

Photo diary:  
An afternoon in a village  
outside Chiang Mai



*Christine Tan is a Melbourne based photographer who recently spent time in Thailand. Here she shares a photo diary of an afternoon with Muana and a group of local believers.*

I arrived in Chiang Mai on a hot and humid summer day in August. Muana, the Thailand team leader picked me up from the airport in his silver truck. After a warm greeting and some introductions, we headed off to visit a new faith community in the village of Sanpatong. It's a 45 minute drive on the outskirts of Thailand's second largest city.

We whizzed past familiar sights along the main shopping strip – a McDonalds and KFC every few minutes, cinemas, shopping centres, outdoor markets and dozens of Buddhist temples. Even Hindu shrines appeared every so often. Eventually traffic thinned out as we turned off the main road and approached the village.

When we arrived at our meeting place, I was greeted first by a smiling yet inquisitive grandmother named Kaew. She quickly offered me fruit from their longan tree and cold water. We waited outside with Muana for others to join us for food and fellowship.

Here in Sanpatong is a fledgling community of the village's first known followers of Jesus. They don't meet in a chapel or travel to the city to gather in a church building. They don't even sing hymns as some typically imagine. Rather they meet around a table in the shade outside of a home. They share a meal, recite Psalms for worship, read the Bible and pray together. It's a simple gathering, but one filled with hope, sincerity and generosity.



Muana spends time with this community regularly. He equips them to live out their faith in a manner that is authentic to who they are as Thais.

They are not asked to conform to any tradition or style of meeting. They don't need to meet in a building if they choose not to.

They can stay engaged in their temple activities where so much of village life occurs, though they are learning to discern the difference between taking an active versus passive role. "We do not extract people but rather encourage them to live out their faith in their community," Muana explained.



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Muana is discipling Kasem to lead this group of believers. Even with limited education, he eagerly accepts this role. With intention and gentleness, he sat at the head of the table during our meeting.

Kasem was raised as a rice farmer, but is now a self taught builder. While he showed me his rice paddy, storm clouds began to roll in. We swiftly left the fields and crossed to the other side of the street where Kasem showed me his vegetable garden and the fish farm he constructed himself.

When I ask how his life has changed since becoming a follower of Christ, he answered, "I used to worry about all the decisions I have to make. I'd feel anxious and pressured to make the right decision. Now I don't worry any more. I see that God has been protecting me all along and I believe He will continue to provide for my every need."

Our time together was too short. During this half day trip, the most moving thing to me was experiencing the community, hospitality and generosity of the Thai villagers.

I was also stirred by the re-realisation that God is at work in all corners of the globe, calling people to Himself.