Dear Friends and Partners,

Greetings! We are pleased to have arrived safely five months ago and are settling into our work here at CEART. We have already enjoyed ten years of mission service in Southeast Asia and we look forward to further service in spreading the Gospel and preparing for Christ's soon return.

It is my prayer that this newsletter will bless you with helpful information and encouragement as well as challenge you to invest yourself more deeply in reaching out to East Asians.

For Christ,

Pastor Greg Whitsett

R to L: Greg, Amy, Ryan, and Tyler Whitsett

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Who Does CEART Target?

I am often asked who exactly the Center for East Asian Religions and Traditions is focusing on. That's a great question!

Most of you know that CEART is the new name for the Buddhist Study Center, a ministry in the Global Missions department under the umbrella of the General Conference Office of Adventist Missions. The new name reflects that the focus is somewhat broadened to be more than Buddhists.

The image below demonstrates graphically the size and nature of the eight religious groups of the world of which there are five major ones: Abrahamic, Dharmic, Taoic or East Asian, indigenous, and secular. Of these, CEART focuses on Buddhists (which are part of the Dharmic religions) and all of the Taoic or East Asian religions plus secular peoples who are traditionally associated with the Buddhist and Taoic groups. Incidentally, CEART is interested in these peoples regardless of where they live in the world although we have special interest in reaching them in their homelands.

Click on the graphic below for a larger image.

Annual CEART Meeting Adjusts Focus
Since 2003 the Ministry Among Buddhists Meeting has focused on training pastors, teachers, and expatriate missionaries in best practices for reaching Buddhists. The meeting has enjoyed good attendance and most have considered the meetings a success. So why would we want to change the meetings formula if its working?

Most of those attending in years past are workers in Thailand and bordering countries who return year after year. CEART would now like to focus on developing a global network of mission specialists that we can partner with to equip the Church in using best practices for reaching East Asian peoples.

So this year we are inviting specific missions to appoint one or two delegates to attend the conference. Also, we will be inviting key mission professors and ministry leaders. Under this new focus we have renamed the meeting, CEART Mission Issues Leadership Conference.

We invite those who are interested in participating or in making a report on their ministries to contact us to arrange plans to attend. Below are the details.

**2013 Dates:** 8am, May 21 -- 1pm, May 23.
**Location:** Asia Pacific International University, Saraburi, Thailand
**Registration Deadline:** April 20.

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The Chinese New Year Connection

*Dr. Samuel Wang, Chinese Evangelism Resources Developer*

The Chinese New Year, also known as Spring Festival or Lunar New Year, is the most important of all the traditional Chinese holidays. On February 10, the first day of the year of the snake, my family enjoyed our third Chinese New Year in Taiwan. This year was perhaps our best-celebrated New Year ever! We invited more than a dozen young people to celebrate with us who don’t have homes and parents to go home to.

The way we Chinese celebrate this festival is reminiscent of the Jewish Passover as well as the marriage supper of the Lamb (Ex. 12; Rev. 19:7-9). The Spring Festival is a yearly time to remove the old and bring in the new. Customarily, no debts are brought into the New Year; forgiveness is liberally offered to smooth relations as well as settling debts. The New Year thus becomes a symbol for rest, peace, and freedom from all debts and guilt.

There are other interesting similarities between Passover and the Chinese New Year. The Chinese New Year, like the Passover, is the longest festival in the year – a 15 day celebration from the first month of the lunar calendar. The door posts
are decorated with red couplets that symbolize welcome and blessing. It is not clear to me which practice may have came first, the Chinese custom or Israel’s painting their doorposts with blood. Also on New Year’s Eve, every family customarily dines to welcome a new beginning in life and reminds Christians of the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven prior to God’s creation of the new heavens earth.

Is it possible that there is some distant connection between Chinese New Year and the Passover Lamb of God? I like to think so! Certainly Christian Chinese can celebrate our hope in soon return of Christ and the great marriage supper of the Lamb. Here is an opportunity to build bridges of understanding and proclaim Christ’s provision for our past and His soon return. A new Eden home awaits us all.

Lunar New Year Celebrated by 5 Countries

Did you know that the Lunar New Year is celebrated by more than just the Chinese? Here are the countries who observe this festival:

- China, they call it *Nian Jia*;
- Tibet, who call the new year, *Losar*;
- Mongolia, their name for the new year is *Tsagaan Sar*;
- Korea, who calls it *Soellal*; and
- Vietnam, *Tết*;

The Lunar New Year is based on the solar and lunar calendars. It usually falls on the second new moon after the winter solstice. This year fell on February 10. The public holidays keep businesses closed for a number of days--usually at least 3--although the festival covers a two week period.

While different countries have different mythologies associated with the holiday As
Dr. Wang describes the Chinese New Year, the festival is generally a time of new beginnings and putting aside past wrongs, conflicts, and debts. Above all else, the Lunar New Year is a time of returning home and to celebrate with family.

**Goodbyes**

**Scott & Julie Griswold**
After serving as director of CEART for ten years, Scott and family have returned to the States where Scott is affiliated with Adventist Southeast Asian Projects. The Griswolds invested their whole family while serving in Thailand and they are dearly missed! Many successes mark their time with CEART including establishment of the annual CEART conference, several worship groups planted in Central Thailand, and the development of many materials and resources. Thank you, Griswolds, for your whole-hearted service!

**Greg & Sue Lundquist**
Greg and Sue served as volunteer missionaries through Adventist Volunteer Services. Due to family needs back home, the Lundquists returned to America in May 2012. Greg served as administrative support in areas of finances and planning while Sue published the Center’s newsletter each month. Thank you for serving selflessly!

**Prapaporn (Miew) Phonboon**
We congratulate Miew in her new position as a dean of women at Asia Pacific International University in Saraburi, Thailand. Miew served CEART as a Thai Bible instructor by conducting outreach ministries and assisting with Thai materials development. While we are happy for her future, we will miss her very much!

**Mike & Marilee Kier**
When Mike and Marilee first came to CEART seven years ago, they didn't know they would stay so long. Mike and Marilee have specialized in focusing on discipling people in Christ. They look forward to the next step in faith and in June will become fully volunteer missionaries here in Thailand where they will continue to support church planting and missionary endeavors.

**PLEASE PRAY FOR GOD'S BLESSING IN THEIR LIVES! If you would like to have contact emails for these folks, please contact us!