

Laos in Alaska

Alaska seems an unlikely destination for tribal people from Southeast Asia. But Chong is part of a growing Laotian population in Anchorage, a community being reached by InterAct missionaries.

Chong and her husband were part of a Laotian tribal group who spied for the United States during the Vietnam War. When the U.S. pulled out, they were left to fend for themselves and were hunted and killed by their oppressors. Chong's husband was killed, and she fled to a refugee camp in Thailand with her children to escape the same fate.

Chong immigrated to California in the 1980s and then to Anchorage in 2001. That's where she met InterAct missionaries Dennis and Celesta Richardson.



Chong & Celesta

Dennis and Celesta had spent four years in Alaska's remote interior, nurturing a village church in Grayling, before moving to Anchorage in 1996 to minister to Alaska Natives in an urban setting.

In 2003, the Richardsons were commissioned by their church elders to pastor a multi-ethnic church in northeast Anchorage. They already had hearts for cross-cultural ministry because of

their friendship with Alaska Natives, so they said "Yes."



Dennis [left] at National Night Out

One of the ministries of Mountain View Baptist Church [see sidebar] is English as a Second Language (ESL). It was the ESL ministry that brought Celesta and Chong together.

Celesta and other teachers open the world to 15 adult students who speak Hmong, Spanish or Russian as their first language. The majority of students in ESL are Hmong; the younger generation knows English well, but the parents and grandparents do not.

Some immigrants are *pre-literates*: they have never had the opportunity to read and write their own language. Teaching them to read ... in English ... constitutes a big challenge. And it's all about motivation.

"Chong is so faithful," says Celesta. "She loves it and is so excited to learn."

The Richardsons see God using the ESL ministry to build stronger relationships within their church body. In spite of language and cultural barriers, connecting through ESL allows them to find a way to understand each other.

Dennis and Celesta's biggest burden is the lack of people to help them in the ministry. The potential for outreach is staggering, but the harvesters are few.

More Than Just Sunday

Mountain View Baptist Church has been a part of the Mountain View and Muldoon communities in Anchorage for almost 60 years. When the church began, those communities were thriving. More recently they have declined. Today, they struggle with the problems many low-income neighborhoods have, such as gang activity and drugs.



Dennis brings joy to a friend.

The church hosts two congregations: The smaller English-speaking group meets on Sunday mornings and is pastored by InterAct missionary Dennis Richardson. On Sunday afternoons, the larger Hmong flock gathers. Chong's son pastors the Hmong congregation.

At the same time, in response to the needs of the community, the church provides much more than just Sunday services. Other outreach activities include ...

- Weekly Kids Club meetings for 30-40 local children from Hispanic, African-American, Samoan and Hmong homes.
- A twice-monthly Food Shelf ministry, providing groceries to over 100 families each month.
- A once-a-year Thanksgiving Blessing when Mountain View joins other Anchorage charities to serve food baskets to over 900 families.
- National Night Out, a once-a-year block party offering activities and information from the church to local families.
- ESL (English as Second Language) classes.

After all, Jesus is Lord every day of the week.



The Food Shelf ministry helps to feed many families in the community.