



# Laos

## PARTNERSHIP PROPOSAL



BuaLa & Kumgote | Don Ian Village

## WHERE:

Laos is the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia, bordering Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and China. It has a population of around 7.2 million and is one of the world's few remaining Communist states. During the Vietnam War, in order to restrict use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the United States dropped two million tons of bombs on Laos, making it the most heavily bombed country in history relative to its size and population. A significant portion of these bombs never detonated, and unexploded ordinances in rural areas continue to be a major concern. Non-government organizations also highlight human rights, human trafficking, and religious persecution, particularly towards Christians, as major areas of concern. Christians are often ostracized and imprisoned, which has forced most churches underground.

## WHO:

Mr. BuaLa and Mrs. Kumgote are a Christian couple with a history of strong faith and zeal in building up the Kingdom of God.

Kumgote translates to "Golden Rule." When she was a young lady, her father, who was the pastor of a church, was accused of being a CIA spy by local villagers during the Purge of the Lao Civil War (what we know as the Vietnam War). He was dragged into the forest and shot. The church, which now consisted of mostly women, was left without a leader. None of the remaining men would step up and replace Kumgote's father, so her mother bravely stepped forward to lead this group of Believers. It was in this setting that Kumgote developed a bold, fiery faith.

BuaLa was raised in a traditional Buddhist family. As a young man, he joined the Lao Communists as a soldier in the Lao Civil War. However, when he met Kumgote, he was drawn to her goodness and loyalty, and ultimately gave up his career with the communist army and his Buddhist beliefs. Over the years, his faith in Christ has grown to be just as strong and bold as his wife's, and he is a leader in the church.

In their village, BuaLa and Kumgote are greatly respected for their kindness and honesty, so much so that BuaLa was voted to be the village mayor. Due to that same commitment to honesty, BuaLa publicly declined the position. He explained to the entire village assembly that he could not be mayor because he was a Christian and would not be able to perform the Buddhist ceremonies traditionally required of the village head. He expected to be persecuted and ostracized, but the villagers came to a consensus that he would not have to perform these ceremonies. He was able to accept the position. He served as mayor with a continued commitment to honesty and integrity and, thus, endeared himself further to the villagers. He and Kumgote are still so highly revered among their village that they are able to openly worship and conduct evangelistic outreach without persecution.

Some years ago, three girls from a northern village were sent by their parents to the capital city. They had \$5, a bag of sticky rice, some dried fish, and a one-way ticket. They had been told they would have factory jobs once they arrived, but this proved false. They were alone in the largest city in Laos with no job, no money and no way to get back home (prime targets for the human trafficking that is prevalent in the area). They did, however, have the phone number of one Christian man in the city. He tried to find a Christian family to take them in, but everyone was afraid of drawing attention from the government – everyone except Kumgote and BuaLa. They immediately welcomed the girls into their home, shared what little food they had, and began teaching them about God. After many months of learning about God and seeing His love embodied in Kumgote and BuaLa, all three girls became followers of Jesus and were baptized. During the girls' time with the older couple, they also learned specialized sewing/embroidery work and how to make money. They were able to return back home, where they shared with their communities about Kumgote and BuaLa. As word spread, more families asked the couple to take in their daughters, keeping them away from exploiting situations, and allowing them to go to high school, learn about God and learn a trade. Kumgote and BuaLa have been welcoming young girls into their home ever since.

Kris Bowen (Agape's current Social Work Coordinator) lived in Laos as a missionary for several years. Her and the other missionaries in the area know this family well and vouch for their character & work.

## WHY:

Laos is vastly rural and agricultural. Most of the girls who have come into Kumgote and BuaLa's care are from remote villages – often in mountainous regions only accessible by boat or long cross-country walking. These villages often do not have electricity, roads, or job opportunities. The schools only go through the equivalent of 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Subsistence fishing and farming are some of the only options near these isolated villages. Many girls work in restaurants and hotels as waitresses and cleaners that put them in dangerous situations prone to exploitation. Some of them have gone to work in Thailand where the danger for sexual abuse is multiplied. Others have worked for Chinese companies operating in Laos. There is no real policing of their operations and the language barrier makes the girls good for only a few "trades."

Kumgote and BuaLa provide these girls with a safe home. They teach them farming – the girls help with taking care of the animals (goats and chickens) and the garden, where they get most of their food. They are also able to go to the local school which allows them to graduate from high school. The couple teach them how to do sewing and embroidery for the traditional skirts worn by Lao women so they will have a trade and be able to earn money for themselves. In addition to all of this, and most importantly to Kumgote and BuaLa, they teach the girls about Jesus and disciple them.

## WHAT:

This wonderful couple needs partners. They welcome the girls into their own home and use their own finances to care for them, but their personal income is very small. The garden on their land is doing well but only provides them with vegetables and some fruit. They have recently not been able to afford meat, and have been subsisting on rice, greens and the limited eggs that their own chickens produce. To be able to continue the good work that they have started, they need financial help to provide adequate food for these girls and pay for their schooling fees.

This couple and their work are perfect examples of the kind of leaders Agape Asia looks for. They are already caring for vulnerable children and sharing their faith. They lead this work themselves and have been investing their own finances in the work. They are now in need of some outside support from a group like Agape Asia so that they can continue and grow this work while becoming increasingly self-sustaining.



## COST:

Agape Asia is seeking \$8,000 to begin this new partnership. This level of funding will cover the full cost to operate this new program as we provide daily necessities for the girls and help these wonderful leaders.



