

Mercy for Refugee Students

By Sarah Schafer

Van K'Pa*, 10, and his family are Montagnard refugees who came to the U.S. in 2005 traumatized from years of persecution for their Christian faith. Like thousands of other “mountain people” from hill tribes of Vietnam, they resettled in North Carolina, making it the largest Montagnard population outside of Vietnam.

“They have lost a child, relatives, friends, homeland, culture, and almost all worldly possessions,” wrote Sheila Eichert, Neighborhood Outreach Director for Resurrection Lutheran Church, Charlotte, N.C. Van is one of about 120 refugee children who live within walking distance of outreach centers operated by the church.

Many refugees like the K'Pa family do not know English and have little formal education. They cannot read notes from teachers, offer homework help, or pay for academic tutoring. In 2006, 16 refugee students in Van's neighborhood dropped out of school.

Van's parents can only find shift work and cannot pay for childcare. They must leave their kids alone after school, in an area threatened by gangs, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, gambling, addiction, crime, and poverty.

“Refugee children already endured great deprivations and trauma of persecution, and continue to face daunting challenges adjusting to a totally new culture for which they are ill prepared,” said Eichert.

With grants from LCMS World Relief and Human Care in 1995, 1997, and 1999 the

church began reaching out to refugees. This fall, they expanded outreach efforts to include the Good Shepherd Afterschool program with a \$17,000 grant from LCMS WR-HC.

The afterschool program provides a free, safe place for 19 at-risk Montagnard students. Each day they hear a devotional, practice English, and get homework help. They also work on a family history project, researching their family heritage and unique faith journeys.

A few high-school Montagnard students, including two of Van's sisters, work as interns for a small stipend to help their families financially. A volunteer from Resurrection cooks for them and other volunteers teach workshops in arts and science. Local university students also volunteer, providing homework help and serving as role models. The Montagnard students have shared their faith with the volunteers – Eichert calls it a secondary ministry of the program.

Van doesn't attend Good Shepherd every day, but regularly attends Resurrection's other programs. These are some of the only places he receives adult guidance and nurturing to help him meet his challenges. His siblings also attend Good Shepherd Afterschool and other programs.

“The Good Shepherd has an abundant provision in store ... to supply many of their unmet needs – social, educational, and spiritual. What a privilege and a pleasure it will be to convey His love to each of them in many practical ways that will enrich their lives for time and eternity,” wrote Eichert.



A University of North Carolina education student helps Su Rochom with her homework at Good Shepherd Afterschool in Charlotte, N.C.

To support mercy work like Good Shepherd Afterschool, send gifts to:

- Mail: LCMS World Relief and Human Care, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-6861.
- Phone: 888-930-4438.
- Web: <http://givenowlcms.org>. Click on “LCMS World Relief and Human Care Where Needed Most.”

All gifts are used where needed most as determined by LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.

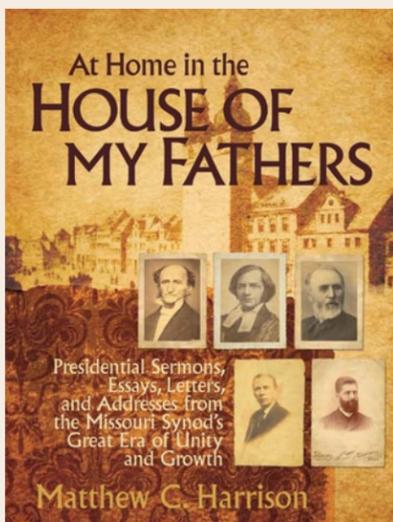
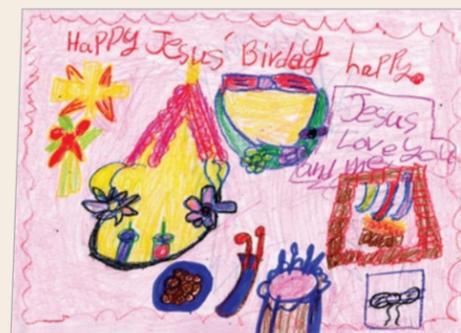
*Name changed for confidentiality.

Students Design First-ever WR-HC Christmas Cards

Artwork from five refugee students at Good Shepherd Afterschool, Charlotte, N.C., will be featured on the first-ever set of LCMS World Relief and Human Care Christmas cards. Winning artists are: Plih K'Pa, 13; Pyan Rolan, 7; H'Nath K'Pa, 15; Chuyen Siu, 13; and Pyin Rolan, 13.

“Art is a means of expression that many of our students excel in,” said Sheila Eichert, who oversees the afterschool program. Many of the students' families were persecuted because of their Christian faith but in the U.S. they are free to celebrate the Savior's birth.

The five-card set is available for purchase at www.lcms.org/wrhcstore. All proceeds will go “Where Needed Most” to support future mercy work in the U.S.



Book Features LCMS Forefathers

Don't miss Rev. Matthew Harrison's latest book, *At Home in the House of My Fathers*. In it, he and others translate nearly 100 writings from the first five LCMS presidents and others, providing insight on 91 years of Synod history and topics such as: ecumenical concerns, lay preaching, clergy depression, divisions, confessional allegiance, worship, and stewardship. The book is available for \$19.95 from Lutheran Legacy Press, <http://lutheranlegacy.org/publicationsfathersbook.aspx>.

The Paradoxical Church: Holy, Yet Hidden in Sinners

The church is a paradox. She is the bride of Christ, “spotless,” “holy,” “washed,” (Eph. 5:25-25), the “pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Tim. 3:15) “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:1ff.), and yet she only appears in this world hidden under the guise of poor sinners, flawed leaders, tension, divisions, and even false teaching. This is at once disturbing and comforting. It is disturbing because we find ourselves such people in such congregations, denominations, and Christendom. It is comforting because, despite its outward appearance, despite the fact that there have been times in the history of the church when the pure teaching of the Gospel all but disappeared from the public confession of the church and its practice, nevertheless, the “gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). The church endures because Christ endures. And He will never let His Gospel go unbelieved, until the end of time. That's worth rejoicing over, especially in the times in which we live. ... This is why neither people, nor faith in the heart, nor even charity, are the infallible marks of the church's presence. Wherever the Gospel and Sacraments are – enough to bring people to true faith in the true Jesus – there is the church (Augsburg Confession VII).

Where Jesus is believed, there is the church, and there is love (however imperfect and weak!). “Faith justifies alone, but justifying faith is never alone.” Genuine faith clings to Jesus, and can't but care for others. This is why at LCMS World Relief and Human Care, virtually everything we do is directed toward connecting mercy to the church (proximity to Word and Sacrament), and the church to mercy.

Pastor Matthew Harrison



Mercy forever.