

## Sandy Yoeun and her Family's History at St. Matthew By Kathy Stewart (March 2021)

Sandy Yoeun has been coming to St. Matthew since she was in elementary school. She and her husband, John, have four children: Nadia (22 years old), Nicholas (18 years old), Peyton (12 years old), and Preston (5 years old). When asked what she remembers most about St. Matthew when she was young she described her uncle, Saray Yuorn, who made sure that she, her brother, and her cousin, Mary, went to church with him every Sunday. Saray has been a parishioner at St. Matthew since the early 1980's after he immigrated from Cambodia.

When Sandy started coming to St. Matthew, the church building had not been remodeled and she attended Sunday school in the portables behind the church. She said she "always felt welcomed and safe at St. Matthew". She fondly remembers the Youth Program where she had "lots of fun" participating in games and other activities with the middle school and high school kids. These youth helped package the turkey dinners at Thanksgiving and wrapped presents at Christmas time for families in need.

Sandy's family has a long and important history at St. Matthew. Her uncle, Saray, and his two siblings came to Tacoma, Washington from Cambodia in the late 70's and early 1980's to seek refuge from the Khmer Rouge. Bishop David Cochrane, who retired in 1981 as Bishop of Alaska, and his wife, Mary, moved to Northeast Tacoma and became parishioners at St. Matthew. He helped found Holy Family of Jesus Cambodian Episcopal Church in East Tacoma, the first Anglican Cambodian church, and served from 1984-1988 as its first Vicar while being a member of St. Matthew. (He was also Interim Rector at St. Matthew before Fr. Pete Stanton was called.) Sandy fondly remembers Bishop David as a key person who contributed his valuable time and efforts in helping the Cambodian community resettle in the Tacoma area. Due to Bishop David's work with the Cambodian community, about 10-20 families were "sponsored" by St. Matthew parishioners. At that time, some of the liturgy at St. Matthew was translated into Khmer. Saray is very grateful for the warmth and love his Cambodian family and community received. St. Matthew is Saray's first church family here in the United States and he remains a loyal parishioner to this day.

Sandy currently serves on our new Beloved Community Team at St. Matthew. This team has recently formed to begin to address equity issues and racism. Our understanding of St. Matthew's history with the Cambodian community and with People of Color is critical as we fulfill our mission: "To be a church that passionately embraces and values all people, growing in the love of Christ through word and action."

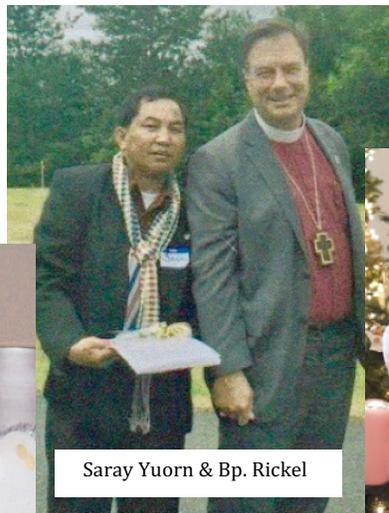
*Author's Note: This article serves as an introduction to telling the story of St. Matthew's history with the Cambodian community. More stories are yet to come.*



Sandy, Peyton, Nadia, John, Preston, Nicholas Yoeun



Peyton Yoeun



Saray Yuorn & Bp. Rickel



Mary Saray & Saray Yuorn