

2022 Year in Review



Mark and Deb Wilson – Cambodia

2022 was a year of many “firsts” for the Cambodian ministry at the Phnom Penh Bible School (PPBS). 2022 marked the first time that the school was able to return to **in-person studies** for the whole academic year since the beginning of the pandemic. This was a tremendous blessing.



Likewise, since the beginning of the pandemic, PPBS had its first **graduation ceremony** to celebrate God’s goodness and the accomplishments of the students spanning the years 2019-2022. 36 students and their families gathered with the staff, faculty, and board to celebrate God’s amazing work in the lives of these young Christian leaders!

For the first time in 11 years, a faculty member returned from advanced studies abroad to rejoin the faculty of PPBS. Similarly, the first PPBS alumni in over a decade joined the PPBS faculty. We give thanks to God for these additions to the PPBS faculty, providing sufficient teachers for 2022 and 2023! 2022 also marked the launch of the school’s **first graduate degree program**: Masters of Christian Ministry (MCM). This program enables Cambodian Christians engaged in full-time work and ministry to gain their degree through part-time study.

In 2022, I also became the **first new member of the PPBS board** in a decade and the first board member who has also served as a faculty member. In addition, this past year we celebrated **the 30th anniversary** of the founding of PPBS. I am proud that PPBS was accredited by the Asian Theological Association, ATA.



In terms of our ministry, the transition of living in the U.S. and working remotely has been working out well, but personally it has been more difficult than I had imagined. I’m **thankful** that your support of the Cambodian

ministry has provided opportunities for the continued work of God in Cambodia through the students at the PPBS, their teachers, and of course, myself. As Principal Vuthy put it in his report (paraphrased), you have been generous with your prayers and finances and these are a great encouragement to us all, enabling us by God's grace, to faithfully fulfill the vision and mission God gave us.

A glimpse at what your support made possible:

Student Financial Assistance (SFA)—While some of the students attending PPBS can afford their studies, many cannot. SFA is similar to “work-study” in the U.S., where students perform additional work assignments. These assignments help the school decrease its overhead costs and reduce the cost for study at PPBS. SFA helps needy students offset the costs of things like tuition, dorm, study materials, and food.

A single RCA congregation began giving to the SFA fund in 2017. In the past several years, additional RCA congregations and individual households have contributed, making it possible for more students to study at PPBS! Of the 32 students who took part in the combined graduation ceremony in 2022, 50 percent received student financial assistance.



One of these students is **Chhoeung Veasna**. Veasna truly is a servant leader and man after God's heart. This was clear as I watched a video presentation he made for a local church serving its local community course. Veasna, who had recently been very ill, was seen serving his needy neighbors while connected to an IV drip!

As we studied the subject of Biblical Leadership together in 2022, Veasna shared his calling with me: *my presence on this earth is to glorify God by sharing the Good News, teaching God's Word, and making disciples. I commit to follow Him and serve Him faithfully, becoming a bridge for those who are hopeless and weak so that they will be saved through the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Now, Veasna is the pastor of a small church in Phnom Penh and he and members of his church regularly do evangelistic outreach to unreached and least-reached groups in Cambodia.

Gifts like those made by RCA congregations, individuals, and households made it possible for Veasna to study and, in return, impact God's world by fulfilling his call to be Christ's witness among various people groups in Cambodia. If you are interested in assisting other students like Veasna, see the Cambodia ministry page at www.rca.org/wilson.

Mark—You may have heard it said that the goal of every missionary is to “work themselves out of a job,” and that is, in many ways true and it has always been our goal. However, it is not without its challenges. In the body of Christ, we will always be interconnected. Our transition to the U.S. has allowed me to respond to PPBS’ invitation to serve in some new ways; where once I served students directly as a teacher in the classroom, I now serve the school’s leadership as a member of the board and as a textbook writer. Gratefully, with the advancement of technology, I’ve been able to mentor and coach students, alumni, faculty, and leaders of the school.

It was through my role as a coach that I could most readily sense God at work through me this past year. As in the past, a few students asked for coaching assistance as they prepared to graduate from PPBS. There were two cases in particular in 2022 when God worked in gentle yet powerful ways. Due to the sensitivity of these

interactions, I cannot share the details, but it was such a privilege to walk with these leaders in their time of need, strengthening and encouraging them.

Our challenges of 2022

The first challenge was reverse culture shock. After living abroad for close to 35 of my 60 years, the climate, culture, and working environment are all very different in Oregon than they are in Cambodia. While I'm very thankful for the beautiful nature in which we have settled, adapting to doing ministry mainly from my barn office has been, at times, stressful, frustrating, confusing, and tiring. Likewise, the change in climate and hours of sunlight have made setting and keeping a regular schedule challenging. I have only recently come to understand that I need to process these changes and grieve the losses from our move even as we celebrate the new things that God is doing and look forward to what will be.

A second challenge has been the seemingly nonstop discomfort of my chronic pain, which has now increased through headaches, migraines, and emotional trauma. I'm beginning to understand that I did not take the proper time to process what I had seen or experienced in my past for the sake of continuing ministry and it's beginning to surface. A few of these traumatic experiences were being separated from Deb and Zach when tanks were rolling in the streets of Phnom Penh, the time my father died just days before my arrival to see him, and the time I spent looking for a friend and colleague among those lost to the tsunami wave that hit the southern coast of Thailand. I am not alone; there are many like me who consciously or unconsciously prioritize the work of ministry over their health.



Mark and Year 3 students and returning to Cambodia with Sambo in 1997

Paul says, “*For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.*” (2 Cor. 1:8b, ESV) There were times in 2022 when Paul’s description in this verse seemed to describe my experience—the physical pain merged with traumas of the past—and made life and ministry difficult, sometimes even to the point of despairing about life itself. Thankfully, as I share with my students, “that’s not the end of God’s story.” If you have read 2 Corinthians, you know that it is *not* only about Paul’s pain and suffering. There is so much more, including the comfort and hope that Paul receives from God; Paul also knows how God has, is, and will use the afflictions in his life for the benefit of others as they see the power of Christ through his weaknesses and his dependence on God.

Like Paul, I have set my hope on God and can bear witness to His faithfulness in and through my afflictions, past, and present. While it has not been easy, it brings tears to my eyes as I hear testimonies from students and colleagues who have “shared in our comfort,” being strengthened in their faith and giving thanks for what God has done and is doing from their vantage points (e.g., they’ve seen my pain, they have seen me return to Cambodia in a wheelchair and yet be back in the classroom the following week). And so, while these things have been challenges and afflictions, I am thankful that, yet again, God has been faithful. This includes providing me an opportunity through an RCA “Clergy Revitalization Grant” to get more help processing these challenges along with other missionaries and pastors. Please, if you know of a pastor or missionary in a similar situation, I want to urge you to not only encourage them to find help but as appropriate, *assist them* to receive that help.

Please pray

1. PPBS has relaunched its Extension Education program, which sends teachers to churches throughout the country to provide pastors and leaders with in-depth Bible training. Secondly, PPBS has begun its Master of Arts in Christian Ministry program. We are thankful God has already provided teachers with the appropriate credentials to begin these programs and ask that you join us in prayer that this will continue. Pray for the pastors and churches in need of these programs and that through them they will grow in their relationships with God and His Word.
2. Please pray that all PPBS students will truly and humbly commit themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord and their studies. Pray that the fellowship between students, staff, and faculty will grow increasingly stronger as a community of believers. Pray that there will indeed be the transformation of "hearts, heads, and hands," and a turning away from ourselves and our ways and turning toward the Lord and His ways of serving and loving and obedience and fruitfulness.
3. Pray with us as the **PPBS Board** adjusts to its new configuration. Pray that, by God's wisdom, I will successfully make this latest transition from the classroom to the boardroom to the glory of God and the good of the school (I'm still adjusting to this new role which includes wearing a suit). Pray too for my new and growing relationships with my fellow board members, alumni, and school leaders. May I wholeheartedly commit myself to the ways of God and allow Him to fill me and use me in the lives of these leaders.



4. Please join me in prayer as I continue the journey of healing—for this, too, is a journey of transformation, of moving from pain, burdens, and trauma, toward God's perfect shalom. Pray that God would continue the work He has already begun. And while this is difficult to ask, would you pray especially as it relates to afflictions and burdens "so that many give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many" (2 Cor 1:11), even as some of you have already done so in the past?

In closing I would like to share with you a note from Mr. Son Vuthy, Principal of the Phnom Penh Bible School (PPBS):

"We praise God every single semester for His vision and provision. We owe our thankfulness to God who never fails to shower us with love and care through our Brothers and Sisters in Christ to enable PPBS to enhance the Gospel ministry in Cambodia *and beyond*. We also glorify Him who makes things possible through various parts of His Body even amid the COVID-19 global pandemic. We are grateful that every one of us has been allowed to continue to play a part in achieving His goals and glorifying His name."

Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. Ps. 119:129.

Mark and Deb