



## CAMBODIA

# Serving Khmer Christians

*Steve Westergren describes efforts in providing literature for Cambodians.*

The Alliance Literature Department is part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) denomination. The C&MA in Cambodia was the only protestant evangelical mission in the country from 1923 to 1973. Missionaries translated the Bible, and wrote, translated and printed Bible school curriculum, tracts, new believer materials, Bible studies, songs and more. The C&MA possessed almost all Christian materials in the country.

At the end of that time, the war in Vietnam escalated and Cambodia served as a hideout for communist Vietnamese. Also, the Khmer Rouge (French for red or communist) infiltrated the country, fomenting discontent against the Cambodian government.

In 1972, a spiritual awakening began, mainly in the capital, Phnom Penh. Unprecedented spiritual revival in Cambodia grew right up until the months before the Khmer Rouge took over in

1975. During those very frightening years of war, tens of thousands of Khmer accepted Jesus as their Savior. At least 29 meeting points are known to have existed throughout Phnom Penh in 1974.



*From left to right: Sauphorn Soeurn, Editor; Steve Westergren, Missionary; Sopheap Kes, Receptionist; Da Yourng, Production; Samrech Phol, Administrator; Savy Dith, Chief Editor.*

A Khmer proverb, also the title of a book on the history of the Church, was very true during this time: *When the blood flows, the heart grows softer.*

### *Years of Bloodshed*

From April 1975 to January 1979, Cambodia experienced its own holocaust under the Khmer Rouge. Cambodia was cut off from the world until

late 1978 when word started trickling out about the state of affairs. It is estimated between 1-3 million people died of starvation, malnutrition or mass killings. Thousands of believers and pastors died.

Refugees began to flow out of the country in 1975 but was halted considerably during the Khmer Rouge years. Dozens of refugee camps were established within the Thailand border. More than 200,000 people fled to other countries during the next 10 years. Also, 360,000 Khmer lived in refugee camps until 1993 when all refugees were repatriated. From 1973-1990, C&MA provided Christian literature for the refugees on the Thai border. However, for 15 years starting in 1975, Bibles were not available in Cambodia.

### *New Beginnings*

A remnant of believers survived the holocaust and remained in the country, including three pastors. We estimate there were approximately 200

or more meeting secretly in Phnom Penh when C&MA returned to Cambodia in 1990. In May of 1990, God enabled us to get 1500 pounds of literature into the country, including Bibles. We trucked in materials from Thailand. Currently we have 96 published Khmer titles, and publish about 10 titles a year. Currently our front list has two or three titles. Our backlist has at least eight titles.

In the past few years, the Alliance Literature Department has primarily edited and reprinted existing materials. The ministry has been able to financially support itself for seven years. One third of all revenue from literature sales is set aside each year to defray administrative and personnel costs. In 1999, financial assistance was requested for the first time. However, we continue making materials as inexpensive as possible for the Church.

Our publishing work has three full time Khmer staff and one part-time missionary. The staff selects titles to be translated, written, edited, and