

Teresa & Gabriel

Serving with: ACTS



Why did you decide to participate in mission trips? Why as a family?

We are a family of 8 with 4 boys & 2 girls. It started with a discussion with Drs John & Priscilla 6 years ago on meaningful family time during the school holidays. They seeded the idea of a mission trip to work with the Salesian Sisters at a village primary school in Phnom Penh.

'Mission' conjures a romantic image: going around with Mother Teresa, digging trenches & attending to victims with more bandage than skin, eating from expired tinned food & living in leaking shed. It was far from it— we lived in 3-star hotels and bathed nightly, the nuns made sure we ate well, and we faced others who looked & smelt like us, only more stoic & gracious.

Perhaps Jesus was giving us a little tap on the back, waking us up. Perhaps we have been a little too comfortable in prosperous Singapore, so here was a godsend to do something worthwhile, together, as a family.

Where have you been?

What was your role on these trips?

Our first trip was to the Don Bosco Elementary School. It was to learn about the needs of the villagers of rural Phnom Penh and discern if there was something sustainable we could share & develop with the Salesian Sisters. There were about 20 of us and half were kids! We each did what little we could. The children planned English lessons for the primary students & helped cleaned up & paint part of the school. They did what was most important – they played with the local children. They immersed themselves & blended with their new-found family. They gave of and received joy & affection as only those with the purity of children could.

A team of GPs, we offered what little medical help & advice we could to the students & villagers (we were truly humbled by what little we could do). We saw, felt and tasted want, misery & poverty. We also experienced peace & joy that could only have come from Christ. Beyond the pain & desolation etched in their scarred & weary faces, were cheerful patience, fortitude, industriousness & abandonment lived to such heroic degrees that they will form great subjects for our personal examens. In their eyes we saw the spark of hope that suffering had left undimmed.

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Would you continue with mission trips? Why?

Our kids wanted to return. They preferred visiting their friends at Don Bosco than holidaying at a resort. When they discovered that it took US\$ 250 to support one needy student through a school year, they pulled together part of their allowances to 'adopt' a needy P1 girl called Srei Son & resolved to visit her every year. Srei is in P6 now.

It is one of those life experiences whereby you blindly take a plunge first and then later be amazed at what you have opened yourself to. It would certainly make more economic sense to send the money rather than spend more on travelling there. Why the compulsion to return? Henry Nouwen writes what is hard to express:

"...the truth is that we are most ourselves not when we differ from others but when we are the same. Indeed the main spiritual question is not 'what difference do we make?' but 'what do we have in common?' It is not excelling but serving that makes us most human. It is not proving ourselves to be better than others but confessing to be just like others that is the way to healing & reconciliation. Compassion - to be with the other when & where they suffer & to willingly enter into a fellowship with the weak - is God's way to justice & peace."