

# Letters from Cambodia

“this is the way, walk in it”



## Settling into Phnom Kravanh

It's hard to believe that it's almost November and I am entering my 3rd month in Cambodia!

I have been living in Phnom Kravanh at the Life with Dignity (LWD) compound (pictured above) for almost a month now and I have been keeping busy! My placement with LWD includes a variety of roles, including teaching English to my coworkers, going on field visits, attending trainings, editing reports and proposals, and teaching English to grades 7-9 at the nearby school. I haven't settled into a regular schedule yet but I hope to share "a day in the life" with you when I do.

Part of the reason I haven't fully settled in yet is because from October 10th-14th, the 5 YAGM working with LWD along with our country coordinators were invited to join the Life With Dignity staff for their Annual Conference in Sihanoukville. We were able to learn a lot about LWD and we even got to go to the beach! It was a fun week getting to know our coworkers better and seeing a new part of Cambodia.

There have also been a number of holidays since I went to my placement! From September 30-October 3, my Cambodian friends celebrated Pchum Ben Day. The entire holiday is actually 15 days long but over this weekend specifically, most



About 32% of Cambodia's population is under 15 and only about 4% is over 65



In Cambodia, a *sampeah* is the traditional greeting and a way to show respect.



The Cambodian flag is the only flag in the world that has an image of a building - a temple at Angkor Wat.

Cambodians pay their respects to their ancestors by going to the pagoda with family. Since then, we have also celebrated Constitution Day (September 24), Commemoration Day of the King's Father (October 15), and Paris Peace Agreements Day (October 23). I have been able to learn a lot more about Cambodia and Khmer culture through these events.

On October 21st-24th, I also attended our first Worship Weekend as a YAGM Cambodia cohort! It was wonderful to see everyone and hear stories from their placements. On Sunday, we attended church at City Church in Phnom Penh, part of the Lutheran Church in Cambodia. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone again at our Fall Retreat!

One of the things I have already been made aware of in my 2 months in Cambodia is how climate change is having a major impact on people's lives. We learned from the previous YAGM cohort that the rainy season came late this year. This means that many farmers must wait for the rains come to plant their crops, which limits their productivity. In October, which is supposed to be the end of the rainy season, there has been major flooding near Phnom Penh. Unfortunately, when disasters strike, it is the poorest people who suffer the most. Life With Dignity, an ELCA partner and my placement, works to combat the effects of climate change by planting trees (to provide defense against mud slides during floods) and building ponds (which allow farmers to store water to irrigate their fields).



## YAGM Cambodia

These are the wonderful people who have also been called to serve in Cambodia this year:

**Top Row:** Kyle, Ashley, Me, Lindsay, Savannah

**Middle Row:** Rachel and Mallory

**Bottom Row:** Kurt

Kurt, Savannah, Rachel, and I are serving with Life with Dignity (LWD) while Lindsay and Mallory are serving alongside the Lutheran Church in Cambodia (LCC). Ashley is working with both LWD and the LCC and Kyle is serving with the Reproductive and Child Health Alliance (RACHA).

Photo by Steph Berkas

## PRAYERS & THANKSGIVING

Prayers for:

- me, as I continue to study Khmer and learn about my host community and Cambodia
- the other members of YAGM Cambodia 2016, including our country coordinators Matt & Jen, as they learn, grow, struggle, and triumph in their own placements
- Life With Dignity, as they continue to work tirelessly to "uphold the rights of the poor and oppressed" and combat the effects of climate change

Thanks to everyone who is supporting me spiritually and financially this year! A special thanks to the following people who have sponsored me for a day in October:

Mark & Betsy Borling - October 16th

Chris & Frank Frazee - October 28th

Ken & Doris Schoenbeck - October 26th

Kim & Henry deGroh - October 30th