

1 Sermon, July 1, 2012

Texts: Proverbs 31:10-31

Title: "Stories of Faith: Hmong House of Good News"

Zong Moua came to Milwaukee a number of years ago, but found herself pretty isolated. She didn't have a very good relationship to her husband, and since she came to the US as an adult, her English was not very good.

Zong Moua died recently from stomach cancer, but before she did, she found loving support at Hmong House of Good News, housed in Central United Methodist Church in Milwaukee. She was not a Christian, but came to the Bible Study every Wednesday, and really got a lot of spiritual support out of it.

She also was able to take advantage of the meals they ate together, and all the handiwork projects that the women did, like bookmarks, cross stitch, aprons, etc. Hmong House of Good News was a refuge for her.

Lou Vang also died recently, but her story was quite different. She was quite elderly, lived with her son, but there was nobody else home during the day, so she got very lonely. Lou Vang was in almost constant pain from a bad back, so she couldn't participate in the gardening and meal preparation and craft work. But she loved to just be there, three mornings a week, and converse and listen. Lou Vang was a Christian woman who smiled constantly, despite her pain, and she acted as a role model for all the others who came.

These two women are examples of the regular participants in the Hmong House of Good News. Weekly there are about 12-15 participants, all over the age of 55 and mostly women.

As the years go by, and these first generation Americans pass away, there won't be a need for Hmong House of Good News. The younger generations speak English well, and have made a place for themselves with hard work. But right now there is a need. Hmong House of Good News is scraping by. God has sustained this ministry for four years, but it is difficult to find the funds to pay their two part-time staff members.

The Hmong House of Good News is an example of what the Holy Spirit can do with a vision and with people to support the vision. Five years ago, Kady Herr-Yang wanted to do something for Hmong elderly, who were lonely and isolated. She had a vision of a place where older Hmong ladies could be cared for, where they could get English

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interpretation if needed, where they could ask questions about health care, and find an advocate for them in the system.

United Methodist Women in Wisconsin listened to Kady's vision, and decided to make it happen. And it officially began in March of 2008.

It's the way God works. God inspires a person or small group, and then others join in to make lives better.

Hmong House of Good News offers English teaching, Bible Study led by several Hmong pastors in the area, and nutritious Hmong meals. I was surprised to learn that the women at Hmong House don't eat spicy food, because many of them can't handle it.

Hmong House of Good News needs approximately \$60,000 per year to offer our these free services.

You probably know the background story of why Hmong are in Wisconsin. The Hmong people were subsistence farmers, somewhat nomadic, in the mountains of Southeast Asia, covering parts of China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand.

The Hmong are a minority population in each of these nations, and lived somewhat in isolation in the hills.

During the Vietnam war, many Hmong men were recruited to help the American side, which caused them to be shunned and persecuted in Vietnam, and many left and went to refugee camps in Thailand. This was often a harrowing and dangerous journey. Many then waited for years in refugee camps, waiting to find a permanent home.

At parades, you may have seen Hmong men in uniform, walking along with Vietnam veterans, carrying banners that proclaimed gratefulness for their help in the Vietnam war.

In traditional Hmong culture, women don't have much voice. So you can imagine that it was especially difficult for Hmong women to find a place in American society.

The Hmong House of Good News fills that gap. It's a place to socialize and get good nutrition and engage in meaningful work.

You may have noticed the Hmong needlework in our library, in a frame. Hmong women take pride in their work, much like the woman talked about in the book of Proverbs.