



With local brothers during Project 25 trip



CUI students with local family at HEAL site



Left-behind kids with their GROW teachers



With local students during GROW trip

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Revelation 5:12 (ESV)

Merry Christmas to you and yours from chilly Northern California! Coco, John and I are here this week celebrating Christmas with my sister Christa and her family. Since we're in the U.S., I'll be able to share a little more openly with you in this letter.

Earlier this month, I was blessed to join yet another CWF service trip. This one was different and special for me. Most of the service trips I have been a part of in the past few years have been located in Yunnan province, and I have been at least partially responsible for preparing for and leading the groups. This time, we were in a different part of the country – Guangdong province – and I was in the role of participant and observer rather than trip leader. Eleven of us were there to take part in the December GROW trip (you might remember me giving an introduction to the GROW program in a previous newsletter). With guidance and support from one of our full-time people, the GROW program is mainly organized and led by our university interns, who are all previous recipients of CWF high school scholarships and the REACH student development program. This year, they have recruited and organized their classmates and fellow CWF recipients into a large and active volunteer group. Each month, a small group of these volunteers heads out to a small rural village to teach, encourage and show love to the 'left-behind' kids at the local primary school there (for more background about China's left-behind children, read this article:

<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21674712-children-bear-disproportionate-share-hidden-cost-chinas-growth-little-match-children>

Of course, this month's trip was just before Christmas and gave our team an opening to share about the Christ-Child who came to be God-With-Us. For the kids, we put on a fun nativity drama and taught songs such as Silent Night. With our team of volunteers, we held devotions each evening. On the last night, my colleague Roger, who played the role of the sheep in the nativity drama, shared with us that when celebrating Christmas, we should always look ahead to what Jesus did for us at Easter, and we read a series of bible verses to tell that story, concluding with the verse from Revelation above.

Roger is one of two new CWF colleagues who joined this month's GROW trip. He is a good friend and former [Concordia International School Shanghai](#) (CISS) teacher who is taking a year off from the classroom to volunteer, and he's graciously agreed to temporarily fill the role of Service Learning Director, which is a *huge* help for our

team.

In addition to Roger, God has answered our prayers and provided exceptional new coworkers to fill both positions I referenced in our last newsletter. So we now have two new people in our Kunming office: Asia Xu and Zhao Bing! Please keep all three of these folks in your prayers as they continue to transition into the organization, and for faith and grace to grow closer to Jesus each day.

Since I last shared news with you, I also helped lead three additional service learning trips prior to the most recent GROW trip. All three of these trips were connected with CWF's education and health projects in Yunnan province, and two of the trips were done with Lutheran educational partners: our long-term partnership with CISS's high school teachers and students, and a newer collaboration between CWF's HEAL program and the international development master's degree program at Concordia University Irvine (CUI).

Over the summer, I also had the joy of collaborating with a new group we haven't worked with before, called Project 25. This team was made up of university students, recent graduates and one researcher from several U.S. universities. Most of the team members had an academic focus in the health sciences, and they helped us conduct a professional evaluation of one of our drinking water projects. You can see a blog post about that trip here:

<https://www.cwef.org.hk/drinking-water-project-impact>

In addition to trips like these, I continue to carry out my regular duties of supervising and supporting our local managers and staff at CWF's three offices in China and Cambodia. This year, our team continues to see the need to adjust programming in order to better serve the needs of the rural communities we work with, and to more thoughtfully engage with local government and church partners. Things are changing fast in China and Cambodia, and we need to keep up in order to serve in the most helpful ways we can. One of the efforts we have been working on to prepare for this new stage of CWF's growth is to redefine our organizational values, which we accomplished together in discussions beginning at our annual all-staff meeting in Hong Kong back in August. We were thankful for this process which resulted in a strengthened focus on Jesus as the Cornerstone of the organization and confirmation that "reflecting the love of Christ through authentic care and development of people is the most important goal of our work."

In closing, I'm very pleased to report that as of the recent board meeting, Persephone James has now been officially named the permanent executive director! This is great news. It has been my joy to begin working with Persephone again this year, and I look forward to seeing how God will work through her and her continued service.

