

# Reaching Thailand in this Generation: The Thai Church's National Plan

By Dr. Randy Wollf, April 2010

God is moving in an amazing way in Thailand. There are very few countries in the world where Christians have come together in such a concerted, prayerful and strategic way to reach their nation for Christ.

Thailand, a nation of 65 million people, is 94% Buddhist, 5% Muslim and 1% Christian. Yet, even though they are a small minority, many of the Christians have a fiery passion to make disciples of Jesus. In 2009, the growth of the Church in Thailand (4.54%) outstripped the population growth rate (0.63%) by seven times.<sup>1</sup> One association of churches has gone from 20,000 members in the 1970s to 160,000 today. Yet, as one Christian leader said, "At that rate, it will still take us 200 years to totally reach our nation. We want to do it in this generation."



A coalition of three major Protestant groups in Thailand, representing almost 80% of the over 4,100 Protestant churches and other Christian ministries, has formulated a National Plan to reach their country for Christ. The first phase of the plan, Vision 2010, focuses on planting a church in each of Thailand's 926 districts, starting a Christian group (e.g. house church) in all of the 7,415 sub-districts and presenting the gospel in each of Thailand's 80,000 villages. The second phase, Vision 2020, is to plant churches and start Christian groups in all 80,000 villages. In Thailand, when a church exists in a particular region, the people in that area are 100 times more likely to hear the gospel. The National Plan seeks to inspire, mobilize and train people to "Love Thailand" by fostering a disciple-making and church planting movement that will engulf the country with the love of Christ. According to YWAM missionary, Iven Hauptman, "The Thai National Plan helps provide a context for the entire body of Christ to come together, pray, and share information so that we can all go together to the places that have not yet been reached by the gospel."<sup>2</sup>

Why do many believe that Thailand is ripe for a mighty harvest of souls? Veteran missionary to Thailand, Gregg Nicholson, describes four internal factors within the church that God is using to push Thailand toward a spiritual "tipping point."<sup>3</sup> These factors are prayer, unity, research and evangelism. I will discuss two additional factors: strategic focus and supportive accountability.

## Prayer

The current prayer movement in Thailand started after Yongi Cho and Peter Wagner told the pastors in Thailand that they needed to pray. The *Bless Thailand Prayer Network* started in Bangkok in 1996. There are now four



<sup>1</sup> Martin, Dwight. (2010). Presentation at the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand Conference, March 2010.

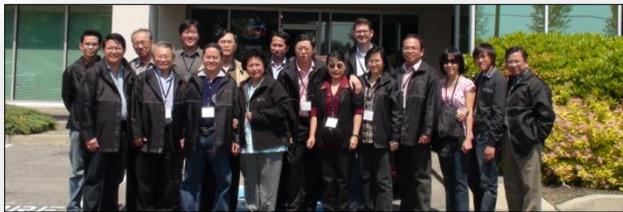
<sup>2</sup> Hauptman, Iven. (2010). *Success in Unity!* YWAM Thailand Publication. [www.ywamthai.org](http://www.ywamthai.org).

<sup>3</sup> Nicholson, Gregg (2009). Personal interview, October 13, 2009.

prayer networks in the city. In the last two years, the number of prayer networks in the entire country has gone from 50 to 70. Many Christians in these networks participate in an annual 40 days of prayer and fasting for Thailand that culminates in a national day of prayer. God is truly moving in response to the fervent prayers of His people.

## Unity

How do you get almost 80% of the Protestant churches and other ministries to agree on a National Plan to reach their country? It is definitely a work of God. However, building unity has not been an easy process in Thailand. Even with the widespread endorsement of the National Plan, the unity is still delicate. The Thai government helped to bring Christian leaders together by requiring representatives from the Church of Christ Thailand (CCT)<sup>4</sup>, the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT)<sup>5</sup> and the Thailand Baptist Convention to meet as the Thailand Protestant Churches Coordinating Committee (TPCCC). Rev. Yuttasak Sirikul, member of the TPCCC and Director of Thailand Campus Crusade for Crusade, recounts



how the TPCCC went from meeting together out of a sense of obligation to coming together because they liked each other and wanted to find better ways to collectively reach their nation. Several key conferences served to bring together these and other Christian leaders in Thailand: Amsterdam (2000), the Southeast Asia Congress on Evangelism

(2002) where 400 Thai leaders met in a room to discuss what must happen to reach Thailand, and Lausanne (2004), which was held in Thailand. However, the 2005 tsunami brought the Thai Church together in an unprecedented way. “We Love Thailand” became a rallying cry as believers from many different denominations joined hands to help the tsunami victims. This unity continues today and is a powerful testimony of Christ’s love.

## Research

Dwight Martin, who grew up in Thailand, maintains a database on the number of believers and churches in the villages, sub-districts, districts, provinces and the country as a whole. This research has inspired many churches and other ministries to strategically direct their efforts towards areas of greatest spiritual need, which is a key goal of the National Plan.



## Evangelism

In 2004, the DeMoss Foundation conducted a media-based evangelistic campaign in Thailand called “Power for Living.” They gave away as many as three million Christian booklets by the same title. This was the first time that the gospel went out to the whole nation. Christians began to think, “Maybe, This

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<sup>4</sup> The CCT is made up of American Presbyterians, American Baptists, Disciples of Christ and others. The CCT has 26 schools and 8 hospitals.

<sup>5</sup> The EFT has 122 mission organizations, 43 church associations and 9 institutions.

are not as opposed to the Gospel as we thought.” The campaign communicated, “Perhaps, Christianity is not a foreign religion.”

Nicholson believes that Thailand’s history of political unrest, uncertainty about the monarchy, economic struggles, AIDS (over 1 million Thais are HIV positive), prostitution (some estimates indicate that there are more prostitutes in Thailand than there are Christians), and a growing disillusionment with Buddhism amongst Thai people have created an unprecedented openness to the gospel. In addition, the 2005 tsunami provided many opportunities for the Thai Church to show Jesus’ love in practical ways. It taught the Church about social transformation. In the aftermath of the tsunami, Christian leaders put aside the National Plan for a time. However, in 2006, Rev. Yuttasak encouraged the leaders to once again make the plan a priority. Three hundred Christian leaders met in Pattaya where they discussed research on unreached areas in Thailand. In 2007, provincial strategic coordinators were chosen to implement the National Plan in Thailand’s 76 provinces.



In May 2009, over 4,000 Christian leaders came together at the Seventh Congress on Evangelism. This was the largest gathering of Thai Christian leaders in the 181-year history of the Thai Protestant Church. They came from nearly every denomination and Christian organization. What would motivate this many Christians to come together for a five-day Congress? They came to the Congress because of their love for God, each other, and the unreached in Thailand. According to Rev. Yuttasak, the Congress was “an amazing picture of the growing unity and evangelistic initiative of the Thai Christian Church.”<sup>6</sup>

Rev. Virat Koydul, Moderator of the Church of Christ Thailand, said in one of the sessions, “This is our time. We are making history here at this Congress.”

One of the initiatives discussed at the Congress was to start 100 Christian community radio stations. Christian radio stations can be an excellent way of reaching the lost, helping believers grow in their faith and connecting people in the community with local churches. At this point in time, the Thai government is open to granting community radio licenses to Christians wanting to broadcast the gospel. This is a tremendous window of opportunity! One Christian station in northern Thailand has played a part in the growth of eight local churches and has helped to start a church across the border in Laos. The Thai Christian Radio Network is developing an online resource base of Christian broadcast materials that both Christian and secular radio stations across the country can use to access quality Christian broadcasts.



Another initiative that came out of the Congress was the *My Hope* campaign, a media outreach of the Thai Church and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The campaign took place in December 2009. In advance of the campaign, over 40,000 Christians received training in basic evangelism. Over 1,700 churches held *My Hope* events where at least 181,000 Thai people heard a clear presentation of the gospel.

<sup>6</sup> Sirikul, Yuttasak (2009). *Thailand Campus Crusade for Christ December 2009 Newsletter*.

Approximately 12,000 people prayed to receive Christ. One church started 30 home groups because of *My Hope*. Another church planned to start a new church to minister to the 100 people who received Christ through the campaign. A church in the north showed *My Hope* to 1,000 inmates in two prisons. All who attended indicated that they wanted to receive Christ and many were baptized. As Rev. Yuttasak reports, “We have clearly seen, when believers are one in Christ and join together in following Christ’s Great Commission in proclaiming the gospel and in faithfully and boldly teaching new believers, our Lord is the One who will bear the fruit. May God alone receive all the highest glory!”

### Strategic Focus

The National Plan represents the strategic focus of the Thai Church – to ultimately reach Thailand for Christ by planting churches in all of Thailand’s 80,000 villages. The TPCCC has four strategic initiatives related to prayer, evangelism and church planting, leadership development, and compassion ministries (social transformation) that seek to advance the National Plan. Each strategic initiative has a coordinator. I have already described how God is working through the prayers, evangelism and church planting efforts of His people in Thailand. Another key component of the National Plan is leadership development. The leadership capacity of current and emerging leaders must increase to facilitate the ongoing expansion and deepening of the emerging spiritual movement. In addition, the TPCCC wants their members to exercise compassion leading to social transformation – to change the very fabric of Thai life. From the perspective of this observer, progress on the leadership development and compassion initiatives lags behind advancements in prayer and evangelism/church planting. If this gap is not addressed, the movement may stall because of leadership limitations or it may fall short of transforming Thai society because of an inadequate focus on social transformation.

### Supportive Accountability



At a national level, the TPCCC meets regularly to strategize about the National Plan. At the provincial level, there are provincial coordinating teams made up of two strategic coordinators, a CCT divisional leader and key organizational leaders. These provincial coordinating teams meet together every three months. The meetings are intended to be inspiring (by encouraging people and getting them excited about their ministries), informative (by sharing what is happening in the provinces), improvement-oriented (by finding out what people need to do their ministry more effectively) and implementation-

focused (by helping participants decide what they should do next to best implement the National Plan in their provinces). At a district level, the provincial coordinators are supposed to meet monthly with local pastors. The coordinators encourage local pastors to adopt the Nehemiah strategy. Just as Nehemiah mobilized some of the workers to rebuild the wall close to their homes, provincial coordinators encourage local pastors to take responsibility for their own province. In keeping with Vision 2010, if a district or sub-district does not have a local church, neighboring pastors are responsible for



filling the “gap in the wall” by helping to plant a church or Christian group in that area (the Nehemiah strategy will grow to include villages during the Vision 2020 phase of the National Plan). Admittedly, some districts are doing well in their implementation of the Nehemiah strategy, while others are struggling. It is encouraging to see how some provinces are beginning to help neighboring provinces. To help with the implementation of the Nehemiah strategy, provincial coordinators assist local pastors and their churches by providing tools, teams, training, technology, talents, and treasure (the six “T’s”). This system of supportive accountability at the national, provincial and district/sub-district levels is another key factor in the growth of the movement.

Obviously, other historical factors have contributed to the six mentioned here. In addition, there may be other current factors of which I am not aware. However, this description gives a snapshot of at least some of the internal factors within the Christian community that God is strengthening and using to build His Church in Thailand.

## Conclusion

This is Thailand’s time. Because of God blessing the Thai Church’s prayerfulness, unity, evangelistic and church planting fervor, strategic focus (based on accurate research), and supportive accountability, it is well positioned to project and present a Jesus that can meet the deep needs of the Thai people. Yet, will the church experience a “tipping point” that will turn a “growth by addition” movement into a rapidly multiplying movement? Will Christians become even more prayerful in the days ahead? Will they be able to keep and increase the momentum for evangelism and church planting? Will the Thai Church be able to develop new and existing leaders so that the movement can grow deeper and expand even more into unreached areas? Will the unity amongst divergent Christian groups continue and even deepen? Will the Thai Church emerge as a major force for social transformation in Thai society?



Even though the Thai Church is moving forward in a remarkable way, they are looking for the help of willing partners to assist them. Whether you live inside or outside Thailand, you can join hands with Thai Christians and help them achieve their National Plan. Let’s rejoice in what God is doing in Thailand. Let’s be encouraged and learn from the example of Thai Christians. However, we also need to pray for Thailand and the Thai Church as it seeks to accomplish a God-sized vision. Consider investing your finances in strategic ministries and in Christian workers who are making an eternal

difference in the country (I would be thrilled to supply you with a list of such ministries and individuals). If you are currently living outside Thailand, God may call you to serve in Thailand. Listen to God’s call and join what is becoming a spiritual movement that has great potential to transform Thailand and beyond.

With God’s help and the help of God’s people around the world, I have every confidence that the Thai Church will reach Thailand for Christ in this generation.



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