," (pimp) "prostitute," "ladyboy," "foreign customer," or "Thai customer." Those with the various labels came forward to share their experience and thoughts about having these labels. It turned out the "policeman" was actually a policeman and had a lot to say about the situation. Even more powerful was when



the "pimp" shared that he had been a pimp in Bangkok for several years. His disturbing testimony of the harsh reality was moving and eye-opening. Later a young woman came and shared had worked in the bars of our area until pregnant by a customer and then returning home where she found Christ.

### **Sharing the Light**



Two of our women shared their testimonies at the gathering. Their honesty swept away any remaining deception that this work is acceptable or honorable to women and families.

After some more sharing about NightLight and our goal for the campaign, the attendees



were given profiles of actual lives (names changed) to discuss the issues, challenges, and possible solutions, and then to pray for these women or those who would be in similar situations.

### **Light Piercing the Darkness**



The roar of these prayer warriors brought a breakthrough that will continue to shatter false perceptions long after we are gone. It was a great step forward into partnership to stop the great deceit that prostitution is an honorable choice for the daughters of Thailand. We are encouraged that the churches in the Northeast are burdened and want to partner with us to turn the tide of girls away from prostitution and into dignity and the loving arms of God.

### **Please Pray:**

Thank you for the prayers. Please pray for Wii and Oy who bravely shared their stories. It isn't unusual for the women to come under attack when they begin to testify. Wii's father was hospitalized just before this event and Oy was hospitalized after the event. They need your covering.

Pray for the churches to keep the vision burning and to fan it into flame.

Pray for strategies and for readiness to take the message to the heart of the communities.

Please also pray for the young woman who admitted she had been in the bars. She has a baby by a foreigner who is now in jail on drug charges. His parents will be coming from Germany to visit and she asks for prayer that they will accept her and the granddaughter.

We appreciate your faithfulness and generosity with your time and resources that makes all of this possible!

Blessings,

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NightLight Bangkok

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