

# Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

May 2011

## Transforming the Lives of Prostitutes By Trusella Dingle

**T**helma and Jonathan Nambu, founders of Samaritana Transformational Ministries, spoke at the April 11 meeting of the Manila Women's forum.

Thelma started off saying that the Philippines is a Christian nation, but back when she was a student she often wondered whether God was concerned about the poor or not—because many poor Filipino women were working abroad in places such as Japan as entertainers/prostitutes and many worked in bars and as prostitutes in Manila just to feed their families.

While studying at a seminary, Thelma reflected about how she felt about this and wondered how she could be the hands and feet of Jesus to poor people. She organized a group of friends and they started meeting twice a month, helping women in the bars of Ermita in Manila one at a time. Jonathan, who was then her friend at the seminary, encouraged her to do more.



*Thelma and Jonathan Nambu*

In 1991, Thelma and her four friends met regularly to pray, study what the Bible says about reaching out to women outcasts, and share the vision with churches in Quezon City. By 1992, Samaritana was born—an effort to care for and befriend women working in the bars and streets of Quezon City.

Through the years Samaritana has helped hundreds of interested women transition out of prostitution. Every week the outreach team visits women in bars, on the streets, and in their homes. Thelma said, “If they are willing to leave the bars, we tell them we have a center that provides training in housekeeping, sewing and literacy classes.” Thelma further stated that, “many of the women in the bars are not educated.”

Samaritana has many volunteers who help the women raise their sense of dignity, self esteem and sense of who they are as women. One important way of restoring dignity is finding out the women's real first names, remembering their names and using them. Most of the women are given numbers, or use aliases when they are working, and are deeply touched when a Samaritana volunteer calls them by their real name week after week.

Samaritana has a training program that takes three years to complete. It provides counseling and basic education. Some of the women have been able to complete their literacy requirements and are now studying in college. The women are also encouraged to develop their leadership skills. There are four women who have become servant leaders. They have completed three years of training and have decided to go back to the streets and bars to tell their story to others. Healing begins when one is able to tell her story to someone who is willing to listen. Presently 21 women are in training and 5 are wait-listed for the training program.

Jonathan shared his story, of how when Thelma started the work he didn't think he had a role to play. Later  
*(Continued on page 2)*

An oft-repeated cause of prostitution is poverty. But poverty is only one of the reasons. The helplessness of women forces them to sell their bodies. . . . The other causes of prostitution include ill treatment by parents, bad company, family prostitutes, social customs, inability to arrange marriage, lack of sex education, media, prior incest and rape, early marriage and desertion, lack of recreational facilities, ignorance, and acceptance of prostitution. Economic causes include poverty and economic distress. Psychological causes include desire for physical pleasure, greed, and dejection. (From Prostitution in India, Azad India Foundation)

**APRIL MWF Meeting** ■ **When:** Monday, 2011 May 16, 6:30 p.m. ■ **Where:** Corina Raemaekers' house, # 1 Tangile Road, corner Kawayan, North Forbes Park, Makati. ■ **What:** Sophie Punte, Executive Director of the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities Center, will talk about whether the air in Manila is safe to breathe, what the government is doing, and what you can do to protect yourself and your family. ■ **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner.  
■ **June Meeting:** Monday, 2011 June 20.

*(Transforming . . . from page 1)*

he realized he could contribute a great deal. He described the relationship they have developed with a Fair Trade company in the United States to sell hand-crafted cards made by women of Samaritana. He also said that Samaritana is affiliated with the International Christian Alliance on Prostitution (ICAP). ICAP is connected with a variety of groups and projects that do intervention and after-care for prostituted women and their children around the world.

Jonathan talked about the factors that contribute to the problem of prostitution: poverty, broken homes, and sexual abuse of young girls and teenagers. He quoted statistics that 96% of women in prostitution want to leave, but feel trapped. Demand for prostitutes is fueled by tourists: it is estimated that 70% of tourism in the Philippines is connected with the sex trade, often facilitated through the Internet. There is an anti-trafficking law (2003) that views prostitutes as victims and the customers as criminals, a big change from previous laws. However, as with many laws in the Philippines, it is not being fully implemented.

There were many questions for Thelma and Jonathan. Here are a few:

**Q. How do you talk to the women when they are working in the bars?**

A. We go at certain times of the day/evening when they are not very busy and talk about “normal everyday things” to break the ice and get to know them, and develop a relationship of trust.

**Q. How has AIDS/HIV impacted your work?** A. No immediate impact yet. We encourage the women to be tested and we also have a “Mobile Medical” team that comes to Samaritana once/twice a year to do free medical check ups for the women and their children. We also train our women leaders to be peer educators with the other women not only on HIV/AIDS, but other sexually transmitted diseases as well.

**Q. What about contraception?** A. We do not provide contraception, but we provide training seminars on such topics, as well as free pap-smears at medical missions, and we encourage visits to OBGYNs.

**Q. How do you handle their families?** A. It depends on their families’ expectations. We help the women make decisions about future relationships with men. Some of them may have live-in partners, etc. We don’t make decisions for these women, but help them process many of their decisions by listening to them work out their own issues.

**Q. What kind of income do they earn?** A. Most of the women in the Cubao area make P150-300 per customer. Quezon Avenue girls get paid more. The poorer bars we visit don’t pay the women very much; some only get a transportation allowance. But some nights they don’t have any customers and earn nothing.

**Q. Where do you get your funding?** A. Samaritana is a faith-based non-profit organization that relies on donations from individuals and

churches, and occasional foundation grants. About 40% of our funding currently comes from the Anglican Church Relief Fund in Sydney and about 30% comes from donors in the Philippines. We also sell handmade abaca paper products like cards, lamps, boxes and gift bags.

For more information on Samaritana email [info@samaritana.org](mailto:info@samaritana.org), call 938-1617 or 431-5771, or visit [www.samaritana.org](http://www.samaritana.org).

## Manila Women’s Forum

Manila Women’s Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join.

The current officers are: **Amy Alexander**, Message Board. **Julia Holz**, Treasurer, Membership and Programs. **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair. **Junie Navarro**, Message Board. **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P50 for non-members. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at [lumbao@mozcom.com](mailto:lumbao@mozcom.com).

Visit our website – a work in progress [www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum](http://www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum)

MWF Newsletter  
c/o Lisa Lumbao  
26-B Casa Real Townhouse  
Real St., Urdaneta Village  
Makati City 1225