

Episode 9

Faith In Action THE OLDHAM'S LAOS MISSION

[BEGIN MUSIC]

THOMAS S. MONSON: I extol those, who with loving care and compassionate concern, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and house the homeless. He who notes the sparrow's fall, will not be unmindful of such service.

NARRATOR: The Mormon Channel now presents, Faith in Action.

[MUSIC FADES]

INTERVIEWER: Welcome to Faith In Action on the Mormon Channel. A show about welfare, humanitarian aid and service around the world. Today we have the pleasure of visiting with James and Karen Oldham, welcome.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Thank you.

JAMES OLDHAM: Thank you, Bob.

INTERVIEWER: Brother and Sister Oldham served in Laos, let me get this right, Vien Chang, recently, did I say that right?

JAMES OLDHAM: That's correct!

INTERVIEWER: It's in southeast Asia, northeast of Thailand, west of Vietnam. And the country were dedicated on February 23rd in 2006 Elder Jeffrey Holland dedicated the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the Work of the Gospel. Let's go back a little bit, you've obviously been serving in the Church all of your lives, is that correct?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Yes, I think so [LAUGHS A LITTLE BIT]

INTERVIEWER: An all of a sudden you decided a service mission or a proselyting mission or have you done both? Tell us a little bit about your history.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Well, we just served in the Church and as soon as Brother Oldham retired we knew that we would be going on a mission. We didn't *request* a particular mission we just said we'd go wherever we were needed.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have the option of saying, "I want to do a proselyting mission or a service mission" or just what, whatever as the calling comes?

JAMES OLDHAM: Well you can put in for a preference but the Lord sends you where He needs you.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

JAMES OLDHAM: You know I think people who put in for a mission know that and are willing to accept to go wherever, wherever they are *needed*.

INTERVIEWER: That big envelope comes and you open it and it says, "Laos". What did you think? What was your first reaction to that?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: I was elated! It actually did say Thailand, but with an assignment to Laos...

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm

CAROLYN OLDHAM: ...and I was very excited! And I know Elder Oldham was too. Very surprised, but he has particular reasons that he was excited about it.

INTERVIEWER: They are...?

JAMES OLDHAM: During the Vietnam war, I flew F-4s out of Thailand and a lot of our missions were over Laos, the Ho Chi Minh trail, the North Vietnamese were using the Ho Chi Minh trail to supply South Vietnam. We dropped a lot of bombs there.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm.

JAMES OLDHAM: And the flying over Laos, the big Karst, the green, just a beautiful country. I had told Caroline about a year earlier when we were in China and saw some Karst country I said, "I'd really like to take you to Laos and show you, you know, the beauty of that country."

INTERVIEWER: That's something else, your story kind of weaves in and out and ends up there at this particular point. That's wonderful. So serving there in the military, where were you stationed then?

JAMES OLDHAM: Stationed in Ubon, Thailand.

INTERVIEWER: Ubon, Thailand.

JAMES OLDHAM: Yeah it was during '72, Linebacker One, Linebacker Two.

INTERVIEWER: So the country wasn't probably as much of a shock to you as it was for Sister Oldham, I would think. You get off that airplane and what are you thinking? What did you think at that time?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: [BEGINS LAUGHING] I was pleasantly surprised. I was prepared that perhaps we'd be living in a bamboo hut or something and it was more developed actually than I thought it might be, and we even had air conditioning, we lived in an apartment building that had formerly been headquarters for the Russian Army.

JAMES OLDHAM: The Russians basically used it as a headquarters, they were, the primary grantee of funding and backer of the Laotian government, you know, prior to

the demise of the former Soviet Union.

INTERVIEWER: Was this a large building? Was it full of diplomats or people serving in the Church or, who were your neighbors generally?

JAMES OLDHAM: There's only two missionary couples in Laos. Because Laos is a communist government, they don't allow any proselyting missionaries so they're just welfare services besides the other couple, that served with us the other people in the building were business people, we had a lady next door that was with the Chinese government and selling helicopters to the Laotian government.

INTERVIEWER: Very interesting. So, Sister Oldham, you get off the plane and you get to the apartment and did it take you a day or two to kind of get ready? Are you ready to go right now and let's pick up the phone and find out...or do you, or do you have some time *first* in Thailand? To find out what you're supposed to be doing? How does this work, when you arrive?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Well, we, actually we were in the Bangkok mission office for a couple of days just getting visas getting into Laos, and those things organized. And so, we didn't get really *training* specifically for Laos. Fortunately when we arrived in Laos, though the couple that we were replacing was still there. And so, we spent two days with them, or even three days, which was very comforting because they kind of helped us along in what our responsibilities would be. Because I was overwhelmed actually to begin with. And had they not been there to *tell* us and help us I would have been *more* overwhelmed. [LAUGHS]

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to get to the missionary part in just a moment, but it's so interesting that you're kind of walking into this new environment, is there a small market nearby to buy food? Do you have an automobile? Are there people that were speaking English? Or is this just a *totally different* experience for you?

JAMES OLDHAM: We basically have, had an interpreter who was also our van driver. And he was also our Branch President. And, you know that's another minor or major miracle. To have such a wonderful person like that to help us out.

INTERVIEWER: A Branch President as the van driver. That is a miracle. I would think.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: [LAUGHING] Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How was driving there? Was it something you would do or were you glad you didn't *have* to do it.

JAMES OLDHAM: I would do it, but I'm a little adventuresome. But, it's like driving in Mexico, or any, any other third-world country, where and no offense, maybe Mexico is not a third-world country, but it's like driving in a third-world country, where you have to do, be defensive and you have to be aggressive.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. How is the infrastructure? Are there major highways or roads? Or are they dirt? Or are they broken up? What kind of, what are you traveling on?

JAMES OLDHAM: Well, Laos is, is actually the worst country in Asia, it's one of the poorer countries in the world. They have a lot in international aid from countries, a lot of Asian countries and European countries. Until, oh maybe the last 10 years, most of the roads were *dirt*. They do have a North-South highway that runs from China to Thailand that the Chinese and the Thais have basically built for them. For that two-way highway is also the place that animals wander on, the children play on. When you're driving down, you know the major highway, you can just expect anything to happen on that highway.

INTERVIEWER: [7.13.7] Just anything at all. Anything at all.

JAMES OLDHAM: Anything at all.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. The little research that I did, it talked about the average life expectancy of a person there being about 55 years of age. This was just incredible to me. This will point out then, I'm sure the conditions and *your opportunities* there. Let me step back, I had a question about your Branch President. Since the Church is not allowed to be there? Is that the correct term? Or you're not allowed to proselytize there.

JAMES OLDHAM: We're not allowed to proselytize. Proselytize. But what happened is, because the Church moved in there and has been doing welfare services since about 1995 the couples that have worked there have established a good relationship with government officials and the government had allowed the Church to operate in terms of having meetings with the members on Sunday. And preaching the gospel to anyone who came to the Church on Sunday and while we were there we were able to get that permission in writing which may make it a little more enduring.

INTERVIEWER: So the trick is to get somebody there so that you can teach them. I guess trick's not the right word but, kind of is. You've got to work with the system to get someone into the, into the Branch meetings then.

JAMES OLDHAM: Yes, it's interesting that the growth of the Church in Laos primarily came from a couple that came to the United States, he was part of the national government army that supported the United States during the Vietnam war, in Laos, in terms of fighting the path at Laos. And so he fled to the United States, he married a woman over here, they joined the Church. When they retired they moved back to Laos and when they moved back to Laos they basically brought their friends and family and neighbors to the Church and that was kind of the first big influx of growth and that's where the Branch in Laos, you know, got its kick-start if you will. The growth since then has been a lot from either members bringing their friends and neighbors, or from relatives in the United States that have joined the Church, and have called their relatives back in Laos and said, "you know, you need to go to this church, it has something for you."

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. This is Faith IN Action, on the Mormon Channel. Today Brother and Sister Oldham speaking about their experiences in Laos. Let's talk about your tasks then. Were you given specific charges, these are things that we would like you to do. Or did you have to go find them yourself, discover things

to do.

JAMES OLDHAM: There's actually a little of both. The Church has five major initiatives. We pursued four of those initiatives in Laos. Wheelchairs, clean water, vision projects and neonatal resuscitation. All of which are ongoing projects now in Laos. In addition to that we had area initiatives where there's a certain amount of money available that we could go out and find projects that were unique to our particular country, that needed to be done that would help bring the Church out of obscurity as well as help the poor.

INTERVIEWER: You were in a, in a branch in Vinchin and the only branch in the country. Is that correct?

JAMES OLDHAM: That's correct.

INTERVIEWER: What is a Sunday meeting like in that branch?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Oh, it's just wonderful [SHE SOUNDS LIKE SHE IS SMILING] originally the people had a hard time wanting to sit on chairs. Chairs were brought in, because they're so used to always sitting on the floor. And even our sweet sisters still will tuck their legs up and sit as though they're on the floor but they sit on the chair. I just thought that was so sweet. And there was someone that had already learned to play keyboard, and was accompanying would play prelude music and the young people were *so active*. In fact the branch in Vienchun is the most active and the largest branch in the whole Thailand mission. And Thailand has proselyting missionaries and of course Laos does not have any of those. And the people are so sweet and humble, always happy, grateful for whatever they have, and surprisingly the meeting is, was almost like being in a meeting in, in Utah! President Compey, he had only been a member of the Church for two months when he became the Branch President.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: So he has been a member four years now and just so much wants to do everything just right. And conducts the meeting beautifully opening song, opening prayer, people speak, in is interesting that the talks for the following Sunday are just assigned from the pulpit. When the meeting is nearly finished the, President Compey would just announce who would be speaking the next Sunday. So that was a little different. It reminded me of the olden days when the prophets would call missionaries from the pulpit [LAUGHS].

JAMES OLDHAM: You might tell him a little bit about the fact that because the members come from so far it's a full day's activity for most of them to attend a block of Church meetings.

INTERVIEWER: Let's get to that in a moment. How do they get there? Then we'll get to what happens. How do they arrive?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Many of them come by bus, by public transportation, and motorcycles, many people will have a motorcycle, and then a bus, that brings many members from

a distant village.

INTERVIEWER: I've seen pictures of people on motorcycles where they're stacked four or five or six deep as that was...

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Yes! Common? Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Am I seeing that as well, is it common?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Very common.

JAMES OLDHAM: People come so far and it's so much of their day, that people bring rice in a little basket and some good sisters that, that live in and around Vienchun make up a few other necessities that go with the meal and I'll let Sister Oldham tell about that.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Well, just after Church all the Relief Society sisters get together, they gather, their squatting on the floor in the Church building, they don't do anything up on counters like we're accustomed to, they just sit on the floor and prepare a meal. Bamboo soup, or some chicken dish

JAMES OLDHAM: And eggs!

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Oh, and eggs! Lots of eggs. Ant eggs. We had ant egg soup one Sunday and then spread out the mats. They clear all the chairs from the chapel area, designated chapel area, and spread out mats for us to all sit down on the floor and eat this meal and that happens every Sunday except fast Sunday and the members just enjoy each other's company and then afterwards they just all go outside in the backyard of the Church and get huge tubs and wash the dishes because they don't use paper plates like we're accustomed to, they also don't use utensils, they eat with their hands, so that was, that took some getting used to. [LAUGHS] But it was very charming and just so wonderful to be with these humble people. We loved them.

INTERVIEWER: [14.32.0] What is the chapel like? It was obviously not a traditional chapel that we would see. Is it a hut or is it...

CAROLYN OLDHAM: It's just a beautiful old French Mansion. In fact our members would say, they didn't know, I mean they knew it was beautiful, but they'd say, "oh we bet your Churches in the US are much more beautiful than ours.", and we'd say, "oh, no you are really blessed." Just a beautiful old French mansion. And so each *bedroom* so to speak became a room for, there was Priesthood meeting in one of the rooms, each of them had their own private bathroom off of the side of it, and the chapel was just a very large, like a ballroom. With huge porches and off to the sides. Very nice!

INTERVIEWER: Not what you would expect certainly.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Not at all! [LAUGHS]

INTERVIEWER: [15.21.3] This is Faith In Action on the Mormon Channel. Today brother and sister Oldham are speaking about their experience in Laos. Let's talk about, then some of the projects you were involved in. You mentioned *wheelchairs*. And again, I go back to average life expectancy of 55. This must be very difficult, for the Laotian people to just exist, to just live every day.

JAMES OLDHAM: It's a hard life, which you find is that the people are happy. Maybe they don't know it's that hard or maybe they're just happy to begin with. But they seem to accept any faith, anything that happens in their life as part of their existence. The Buddhist culture predominates there and very peaceful, very happy, very at peace with oneself. You know, a state of mind. The people will accept what happens to them just as that's what's supposed to happen to them

INTERVIEWER: You'd mentioned water, well I'd imagine water purification or sourcing water which would the...?

JAMES OLDHAM: The Church has a clean water initiative which, which basically provides, in many cases, deep bore water wells to areas that need clean water. In Laos we were focusing primarily on the schools, the, the school system there is actually one of the poorest in Asia, it *is* the poorest in Asia, and one of the poorest school systems around. It's not really supported by the government, the government pays the salary of the *teachers* but as far as the buildings and any of the facilities the local people need to come up with that, the funds to take care of that. And as a result, you know, most schools did not have running water, they did not have any latrine facilities the children would use the jungle or they would put a bamboo fence up where the boys and the girls would take turns, you know, using it at appropriate times. And so the Church, you know, has a project where we've been putting in deep bore water wells with a pump and holding tank to provide, you know, clean water for, for drinking and also for sanitation purposes, and then a, either a two or four stall toilet, and these are not the toilets like we sit on, these are, you know, floor toilets, which are squatters

INTERVIEWER: Like in China.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Yes.

JAMES OLDHAM: Like, like in China. And it's really a step up for them, and they, it improves their sanitation and it improves their health. Sister Oldham can tell you a little bit about some of the training that we did with the children to help them use the facilities well.

INTERVIEWER: Sister Oldham?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Well, we just developed a little puppet show that some of our branch members helped us with. Teaching about washing hands and we'd sing songs and also about putting trash in a receptacle rather than just throwing it on the ground and, and the children were really receptive to that and we practiced doing it and we would go back to the schools a few months later and we would find that some of them were actually still doing that. They were putting their trash in the

receptacle and very conscious of what we had taught them. I think improving the sanitation of course improved the health situation and so we were really grateful for that opportunity.

INTERVIEWER: The puppet show, obvious a language barrier. Was you driver, the Branch President, helping you with this or how are you communicating with the children through a puppet show?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Well, we did learn enough language to do some communication and I had some of our Lao friends help me translate the words to the music and the songs and after I heard them enough I could also sing them! And so, it was fun! We all learn well with music. And that was one of my favorite things to do. I also was privileged to teach keyboarding in our branch and to other people and so I could tell that the music had an influence in their lives.

INTERVIEWER: What a great story. How do you focus on a particular school is there like a council in the community that comes to the Church and asks for water? Or do you just go out and find people that need it? How is this done?

JAMES OLDHAM: That's a good question. Everything in every project that is done in Laos is done with and through the Laos government. They are our partners in that venture. And so all the requests come from the school and the local level, the local village chief signs them out and then they go to the district, the district coordinates on them, and then they come to the national level and come to us through the, we, we work through the Ministry of Education for most of our projects and the Ministry of Education will give us a list of schools that had requested what they needed. Then we would go out with the government folks and we would inventory the schools and see which schools needed them the most and then from there we would select the schools that we would actually put the wells and the toilets in.

INTERVIEWER: How long of a process is that from beginning to seeing the well done? Does it just depend on the project? Or...

JAMES OLDHAM: Once the project is approved and funded, you know, through the Church from that turn-on point until the first water wells and toilets are done it's probably about three to four weeks. And then it's ongoing, ongoing for about six months, for a typical project.

INTERVIEWER: This must be an exciting time for these youngsters. They must just love what you do for them.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: [LAUGHS] They are so appreciative. At one school we had just popped in, not realizing that the water had just been turned on and all of the children were out playing in this water, they hadn't had and just delighted and then they, seeing that we had arrived, the teachers had them all line up and just clap their hands and say "thank you" to us. [SHE SOUNDS A LITTLE CHOKED UP] It was really touching.

INTERVIEWER: That *was* touching. I go back to the wheelchairs again for a moment. I have

seen around the world how we have touched lives with wheelchairs. Helping people to be mobile again. This must be a great feeling of gratitude from the people that receive these.

JAMES OLDHAM: It really is and we've been able to do something with the help from the Church Humanitarian Services Department in Laos, that has really been a help to the Laotian people. And that's, instead of buying wheelchairs and shipping them into the country we basically had a program where the wheelchairs were built in-country and they were unique, they were built specifically for the person. The size and limitations. In fact there was even one wheelchair that was built for a woman who could only lay on her stomach, and could roll the wheelchair and it was modified somewhat. We had some other wheelchairs which were three wheeled and could be pedaled and move a handle back and forth and there were some folks with limitations that were actually using those for transportation and they would pedal those things ten to fifteen kilometers a day to go to work.

INTERVIEWER: So this, *again*, is something that is very specific to one person. It's not, it's not a blanket, "here's a busload of wheelchairs that we're bringing into the country. Here's one just for you." ...then is...

JAMES OLDHAM: Exactly. Exactly, and even another step off of that as part of that wheelchair project. We also did a prosthetic project. There are a lot of people in Laos who have lost limbs due to unexploded ordinances. As well as now there are starting to be a lot of amputation associated with motor accidents, particularly motorcycles running into each other. And so what the Church did there we could build an artificial leg for about a hundred dollars there in Laos, if we brought them in from Australia they were about two thousand dollars. So for, you know, twenty thousand dollars, we could make a sizable contribution to the number of people who would be fitted with an artificial leg and have the mobility, you know, necessary to, you know, function better.

INTERVIEWER: So this being, I think you've mentioned the *poorest* country in the region, where the Church then is doing more than just providing water. We're providing some jobs and some skills and some other things to these people as well.

JAMES OLDHAM: You know the whole idea of the Humanitarian Services, Welfare Services, is to make the people self sufficient, and to provide them with the skills and the means and the tools so that they can do things for themselves eventually.

INTERVIEWER: This is an amazing story. Let me ask a couple more questions about, I don't think I got an answer from you, Sister Oldham, on *shopping*. I have spent some time in China and the back of China so I understand what shopping is kind of like, is it very primitive in Laos?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: It is in many ways. Going to market is quite the experience. Just an open-air market with all the fruits and vegetables and the meat and filleted fish and you just say, "I'll take that fish", and they chop it and skin it for you. Actually arrival there the smells were one of the hardest things for me to adjust to

[LAUGHS A LITTLE] and especially going to the market. But then it became very delightful, and if we had any guests we always took them the market because it was quite a unique experience.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have family that came to visit while you were there?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: We did! We had our son and his wife lived in Guam at the time and they brought their three children. Their youngest was just four months old and bald. No hair, and everybody wondered why they had shaved her head! Because of course all little Lao babies have a head full of hair and they thought maybe something had happened to her. And the little two year old, so blonde, and everyone wanted to touch him and hold him and he soon was just hanging onto his mother's skirts behind her walking along like, "don't touch me!" [LAUGHING] It was, they had a wonderful time and it was really fun to have them come and also my brother and his wife visited us *and* a son and his wife...we had lots of visitors! [CONTINUES LAUGHING]

INTERVIEWER: You had some visitors!

JAMES OLDHAM: The Lao people, with the Buddhist religion, many of the young boys, or most of the young boys, at one time or another go in and become a novice which is like a monk in training. And they all shave their heads. So when our little grand baby was there without any hair some of them had to ask if we had shaved it so that, you know, she could become a monk.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Or a nun. The women are nuns of course, they wouldn't...

INTERVIEWER: Was it an eighteen month? Is that correct? What goes through your mind when you end the last day and you look at this country and you look at these people you've grown to love? What are you thinking? What is it, is it difficult? Do you have, are you anxious to get home? Or do you think even today, "how are they doing?" "could I go back and do more?"

CAROLYN OLDHAM: All of those things. We were of course eager to see our family again. [BEGINS TO CRY] And our Mission President Dodge said it is right to want to go home because our mission is finished and it, we have responsibilities at home. At the same time knowing that we may never see these people again it was hard to leave them. And I think that they kind of become like your family there, and you love them, and we do call them. We still call some of them and, and it's nice to get to talk to them again. [LAUGHS A LITTLE]

INTERVIEWER: When you say call them...

CAROLYN OLDHAM: So they, some of them have cell phones!

INTERVIEWER: There actually are cell phones! That surprises me.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: That was surprising to me as poor as the country is, *maany* young people are getting cell phones now. These are two particular college students, well they're in upper education, they have cell phones and so we Skype them. [LAUGHS]

JAMES OLDHAM: We, we saw a mother one day driving along, holding her baby, she's on her motor scooter, holding her baby, nursing her baby, and talking on a cell phone.

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHTER]

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Yes!

INTERVIEWER: Elder Oldham, what is left for the Church, when do you see that door opening in missionaries finally? Walking into the country? Do you think it's any time soon or do you think there's a lot of work yet to do?

JAMES OLDHAM: We hope it's soon but you know obviously there's a lot of work and you know the Lord will work on His own timetable. The short time we were there and in looking back through the history what we could see is the Lord's intervention in many, many places that specific things had happened, relationships were formed and other groundwork was laid for, you know the Church to grow and to continue their...the Laos government, although Communist, is kind of a Comm...my opinion is a Communist veneer on a Socialist government with Capitalist aspirations. So with that premise as we move forward, I think there's opportunities for the, you know, for the Church to grow and to eventually bring missionaries in even as there is in China.

INTERVIEWER: I would hope so. Sister Oldham...

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Well I was just thinking about the way we touch the government officials and they were so, seemed to be the greatest influences when there was a flood in...the Makong flooded and I just...and we provided rice and even though we had done many other projects this seemed to be the most influential with these government officials. Why don't you tell them about it?

JAMES OLDHAM: Well, the Mekong River in Vienchen floods at twelve meters above the normal level. It, it got up to fourteen meters. They had people working around the clock, and this was really inspirational to see how they could energize the whole community, and get everybody involved in sandbagging. And sandbag for two meters, bottom line is the Mekong came within about, you know, three inches from the top of the sandbags. But there were areas that were not sandbagged in and around Vien Chen and in Laos in general, and all along the Mekong River that were flooded substantially. We worked with the Laos government particularly with the Laos Front, which is the People's Government, or if you will the, the Communist arm of the government. And delivered rice personally to a lot of the flooded areas, and some places we actually took it in boats to be able to reach the people. In doing this and in working with the different levels of government officials, we formed a lot of friendships and bonding with those individuals that, you know, potentially could be, you know, influential in helping the Church prosper, in the future.

INTERVIEWER: Is the Church able to respond quickly to situations like this? Is it a matter of you just picking up a phone and, and calling the Mission President or whomever in Thailand and saying, "we need rice." And it's here? Or how does

that work?

JAMES OLDHAM: Well, the, the lines of communication and authority are just a little different from an Ecclesiastic, we reported to the mission from a project standpoint we reported through Hong Kong, through the Welfare Services in the Area Asian Presidency there. So it's a matter of basically putting the request in to Hong Kong, it's considered by the Asian Area Presidency, Welfare Services portion of that and in short order, I think it took us less than a week to go ahead and get that approved.

INTERVIEWER: That's amazing.

JAMES OLDHAM: So, I would say, you know, fairly, fairly responsive.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm. Anything that I've missed that you'd like to talk about? Some adventures that you had or successes that you'd like to talk a little bit more about?

JAMES OLDHAM: Well, I think one of the real blessings of the Humanitarian Services in not only helping the poor and the needy but also helping bring the Church out of obscurity. Missionaries have been in Laos since '95 and the missionaries who have been there before have provided such great service and provided such a good example that it's allowed the Church to grow at this time and will allow the Church to keep growing there because of those relationships and good works that have been shared with the people. We have some of our first members of the Church join the Church there in Laos because they were around the previous missionary couples and said that they wanted their marriage and their life to be like these people.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: [SPEAKING VERY SOFTLY] Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that wonderful? Because of the restrictions do you get to wear the little tag? Or do you not, are you not allowed to wear the missionary tag?

JAMES OLDHAM: The stipulation, the memorandum of understanding that we have with the Laos Government says that we do not proselyte. We would wear our name tags to Church because we weren't out proselyting. When we were out doing service projects we wore our nametags that said "Deseret International Charities". That's kind of a fine line for interpretation as to making sure that, that we're being honest and straightforward with the Lao government in terms of what we said we would do and what we're supposed to do as opposed to, you know, proselyting for the Church. We were able to move forward in talking more about the Church at our project turnovers. In fact, we had moved along far enough that some of the Laos government officials would actually *tell* about us and tell about all the good things that the Church does worldwide and how these are really good Christian people and went so far as making the statement that, "you don't need to be afraid of these people, these people have only come to help you."

INTERVIEWER: Amazing.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Mm-hm

INTERVIEWER: I've seen some of the, in Africa, when the water is turned on they have big parties, there's dancing and singing. Is that happening in Laos as well on those occasions?

JAMES OLDHAM: Oh yes.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: [LAUGHS] Yes and in the beginning they have a special ceremony, it's called a "boss" way of thinking. People, it's a Buddhist or religious for them and we were asked to not participate in that anymore and it was at *that time* that we instituted doing a puppet show which was really better as far as helping the people learn proper hygiene. But we still had the dancing and the children would perform dances for us and then there would often be a dance that we were always asked to participate in, a Lao dance, a circle dance. We got so that we were pretty good at that, don't you think? [LAUGHTER] 'Cause we did it a lot!

JAMES OLDHAM: There were a lot of laughs.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: We probably did fourteen, fourteen wells a year, probably. Is that?...And so we would have...

JAMES OLDHAM: ...thirty...

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Oh! Thirty wells a year! Oh my goodness! So we did a lot of what Brother Oldham called a turnover or a special ceremony where we went and...

INTERVIEWER: Ok, that brings another question. You're doing three wells a month. Are the people themselves doing the well? Is there a source of income? Or do, are you bringing in contractors, are doing these wells? How is that happening?

JAMES OLDHAM: Well, the Church basically does most of the work with regard to the well. There needs to be a bind from the community, there needs to be some sweat equity. What we observed was in Laos if the Japanese would come in and build a school and just turn it over to them it would not be taken care of as well as those schools that they had participated in building so we sort of had a joint project with the, the community and the village, in that they would provide certain labor and do certain things which were within their ability. And the Church would basically come in and, and provide the funds and the labor for, for the rest of it. But that way when it was turned over the signs on the well said "Donated by the Village of Such and Such and Deseret International Charity, funded by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints".

INTERVIEWER: That is amazing. Anything that I've missed today that you'd like to mention?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Well we really enjoyed our school teaching. That's how we got into the country in the first place. We taught English, we went as English teachers.

JAMES OLDHAM: To government officials.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Uh-huh! And so we, that was an interesting experience. We taught English every day and...

INTERVIEWER: So your day is a bit of teaching English and a bit of arranging for this and, and...

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Yes...

INTERVIEWER: How fascinating that would be. So you don't get one thing every day?

CAROLYN OLDHAM: No.

INTERVIEWER: And so you taught English to the government officials.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: ...officials. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Not the children, but the officials. So, this gives you an opportunity then to get some relationships with them as well.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Yes.

JAMES OLDHAM: We had some special classes, in fact there was one missionary couple that both had very strong teaching background, the Jones', from Idaho, and they went so far as they established contacts in a number of hospitals and for the local younger children who didn't have any opportunity or funding to go to school, and they even taught some night classes. So it, the memorandum of understanding that we had with the Ministry of Education said that we needed to teach so many classes to the government officials, but there were a lot of extra classes that were taught by wonderful missionary couples that had a great love for the Lao people.

INTERVIEWER: What a wonderful opportunity to serve for you. More in your future? Would you like to do? I see a head shaking there from Sister Oldham.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: [LAUGHS]

JAMES OLDHAM: We, well, you know, at the drop of a hat. I've got to say at least for me, and I think Sister Oldham wouldn't disagree this has just been one of the highlights of our life, and our accomplishments of all our wonderful things that we've done, the projects that we've worked at, the jobs that we've had the vacations that we've had, the experiences that we've had, this is right up there near the top. If not the top.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you for your service to our Father in Heaven. I'm sure you're blessed for this.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Our pleasure.

INTERVIEWER: The show is Faith in Action on the Mormon Channel, a show about welfare, humanitarian aid and service around the world. We've been visiting today with James and Carolyn Oldham. Nice to have you here today, thank you.

CAROLYN OLDHAM: Thank you.

JAMES OLDHAM: Thank you.

[BEGIN MUSIC]

NARRATOR: You have been listening to Faith in Action on the Mormon Channel.

[END MUSIC]