Listen, Be Still, and See God's Grace: Big Canoe Chapel Members Nurture Girls in Thailand

A Sanctuary of Sounds and Grace

Listen—and you hear it.
Morning settles in with birds greeting the rising sun and a rooster's call echoing across the hills, announcing a new day.
Footsteps patter across the courtyard, laughter bouncing off the walls as girls race past one another.
Chickens rustle through the grass nearby.
In the kitchen and garden, hands move together—chopping, stirring, tending, setting—while clothes flutter on the line outside, carrying with them the scents of fresh herbs and spices drifting through an open window.

Photo 3 - Side by side, the girls learn that caring for a home means caring for one another.

Be still—and you feel it.
The warmth of a hug, gentle but steady, surrounds a girl discovering her own strength.
Soft encouragement passes from older girls to younger ones, their voices low and reassuring as laughter and whispered guidance fill the space.

Together in faith and fellowship, the Big Canoe mission team and Sisters of Grace girls celebrate a partnership rooted in love, mentorship, and shared purpose.

Here, every sound, every movement, every small act tells a story of hope, healing, and God's grace.
This is Sisters of Grace, a sanctuary for girls at risk of human trafficking in Chiang Rai, Thailand. It was here that ten representatives of Big Canoe Chapel, joined by eight additional missionaries, recently spent transformative days walking, teaching, worshiping, and learning alongside the girls and staff.

The new Harbour of Hope Playground offers a safe space for joy, healing, and the simple gift of being a child.

The Sisters of Grace campus serves girls ages 6 to 18 from hill tribes in Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos—among the most vulnerable populations in Southeast Asia. Human trafficking is considered the most lucrative form of organized crime worldwide, generating more than $150 billion annually, with Thailand remaining a leading destination for trafficking victims.

A Lifeline Through Language

For the past two years, Big Canoe Chapel members have connected weekly with the girls through virtual sessions, helping them develop conversational English. For many, learning English is more than an academic skill—it is a lifeline. Conversational literacy opens doors to education, employment, self-advocacy, and global connection that might otherwise remain closed.

For many of the students, learning English is more than a classroom skill—it is a lifeline.

Beyond their time at the Sisters of Grace campus, the team spent three days teaching English at a local Thai elementary school, offering engaging lessons and support to teachers and administrators. Through games, songs, and hands-on activities, meaningful connections were formed, bringing joy,

encouragement, and cultural exchange that extended far beyond the classroom.

Mentorship and Community

Life at Sisters of Grace is grounded in intentional mentorship. Older girls care for and guide younger ones, teaching them how to grow food, tend livestock, manage chores, care for shared spaces, and take responsibility for themselves and one another.

At Sisters of Grace, mentorship begins in small, faithful acts of love.

Through these daily rhythms, the girls develop leadership, resilience, and a deep sense of belonging. “It’s like family here,” said Bob Crouch, Big Canoe Chapel member and mission trip organizer. “The way the girls look out for one another, teach one another, and lift each other up—it’s inspiring.”

Gifts of Love and Learning

One of the most meaningful moments of the trip came during the presentation of Thai-English Bibles. Each girl received her own Bible—a simple but powerful expression of faith, care, and connection, affirming that she is seen and valued.

Each girl received her own Thai-English Bible — a lasting reminder that she is seen, known, and deeply loved.

The team also provided practical gifts to support daily life and learning on campus, including a large-screen monitor to enhance virtual English lessons, a freezer chest to store vegetables grown in the gardens year-round, and an oven to help the girls develop baking and other life skills.

“These gifts are about more than objects,” said Emily Leatherbarrow, founder of Sisters of Grace. “They are tools for growth, learning, and independence.”

Faith, Celebration, and Stories of Hope

A powerful highlight of the visit was a Friday night worship service led entirely by the girls. Through song, dance, and personal testimonies, they shared how Sisters of Grace had homelessness, and family addiction.

Pure joy — a beautiful reminder that healing includes space to laugh freely and without fear.

One young woman shared her story of growing up in a small, war-torn village in Myanmar, where survival was a daily challenge. Her mother had died, and her father moved in and out of jail due to theft and drug use. Her brothers struggled with addiction. At times, there was no food, electricity, or clean water, leaving her to survive largely on her own. Through Sisters of Grace, she found a safe home, her own bed, consistent care, and access to education—offering a path forward grounded in faith, dignity, and hope.

During the visit, the team also celebrated the groundbreaking of the Graham Family Retreat Center and the ribbon cutting of the Harbour of Hope Playground. The retreat center will provide rest and renewal for staff and visiting teams. The playground offers a safe space for joy, healing, and play.

“These spaces represent peace, restoration, and community,” said Aye Chananan, National Director of Sisters of Grace. “They strengthen our ability to care for both the girls and the staff who serve them every day.”

Witnessing Life Beyond the Campus

Beyond campus activities, the group experienced Thai culture through visits to local temples and historical sites and toured areas affected by exploitation, gaining a deeper understanding of the realities of trafficking in the region.

A Transformative Experience

For Big Canoe Chapel members and their missionary partners, the experience was life-changing.

On the new playground, confidence grows alongside every smile and shared moment.

"The girls captured our hearts almost immediately," said Dock Hollingsworth, Senior Chaplain of Big Canoe Chapel and a member of the mission team. "Sisters of Grace is built on the economy of generosity. All of us have received more than we deserve, just as Matthew describes in the parable of the all-day workers. And every time you see joy and generosity here, you see God's grace at work."

Through language lessons, mentorship, worship, and daily connection, the team witnessed the transforming power of love, faith, and community—one girl, one lesson, one act of care at a time.

Through engaging English lessons, meaningful connections were built that extended far beyond the classroom.

In addition to Senior Chaplain Dock Hollingsworth and Bob Crouch, the Big Canoe Chapel Thailand mission team included Brenda Bedingfield, Melissa Hollingsworth, Jean James, Heather Mackel, Wes and Gayle Silvey, Margo Vallone, and Randy Wiersma. Bob, Brenda, Jean, and Margo also serve as weekly virtual English teachers and are joined by Liz Donovan Davis, Rebecca Hauseman, and Julie Olliff. Together, their dedication over the past two years has been vital lifeline—opening doors and opportunities that might otherwise remain out of reach.

With hard hats and hopeful hearts, the girls celebrated the groundbreaking of the Graham Family Retreat Center — a symbol of restoration and renewal.

Laughter fills the air as the girls embrace moments of freedom and joy in a place designed just for them.