

OUR MISSION JOURNEY By Carol Coapman Miles

Celebrating Mission, April 2024

Serving the Lord with Gladness in Thailand

“I can do all things through Christ
that strengthens me.”

— Philippians 4:13

*At right: Tom & Carol Miles (1st & 3rd from left)
1991-92, Cambodian Refugee Camp, Thailand*



Both nurses, Tommy and I served in Site #2 Refugee Camp on the Cambodian border in Thailand for four months in 1991-1992. There were 250,000 refugees in Site #2, with seven more camps along the border. We worked with a staff of 20-24 refugees who had been trained in the camp. The team was examining and treating up to 500 patients per day in the Outpatient Clinic. The camp was run by the United Nations and was active for 12 years, serving both Cambodians and Vietnamese.

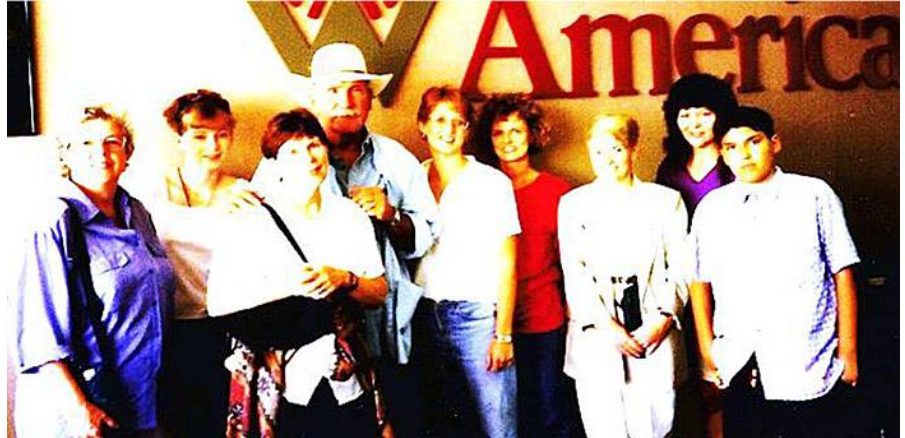
Most of the refugees had fled the Pol Pot Regime, which was trying to eliminate all those who had an education ... teachers, physicians, nurses, lawyers, and yes, even those who wore glasses! The UN was in the process of repatriating all refugees back to Cambodia and Vietnam. Families were being separated in the complicated process. They were bussed back to a country they had fled, and the refugee camp was still being shelled at night from Cambodia. They were given a large blue tarp (for shelter) and a large bag of rice.

As foreign staff, we were supplied by non-profit organizations such as the one we were serving with, Youth with a Mission (YWAM), with teams all over the world. We were housed in Ta Phraya, a small village about 20 miles south of the camp, and trucked into camp each day.

Back Home for a Time of Renewal

Upon returning home, our church, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran (SOTH) in Fountain Hills, AZ, invited us to attend a Lutheran Cursillo weekend of renewal. We each went separately, Tom first, then a few weeks later I had the opportunity to attend. I was a bit resistant to the affair, but what a weekend it was! My faith was renewed.

During Tom's weekend, he was the talk of the retreat. Upon arrival and meeting others, at his table was a man from Tucson who had been at Tom's crash site in Thailand where a bomber had crashed on take-off with a full load of bombs heading for North Vietnam. Tom's rescue helicopter was blown out of the air when the bombs went off and he was the only survivor. He spent two years in the hospital in San Antonio, TX, recovering from life-threatening injuries. Meeting this man was certainly labeled as a God-planned moment! As our life journey unfolded, we were to meet a total of five men who were present at his crash.



Tom & Carol with group at Lutheran Cursillo weekend renewal retreat

Waiting for a Call to Serve

Our strong desire to continue serving as missionaries prevailed. I began to search for places that needed us, including International Teams USA, a Christian organization based in Chicago that had needs in Vietnam. WOW!!! But then I came to the realization that Tom might not be too excited about returning to Vietnam. He'd had two tours of duty there and suffered greatly after his crash.

While waiting for that CALL to SERVE, we became aware of a Lutheran mission and school at Rock Point, AZ, on the Navajo Reservation. Our connection was the daughter of friends at SOTH, Louann Somers. She was a schoolteacher on the reservation and married to a Navajo. Louann helped us get organized to lead teams to the school that housed 68 children. It was 50 miles from any kind of healthcare and then very limited. Louann was also a Naturopathic practitioner. Karen Sigurdson, RN and Naturopathic student, got her professor and class involved in the seven annual mission trips from SOTH. Together, we provided healthcare plus hearing and eyesight testing for all the kids and the whole Navajo community.

The Call

Then we learned of an opportunity to serve in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in Vietnam. But how could we possibly leave our home and our jobs for the one-year required commitment? We worried about finances — how could we make the house payment, pay the utilities, etc., etc? Well, God took care of all that too. David and Mary Volkman had a friend needing a place to stay and would care for the house and pay the utilities. We had the funds donated from SOTH, enough for the airfare, and a week left before leaving. Tom went outside and shouted, “Lord, if you want this to happen tell us what to do next!” Just then the phone rang. It was Mary calling from the church office, telling us that matching funds from Lutheran Brotherhood had just arrived. Why do we worry and fret? God’s got this! We were going to join a mission team in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, for one year! Exciting!!

After long and then longer flights, we touched down at Tan San Nhut Airport. Tears welled up as we passed concrete Quonset huts housing military planes. We were met by our teammates and taken to a guest house where we would then search for housing. The team — physicians from the Philippines with two children, a single woman, and a young couple from Kentucky — had been living together in one large house. Just before our arrival, they were all arrested in the middle of the night and taken to the local police station. They were questioned over and over. “Why were Philipinos and Americans living together? What were they plotting against the government?” When they were finally released, they found lodging in all different parts of the city.

We found a home, then furnished it sparsely and spent the next year serving the Lord in many ways. We got jobs with a Med Evac company ... which led to teaching English, which led to meeting the director of a 1,000 bed Obstetrics and Gynecology hospital (Binh Vinh Hung Vuong), and 30 years of working with teams and teaching. We soon made friends with Nhan, who would become our first project manager after forming Vital Links for Humanity, Inc. (VLH). He was a neighbor living with his aunt, and soon made friends with Tom, who sat outside our door watching the local activities. [Nhan, this new “son” of ours, recently came all the way from Australia to see us in Alabama. What a joy and a believer he is!] We had baptized him at night on a rooftop near our home in Saigon. It’s against the law in Vietnam to share your Christian faith outside the government-controlled church.

We spent 1991-92 in Saigon learning the culture, making lifelong friendships, and teaching Bible studies. We taught English to youth, neighbors, physicians, midwives and nurses, which eventually evolved into teams teaching at many hospitals and the University of Pharmacy and Medicine.

We attended a Baptist church, and I was invited to sing *Oh Holy Night* on Christmas Eve. The police came to the practice saying they needed a permit



for a foreigner to sing in the church. So, the church applied for the permit, and the police said, “NO.” I even had a verse in Vietnamese that a neighbor helped me learn. In Spring 2023, Tom and I made our 30th trip to Vietnam. Hard to believe all that’s happened along the way.

Vital Links for Humanity

In 1998, the first Vital Links for Humanity (VLH) mission team headed to Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam, and beyond! They were full of expectations, and also fear of the unknown. Things like the language barrier, and yes, even the toilets took some getting used to! The hard mattresses, the oppressive heat, and the rain showers that cooled us off at just the right time.

The Vital Links teams were made up of 8-10 adventure seeking Christians, some with medical knowledge to share and others from all walks of life who also had gifts to share. We have taken teams to Nha Trang, Da Nang, Da Lat, Hoi An, and finally in 2018, the last team to include conference in Cambodia. I tell you, Christianity is alive in the young people we met there! We have ridden on the back of motorbikes through the jungle in the rain to reach the villages on the Cambodian border where we have provided funding to build churches, dig much-needed clean water wells and train pastors for the many house churches in the small villages along the border. These faithful Christians risk arrest by Vietnamese police to worship Christ, our Savior.

Our VLH physician, Dr. Hang, and her staff make monthly journeys to provide much needed healthcare and dental care to remote village settings in churches ... where police give permission. She also teaches a “Fetal Protection Program” to women and youth at city and country church settings. We attended “100 Years of the Gospel in Vietnam”, a huge Christian conference in Da Nang that was almost cancelled by the government.

In 2018 a SOTH board member, Marcia Fears, and her husband, John, met with Pastor Bill Moberly and invited him to give a presentation about mission outreach to the congregation at SOTH. We met at the church there in Fountain Hills, AZ, and quickly a plan came together. Tom and I were able to turn Vital Links over to Pastor Bill Moberly of Awakening Lives to World Missions (ALWM). VLH now lives on through ALWM. After 30 years of journeys with teams to teach and share the Gospel, we were blessed to meet Pastor Bill and Sally Moberly, as their journey began in Vietnam carrying on the name Vital Links.


Vital Links ... the Ministry Today

VIETNAM

VITAL LINKS FOR HUMANITY, INC.

- 20+ year old Lutheran
- Gospel & Medical Ministry

Religion	Population	%
Christians	8,395,410	9.43
Evangelicals	1,576,889	1.8
Buddhist	46,722,283	52.48



ALWM.ORG



2018 VLH joins with ALWM, team heads for Vietnam and Cambodia

Dr. Hang - The heart of the ministry

- *Physician*
- *Devoted Christian*
- *Passionate*
- *Committed*
- *Ministering to those in need*
- *Protecting the unborn*





The Vital Links local team that makes things happen! L-r: Tuyet, Be Dung, Thao, Van, Hanh and Han

ALWM INTERNATIONAL

...VLH – the ministry today

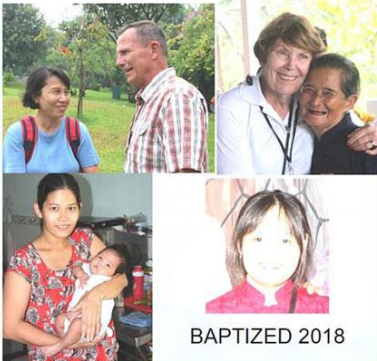
Vital Links for Humanity, Inc.

- Pro-Life Ministry
- Orphanage Ministry
- Village medical outreach clinics in partnership with local churches
- **TESL**
- Partnership with nurses & hospitals
- Gifted Vietnamese Staff

a ministry of

ALWM.ORG

VIETNAM



BAPTIZED 2018



Dr. Hang and her Gospel kids



Workshop for nurses



Providing health and dental care for 5 years at Christian school for the Hill Tribe children



Reading glasses for Hill Tribes



Hill Tribe
BAMBOO
CHURCH
\$1850 GRANT
For
TOILETS
&
WELL

3 Wells for 6 Stieng Hill Tribe Villages (2017)



Hill Tribe Mom and kids



Hill Tribe Village



Hill Tribe mom and kids / Hill Tribe village

Mekong Delta Church- Clean Water Project

TEACHING CLEAN HANDS



Supplying 125 Gallons of clean water per day for the island community



Vital Links...the Ministry Today

Mekong Delta Outreach Clinics



Pastor says "it's our best Evangelistic outreach"



in Partnership with key churches who minister to the poor and share the Gospel!

Peds – Neonatal Grant - \$2400



AGAPE GOSPEL HOUSE MOMS

SAVED FROM ABORTION



Vital Links...the Ministry Today

Orphan Health Care



Wheel chair and stroller donations & grant projects

Vital Links...the Ministry Today

Gospel House orphans!



Saved from abortion or abandoned at local hospitals
The Pro-Life work of Dr. Nguyen Thi Hang

Vital Links...the Ministry Today – Partnerships

Vietnamese Nurses Association
Pediatric Hospital #1 - University Of Medicine and Pharmacy
Ear Nose Throat Hospital



Nursing Conferences & English Classes

ANH VĂN GIAO TIẾP DÀNH CHO ĐIỀU DƯỠNG
ENGLISH COMMUNICATION FOR THE NURSE

Ngày 07, 12 & 13 tháng 06 năm 2018
June, 7th, 12th & 13th 2018



Van Phan, our project manager, with wife
Thuy & family



UMP faculty visits Arizona State University and
Mayo Clinic, February 2018



Miles, Carol

Carol Coapman Miles, mother of 5, was born in Rochester, NY, and raised in Wisconsin Dells, WI. She graduated from St. Luke's School of Nursing in Racine, WI, and from the University of Wisconsin with a Bachelor of Nursing degree in 2006. Carol married Tommy Miles Jr., a 45-year USAF Retired Pararescue Licensed Practical Nurse. As members of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Fountain Hills, AZ, they heard God's call to serve 4 months in the Site 2 Refugee camp on the Thai/Cambodia border, caring for up to 500 Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees in the outpatient clinic. Then they led 7 teams to a Lutheran mission & school at Rockpoint, AZ, to provide much needed healthcare to school children and Navajo reservation residents with help of naturopathic school students and their instructors. Next, they spent a year as Christian missionaries in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (formerly Saigon). Carol and Tommy then formed Vital Links for Humanity, a nonprofit Christian organization, and led teams to Vietnam for 30 years. Activities included: teaching at hospitals; building churches and digging wells in Cambodian border towns; teaching Bible study; introducing cardiopulmonary resuscitation to nurses and physicians at hospitals throughout southern Vietnam; supporting Vietnamese physician, Dr. Hang, in her Fetus Protection Program, her orphanages filled with children saved from abortion, and her monthly outreach to provide healthcare for the poor and elderly. They were pleased when God led them to Pastor Bill Moberly and his Awakening Lives to World Missions organization, who continue their mission as Vital Links in Vietnam. Thanks be to God for the opportunity to serve!

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Links:

Thailand: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Thailand>

United Nations: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations>

Pol Pot Regime: <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/pol-pot>

Cambodia: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cambodia>

Vietnam: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vietnam>

YWAM: <https://ywam.org/>

Ta Phraya: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ta_Phraya_district

SOTH: <https://sothaz.com/>

Mission: <https://nelm.org/>

Navajo Reservation: <https://grcahistory.org/sites/beyond-park-boundaries/navajo-reservation/>

Ho Chi Minh City: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ho-Chi-Minh-City>

Lutheran Brotherhood: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thrivent>

Tan San Nhut Airport:

<https://www.vietnamonline.com/destination/ho-chi-minh-city/transportation/ho-chi-minh-city-airport.html>

Hospital: https://bvhungvuong-vn.translate.google/?x_tr_sl=vi&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en&x_tr_pto=sc

Vital Links: <https://www.alwm.org/vietnam>

Nha Trang: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nha_Trang

Da Nang: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Da-Nang>

Da Lat: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Da_Lat

Hội An: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%E1%BB%99i_An

ALWM: <https://www.alwm.org/>

