



The Xiong family:
(front, left to right)
Thaey Faith, Sue,
Pastor Doua, and
Gaolew Leslie
(back, left to right)
Xufing and Chu
King Kennedy

Out of Darkness *into Christ's Light*

BY SUE AND FAITH XIONG

WITH BECKY WEHRSPANN, FEATURES EDITOR

[Jesus] said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Luke 10:2

Sue Xiong is a first-generation immigrant to the United States from Laos. She heard the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ as an adult. She gave up much of her former life to support her husband, Doua (also a first-generation Laotian immigrant), in becoming a Lutheran pastor and answering God's call to serve Hmong refugees. Sue and her daughter, Thaey (Faith), share their family's story of leading others, through the power of the Holy Spirit, out of darkness into Christ's light. They are beacons of His light.

Sue: Doua and I both arrived in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, as Hmong refugees (he and his family in 1987; my family and I in 1992). We did not know anything about Jesus. We believed in and practiced shamanism, a religion involving interaction with a spirit world. We never imagined how God would intervene in our lives. A pastor for the Hmong Mission at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Eau Claire first shared the Gospel with us in 2004, but it was not until 2007 that we confessed Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit had called us *out of the darkness into His saving light* (1 Peter 2:9).



According to the Migration Policy Institute, more than 200,000 Hmong refugees have fled Laos, Vietnam, and China since 1975. Approximately 90 percent of them resettled in the United States. The largest concentrations of Hmong are in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota-Wisconsin area and Fresno, California.



We soon felt a calling from God to the mission field. In 2009, we began at Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I studied Christian outreach while Doua was in pre-seminary classes. After graduating, Doua spent four more years at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. In 2014, he was given his vicarage assignment to St. Paul Lutheran Church, Merced, California. We still live in the Merced area. God has called us to bring Jesus to the Hmong people in the central valley of California.

Faith: What parents would quit their jobs, turn their backs on the culture and the religion of their ancestors, leave their extended families, and move their four young children hundreds of miles away? Those parents are my father, Pastor Doua Xiong, and my mother, Sue. I am their second child and oldest daughter, 17 years old, and my given name is Thaey. My parents were shunned and ridiculed by their family, friends, and co-workers. Many thought they were crazy, but, as believers in Jesus as their Savior, they experienced the joy of breaking the bondages of sin. They were called to share the Good News with their own people, the Hmong, in the United States.

Sue: Our focus is in two unique cultural settings: the Hmong Language School and Hmong New Year Celebration Festival.

I am the Developer/Director of the Hmong Language School which began in Merced in 2015, with help from an LWML California-Nevada-Hawaii (CNH) District grant. Many older Hmong can't read or write Hmong. Most Hmong children don't speak Hmong, but their grandparents cannot speak English. The Hmong Language School helps bridge these gaps. We teach the children to speak, read, and write Hmong, but we also share the Gospel with them in English. Most of our students and their families are

not Christian, but, when celebrating Christmas and Easter at our school, we encourage the children to participate in our Christmas and Easter services. Their families get to see them in the services — another way to reach them with the message of the Gospel.

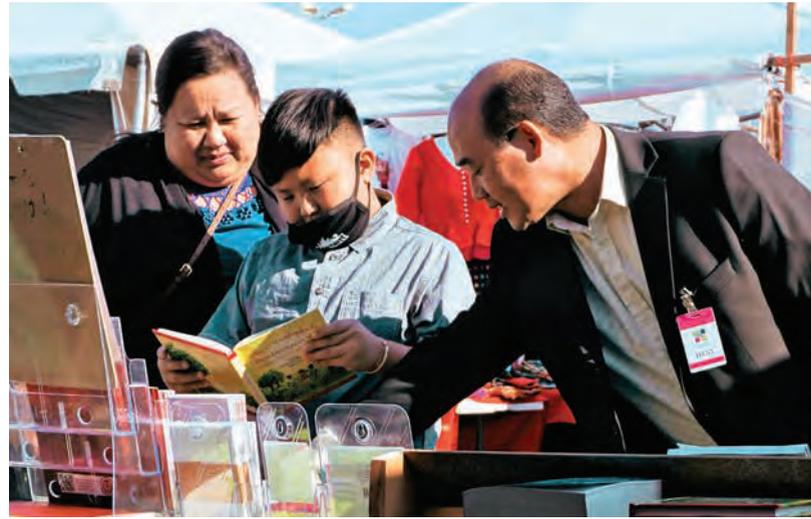


In 2018, we added another Hmong Language School in Fresno, which has the largest population of Hmong people in California. The Fresno site was possible because of a grant, supplies and material donations, and earnest prayer from LWML CNH. Several women have been a part of our school ministry since the beginning, and we are thankful for their support.

Faith: A major part of our family's work has been at the Hmong Language School. The school was my mother's idea: teach the Hmong children how to read and write Hmong, our mother tongue. Hmong people are animists or spirit worshipers — in bondage to evil spirits of their culture and traditions. They will not allow their children to attend church; however, they will allow their children to attend Hmong Language School on Saturdays, where we present Jesus to the entire family. My mother has spent hours planning, organizing, training teachers, and securing materials, such as *A Child's Garden of Bible Stories* and *Luther's Small Catechism*, translated into Hmong. What faith, trust, and hard work she and my dad poured into starting and maintaining the school as an outreach to the entire Hmong multigenerational household!



Each member of the Xiong family spends time in prayer and sharing Christ's love with others at the Hmong New Year celebration outreach booth. Left: Xufing and Chu King, Sue, and Pastor Doua praying for a young woman. Below: a mother and son browse the books that are used as teaching tools in the Hmong Language schools.



*For we do not
wrestle against
flesh and blood,
but against the
rulers, against
the authorities,
against the cosmic
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present darkness,
against the
spiritual forces
of evil in the
heavenly places.*

Ephesians 6:12

Sue: Another area of ministry is the Hmong New Year Festival. Traditionally, this is a month-long outdoor celebration, but the Fresno community celebrates during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. It is the most popular Hmong celebration in America. The festival is an opportunity to share the Gospel with the Hmong, because it draws thousands from around the United States and the world. Volunteers work with us at our booth. We offer prayers for people who need and request them, and we witness how Jesus saved us. One or two families are converted each year. We will continue to keep going as long as the Lord leads and blesses us. This ministry also received a grant from the LWML CNH District.

Ministering to and sharing Jesus with the Hmong take time and patience; however, we find our strength in God's Word. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm* (Ephesians 6:12-13).

Faith: In addition to my mother's work at the school and other outreach ministries, she shares her time and skills with the LWML and encourages my sister and me. My sister and I were sponsored to attend an LWML retreat when I was 13 and my sister was eight. When the day came, we wanted to spend our weekend doing something that would be more "fun." We started the day tired and grumpy, but who knew all we needed was a delicious retreat breakfast! My experience at that first LWML retreat was amazing! The ladies were so happy we joined them; they were welcoming and full of an indescribable joy and passion for Jesus. Every woman had a story; they had experienced a lot in life and gave words of wisdom. I could sit with them for hours, listening to their stories. Hearing how God was involved in their lives made me reflect on my own life. It helped me see all the wonderful things God has done for me — things I hadn't thought were wonderful at all. I gained more from that retreat than I thought I would. My sister and I were sponsored for another retreat, where I participated in the servant event, putting together braille Bibles for the blind. By the evening, we had put together about 100 Bibles. Knowing I was able to help make Bibles for those unable to see touched my heart. I highly recommend bringing your daughters,



Sue teaching a lesson at the Hmong Language School.

Below: the Xiang family in traditional Hmong festival clothing.

friend's daughters, or any young woman to your zone or district LWML retreats, sponsoring them if you are able. I am looking forward to meeting more women my age in the coming years, hopefully as a Young Woman Representative (YWR) at a national LWML convention. It would be a great opportunity to make friends and connections in the Lord!

As you can imagine, just about everyone stumbles over how to say my name, ThaeY. When I was younger, one of my teachers decided my English name would be Faith. I was not keen on being given a name without any input, but I have truly grown into that name. Being a pastor's kid brings on lots of joy and challenges, including moving a lot when I was younger, due to my father's schooling and ministry work. It was not easy. I now know that I am here to be a pastor's kid for a great purpose that God has set for me in my journey in this life — a journey of FAITH, one my mother has shared by her example to our family. I am thankful my parents were brave enough to quit their jobs, leave their families, and listen to the calling of God.

My favorite Bible verse, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (Hebrew 13:8), serves as a constant reminder to me that, in times of trouble, need, or praise; no matter what, I can always rely on Jesus Christ. **Q**

Sue Xiong, Developer/Director of the Hmong Language School in Merced, California, is an immigrant from Laos. She teaches not only Hmong children but their families as well. Because of Sue's teaching and influence, her daughter, ThaeY (also known as Faith), has become not only an active part of the ministry to the Hmong, but a Lutheran Woman in Mission in LWML.



The LWML recognizes that there are gifted multicultural women serving with joy and passion throughout The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). The purpose of the Heart to Heart Sisters program is to motivate, equip, challenge, and provide mentoring opportunities within the LWML for women of diverse ethnic groups. As we support and strengthen them, they are better equipped to evangelize in their communities.

We are committed to assisting LWML districts in establishing Heart to Heart Sisters programs so multicultural women may mutually encourage and support each other, and work together, living out the beautiful diversity that is the body of Christ.

The LCMS has developed multicultural ministry outreach in every district. Discover those ministries through your LCMS district office. If there are none yet, find out how you can support the district effort to reach multicultural communities in your area.

For information on Heart to Heart Sisters, see page 17, visit lwml.org/heart-to-heart-sisters, or contact Deaconess Betty Knapp, Vice President of Special Focus Ministries, at depsfm@lwml.org OR vpsfm@lwml.org.