

## Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

### Thailand

[<http://www.wels.net/missions/Thailand>]



Thailand is a country known for many things. Often referred to as "The Land of Smiles," the nation boasts of its well-renowned beaches and lush jungles, its well-preserved cultural traditions and its many ethnic hilltribe groups, its highly revered royal family, and its delightful cuisine!

We have come to know Thailand as a place where we are able to share the love of our Lord and Savior. In a country where more than 95 percent of the population

nominally holds to Buddhism, our WELS missions are working alongside nationals to share the law and gospel message found in the Bible. The work is centered in three regions of northern Thailand and include eleven mission fields. Regularly scheduled mission trips provide people opportunity to experience and contribute to the Thailand mission field.

It is said that the heart of a church body is its seminary. What future leaders of the church learn at the seminary will be implemented and taught to the people they serve. So it is vital that seminary students in Thailand receive the highest standard of biblical instruction. The course of instruction follows a path similar to that offered in the U.S. by the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. This program is designed for students from cross cultural venues. In addition to doctrinal studies, students study Greek and Hebrew to enable them to refer to the biblical texts. Practical courses in sermon preparation and delivery are also emphasized.

**Mission updates** The seminary currently has three full-time instructors. All students live on campus. Those who are serving as part-time vicars travel to their assigned congregations on weekends. From time to time, visiting pastors and professors from the U.S. participate in providing additional short term concentrated course studies. In the summer of 2013, five pastor candidates graduated and were assigned to carry out mission work in the hill tribe villages. The current student body consists of five men. Most of the students come from the hill tribe villages where WELS missions are located.

Missionary Ken Pasch works closely with the Hmong missionary in Chiang Rai, the Lao missionary in northeast Thailand, and the ethnic Thai pastor who leads the work based in Chiang Mai. Two non profit organizations affiliated with WELS are currently operating alongside our WELS ministry outreach to provide humanitarian aid and vocational opportunities to the hill tribe peoples as a bridge to our evangelism outreach endeavors."

**Mission statistics** Baptized nationals: 744 National pastors: 5 plus 3 seminary faculty National evangelists: 4 National vicars: 4 Seminary students: 5 Preaching stations: 5 Congregations: 11

Thailand: Mission History  
[<http://www.wels.net/missions/thailand/history>]



**1986-1988:** Outreach efforts to the Hmong people living in St. Paul, MN, U.S.A. result in new Hmong Christians beginning to share their new faith in Christ with friends and relatives back in Thailand.

**1988:** The Southeast Asian Mission Conference under the WELS Board for World Missions met in Denpasar, Indonesia to analyze mission outreach possibilities in Southeast Asia. Thailand scored very high in the analysis.

**1991:** A team of three Southeast Asian missionaries (Gary Schroeder of Hong Kong, Bruce Ahlers of Indonesia, and Robert Meister of Taiwan) carried out a ten day mini-exploration of Thailand. The subsequent report reflected the need and possibilities for beginning mission outreach in Thailand.

**1993:** While continuing his studies for Hmong ministry in the St. Paul, Minnesota area, Ger Yang visited relatives and friends in Thailand and Laos, including those at Village 9 in northwestern Thailand. Hundreds gathered in the Hmong villages where Ger Yang was teaching the Bible. Robert Meister and John Hartwig accepted calls to a two-year exploration of Thailand. Their recommendation was to begin work in the Chiang Mai area with a focus on reaching the ethnic Thai population.

**1994:** The Southeast Asian Committee under the WELS Board for World Missions approved a short term exploratory visitation by Ger Yang to determine whether his Hmong contacts could be helpful to the exploratory efforts of Meister and Hartwig.

**1995:** Robert Meister accepted the permanent call to serve as a missionary to Thailand. (John Hartwig accepted a call to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary). The plan called for the missionaries to work in the Thai language with young people, businessmen, and HIV sufferers in the Chiang Mai area as the first phase of outreach in Thailand. Work was also begun to coordinate outreach efforts of the Hmong mission trips from the St. Paul, MN area that were actively seeking to reach the Hmong peoples settled in the Tak Province. In December, on his third mission trip to Thailand, Ger Yang died at Village 9.

**1996:** Robert Meister began monthly visits to Village 9 to assess continuing ministry needs and work with the people Ger Yang had reached. English Bible classes were offered in Chiang Mai at a rented facility. Bible classes and Institute-level studies began with two men in the Nong Khai area of northeastern Thailand. The "It Is Finished Bible Institute" was established in Chiang Mai.

**1997:** Two WELS Kingdom workers arrived in Chiang Mai to assist with mission efforts. T.C. began his ministry studies in St. Paul, Minnesota through the Pastoral Studies Institute. He also began family visits to Thailand where he shared the gospel with relatives and friends in the Nong Khai area. Paul Workentine arrived as a full-time missionary to serve with Robert Meister. He returned to the U.S. in 1999.

**2001:** Jud Krohn accepted the call to serve as a missionary with Robert Meister.

**2002:** WELS Hmong missionaries from the U.S. visited new locations in Thailand where Hmong Christians in America had family and friends.

**2004:** The Lor family from Kansas City, Missouri, USA, visited their former congregation near Chiang Kham where their father, Xao Lor, had formerly served as pastor before moving to the U.S. and becoming WELS. The congregation had a building, but no pastor. After a time of detailed doctrinal study, the congregation expressed its desire to establish fellowship with the WELS. Because of the interest and involvement of a number of U.S. based mission minded participants in serving the Thailand field, the WELS Synodical Council established the Joint Mission Council to oversee and administrate the policies and actions for further ministry efforts. The Joint Mission Council determined that a two track system (one under the Board for World Missions and one under the Board for Home Missions) would be in order to avoid difficulties in policy and procedure. A future goal would be to converge the two tracks.

**2005:** T.C. graduated from the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and was assigned by the Joint Mission Council to northeastern Thailand. He was installed and began work under the new two track system serving the Thai Issan people. The new church building at Village 9 was dedicated. Two additional Hmong mission trips to Thailand were conducted to focus on the congregation in Ban Mai Rungthawee which had expressed the desire to join WELS fellowship and to increase mission efforts in Red Dirt Village. Chiang Rai was chosen as a natural center for Hmong ministry in northern Thailand. The Joint Mission Council appointed the U.S. based Hmong/Lao Committee to be the immediate supervisory body for the second track of ministry in Thailand.

**2006:** The Joint Mission Council called D.L. from Kansas City to serve in Chiang Rai as a mission developer for the Hmong congregation near Chiang Kham and to begin training Hmong men for ministry. Eight men enrolled in the Pastoral Studies Institute program at Chiang Rai.

**2008:** Niran Temsagoon graduated from his studies under Missionaries Meister and Krohn at Chiang Mai and was installed into the pastoral ministry where he began work to establish a Thai congregation in the city. The mission in Red Dirt Village constructed its chapel.

**2008-2009:** The economic crisis hit. Funding for world missions was cut and nine world missionaries were defunded and recalled. Missionaries Meister and Krohn were among those affected by the cutbacks and the Bible Institute at Chiang Mai was closed.

**2009:** A daughter congregation of the mission in Ban Mai Rungthawee was started as a house church in Ban Lai Village.

**2010:** The Joint Mission Council created the Thailand/Laos Oversight Committee to oversee and administrate all Thailand mission fields jointly. The two track system was removed and Kenneth Pasch was called to serve as the Field Coordinator for all WELS Thailand mission efforts. Seven men graduated from the Pastoral Studies Institute program at Chiang Rai and were ordained into the ministry and installed into waiting mission congregations.

**2011:** The first national pastoral conference was held in Chiang Rai involving all national pastors, evangelists, and seminary students from both former mission tracks. Discussions began on unification of our mission efforts and the future establishment of a national church body. Evangelist and third year seminary student, Samorn, died in Nong Khai from cardiac arrest. The village church suffered some minor setbacks as superstition and rumor of curses upon Samorn and the church are circulated within the village. Construction began on a church in Ban Mai Rungthawee and a new chapel was dedicated in Ban Lai.

**2012:** The seminary was moved to a new location in Chiang Rai.

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Note: Downloaded from two webpages (as indicated above) on the website of the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod [<http://www.wels.net>] by Herbert Swanson, 2 May 2014. The historical timeline was also available at WELS Thailand [<http://www.welsthailand.com/wels-thailand-history.html>].