



RCA Global Mission

2021 Year in Review

Mark Wilson - Cambodia



I serve with both the **Phnom Penh Bible School (PPBS)** and the **Theological Education by Extension Association (TEEAC)**. God has called me to love, encourage, and equip my students to discover, understand, and live into God's very good intentions for themselves, their families, churches, and their communities. I do this through various activities both at PPBS where I was a full-time faculty member during 2021 and at TEEAC where I served on the Board and am currently working on study materials that will be used in both ministries. Over the space of 28 weeks in 2021, I taught 42 students in four courses. The Year 1 students and I studied the book of Genesis. In Year 3, we studied Holistic Ministry. The Year 4 students studied Global Mission and Biblical Leadership. We were able to study Global Mission in person but Biblical Leadership was mostly online. In addition to teaching, I was also a mentor to students in a small group and served on the Chapel Committee.

Blessings of 2021

Returning! The first thing to celebrate technically happened in 2020, but it made much of 2021 possible—being able to return to Cambodia, even if I had to take five COVID tests, be wheeled in, and be locked in a government-sponsored hotel on arrival ... praise God we got back into the country!

Year 1 Students During the first semester we walked through the book of Genesis together. I count teaching first-year students among one of the highest privileges at the Bible school; it is an opportunity to help them get off to a good start, both individually, and as a group. As part of this, I share with them a Latin phrase I was taught at seminary: "*Si vales, valeo.*" It means: "If you succeed, I succeed." The hope is during our time together they will learn to use their gifts to build up one another rather than compete with one another or choose to walk alone during their time at the school, and hopefully, one day, encourage others to do the same in churches throughout Cambodia. I believe that I was successful in laying a good foundation for this as I watched them grow together as a class and I look forward to checking in with them in the future when we study together again in later years.



Year 4 students



Year 1 students

Another wonderful outcome was the majority of students met the objectives of the course—to better understand the themes and message of Genesis and to be more confident in their understanding and use of Genesis in their lives and ministries. While this may not seem very "exciting," it truly is! I am thankful for the work of the Lord in

the lives of these young people. I look forward to seeing how He will continue His work in and through them and the Cambodian church as a result!

Shared Experiences across the Globe Having to go completely online this year meant teachers and students needed to find ways to use the tools God had given us already to continue our task at hand—study His Word. While attending a Zoom conference for my role in TEEAC, I learned about new tools and techniques for online learning which I brought to PPBS and used in my classes: a combination of Zoom (for large and small group video groups) and Google Classroom. This is exciting because of the shared learning between organizations within the TEEAC network and, from there, to PPBS, and then, *within* the PPBS network. It was also exciting to see how the tech-savvy students within each of my classes jumped in to help me and their fellow students adapt to this new way of teaching and learning—*si vales valeo!* We succeed together! (cf. 1 Cor. 12:18) We used what God had given us for His glory.

Because of many of you, funds were remaining from the RCA’s 2020 COVID relief gift to help students like Sota who needed financial assistance for extra phone data to study even more online during 2021. Our thanks to those who participated in this! Your help is greatly appreciated and so greatly useful!

Khin Sota, *still water runs deep.* I want to introduce you to Khin Sota. Over the past three years, I have come to know him and watch him become a quiet, thoughtful young servant of God. Despite navigating obstacles in 2021, Sota was generally *the first* to “show up” for Zoom class and *was at the top* of his class to start during sharing time. For his “Act of Love” activity in our Holistic Ministry class, Sota led members of his church to use the resources God had given them to meet the needs of several families in their community that were locked down in their homes due to COVID. They delivered food, sat a safe distance to eat together, and prayed with them. Through these simple acts of love, covered in prayer, Sota and members of the church helped the physical, social, and spiritual needs of the neighbors, sharing food and the hope they have in Christ. They opened new doors for relationships in the future. Another student, Chhoeung Veasna, came in a close second having done his Act of Love just days after being released from the hospital. His presentation photos show him carrying out his activities one-handed with an IV still in his hand and the drip seen clearly in the background! The lives of these young men should help us stop and reflect as we continue to face COVID-related challenges. What will be our response? What can we learn from the servant example of Sota and Veasna as they follow Jesus into a lost and broken world so loved by God to show His love in all parts of life?



Challenges of 2021

Wheeled back to Cambodia. We were “displaced” from Cambodia in 2020 and then when Cambodia opened back up, we almost didn’t make it back for the new school year. Another challenge is I went back to Cambodia in a wheelchair because of a back injury during our time in Oregon. This made the trip back one of the most difficult ever and sadly added to my list of health issues. We give thanks to the Lord that that surgical option that the doctor first discussed for the compressed and bulging disc was not, in the end, necessary because of physical therapy!

COVID The Royal Cambodian Government understood that the country’s healthcare facilities and medical personnel would be quickly overwhelmed if COVID continued to spread as quickly and widely as it began early in the year and for these reasons closures were widespread and longer-term than in 2020. This meant students could not come to campus and, much of the time, neither could teachers! At times, our whole neighborhood was quarantined—there was no going in or out. The only exceptions were medical.



Moving Speaking of neighborhoods, another challenge we faced was that our landlord decided just after the beginning of the year that he wanted to move back into his house. So, we moved, not once, but twice (more on the second move below)! The amazing grace of this situation was the Lord provided another house quite quickly through an alumni couple of PPBS which was equally close to both Garden of Life and the Bible school! It was a great opportunity even in “community lockdowns” to bear witness to the hope we have in Christ—we even had the opportunity to provide transportation for our landlord’s elderly mom when she wanted to receive her first COVID vaccination

New ways of learning I spent many hours learning how to use Google Classroom and making instructional videos for my fellow teachers and finding videos in the Cambodian language for my students.

Relocating One of the most challenging things we faced during 2021 was the final decision to *relocate to the U.S.* We began thinking a bit about this when we spent time in Oregon last year and saw our family there *also* needed us; my Aunt could use help on the ranch and my mom could use more help. Now, considering the situation with the pandemic and the lack of options for legally obtaining my medicines, our *previous* vision of living and serving in Cambodia “*until death do us part*” no longer seemed viable; heartbreakingly, we discerned it would be best to relocate to the U.S. We will share more details in our next newsletter, but for now please know that *we are not retiring, we are relocating to Oregon.*

In 2022, we will make trips back to Cambodia to continue our work with our local partners; Deb will return in February for a month and we both will return in May for two months. Please contact us with any questions or concerns you may have.

Hopes for 2022

Before beginning each Biblical Leadership class, I asked students to take turns reading the following text from Proverbs 3:5-8: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.*

I look forward to “walking the talk,” more deeply teaching my students as I share about the great faithfulness of our God and how He is worthy of our trust. I look forward to continuing this incredibly scary journey of “letting go” of something that was never mine to begin with—God’s mission in Cambodia and the development of the next generation of leaders of His church there. Yes, there is still much to be done and I still have my part to play, though my role is changing and I am now preparing to pass the baton on to others and change the way I connect with some leaders.

My specific goals for 2022 include completing the final three or four chapters of the Holistic Ministry TEE Study Guide that I’ve been working on for several years. I’ll be heading back to Cambodia in May to teach this class as well as one other class where I will prepare and send out possibly my last group of students in their final semester with a clear vision of who God is calling them to be and what God is calling them to do. I’ll also be coaching three students in 2022.

Beyond these hopes is the possibility of a second book due on Biblical Leadership.

On our return from Cambodia, Deb and I will begin, as possible, to make visits to congregations. Finally, we are looking forward to trusting in the Lord and acknowledging Him and what plans He has for us as we discern what comes after 2022.

How We Can Pray

- Praise God for 26 years together and rejoice with us that God’s kingdom continues to expand in Cambodia! What we had prayed and hoped for when we first arrived days after our honeymoon is more and more becoming a reality—the Cambodian church that Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge attempted to destroy is *growing and maturing* to the point where expatriates no longer need to take the lead. Now we join with our Cambodian partners *at their invitation*; the Joshua Project estimates that Cambodia is now over 3.4% Christian and growing annually at near 8.8%! In 2021, PPBS celebrated its 29th Foundation Day, thanks be to God!
- Pray that **God will continue to work through our Local Cambodian Ministry Partners** so *every person* in Cambodia will have the opportunity to hear about Jesus, come to know God, worship Him, enjoy Him, and share Him with others! We continue to pray for the **unreached peoples of Cambodia**.
- **Give thanks to the Lord for providing continued, stable financial support.** The statements of support shared at General Synod were so encouraging and edifying.
- Pray **that the next generation of Christian leaders in Cambodia**, both being produced by PPBS and TEEAC as well as those currently serving at the Garden of Life, **would discern God’s call and be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord**, knowing that in the Lord their labors are not in vain.
- As for the Bible school specifically, **continue to pray for qualified Cambodian and expatriate teachers**, especially with the vision to serve full-time and long term.
- **Give thanks and continued prayer for my physical and emotional health.** The compressed disc in my back was successfully treated with physiotherapy and exercise! Sadly, I was unable to have the surgery for my chronic pain condition which was postponed from 2019. However, by God’s amazing intervention, we *were* able to replenish my medications which were not available in Cambodia! In other good news, I received a clean bill of health from a complete physical checkup—all is good except for my chronic health issues. For these good results, we give thanks to the Lord, and for the chronic pain and emotional challenges that they bring I would ask that you join me in asking that the Lord’s Kingdom would come, and His will be done.
- **Pray for strength, wisdom, and grace** for 2022 as we navigate our relocation to Oregon and our transition to American. Even though we have only been here for a few months, we have already experienced “reverse culture shock.” Likewise, as I sit here in my barn office (outside), I can tell you that I am still getting used to the change in the weather; Alexa tells me that it is 38 degrees right now and 86 degrees in Phnom Penh!



Thank You

While we do not often have the opportunity to tell you in person, *you all truly are a blessing to us, thank you!* We realize some of you wish we would communicate more directly and more often and, truth be told, so do we. Between what often feels like two jobs—the one I do with our various local ministry partners in Cambodia, and the one that I have with the RCA partners in the U.S—it is often difficult to turn my attention away from the needs in Cambodia, even for other important things in the U.S., even my family, even my health and well-being.

And so, I’ll do the best I can for now by writing these words of gratitude: **Thank You** to all of the individuals and congregations in and outside of the RCA who gave generously of their finances and prayers and words of encouragement in notes and ecards—thank you! *What a blessing you are!*