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When a Conference Becomes a Catalyst: How The CPFI Annual Meeting Became My Bridge to Medical Missions

By Deidra Simpson

Are you considering attending this year's Christian Pharmacists Fellowship International (CPFI) Annual Meeting, but you're just not sure? I get it—another meeting on the calendar, another event that might feel like a box to check. That was me last year when I first considered attending the CPFI meeting. I almost didn't go. But what I thought would be just another professional gathering turned into something far more meaningful: unexpected friendships, powerful worship, and even the spark that led me to join a medical missions trip. It wasn't just a meeting for me—it was a turning point. If you're on the fence, let me share why this experience might be exactly what you didn't know you needed.

My heartbeat is missions. I have served for many years in youth and student ministry, both domestically and internationally, but I had never participated in medical missions. Although intrigued, I hesitated. I attended several conferences—Global Missions Health Conference, CMDA Remedy, and Samaritan's Purse Renewal Conference—but when I explored opportunities for pharmacists, most roles emphasized dispensing medications. Having spent decades in academia and clinical practice, and knowing my primary giftings lie in evangelism, shepherding, and discipleship, I struggled to see where I fit in the role as pharmacist in medical missions.

At the CPFI meeting, several pharmacists shared their experiences on medical missions teams, reigniting my curiosity and leading me to scroll through Global Health Outreach's upcoming trips. One opportunity stood out: a trip to Bangkok, Thailand serving women in the red-light district. I began praying—and making excuses. The trip fell during the semester (I'm a professor). It was costly (again, I'm a professor – haha). Yet the Lord reminded me, again and again, that He provides, and that I am to simply follow.



When I mentioned the opportunity to my husband, he immediately encouraged me to explore further. I emailed the team leader and was told they already had a pharmacist. Relieved, I thought I had done my due diligence and could let it go. However, she wrote again and asked if we could talk. After a long conversation, she invited me to join the team in triage, a role that aligned perfectly with my heart—meeting each patient, hearing her story, praying, offering Christ's love, and also contributing my skillset as a clinical pharmacist. Friends and church families donated generously, my employer approved the time off (it's truly a blessing to work for an organization that promotes time off for service/missions). Sitting in that conference at the end of May, I would have never guessed I'd be in Thailand in October, but God clearly moved to make the way.



Upon returning, many asked, **“Did you have fun in Thailand?”** Thailand is so comfortable for me – the heat, the smells, the amazing food, the smiles of the people – since it was a bit of a second home for my family when we were serving in East Asia from 2014 to 2018 as student strategists teaching English in universities. My first day back in Thailand and our teams touring day on the last day was absolutely fun. Yet, what our team on this trip encountered was unlike any missions or life experience I had known.

Each evening, from 4 pm to midnight, we worked in a small clinic that we brought and set up in a coffee shop in the heart of the red-light district, where the women we'd be serving worked. In triage, I partnered with an incredible registered nurse, checking vital signs, performing HIV testing, urinalysis, and glucose screening. The team included pharmacists, nurses, internal medicine and gynecology providers, dentists, and dental assistants. Each evening began with worship alongside the NightLight organization's team (our team was partnering with them for this work), which filled our hearts and minds with His Spirit before stepping into the darkness.

Nothing prepared me for the depth of brokenness we encountered. These women had endured horrific physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse. The depravity of man was painfully clear in each story we heard. I am an

emotional person, crying when others cry; however, we were instructed not to cry, as it could increase their burden. Instead, we offered a gentle touch—holding a hand, resting a hand on a shoulder—and simple conversation. Sometimes, that was enough to break through walls. Tears would fall. Stories would emerge. NightLight staff were ready to pray, connect, and offer a path to both present and eternal freedom. Sadly, more often than not, as soon as the walls were crumbling, that awful darkness consumed them and the walls went back up just as quickly as they had come down.

God moved. During our week, five women were rescued from sex slavery, Praise the Lord!. Others were connected to NightLight for ongoing support. We heard testimonies from two women who had visited the clinic the year before, both now free, sisters in Christ, and working to help others escape. On our final night, two young women arrived who had only been in Bangkok for a few days. They still had their passports (which are often taken from them by the handler that got them there). Some girls are told they are coming to work in a supermarket, others are told that they would be models... only to be shown the streets and bondage of lies holding them hostage. One of these two girls shared that her father was a pastor in Uganda—clearly a father who was praying, since these two young women were rescued before ever being touched. Arriving on our last night of clinic, having their passports, not yet being touched, willfully seeking a way to return home – only God.

Still, many women returned to the streets each night. Walking back to our hotel after the clinic closed around midnight, we passed men touching, comparing, and negotiating for their bodies. Some women lowered their heads in shame; others reached out to touch our hands as we passed. My heart remains broken—but God is not finished. There is power in the name of Jesus and my former teammates and I continue to pray for Him to pierce the darkness there.



Would I go again? I don't know yet if God will lead me back to Thailand or to another corner of the world where light needs to break through darkness. What I do know is this: obedience rarely looks like convenience, and calling rarely announces itself with clarity ahead of time. Sometimes it

begins with a simple yes—yes to surrendering, yes to being willing to go and do whatever, wherever, with whomever He calls.

That's what the CPFI Annual Meeting became for me - the doorway God used to redirect my heart toward His mission in a way I never expected. And it might just be the doorway He wants to use for you, too.



So, if you're debating whether to attend the CPFI annual meeting this June or next year, let me encourage you—go. Go with an open heart. Go with room for God to surprise you. Go ready to meet people who will sharpen your faith and broaden your vision. You never know which conversation, which worship moment, or which quiet stirring of the Holy Spirit might become the turning point of your own story.

I hope you'll be there. And I can't wait to see what God might begin in you!



Dr. Deidra Simpson, a native of Hazard, Kentucky, received her BS in Pharmacy and PharmD from the University of Kentucky. Much of her career has been spent in academic and clinical settings, with many transitions as a military spouse and former missionary in China. She now serves as Pharmacology faculty and international student support for Liberty University's School of Nursing and maintains a clinical practice providing annual wellness visits at a federally qualified health center. Dr. Simpson's deepest calling is to speak truth with grace and to be a light to those the Lord places in her path.

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."
Proverbs 3:5,6 (NIV)*

Who's Driving Our Bus?

We're riding on the bus of life,
not knowing where we'll go.
And if God's the driver of our bus,
that's all we need to know.
He plans a route for each of us
with stops along the way,
and packs our bags with all we need
to make it through the day.

The seats recline; the view is great;
we should enjoy the ride.
But lest we're in the driver's seat,
we don't seem satisfied.
We find it hard to fully trust the one
behind the wheel,
misled by doubting passengers
who claim that He's not real.

You see, this bus is custom made
for people who believe.
It drives past any road sign that's
intended to deceive.
It travels on in providence,
a pathway so divine,
fulfilling every destiny according
to God's time.

The final destination's set;
each ticket guaranteed.
Provided we stay in our seats and
let Him take the lead.
How blessed we are to catch this bus;
praise God and come aboard.
Your faith is all it costs to ride
the *Buslines* of the Lord.

Daniel L. Brown

