



#### RED CROSS CAMBODIAN MISSION

*Sr. Ann Catherine shares with us some of her experiences and reflection on the time she spend among the Cambodian people while working for the Red Cross.*

In collaboration with our Milwaukee Red Cross, I was chosen to serve on a special medical team to help meet the needs of the Cambodian refugees at the Thai-Cambodian border.

Six other Americans and I made up a team. There was a Daughter of Charity who is a nurse; two single lay nurses, a married nurse; our team doctor from Texas; and our team technician, a Red Cross employee from Vermont with two young daughters.

Our first job together was to set up a clinic in the large refugee camp. Our primary goal was to teach the Khmer people some basic medical practices so that they could care for their own people.

We had very limited supplies and when we would be gone, the people would have even less. So emphasis was put on prevention and very natural means of healing.

One of the biggest problems we encountered was malnutrition. So many children and adults had sores, diarrhea, fever, severe weakness because they were not eating well. It was essential that every clinic have a feeding center. Catholic Relief Services prepared meals of rice, meat, or fish, and vegetables. We called it "supplementary feeding," but for most of the people, it was the only food they had to eat. It was always such a joy to see little children begin to smile and play after a few days of eating nutritious meals.

We taught the Khmers, but we also learned much from them. These people, who had constantly been moving from place to place for over five years already, always expressed a hope that someday they would live in a land of peace. There were no words of complaint or bitterness. Rather, there was often a smile and an expression of appreciation for our service to them.

One of our main roles was *presence*. Red Cross personnel were a sign to the people that others from around the world cared about them. Our presence meant a little security for them. Compassionate listening, gentle affection, and support were our tools for showing concern for a suffering humanity.

St. Joan Antida was very alive in the camp. Our works were so similar to her first works - soup kitchens, clinics, visiting the sick in their huts and in the camp hospital, even our use of traditional medicine and natural healing, training personnel to carry on these works, and teaching the young.

We constantly kept in mind that we were "guests" in another culture, and therefore, we wanted to stay as close to the Cambodian culture and traditions as we could.

An enriching experience was meeting and living with people from all over the world. In the compound where we lived with 200 volunteer from 18 nations of the world, three Daughters of Charity and I were able to live a community life together.

Each day, Lauds and Vespers were said together. The last month, I had the privilege of having the Blessed Sacrament in my hut so we could have daily Communion services together. Mass was celebrated by a Capuchin priest from Switzerland who lived in a village near us.

On two occasions, I was able to visit our three refugee sisters from Laos. They live in a Laotian Camp in the north-eastern part of Thailand.

Sr. Marie Christine does catechetical work in the camp. Sr. Laurentia works at the children's clinic. Sr. Theophane had just arrived at the camp. All three are well respected by the people they serve. Their hospitality toward me was great. The simplicity of their life style and mission was impressive.

Sisters, friends, your presence through your sacrifices, prayers, and support could be strongly felt. Although it was a very tragic situation, I always experienced peace and strength knowing you were very much with me spiritually, and knowing I was merely an instrument used by God and representing the Community. Indeed I feel still so richly blessed.

Thank you. May your service to our brothers and sisters in Christ, especially his poor, be deeply blessed!

AMEN!

Sr Ann Catherine SCJA