

Southeast Asian Experiences of Children in Families Affected with AIDS

By AZUCENA (CENY) HIRAHARA

Good afternoon. My name is Azucena Hirahara, nickname - Ceny. I am married to a Japanese, Tomoyuki, and we are both missionaries of the Church of the Nazarene in Thailand since 1999. I have responsibility as the Nazarene Compassionate Ministries Coordinator in Thailand/Southeast Asia. I have been involved in two major compassionate ministries in Thailand - HIV and AIDS and help to the Tsunami affected persons. I recently moved to the Tsunami hard hit area in PhangNga province last July.

I will share today about our AIDS ministries and compassion to the children in families infected and affected with HIV and AIDS. Many of these children are the “invisible and marginalized.” They were abandoned, discriminated, forgotten, etc.

I am presently involved as Consultant to the New Life for Thai HIV and AIDS project in Thailand. I will show you a video which introduces the work of the New Life for Thai project. This video was made in 2004 and then I will have a power point presentation that will give update about NLFT. Pictures of patients are either blurred or can see the back or side. There are only 2 faces in the video that shows the face of the patients clearly, which we had permission to show. On the video, you will see a thin lady and a child (mother gave permission but she already died). .

SHOW VIDEO: NEW LIFE FOR THAI [5 minutes video]

SLIDE #1 –Words – Asia Cutting Edge Conference

In this session, I will share with you about the Christian response of the Church of the Nazarene and experiences with the HIV and AIDS infected and affected children and their families. Most pictures here will show children with adults. The adults are either parents or NLFT team volunteers caregivers, who have impact in the lives of the children.

SLIDE # 2 – Words: The conference theme:

The conference theme: “Responding to Invisible and Marginalized Children.” We think of the children who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

SLIDE #3 – Logo of New Life for Thai

The New Life for Thai HIV and AIDS project of the Thailand District Church of the Nazarene ministers to parents and children. Our logo shows a picture of a family – father, mother and child. It is the goal of the project to bring parents and children together.

SLIDE #4 – Picture of children playing

These are some of the children in our project.

SLIDE #5 – Picture of NCM logo with 2 kids

The Church of the Nazarene (CON) was founded to transform the world by spreading scriptural holiness. The CON world-region areas, include: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Canada, Caribbean, Eurasia, Mexico and Central America, South America and eight Regions in the U.S. (Central USA, East Central USA, Eastern USA, North Central USA, Northwest USA, South Central USA, Southeast USA and Southwest USA).

The Nazarene Compassionate Ministries partnered with the AIDS ministry in Thailand.

SLIDE #6 – Words: Nazarene Manual 904.17

The CON is actively involved in the HIV and AIDS ministry. At the 2001 General Assembly (a supreme doctrine-formulating and lawmaking body) of the International Church of the Nazarene, a statement was formally approved by the delegation and added to the “Appendix” section of the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, 2001-2005 [904.17] Note: See also 2005-2009 [903.15].

Nazarene Manual 904.17 - “Since 1981, our world has been confronted with a most devastating disease known as HIV/AIDS. In view of the deep need of HIV/AIDS sufferers, Christian compassion motivates us to become accurately informed about HIV/AIDS. Christ would have us to find a way to communicate His love and concern for these sufferers in any and every country of the world.” (2001)

SLIDE #7 – Words: Statement - 2002

In 2002, Nazarene World Mission Nazarene Compassionate Ministries issued a statement to cooperate with all the Regions of the Church and with its various educational entities, to:

“1. Inform and Educate Nazarenes on the issues of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, accessing appropriate tools and materials;

SLIDE #8 – Words: Continuation of Statement 2002 – Teach Empower

2. Teach

Scriptural principles of purity before marriage
Faithfulness within marriage
Avoidance of risky behaviour patterns; and

3. Empower the Global Church, in partnership with other Faith-Based agencies, to develop programs of care for the infected and affected, without discrimination to any.”

SLIDE #9 – Goals (New Life for Thai)

The New Life for Thai started with a vision from the Thailand District Superintendent, who was then a pastor in a church in Bangkok. He approached me about having partnership with Nazarene Compassionate Ministries to start a HIV and AIDS project in Thailand. Presently, the partnership includes Thailand District (with 8 churches under the District), Nazarene Ministries Development Foundation of the Thailand Church of the Nazarene and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

The NLFT is a compassionate ministry project to help those suffering from HIV and AIDS in Thai society. The volunteers caregivers are members of the Church of the Nazarene and are trained to share love and compassion with people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA).

The Goals are:

- Provide "Social treatment" to PLWHA in order to change individual behavior
- Provide Physical and spiritual help and care to PLWHA by visiting them in their homes
- Provide Training course and instruction of how to do selfcare
- Provide Proper awareness and knowledge about HIV and AIDS to church members and community
- Assist health centers and hospitals, in providing counseling, love and warmth to help the victims develop the strength to deal with their grief.

SLIDE #10 – Words: NLFT compassionate ministry services

Counseling
Visiting
Educating
Training

NLFT offers services of counseling, visiting, educating and training PLWHA. AIDS awareness/education seminars and training are also conducted in Nazarene Churches. Several PLWHA and their family members asked questions about Christianity and some of them received Christ as their personal Savior.

SLIDE # 11 – Counselling – Picture Palida, Nong and Patient

SLIDE #12 – Visiting – Picture Fang

SLIDE #13 – Visiting – Picture Patient at Hospice

11 & 12 - We have volunteers caregivers, who visit the patients regularly and able to counsel.

13 - Some sick patients or dying patients, we refer to a hospice where they are well cared for.

SLIDE #14 – Educating – Picture Cen, Nong and patients with kids

I try to attend several conferences and echo the information to the volunteers and patients. In this picture, I just came back from the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada.

SLIDE 15 – Educating – Suvit with patients

In this picture, the project manager provided information to patients about self care and shared testimonies.

SLIDE #16 – Training – Suvit in Fang

In this picture, the Project Manager went to our church in Northern Thailand and provided proper information about HIV and AIDS. He also explained about AIDS project implementation. At present, the project expanded to Fang province in Northern Thailand.

SLIDE #17 – Words – Cooperating with:

Hospitals
Health Centers
NGOs and Agencies

FBOs and Churches

NLFT is also cooperating with hospitals, health centers, NGOs and agencies, FBOs and churches. Some of them refer patients to the NLFT team.

SLIDE #18 – Picture – Pinky and Cený

Ministering to the children is not easy especially when we see them crying in grief because the father left them, asking questions why neighbors destroyed toys and clothes not knowing that she was discriminated, separated from brother (affected) because a home for children do not accept infected children, abandoned by parents, etc.

We have 3 cases of children that I would like to share with you. I will mention names but they are not their real names.

Pinky (not real name) is 9 years old. When I first met her, she was 5 years old and had many friends in the neighborhood. She was infected since birth. However, the neighbors later found out that she was infected. The other children did not play with her anymore. She wondered why they stopped coming to play with her. When the volunteer caregiver visited her she said, “I do not know why the toys and clothes you gave me, our neighbor destroyed them.” The volunteer caregiver and I could not answer her quickly and assured her of care. We hugged her and she responded. We showed her some more clothes (second hand clothes donated to the NLFT) and toys to give her. We could not say straight to her the situation. What she knew is that we love her.

SLIDE #19 – Picture – Pinky with bicycle in slum area

Pinky lives in a slum area. Someone gave her a bicycle and she goes to other places away from her home. She is able to play with other kids, who do not know her status.

SLIDE #20 – Picture – Pinky in Oikos Church

Pinky is sometimes able to attend our church.

SLIDE #21 – Pinky kiss Cený

Pinky likes to hug and kiss.

SLIDE #22 – Picture – Baby and Palida

SLIDE #23 – Picture – Baby with mother

Baby is 8 years old. She is handicapped – cannot walk. Her mother is separated from the husband. She had difficulty taking care of her. The NLFT team helped Baby by referring to a Home for handicapped children. The mother had another man and not able to visit Baby at the home regularly. She also has TB. The NLFT team continued to visit and care for Baby. She is now ready to study next year but the Home needed quite a big amount to help her with her studies. She needs a helper to be with her while in school. We continue to look for special support for her studies.

SLIDE #24 – Picture - Ana eating with Palida (volunteer caregiver)

Ana is 12 years old. She was infected from birth. She did not know her HIV status when the NLFT team visited her. She likes to study and gets scholarship support from NLFT project. She was able to watch the Jesus Film shown at their home and she prayed to receive Christ. She read a brochure about HIV and AIDS and associated her sickness with it. She directly asked her grandmother if she was infected. When she came to know her status she said, "Even if I am infected, I am better than other kids. The NLFT volunteer caregiver visits and care for me." She has a brother. They are both under the care of a grandmother and Aunt whose health is weak. They could not take care of their needs. Through referral of the NLFT, Boy is now in a Home for affected children. Ana could not join because the Home's project does not include infected children.

SLIDE #25 – Picture - Ana feeding dog.

Ana helps her grandmother in raising dogs and then sell to earn income.

SLIDE #26 – Picture – Christmas party with children and parents

SLIDE #27 – Picture Christmas party with children dancing

SLIDE #28 – Suvit carrying Pinky

26 - Though there are difficulties encountered by NLFT team and these children (infected and affected), there were ways to overcome them. The children valued their fun times with the volunteer caregivers.

26 - This picture shows fun times during Christmas party with children and their parents.

27 - They had fun singing and dancing together.

28 - Children love to play with the volunteers.

We plan to have another party this December.

SLIDE #29 – Picture – Trip to Zoo

The NLFT have activities to bring children to the zoo, parks, museums, etc.

SLIDE #30 – Picture – Ajaan Sawat praying

They also learned Bible stories, songs, prayers with their parents, etc. They become part of the family of NLFT.

SLIDE #30 – A. Sawat and group

We need prayers for the NLFT team. Mr. Sawat is the Project Director and Thailand District Superintendent. His support to the AIDS ministry as the key leader in the church is vital.

SLIDE #31 – Suvit and kid

Mr. Suvit is the Project Manager. The kids and their parents are close to him.

SLIDE #32 – Picture – Go with kids

Miss Go is like a mother to the children. They love and obey her.

SLIDE #33 – Picture – Nong and mother with kid

Mrs. Nong is able to help mothers in making crafts. She is able to counsel them.

SLIDE #34 – Tomo and kid with mother

Mr. Tomo (my husband) is a consultant in evangelism ministries. He is a Japanese and a key link in Japan churches and Japan Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, who have been partners in the AIDS ministry in Thailand. Through our visits to churches in Japan, we were able to provide awareness and education about HIV and AIDS there.

SLIDE #35 – Picture – Ceny and team with kids and parents

Mrs. Ceny is Consultant and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries Coordinator.

We also have other volunteers caregivers that I did not specifically mention here. Together, we work with PLWHA, children and their families.

SLIDE #36 – Picture - Craft bags

The project helps PLWHA earn income to feed their children. They make Thai craft bags.

SLIDE #37 – Picture – Fancy Jewelries

Fancy Jewelries...

SLIDE #38 – Picture – Making greeting cards

Greeting cards ...

SLIDE #39 – Picture – Nativity Scenes

Nativity Sets

I brought some of their products for sale at the booth.

SLIDE 40 – Words: No cure...know true meaning of life...

“There is still no cure to HIV and AIDS. But I believe that Christians can help “cure” the hearts of children and parents in giving them hope and knowing the true meaning of life. I see one thing common that Christians will embrace – love and compassion to people living with HIV and AIDS. – Azucena “Ceny” Hirahara

SLIDE #41 – Words: Lessons Learned

LESSONS LEARNED:

Need for parents and children to be together
Few churches directly involved in HIV and AIDS in Thailand
Experiences helped in sharing about HIV and AIDS to churches and community
Team able to show love and compassion

Parents and children came to know about the love of God
Character changed
Needs commitment, patience and prayers

What did we learn from these experiences? We learned the great need for parents and children to be together.

There are many groups and organizations working with children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. In Thailand, very few churches are directly involved in HIV and AIDS ministries. Most of them are NGOs, foundations and organizations.

The experiences of the NLFT in the AIDS ministry helped in sharing about HIV and AIDS to churches and community

The NLFT volunteer caregivers/staff are all Christians and church members. The services do not involve only support, help and care. It also involves showing same love and compassion of Jesus to the children and their families.

Some parents and children came to know about the love of God. I recalled one AIDS patient shared in one of our seminar. He said, "I observed that the NLFT are doing this help to AIDS patients not as a job. They come to help and show love." This is the love of God to all... to the children!

Some PLWHA, their families and team's character changed. They enjoyed mingling together.

Doing AIDS ministry to children and their families needs commitment, patience and prayers.

SLIDE #42 – Words: Contact numbers

Website: www.newlifeforthai.com
Thai: Mr. Suvit Amonkulsawat
Email: nlft_suvit@yahoo.com
English: Mrs. Azucena Hirahara
Email: hirahara@loxinfo.co.th

SLIDE #43 – NLFT Logo

Note: Show to end the presentation.

SLIDE # 44 – Words – Question

QUESTION: IF A CHILD, WHO IS A HIV INFECTED OR AIDS PATIENT, JOINS THE CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL AND WORSHIP SERVICE IN YOUR CHURCH, WILL HE/SHE FEEL WELCOMED AND ACCEPTED IN YOUR CHURCH? IF NO, WHY? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

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