

**FORMING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH THAI
CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN CHURCH PLANTING**

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ABSTRACT

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With the rise of indigenous leadership in the Thai churches, it is time for missionaries to consider partnership with Thai leaders as an effective strategy to plant churches in Thailand. However, partnership between missionaries and Thai Christian leaders has not been easy. There have been various conflicts, and examples of success as well as failure. The issue is how missionaries and Thai leaders can work effectively together.

This student used ethnographic interview and participant observation as the two main methods to find out the different types of conflicts and keys to effective partnership between missionaries and Thai Christian leaders. Biblical and missiological studies were also included as foundations for cross-cultural partnership. Throughout the studies, the student discovered six different types of conflicts: cultural, communicational, leadership style, strategic, financial and moral conflicts. The student also suggests four keys to a happy and effective partnership between missionaries and Thai church planters.

Mentor: Larry Persons

149 words

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Gladys Solis Chang, my dear wife who encouraged and supported me throughout this study. She cared for our five children, including the God-planned birth of our triplets during the course of this research. I am truly grateful for her.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION OF CONTEXT AND RESEARCH

Most foreign missionaries in Thailand are involved in some form of partnership with Thais, regardless of whether the missionaries are new in their first term, or more experienced in their second and third terms. Given the history of Christian missions in Thailand (to be surveyed in Chapter 2), partnership with indigenous leaders is not only a likely scenario, but highly strategic in reaching the Kingdom of Thailand for Christ.

Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) and other missionaries have varied experiences and opinions about working with Thai church leaders. The Thais likewise have both positive and negative thoughts regarding partnership with missionaries. The purpose of this research is to uncover the challenges, strengths and weaknesses of partnership between missionaries and Thais in church planting, and seek out solutions to conflicts in order to help missionaries form effective partnerships with Thai Christian leaders. Before proceeding further, I would like to introduce my mission organization and the basic scope of this research.

OMF Thailand

OMF started working in Thailand since the early 1950s. The initial focus was to evangelize and establish churches in the unreached provinces of Central Thailand, South Thailand, and among the minority people groups in North Thailand. In the 1970s, OMF

started churches in Bangkok in order to follow-up migrants moving into the capital city for study and work. In the year 2010, OMF Thailand had approximately one hundred members engaged in church planting in the regions of Central, South, Northeast, North, and Bangkok Thailand. The churches that were planted by OMF or other missions and locals in partnership with OMF have been organized into Association of Churches in Thailand (ACT).

The ACT was founded in 1983, and is currently led by Thai Christian leaders from various local churches. It has national and regional committees for the purposes of promoting greater unity, fellowship, spreading the gospel, church planting, leadership training and protecting the legal rights of local churches. In 2008, there were over 250 ACT churches in Thailand, with a membership of approximately 4,000 ethnic Thai Christians and 10,000 tribal Christians (Visser 2008, 196).

The present vision of OMF Thailand is captured in the following statement: “A movement of indigenous biblical churches reproducing among their own people in Thailand and reaching out in mission to other peoples.” To fulfill this vision, OMF members are occupied in various types of ministry such as pioneer church planting, discipleship, and partnering alongside of Thai churches and Christian leaders. I will seek to explain how effective partnership between missionaries and Thai Christian leaders can take place in order to plant churches and accomplish the vision of OMF Thailand. I trust that OMF Thailand’s goal is in line with the bigger vision of all missionaries seeking to obey the mandate of our Lord Jesus Christ through church planting (Matt. 28:19-20).¹

¹ All biblical references and quotes are taken from the English Standard Version.

Questions of Research

Here are the main questions that I asked while approaching this research: What are some biblical and theological principles for Christian partnership? What are historical and current trends that may affect partnership in Thailand? What are elements in Thai culture that may influence partnership with foreigners? What are main areas of conflict and challenge in cross-cultural partnership? How can missionaries overcome obstacles of partnership in church planting? What are the keys to happy and effective partnership?

Methods of Research

As a missionary sent from overseas, I have served in Thailand for approximately ten years. Some ideas in this paper may stem from personal experiences in contacting Thais and missionaries over the years. However, it is crucial that objectivity be maintained in order for a research to be valid. Therefore, I conducted ethnographic interviews to obtain data and perspectives from others. I conducted ten structured interviews: five with foreign missionaries and five with Thai church leaders. These interviews lasted from thirty to eighty minutes. All the missionaries and Thai leaders interviewed had significant experiences in partnership and church planting. Besides the formal interviews, there were occasions for informal interviews and interactions, when I asked questions related to the thesis. I also used the method of participant observation in this study. I observed three partnership situations over a period of time. I also conducted a written survey among a group of experienced OMF missionaries.

Besides ethnographic research, I spent time in biblical studies and reflections. I compared findings from field research with biblical truths. Missiologists and church planters have also expressed ideas relevant to the thesis. I have studied and incorporated some of their thoughts into the writing. I have included ethnographical, biblical, and missiological disciplines in this research in order to reach a more well-rounded and reality-grounded conclusion.

Limitations of Research

It is true that gathering new data may bring about greater clarity, and perhaps more convincing conclusions. However, a thesis must still be valid and truthful in spite of limitations in the quantity of data.

Missionaries have worked in Thailand for over two hundred years. There are currently hundreds of agencies and wide varieties of ministries. I limited myself to three participant observations and ten interviews. However, as mentioned above, I conducted interviews among the “experts” who served as effective informants in this qualitative research.

Proposition and arrival of thesis statement

I began with a proposition that missionaries working with Thai leaders in church planting will encounter different kinds of conflicts, and there should be several keys to effective partnership. In the process of doing research and analysis, I identified and grouped various types of conflicts. Throughout the interviews, certain thoughts were repeatedly stated by either missionaries or Thai church leaders, thus adding weight to the

ideas. Therefore, the following thesis statement is a summary of the entire research. The thesis states that missionaries working with Thai Christian leaders will encounter various relational conflicts due to cultural, communicational, leadership style, strategic, financial and ethical differences. The keys to effective cross-cultural partnership between missionaries and Thai Christian leaders are an in-depth cultural understanding, genuine Christ-centered community, comprehensive phase-out strategy and clear communication.

CHAPTER 2

PARTNERSHIP AND THE THAI CHURCH

Before going deeper into a discussion on partnership in Thai church planting, one must see the relevancy of this topic, as well as begin with some basic knowledge of Thai church history and cultural background.

Partnership in Missions

Missionary work has entered a new era. The first era belonged to the pioneers such as William Carey, David Livingston, Hudson Taylor, and many great men and women of faith who brought the gospel to countries with no previous Christian presence. Today however, there are followers of Christ in every nation of the world. However among many people groups the church is just in its beginning stages. Many developing countries including Thailand have an existing indigenous church and vibrant local leadership. Mission leaders around the world have sensed an urgency to work alongside of the indigenous church. “The idea is simple: we should never struggle to do something alone, that we can do better if we cooperate with others in partnerships” (Taylor 1994, ix).

Consultations have been held around the world in recent decades to discuss partnership between western churches and the majority churches coming from Asia, Africa and South America. For example, the World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission met in 1992. Ninety-five mission leaders from thirty-five nations discussed

the topic, “Towards Interdependent Partnerships.” This was the definition of partnership suggested at the consultation: “An association of two or more autonomous bodies who have formed a trusting relationship, and fulfill agreed-upon expectations by sharing complementary strengths and resources, to reach their mutual goal” (Taylor 1994, 1).

It is clear that partnership in missions is a relevant issue in many countries today, including Thailand. While some principles of partnership may be applicable in various settings, this research is limited to the Thai church planting context. However, it is important to realize that we are all a part of something bigger. I am thrilled and grateful to be a part of something that God is doing around the world, namely, partnership in missions. God is causing his people from diverse backgrounds to work together for the fulfillment of his salvation purposes, and for the display of his wisdom and glory.

Overview of the Historical Development of Thai Churches

Excluding the earlier arrival of Roman Catholicism, Protestant missionaries have worked in Thailand (formerly known as Siam) for nearly two hundred years. According to *Siamese Gold*—the most comprehensive book written about early Thai church history—the growth of the Thai Protestant Church can be divided roughly into five main eras: beginning years (1816-1851), emerging years (1851-1883), growing or expanding years (1884-1914), consolidating years (1914-1940), and revitalizing years (1946-1980) (Smith 2004). From 1900 to 1940, the Thai church was strengthened by the incoming of new pioneer missions and the revival ministries of John Sung. From the period of 1941 to 1945, the church was tested by the Japanese invasion, political unrests and nationalistic movements. Some missionaries fled, some Thai church members recanted, and some

pastors had to take on secular work in order to support their families. The invasion did not bring significant damage to Thailand's economical development. The members of Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), which made up eighty-eight percent of the Protestant membership in 1940, forged ahead. Spiritual awakenings spread under that preaching of Boon Mark Gitisarn and Puang Akkapin (Smith 2004, 217).

Boon Mark, who was the moderator of CCT, pleaded urgently that overseas missionaries be sent to Thailand. In 1946, a proposal was written for partnership between missions and church, with the underlying principle that "both parties shall give complete cooperation in the matters of money, personnel and work" (Smith 2004, 216). The period of 1940 to 1960 was also marked by the entrance of several non-Presbyterian mission organizations into Thailand, including OMF (Smith 2004, 222).

In 1970, the first Thailand Congress on Evangelism was held and attended by 245 delegates from all denominations. The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT) was founded on that same year (Smith 2004, 223). In 1971, Alex G. Smith initiated the Thailand Church Growth Committee (TCGC). One of the nine main objectives was to develop co-operative evangelism across denominations, aimed at church growth and general awakening through local church evangelism.

Smith concludes his book with proposals and exhortations that the Thai church can be expected to grow beyond the 1980s, provided that missionaries and Thai Christian leaders embrace their responsibilities to reach the nation together. Some key challenges include maintaining the primary goal of discipling the nation, training local leaders, and developing effective strategies to reach Thai Buddhists, such as addressing issues of social solidarity and contextual communication of the gospel (Smith 2004, 271-294).

Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand by Marten Visser is the most extensive work on Thai church growth since *Siamese Gold* (Visser 2008). According to the findings of Visser, Protestant Christianity has been growing steadily in Thailand for the past three decades at the rate of 4.4 percent, and is showing no signs of decline (Visser 2008, 163). Churches have now been planted in every provincial capital, some initiated by mission organizations, some by national leaders or denominations. The past two to three decades have been marked by the rise of indigenous leadership and the spread of the gospel to every province.

Thai Christian leaders within the ACT and various other denominations are maturing and taking ownership of church development and church planting. However, areas of training, coordinating, resourcing, accountability and manpower may still be lacking. From my personal observation, isolation or lack of cooperation among churches has often led to stagnancy or plateauing. Not only individual Christians, but also local churches are meant to relate to one another in order to reach maturity and fullness of Christ. Healthy models of partnership are much needed, and may bring about revitalization and greater movements for God's kingdom. Therefore, the time for partnership in this period of Thai church history is riper than ever.

Cultural Background of Thai Christians

It is unlikely that foreigners can work effectively with Thais Christian leaders without first studying the Thai worldview and culture. Worldview and culture are deeply imbedded in one's upbringing. They generate perspectives and values that may continue even long after a person is converted to Christ. Worldview and culture can be divided

into social (family, education, kinship, and social control), linguistic, religious, economic and technological subsystems (Kraft 1996, 49). All these subsystems will impact how Thai Christians view things like church structure, leadership, money, material possessions, relationships, evangelism, religious ceremonies and many other issues.

It is important to begin with a basic assumption and attitude that there is right and wrong in every culture, and that outsiders need to approach the local worldview with a learning posture, sound cross-cultural principles and dependence on God's word for discernment (Kraft 1996, 77). Foreigners must also keep in mind that there is not only one set of cultural beliefs or values. Thailand is divided into regions and provinces. People in the various regions differ not only in dialects, but beliefs and behaviors that may be shaped by environmental and economic differences. Individual personalities and family units can also influence cultural variations.

Much research has been done on Thai culture in the recent decades, including the work of Thai sociologists and expats seeking to work effectively with Thais in the business world. *Bridging the Gap* is a helpful book that explains Thai attitudes in the workplace, such as being easy-going and having fun, which can frustrate westerners who are more result-oriented (Niratpattanasai 2004). *Working with the Thais* points out that hierarchy is a major cornerstone in Thai relationships. In order to gain acceptance, one must know how to behave according to one's place in the hierarchical structure (Holmes and Tangtongtavy 1995).

Suntaree Komin, a Thai scholar and psychologist who did research mostly among the educated Thais, identified nine Thai value clusters (Komin 1991). The following clusters were listed in order of importance: (1) ego orientation, (2) grateful relationship

orientation, (3) smooth interpersonal relationship orientation, (4) flexibility and adjustment orientation, (5) religio-psychical orientation, (6) education and competence orientation, (7) interdependence orientation, (8) fun and pleasure orientation, and (9) achievement-task orientation. Since the data collection of this research was done from 1978 to 1981, there may be changes in the order of importance, especially among urban dwellers and younger generations. Nantachai Mejudhon included these value clusters in his doctoral thesis, and argued for a “meekness” approach to evangelism and missions in Thailand (Mejudhon 1997). He also pointed out that when missionaries and churches violate Thai cultural values, the results are counter-productive, leaving individual Christians weak and isolated from their own culture and families (Lim and Spaulding 2005, 219).

A careful study of Thai culture and worldview (including the nine value clusters) is pertinent as we consider the subject of partnership between missionaries and Thai Christian leaders. Understanding and working according to Thai cultural orientations will enhance the depth and breadth of partnership. Ignoring basic Thai cultural orientations, such as making someone loose face in public, or refusing to reciprocate acts of kindness, will only lead to isolation from Thai relationships.

Buddhist Worldview

Buddhism is closely linked to Thai worldview and culture. However, it should also be studied and examined distinctively, because there are obvious elements of the religion that should not be transferred into the Christian faith. Meanwhile, there are certain practices and traditions such as art forms, worship posture or the social

significances of the religion that may be adaptable by Thai Christians. Buddhism has had a long and pervasive influence in Thailand. Even though I will not discuss Buddhism extensively in this research, it is important to acknowledge its influences in Thai culture and the Thai Church. I will return to this subject when I address the various conflicts in partnership. Having described the context of partnership, the Thai church, and its historical development and cultural framework, I will now proceed to look at some biblical foundations for partnership.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR FORMING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The following is an effort to build a basic biblical theology of partnership in missions, based on God's revelation throughout the different genres of Scripture. I emphasized the Gospels and Paul's ministry because the New Testament provides more direct teachings on partnership.

Partnership Based on God's Nature

Various theologians and missiologists in recent decades have affirmed that missions is based on the very character of God, who works in loving partnership within the members of the trinity. Without getting into a discussion on the development of the *Missio Dei* term, one should recognize that partnership in missions is not merely a trend, but based on who God is and how he works (Bosch 1991, 390). “The triune God in his very being as Spirit, light and love is an outgoing God, a missionary God, ever sending himself in benevolent relations to mankind...Father, Son and Holy Spirit are cooperating and coordinating to bring man back from his sinful wandering” (Peters 1972, 81). God is loving and relational. He is constantly connecting within himself and reaching out to his creation. Partnership in missions is based on God’s very nature.

God also works through human beings who are his primary instruments in missions. In Genesis 12:13, God called Abram and promised to make Abram a blessing

to all the families of the earth. God worked in partnership with Abram and numerous other people throughout history to accomplish his purposes. Moses, Joshua, the Israelites, David and the prophets were biblical examples of how God partnered with his people. God related to them patiently and faithfully in order that they might be a kingdom of priest among the nations (Exod. 19:6). Many principles and lessons can be drawn from God's dealing with human beings, which revealed God's nature and missionary methods.

Partnership Based on Old Testament Narratives and Wisdom Literature

One of the earliest man-to-man examples of partnership in missions was Moses and Aaron. God gave Moses the mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. God permitted Moses to work in partnership with Aaron, mainly due to Moses' lack of faith and eloquence (Exod. 4:14-16). Moses was the real spiritual leader, while Aaron was the spokesperson. They differed in gifts and abilities, and understood their proper place in God's commissioning. The model of partnership between Moses and Aaron teaches us that working with another person not only builds confidence, it can often keep us from discouragement as seen in the ministry of Moses, who was rejected by Pharaoh repeatedly. Partners can also uphold us when we reach the limitations of our strength. A clear example was when Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses during battle (Exod. 17:11).

While Moses and Aaron were long-term partners in God's mission, Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, was an example of occasional partnership (Exod. 18). Moses and Aaron served as a model of side-by-side partnership, which consisted of two or more

people committed to one another with shared responsibilities. Jethro, however, was a more experienced person coming in from the outside, not to share the work, but to observe and give appropriate advice. The partnership of Jethro resembled a mentor or coach:

“Jethro coached Moses by meeting with him (v. 7), taking time to find out how he was doing personally (v. 7), listening to him about the ups and downs of his journey (v. 8), celebrating with him (v. 9), worshipping with him (v. 12), eating with him (v. 12), watching him at work (v. 14), asking him probing questions (v. 15), challenging unproductive behavior (v. 17), and giving wise counsel (vv. 18-23)” (Ogne and Roehl 2008, 943-949).

Numerous other Old Testament passages, in different genres such as historical narratives and wisdom literature, suggest that partnership among God’s people brought about greater success and victories. Although partnership was never a mandate or a required element to faith and obedience, it was depicted as a good and wise thing to possess. Jonathan could not have defeated the Philistines without his trusted armor bearer who said him, “Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul” (1 Sam. 14:7). David could not have won all his battles without a team of mighty warriors, who were fiercely loyal and ready to lay down their lives (2 Sam. 23:8-39). The following words of wisdom are greatly applicable as we ponder the importance of having companions in the ministry: “Without counsel plans fall, but with many advisers they succeed” (Prov. 15:22). “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment” (Prov. 18:1). “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up” (Eccles.

4:9-10)! “And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccles. 4:12).

Lessons from Daniel

The book of Daniel is insightful and instructive on the subject of cross-cultural partnership. At least three implications can be drawn from this book. First, God is sovereign in working out his plan of salvation, which often includes cross-cultural relationships that bring about his redemptive purposes. From the start of the book, it was the sovereign God who placed his people in exile for a specific reason (Dan. 1:2). The plan of God’s salvation unfolded with each proceeding chapter, as Daniel and his companions were thrown into trying circumstances in order to witness to King Nebuchadnezzar. The events climaxed in chapter four, when the King of Babylon was humbled by God and gave his testimony of conversion to all peoples, nations and languages on earth. Cross-cultural workers today must also humbly recognize and submit to God’s sovereignty. God is the one who leads and orchestrates relationships, which may prove to be extremely difficult at first, but ultimately bring about the fulfillment of God’s redemptive plans.

Second, Daniel entered a cross-cultural partnership from a position of weakness. As exiles in Babylon, Daniel and his companions had no power to demand things. Instead, they constantly faced unreasonable demands and danger. From a position of weakness, they had to serve and earn the trust of local authorities. “God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs” (Dan. 1:9). They had no social or financial advantage over those whom they worked for. The only way to

accomplish things was to be tactful, humble, and most of all prayerful (Dan. 2:14, 18). Cross-cultural partners today can very well benefit from Daniel's example. Often we are unable to build trust and bring glory to God because we fail to begin from a position of weakness and humility.

Third, Daniel wrestled with cultural issues and sought to be faithful to God. Daniel and his companions were confronted by cultural and moral differences at the start of their three-year apprenticeship (Dan. 1:3-7). They learned the language and literature of the Chaldeans, which included knowledge and beliefs that were contrary to God's revelation. They went through name change, which was a sort of identity crisis. The name Daniel meant "God is my judge." Hananiah meant "God has favored." Mishael meant "who is like God." Azariah meant "God saves." Previously all the names of the young men contained the very name and character of God, which signified their identity as God's children. Upon exile, they were given Babylonian names that depicted beliefs in other gods. Daniel was named Belteshazzar or "lord of the straitened treasure." Abednego meant "servant of Nego," a servant of a foreign deity (Carson 1994, 749).

Besides the pressure to conform to Babylonian culture and identity, the young men were given foods that were contrary to the dietary laws given by the God of Israel (Carson 1994, 749). Daniel and his friends struggled with the deep cultural and ethical differences, trying to discern which areas to concede to and which to take a stand. Their decision to refuse the foods assigned was not an easy one (Dan. 1:12-16). Later in the thesis I will argue that missionaries must develop in depth cultural understanding in order to partner effectively with Thai Christian leaders. The example of Daniel exhorts

missionaries to devote themselves to learning, discerning and determining to be faithful to God, who honors those who honor him above all things.

Partnership Based on Jesus and the Gospels

Many missiologists have argued that Jesus is still a viable model for missions today. Even though Christ is unique in his identity, his models of ministry still beckon our reflection. However, we are not merely to copy Christ's methods, but we must study the principles underlying his ministry—principles which determined his methods (Coleman 1972, 66-68). So let us not only examine the missionary methods of the early church, but let us seek to grasp the nature and significance of Jesus Christ's supreme paradigm for missions (Krallmann 2002, 101).

As the Son of Man, he did not attempt to accomplish God's redemptive plan on his own, but trained a group of men to be his partners in the ministry. Men were his method (Coleman 1972). Partnership to Jesus was founded upon a loving community that transformed the lives of those within while they impacted the world without. Eventually Jesus "phased-out" physically from partnership and released his followers to reach the lost in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Faced Conflicts in Partnership

Jesus encountered many kinds of relational conflicts. At the start of his ministry, Jesus introduced teachings that shook his disciples. The Sermon of the Mount astonished them by taking God's standards to a higher level. For example, the repeated phrase "*You have heard that it was said,*" as well as Jesus' challenge to go beyond religious

traditions, such as to love one's enemy, must have stirred up conflicting thoughts in the minds of listeners. The Jews were taught to love only those within the covenant community. Jesus taught that God's love extended to the Gentiles. This teaching incited wrath among the Jews (Luke 4:28). A tremendous amount of ethical conflicts arose when Jesus related to the priests and Pharisees, the supposedly "spiritual leaders" who were more focused on outward appearance than inner obedience (Luke 11:37-54). The clash between heavenly kingdom and earthly cultural values was a constant source of conflict during Jesus' earthly ministry.

Another source of conflict came from expectations toward leadership and power. The disciples wanted to rule with the Messiah. Jesus said: "*You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all*" (Mark 10:42-44). Jesus' teaching on servant leadership contradicted the expectations and style of leadership common in those days. This difference is closely related to a strategic conflict between Jesus and his followers. Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that the Son of Man would soon go to the cross. Jesus said to Peter: "*Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man*" (Matt. 16:23). The cross was God's ultimate strategy for saving people, but Jesus' closest partners could not understand this at first regardless of how many times he explained it to them.

Jesus Developed In-Depth Cultural Understanding

Jesus modeled the basic and essential ingredients to an effective partnership. He developed in-depth cultural understanding before starting ministry. As a Jewish boy, he was well immersed in the Hebrew Scripture and culture (Luke 2:46). Even though it was hinted that Jesus had never undertaken formal studies at the rabbinic academy (John 7:15), he mostly likely learned from a godly home, local synagogues, a number of scribes in Galilean villages and repeated visits to Jerusalem (Krallmann 2002, 35). As a missionary sent from God the Father, Jesus had to learn and grow in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). The anthropologist Jacob A. Loewen wisely stated, “For me, the issue of doing too much too soon has become a very crucial one, especially since I have realized how long Almighty God prepared before delivering his message of redemption through his Son” (Loewen 1975, 358). Not only did God take years and years to prepare his salvation purposes, but Jesus, the Son of Man, took time to learn the language, culture and religious worldviews before working with people.

Jesus Developed a Genuine Community

Jesus also sought to develop a genuine community with his disciples. His method of discipleship and partnership was not based on classroom learning or contracts, but living life together. In Mark 3:14, we read that Jesus spent much time with the disciples before he sent them out to preach. By living and working together, Jesus molded his disciples’ character, and modeled what it meant to have an authentic relationship with God and with one another. Transformation of character can only happen in a context of genuine community. After Jesus’ departure, the Jewish leaders were astonished by the

boldness of the disciples that could only be possible because they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

Central to Jesus' teachings was an emphasis on kingdom values and nurturing a kingdom mentality. Current religious trends and cultural issues had to be examined in the light of kingdom values, and it was done most effectively in a context of relationships (Lingenfelter 2008, 47-50). Christ used daily life occurrences with his disciples to tell stories and point out truths, which was simply contextualized communication. In this age of expediency, there is a danger for missionaries to sacrifice depth for breadth. We may develop many partnerships on a superficial level, but become ineffective in introducing kingdom values because of a lack of transparency and genuine community.

Jesus also demonstrated that genuine relationship engages one's whole life, including one's lifestyle and use of money. It is interesting to note in Luke 5:10, the first usage of the word "partners" was in a business context. James and John were partners with Simon in the fishing business. "In Greek secular usage the word referred to marriage contracts and business relationships—agreements that involved sharing of privileges and responsibilities" (Kraakevik and Dotsey 1992, 6). In Luke 8:1-3, authentic community implied a sharing of finances—a kind of partnership that went beyond merely preaching the good news.

Jesus Had a Comprehensive Phase-Out Strategy

It is important to recognize that Jesus had a comprehensive phase-out strategy. The apostles were chosen to become future leaders. The selection process was not done lightly, but after a time of intense prayer (Luke 6:12-13). Jesus did not call them simply

for the sake of companionship, but called them to participate and extend God's plan of salvation (Matt. 3:19). Luke 9:1-17 gives us a condensed description of how Jesus prepared his disciples. "He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal" (Luke 9:2). This verse tells us that Jesus trained them in real life situations, and their job description was to proclaim and demonstrate God's kingdom. Training, however, was done after they saw the modeling of Jesus, who went about preaching and healing. When they returned to Jesus, they reported back what they had done, which was a kind of accountability, an element we sometimes neglect in partnership. Reporting and accountability can be tremendously helpful to partners who are new to the ministry. When the crowds were hungry and homeless, Jesus said to the disciples, "You give them something to eat." Jesus gave the disciples a chance to face problems, which required thinking on their feet, praying and decision making. This is a glimpse of what would happen to them in the future when Jesus leaves. However, when they were helpless, Jesus stepped in and gave some instructions. The statement: "He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd," is essentially a picture of partnership. Jesus chose to involve the disciples in the work, even though he could have handled the situation on his own. Partnership is "doing ministry together."

The Gospel of Luke continues to emphasize how Jesus trained his disciples for phase-out, by using ten chapters from Luke 9:51 to 19:27 to describe the journey to Jerusalem. Along the way, Jesus repeatedly prepared his disciples for his own suffering, departure, and for their call to suffer and take up their crosses. Jesus' phase-out was perfectly planned and executed.

The Gospel of John Chapters 13 to 17 describes the final stages of Christ's ministry before the crucifixion phase-out. First, he washed their feet to leave with them the unforgettable memory and model of servant leadership. Second, he taught them extensively on the way of fruitfulness, and the main ministry of the Holy Spirit who continues to mediate Jesus' presence among them. Instead of relating to Jesus, they would partner with the Holy Spirit who will bring about God's redemptive purposes through the church. The disciples were well informed about Jesus' departure, even though they could not understand its full implications. Finally, he prayed for them thoroughly, that they would be sanctified, sent out, and that they would display to the world the glory of God through loving relationships with one another (John 17:1-26). John Chapters 20 to 21, Luke 24, Mark 16 and Matthew 28 are all examples of how Jesus prepared his disciples for the ascension phase-out. Jesus grounded their faith through his personal appearance after the resurrection, charged them with final instructions, and assured them of his abiding presence with them through the Holy Spirit.

The phase-out plan was not only carried out to the letter, but also communicated consistently throughout Christ's ministry among his disciples. There was no confusion about whose job it would be to go out and make disciples of all nations, or about the job description and responsibilities entrusted to the disciples. Again Loewen reflects from his personal experience:

“I have been simply amazed at how long I personally have overlooked the significant precedent in the life and ministry of Christ. For thirty long years Christ learned to live and feel with men. This left him only a little more than three years of actual ministry to teach and to prepare those who were to be the witnesses of the redemption he was to effect. The confidence that Christ manifested in these twelve men is downright staggering when compared to any confidence that I have

ever manifested in a fellow-workers, be he missionary or national” (Loewen 1975, 358).

Missionaries need to develop a clear phase-out strategy that will empower their partners to continue with God’s purposes after their departure.

The Gospels and Communication

The four Gospel writers took great pain and effort to research and communicate to their specific audiences. Luke the physician became a historian by writing Luke and Acts, in order to provide an orderly account to Theophilus. John borrowed Greek words and concepts such as *logos*, light and darkness, in order to communicate the fullness of Christ to the minds of people in his day and age. Missionaries must not undermine the importance of cross-cultural or contextualized communication. There ought to be repeated efforts to communicate and discuss issues concerning strategy, values or personal struggles. Failure to communicate may be due to neglect, lack of confidence, pride, or unwillingness to become vulnerable. Ongoing reflection on the ministry and life of Christ will also provide us with wealth of insight in this area:

“If God found it necessary to become ‘flesh’ and to live among men, surely the missionary must be willing to share his humanity and his culture in honest self-exposure. If the missionary has as great a willingness to be known as he has an interest to know, many of the misconceptions about him and his way of life will be eliminated and the stage set for effective bi-directional communication” (Loewen 1975, 399).

Partnership Based on Paul’s Ministry

The Apostle Paul and his ministry to the early churches are instructive for partnership today. Paul’s first partner was Barnabas, who was actually his senior.

Barnabas first spoke on Paul's behalf before the Jerusalem disciples, and then he recruited Paul to work with him in Tarsus (Acts 9:27, 11:25-26). It is clear that Barnabas saw Paul's potential, and Paul reciprocated Barnabas' friendship throughout their successful first missionary journey. It was however at the start of their second missionary journey that sharp conflict arose over the decision to bring John Mark along.

It is difficult to know the exact reasons why Paul disapproved of Mark at this point. Some speculated that it was due to Mark's lack of perseverance. There may be some hints that Mark left the first journey because of disagreement about Paul's view of circumcision, which was an unsettled matter at the time. It is not easy to decide whether Barnabas or Paul did the right thing. Luke was intentionally silent on the details and straightforward in his reporting in order to show that even the best Christian leaders can be fallible and face unsolvable relational conflicts. However, it is important to note that the quarrel did not degenerate into bitterness or personal slander (Longenecker 1971, 60). On Paul's third missionary journey, Paul wrote First Corinthians and spoke of Barnabas as an apostle of the highest rank (1 Cor. 9:6). He also recommended Mark on two occasions to the churches (Col. 4:10, 2 Tim. 4:11). The example of Paul and Barnabas shows that partnerships may be very harmonious at one point, but then it may blow up suddenly due to various reasons. Partners who go their separate ways need not see this as failure. Men must do their part in forgiving and honoring one another, but God is always sovereign

It is important to note that Paul had over one hundred coworkers mentioned in the New Testament. In Romans 16, he greeted the Christians in Rome even before he had been to Rome. It is possible that these Christians worked with Paul at different periods of

Paul's ministry, and went ahead of Paul to Rome in order to start a church (Viola 2009, 269-271). The main point is that Paul valued relationships. He often drew encouragement and support from his partners in the gospel.

Fellow Laborers

Paul used some significant words to describe his coworkers or partners in the gospel. For example, a study of the word *sunergous*, or fellow laborers, reveals Paul's perspective on partnership. These people were his partners for the kingdom of God (Col. 4:11). Paul recommended them, affirmed them and urged the church to submit to them (1 Cor. 16:16). Partners existed for the benefit of the church (2 Cor. 9:23). He described partners as those who labored side by side with him, and asked the church to help them (Phil. 4:3). They were God's coworkers in the gospel, and were able to establish and exhort the believers' faith (1 Thess. 3:2). Paul mentioned Epaphroditus with much affection, not only as a fellow laborer, but also a fellow soldier in the hardships of the gospel. Epaphroditus was an example of how partners ministered to one another's needs (Phil 2:25).

Besides the typical word *sunergous* that Paul used to describe his partners, he also used the word *sundoulos*, meaning fellow slaves. Epaphras (which was most likely a shortened name of Epaphroditus) was a fellow slave of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:7). Tychicus was a fellow slave sent by Paul to encourage the church (Col. 4:7). The different words such as fellow laborers, fellow soldiers and fellow slaves provide a multifaceted picture of partnership between Paul and his companions. Not only were they loyal to one

another, they endured hardships and followed the same Master, to whom they owed their lives.

Meaning of *Koinonia*

Another key word to study on partnership in the New Testament is the word *koinonia*. There are various Greek word forms based on *koinonia*. The word *koinonia* could be translated as fellowship, sharing, communion, or contribution. *Koinonia* refers to something that believers share deeply with one another due to their new lives in Christ. They share in the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13, Phil 2:1), in the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), in the gospel (Phil. 1:5), in the faith (Philem. 1:6), with other believers, and with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). At times, the verb form *koinwnei* can be used in a negative sense, such as sharing in wicked works (2 John 1:11), or participating in another's sin (1 Tim. 5:22). In Galatians 2:9, James, Cephas and John gave Paul and Barnabas the right hands of *koinwnias* (noun form), signifying that there was a clear division of roles and responsibilities among the leaders, but not a break in spiritual unity.

It is very interesting that many believers today have overlooked two important aspects of *koinonia*, namely the communion of suffering and financial resources. In Hebrews 10:33, believers are called to partner with those who suffer. Fellowship includes sharing in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10) and the difficulties of one another (2 Cor. 1:7). When Paul referred to the churches as his partners, he implied that there were certain mutual obligations. For example, if Philemon counted Paul as a partner or *koinwnon*, he was obligated to receive Onesimus (Philem. 1:17). Often the obligations included financial assistance, even though Paul encouraged them to give willingly (Rom.

12:13, 15:26, 2 Cor. 8:4, 9:13). Another clear example is from Acts 2:42-47, when fellowship was seen as a total sharing of lives, including material goods. Does our partnership today include sharing in suffering and material goods? The Pauline model of partnership suggests that our goal should not simply be that new churches become self-reliant, but that there will be mutual dependence (Grindheim 2011, 170-175).

Paul and the Philippians

Paul's letter to the Philippians is filled with rich images of partnership. It is fascinating that the church members in Philippi were diverse and multicultural. Lydia was an Asiatic middle-upper class businesswoman. The jailer and his family were Romans. There must have been others who were Greek or Jewish. Paul rejoiced as he prayed for them because of their partnership in the gospel (Phil. 1:5). Joy abounded because of the common goal of Paul and the Philippians to advance the gospel! Effective partnership and unity can only take place when each one is seeking to imitate Christ, doing nothing out of rivalry, counting others more significant, and looking out for the other's interests (Phil. 2:1-10). Partnership must consist of deep concerns for one another's wellbeing, even to the point of causing pain and anxiety if a partner is ill (Phil. 2:27-30). Partnership between the Philippians and Paul included financial assistance, not for the sake of gaining wealth, but as a service pleasing unto God (Phil. 4:17-18). Finally, partnership must be Christ-centered and Christ-pursuing (Phil. 3:12-17). Partners challenge one another and pray for one another to grow and follow Christ. Spiritual accountability is one of the greatest benefits of having partners!

Paul's Leadership Style

A study of the various leadership styles that Paul used may be helpful in partnership. In some cultural contexts, leaders can be highly directive. Many western missionaries prefer leaders who are non-directive or participative. It is important to see that Paul used different leadership styles when he related to partners and churches. Robert Clinton in his study on leadership noted ten different kinds of leadership styles in Paul's ministry: apostolic, confrontation, father-initiator, obligation-persuasion, father-guardian, maturity appeal, nurse, imitator, consensus and indirect (Clinton 2001, 165-172). There is no one-size-fits-all model from Paul, but leadership style must suit the specific context of our partnership.

In this chapter, I discussed the biblical foundations for partnership from a few Old Testament examples as well as the ministry of Jesus and Paul. I believe it is crucial for missionaries to develop strong biblical theologies alongside of learning from field research. The next two chapters will emphasize findings from real life situations.

CHAPTER 4

CONFLICTS IN PARTNERSHIPS

As mentioned in chapter one, I conducted lengthy interviews with experienced missionaries and Thai church leaders. First I recorded and transcribed the interviews. Then I coded the data to identify the various themes that emerged from the interviews. Based solely on the formal interviews I identified six major areas of conflict: conflicts: conflicts due to culture, communication, leadership style, strategy, finance, and morality. Besides the interviews, I took part in three opportunities for participant observation, administered one survey, and encountered many similar conflicts in my personal experiences. I will now proceed to explore and discuss these areas of conflict along with some support and input from other writings.

Culture Related Conflicts

In spite of good missiological training before workers enter the field, cultural differences can still catch many by surprise. However, it is perhaps better to be surprised than to remain ignorant of the cultural gaps. Missionaries need to be aware that culture is pervasive, covering many aspects of life. A Thai may appear westernized to missionary partners because he or she is using English terms or Evangelical concepts. However, some other aspects of a Thai person's life may be a complete mystery to the missionary who is unaware of the various subcategories of culture.

Throughout the interviews, a number of Thai Christian leaders expressed that most missionaries coworkers understood and accepted the basic or outward aspects of Thai culture. For example, missionaries knew how to greet Thais and eat Thai food, and most were eager to learn the Thai language. However, difficulties in partnership were rooted in the deeper elements of culture. Some Thai leaders felt that missionaries were impatient, unwilling to listen to and accept Thai ideas. These attitudes were reflected when differences arose, often prompting missionaries to make decisions on their own.

Cultural differences between people are vast and interrelated. Anthropologists have classified culture into religious, linguistic, economic, technological and social (family, education, kinship, social control) subsystems (Kraft 1996, 49). What are some of the common cultural conflicts in partnership between missionaries and Thais?

Ministering Cross-Culturally is a useful book for new missionaries facing cultural conflicts (Lingenfelter and Mayers 2003). The authors identify various types of cultural conflicts that are applicable to Thai-foreign missionary partnerships. For example, different views of time are often a cause of stress for missionaries. Most missionaries come from time-oriented societies where punctuality is highly valued. Most Thais, especially from rural backgrounds (which include many Bangkok residents) are more event-oriented. I observed that most experienced missionaries have adjusted to the Thai view of time, but newer missionaries have more difficulties and are prone to frustrations when Thais are late for appointments.

Culture also involves ways of thinking and learning. Many have already written about the differences between Asian or Western ways of thinking and learning. For example, Westerners prefer linear logic, Semitic peoples prefer parallel logic and East

Asians prefer spiral logic (Hwa 1997, 81). Some like to describe it as compartmental thinking versus holistic thinking. Others see it as conceptual thinking versus concrete thinking. The differences in thinking patterns are complex and not easily explained. An example would be when missionaries find it frustrating to talk about a problem in a roundabout way. Rather than dealing with things directly or isolating the problem, a Thai will address a matter from many different angles, or in spirals. It may simply be the preference of Thais to avoid confrontations. However, it may also be that a subject matter needs to be examined holistically by Thais. Thinking holistically also includes thinking relationally—how a problem may affect one's relationships, and how relational dynamics may affect problem solving.

Methods of learning are also different between cultures. The Thais usually learn by rote or memorization. Westerners learn by analysis and reason. Biblically we see clear examples of both kinds of learning. Throughout the research, it seems that some experienced missionaries have come to understand and even utilize the Thai ways of thinking and learning. For some, the cultural differences in ways of thinking and learning have not been a major hindrance to partnership. However, I have observed personally that these differences can cause stress, especially for newer missionaries.

Another area of cultural tension is connected to how one handles crisis. Westerners tend to confront crisis and make preparations for coping with crisis well in advance. When Thais appear relaxed, unwilling to tackle the crisis or make advanced preparations, the differences in attitude can become a source of frustration for missionaries. Western or more developed countries tend to have better infrastructure and resources to manage crisis. Missionaries are often surprised by the Thai attitude of *chuey*

chuey (non-responsiveness), or they misunderstand the Thai reasons for not handling a crisis. One Thai leader expressed that Thais may be slower in thinking of solutions and may take longer to decide on a matter. This, however, is not because Thais are inadequate. Missionaries need to give allowance and time for Thais to tackle problems by using different methods and time frames.

Another Thai leader talked about the uncertainty of how to comfort a missionary who lost a loved one. This Thai leader shared that Thais are often unemotional or unwillingly to talk openly about grief, being afraid to accentuate the pain that a grieving person is feeling. However, many westerners who faced grief may expect lots of sentiments, tears and comforting words. The Thai attitude towards pain is at times a mystery to foreigners. However, this Thai leader voiced the need to move from a Thai cultural way of handling grief to a biblical way, which involves more talking about one's suffering and showing sympathy. In the Buddhist worldview, there is no hope for resurrection. Mourning may seem unnecessary to some, since detachment is a high value, and life is seen as an illusion. This Thai leader's words are insightful, encouraging missionaries and Thais to close the cultural gap by looking to God's word and God's ways of dealing with suffering.

Issues related to culture are not easily discerned and understood. This was apparent when missionaries and Thai leaders faced conflicts in contextualization. It was interesting that several missionaries expressed during interviews that the Thai leaders they worked with, particularly those from Bangkok, were less willing to contextualize. In some cases it was the missionaries who preferred Thai music or more indigenous forms of worship. Some rural Thai leaders however have utilized indigenous music effectively

in worship and evangelism. Contextualization can be an area of conflict, but I will not be able to cover this important topic adequately in this research.

Most missionaries may think that they have mastered Thai culture when they know to take off their shoes when entering the house, or bow their heads when walking between two people who are conversing. However, the issues of culture are much deeper and more subtle. The following categories of conflict can also be closely connected to culture.

Communicational Conflicts

Conflicts between missionaries and Thais often arose because of the lack of communication, or different ways of communicating. During the research, many missionaries indicated that direct versus indirect methods of communication were one of the top causes of stress in working with Thais. There are several reasons for this. Thais highly value peace and harmony. They avoid confrontation as much as possible for the sake of maintaining a harmonious relationship.

Throughout the interviews and participant observations, Thai Christian leaders consistently expressed how they valued peaceful relationships. When conflicts arose, most Thais avoided confrontations. Some Thais in the early days of their ministry saw that they were younger Christians, and perhaps less experienced than the missionaries they worked with. Therefore, they simply kept quiet and went with the flow. Only years later, as they look back or when they talk to other colleagues do they address unresolved issues. Even the Thais who were older and more experienced than missionaries were very careful not to confront or speak directly to missionaries about matters that could lead

to potential debates. Sometimes they felt more comfortable speaking through a mediator. Confrontations however have been possible among the Thai Christians, but done very carefully without causing the other party to loose face, and often in the presence of some *phuu yai*—a more respected elderly person who acts as a mediator.

The lack of sensitivity among missionaries toward the Thai value of harmonious relationship is a source of conflict in partnerships. Missionaries from western cultures are more comfortable with direct communication. At times, posing an overly direct question or discussing issues with *arom* (the use of strong emotions) may cause Thai leaders to withdraw.

Several experienced missionaries confronted Thai Christian leaders on various issues. One expressed his regret in causing the Thai leader to loose face by confronting him publically before other new believers. He felt that the matter could have been handled privately. There are no easy solutions to how cross-cultural partners can confront one another. However, it is important to start by recognizing the Thai cultural value of peaceful relationship, and understand how face-saving works in Thailand.

Face-saving can be another reason why Thais prefer indirect communication. Some westerners see that various kinds of face-saving are deceptive and should be discarded. This is perhaps due to a misconception about the function of “face” in many Asian and collectivist cultures. “Individual cultures navigate life by utilizing a currency of money, but collectivistic cultures navigate life by using a currency of face” (Lederleitner 2010, 334-336). This means that face is a social resource for Thais, just as finance is for westerners. It helps one to relate effectively in a collectivist culture in order to accomplish goals.

Face-saving can be used positively or negatively. One missionary saw that a Thai leader was covering up sin. In this case, face-saving functioned negatively as a protective mask, and prolonged use of that mask often leads to weariness and a distancing of oneself from close fellowship. However, a positive function of face-saving is to maintain or restore honor. Giving a person face is to honor rather than to humiliate. The Apostle Paul's instruction to Timothy, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father" (1 Tim. 5:1a), is an example of confronting while still giving the person face or honor. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1a). The emphasis of this verse is to confront with gentle tactics, with the goal to restore the person to God and to fellowship. Missionaries need to balance the importance of truthful communication with "honoring one another."

Lack of communication is a major cause of conflict between missionaries working with Thais. In several interviews, Thai leaders expressed that missionaries have not been communicating enough with the Thais. Some missionaries appeared very busy, filling up their schedules in advance with lots of programs. Thai leaders in these partnerships were unable to feel at ease in approaching missionaries in order to discuss matters.

In situations where missionaries were working in a team with other missionaries, putting a Thai leader in the minority, missionaries often made decisions with other missionary team members and neglected the Thai. The Thai leader felt confused and looked down upon in these so-called teams. Some of my Thai informants speculated that the missionaries had their own goals and included the Thais only to use them to achieve

those goals. Some thought perhaps the missionaries were trying to cover-up their own weaknesses, or perhaps the missionaries thought that the Thais were not equipped to handle or solve problems alongside them. The Thais in those missionary-led teams were hurt, and felt that they were not on equal standing, or were not considered real team members, even though they were experienced Christian leaders and full members of the church planting team. Big missionary teams must be especially cautious of the tendency to leave the Thais out of discussions and decision-making.

Even in smaller teams, when a single or one missionary couple worked directly under or alongside of the Thais, a Thai leader expressed that decisions were made from the “outside” by the mission organization without actually communicating with the Thais. For example, policies in work, home assignments, vacations, housing, decisions about tithing and ministry strategies were often discussed among missionaries and carried into the Thai churches without including the Thai leaders in the discussion process. Some of the problems may be due to the lack of Thai language abilities in new missionaries placed to work with Thai churches. When missionaries fail to explain things it leaves Thai pastors wondering and guessing. It is important for missionaries with sufficient language abilities to help mediate or communicate to Thai leaders on these matters.

On a wider scale, one well-respected Thai leader voiced that decisions about missionary placement were often made without communicating with Thai regional committees and pastors. The Thai leader expressed that it is not the intention of Thais to control the placement of missionaries, but communication is needed to build trust and avoid misunderstanding. Another experienced Thai leader shared that communication needs to be done on a macro level as well as on a micro level. For example, the mission

organization's goals, values, strategies and phase-out plans should be discussed and talked about with Thai denominational, national and regional committees. Communication encourages unity, high morale, and ensures a smooth hand-over in the future. Therefore, whether missionaries are working in big or small teams, on local or national levels, Thai Christian leaders often deem the lack of communication from missionaries as a weakness in partnership.

The lack of communication is not only a problem sensed by Thai leaders, but by missionaries as well. In a ministry situation where I was a participant observer, the missionaries were frustrated that the Thai leaders seldom initiated team meetings to discuss things with them. The missionaries were the ones asking questions. In numerous ministry situations, Thai leaders did not communicate their problems and difficulties in the ministry. When matters got worse, Thai leaders resigned quietly without giving reasons. In several ministry situations, it was Thais working under other Thais. Leaders submitted their resignations without an attempt to communicate or deal with problems. In one situation, the Thai leader vented his disapproval of the missionary clearly to others, but was unwilling to talk directly to the missionary about the issues.

Communicational conflicts may also be due to different perceptions of certain words and terminologies. A Thai leader commented during an interview that some problems in working with missionaries were due to different understandings about certain Thai words. A simple Thai word such as *kwamchuea*, or faith, may be loaded with different shades of meaning. Words can have different meanings to the speaker and the hearer. Missionaries using the Thai language to communicate need to exert extra effort

to make sure that Thai recipients share the same understanding of certain words or phrases.

Throughout the process of research, I saw clearly that the area of communication was a major cause of conflict in church planting. Both sides have been responsible for the conflicts. Some lacked the effort to communicate, whether they were missionaries or Thais. Some needed more understanding or sensitivity in communicating effectively. I will discuss a few solutions to this problem of communication in the next chapter.

Leadership Style Conflicts

The conflict in leadership style between missionaries and Thai leaders is partly related to culture as well. Hierarchy is one of the cornerstones of Thai social relationships (Holmes and Tangtongtavy 1995, 26). In every social group, Thais need to know their vertical position in relationship to others. Knowing one's place actually enables the Thais to function with greater ease and confidence. This particular aspect of Thai culture is often very difficult for westerners, who come from more egalitarian societies, to accept. Even other Asian cultures such as the Chinese in Thailand place less emphasis on hierarchy (Holmes and Tangtongtavy 1995, 29).

Examples of hierarchy can be seen in Thai politics, when followers are loyal to patrons, often showing strong support for their benefactors in spite of questionable policies. The patron-client relationship is deeply rooted in the Thai social structure. The elements of Thai hierarchical leadership are carried into the churches and Christian ministries.

In the book *Leading Cross-Culturally*, by Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, a particular case study was done on a ministry team that consisted of missionaries and Thais. The Thai member on the team saw that the power of decision-making should be given only to the agreed upon leaders of the team. The Thai viewed the missionaries as naïve when outsiders were invited to join the team too easily. The Thai value of power distance was extremely frustrating to the missionary leader, who ended up carrying out ministry activities without consulting with the rest of the team. The sense of cultural gap in leadership style and decision-making was too wide (Lingenfelter 2008, 91-95).

I personally recall a frustrating occasion when I worked with a Thai pastor and Thai team in a church planting situation. During the team meeting, it seemed that there was consensus and a decision about an event was made together. However afterwards, the Thai leader instantly changed the decision without any consultation with the team. The Thai leader assumed authority without communication, which made me angry. The Thai leadership style is often based on status, which can be frustrating for cultures that value team leadership and consensus decision-making.

A respectable Thai pastor pointed out to missionaries that the status or “weight” of a Christian leader is based on his or her age, experience and education. The status of a Christian leader who finishes a master degree in seminary will go up. However, lay leaders are also respected for their age and leadership abilities proven through time. This is often a cause of conflict among the Thai churches when graduates from Bible colleges and seminaries assume leadership over a lay leader, who may be much older and more experienced. The question that Thais wrestle with is: “Who is higher on the social hierarchy?” Missionaries are often given higher status automatically because of the

foreign identity. This is uncomfortable to some Thai leaders who are unsure at first where the missionary fits in. Particularly if the Thai leader is older, he may feel *krengjai* (not wanting to impose). However, decisions can often be made “behind the back” of the missionary in order to avoid confrontation or embarrassment.

In a lengthy interview with a missionary who worked with an older Thai pastor, the missionary experienced frustration when the older man often made decisions without discussion. Older Thai leaders may equate consultations with confrontations, which may lead to arguments, loss of face and taking matters personally. Making decisions alone seems easier to older Thai leaders. Because of social hierarchy, these situations are common among the Thais themselves. A younger Thai leader who has disagreements with an older Thai leader will most likely remain quiet, or he may look for other sources to confide in, or even withdraw and resign without saying much.

In a survey conducted among a group of experienced missionaries, most missionaries expressed that they enjoyed working with lay leaders more than seminary graduates. Respondents made the following statements: “Lay leaders have few self-expectations and serve out of passion and God’s call on their lives. They sacrifice and are willing to learn. Lay leaders are willing to go the second mile and trust God,” said one missionary. Another wrote, “Lay leaders are a key for the future of the church. [They] tend to be mature, self-supporting, married, and able to understand local culture and appropriate methods of evangelism and pastoral care and will remain in the church long term.” Still another wrote, “Graduates often are so puffed up with their knowledge that they are no longer able to understand the grass roots people. They no longer want to

do the mundane tasks and feel they are excused from them. They look for power positions more often than places that have a real need.”

It appears that graduates from seminaries are more status-conscious, while lay leaders may feel more secure in their positions, since they are often older and have passed the stages of hierarchical advancement. A root of conflict between missionaries and Thai Christian leaders who are seminary graduates lies in the value of hierarchy. The missionary often values group or team leadership, as often seen among missionaries partnering with lay leaders. Seminary graduates often prefer clear vertical lines of authority.

However, it is important to realize that we missionaries may not always be able to choose our Thai co-workers. Thai leaders graduating from Bible colleges and seminaries are increasing in number. Missionaries need to find ways of working effectively with them.

In another interview, a senior missionary told about a particular Thai pastor that he worked with. The Thai pastor was younger than the missionary. The pastor’s style of leadership was very top-down. He made all the decisions, controlled every matter, and did not know how to delegate and give others a chance. The missionary struggled greatly with this type of leadership, which was not empowering and bringing growth or movement. However, the missionary realized that the Thai pastor exercised this style of leadership because that was the only way he knew how to lead due to the example of an older Thai mentor. The Thai pastor simply had not seen models of servant-leadership. Over a period time, the missionary expressed that the Thai pastor improved in his listening skills and became an effective pastor and leader. This is a powerful example of

how leaders can change and grow overtime, especially if they are provided with good models. Missionaries who are struggling with Thai styles of leadership need to be patient, hopeful and proactive in taking positive initiatives. Are we missionaries willing to start by modeling servant-leadership?

It is also important to note that missionaries in Thailand come from various backgrounds. Some Asian missionaries, for example, Korean missionaries, may be even more hierarchical and authoritarian than Thais. A well-respected Thai leader commented in an interview about his observations of Korean missionaries over the years. He noted that the Koreans who were gentle and polite have lasted in partnerships with Thais, while some who were very “strong”—reinforcing high standards of disciplines on Thai partners, acting as bosses—have not done well in the long run. Koreans also expect ongoing loyalty and a continuation of status differences (between a senior and junior pastor) for long periods of time. It is my observation that the Thais and western cultures have less emphasis on this kind of long-term loyalty.

Strategic Conflicts

A number of Thai leaders commented during the interviews that one of the strengths of missionaries is their ability to plan and strategize towards a clear goal. Many Thais do appreciate this aspect about missionaries, and may have learned to plan better in the course of partnership. Missionaries often face conflicts with Thai partners in this area of planning. Some see that Thai leaders lack clear strategies; others clash with the Thai leaders because of differences in strategies and goals.

An experienced missionary commented that he could sympathize with a Thai leader's seemingly lack of long-term planning. He explained that this Thai leader worked in a cultural environment that did not value long-term planning. Many church members were less educated, and tended to respond to problems and crises only as they occurred. In this kind of environment, it is very difficult for Thai church leaders to mobilize people for long-term goals. However, the strength of this kind of mentality is the ability to adapt to change and be flexible, which may be a quality lacking in many missionaries who come from goal-oriented cultures.

What are some major areas of conflict in strategy between missionaries and Thai Christian leaders? Throughout the research, some missionaries shared that the Thai leaders they worked with wanted a proper church building and a paid pastor. While not all missionaries saw this as an issue, some missionaries who came with a vision for house churches, cell churches, or emphasis on lay leadership struggled with these differences. Not all Thai leaders aim for large buildings or paid pastors. Several missionaries in rural Thailand shared with me success stories in training Thai lay leaders, some of whom have been fruitful in multiplying house churches. However, many Bangkok or city pastors do prefer large buildings and paid pastors.

Another major area of conflict has to do with the role of missionaries in the phase-out plan. Many OMF Thailand missionaries have adopted the church planting strategy of model, assist, watch, leave, or MAWL. The plan is to ensure a smooth transition or phase-out, in order for Thai churches and leaders to become self-sufficient. The plan seems reasonable. However, the actual implementation of the plan is dynamic, and may require much discussion and communication with Thai leaders to avoid

misunderstanding. For example, several Thai leaders commented that missionaries are not doing anything to help the church. They say “no” too often when asked to teach or work. Some Thai pastors and leaders are wondering what missionaries do with their time. It is quite clear that during the stages of model and assist in church planting missionaries need to pour in a lot of work. The difficulty comes during the watch stage. Can full-time missionary presence be justified during the watch stage? What should missionaries do if they are only working part-time in a local church plant? A Thai leader commented explicitly during an interview, that missionaries who are just “watching” have set a bad example for many church members. Thai members feel free to watch the Thai pastor work, since missionaries often refuse responsibilities. The watch stage of MAWL needs to be examined, discussed, and understood by Thai leaders. Perhaps watching should be combined with modeling and assisting, or simply done through itinerary visits. It is unhealthy and undesirable to have missionaries sitting in local churches, watching the Thais do the work.

The role of missionaries in the MAWL plan, or in other settings, is a source of conflict in partnership. Some Thai leaders shared in the interviews that they see the role of missionaries as serving side-by-side with the Thais. But what does side-by- side actually mean in reality? Some Thai leaders would like to see missionaries working under the local leadership, and submitting to the Thai church. Some however would like missionaries to be just a member of a leadership team, sharing equal responsibilities with Thai church leaders. A missionary commented that partnership should be like two adults relating to one another. Each one gives the other the freedom to decide whether they would like to participate in something, or simply say: “No thanks, may God bless what

you are doing, but we would like to focus on something else.” Another missionary said: “We should not make a big deal out of differences between Thais and missionaries. We are all one body, serving the Lord and advancing God’s kingdom in Thailand. Making distinctions is unhelpful.” However, another well-respected Thai leader commented that missionaries possess a unique role. He shared: “The days of missionaries walking around passing out tracts are over. Missionaries should be teachers and trainers of Thai leaders.”

Conflicts often arise when missionaries fail to meet Thai expectations of roles and responsibilities. Missionaries, too, have been disappointed by Thais. One missionary shared how he tried to encourage a group of Thai leaders to meet regularly for prayer and encouragement. They agreed to meet when the missionary was present, but when the missionary left, they stopped meeting. Some missionaries expected Thais to initiate meetings or evangelism in church planting, but the Thais were passive. What are some ways forward in resolving the conflict of strategies, goals and different expectations? I will discuss solutions in the following chapter.

Financial Conflicts

The fifth area of conflict between missionaries and Thai leaders is in finance. The use of money is rooted in one’s culture and beliefs. Individualistic cultures see money and material possessions as private or “mine.” More collectivistic cultures see material things as “ours.” The book *Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* by Mary T. Lederleitner provides a thorough treatment on the subject of money and cross-cultural partnerships. She says that Africans define partnership as a long-term relationship, such as a marriage or family. Most expats however focus on

business contracts and partnerships within a specific time period. When missionaries use phrases like “trying out” a partnership, they betray a very different view toward partnership (Lederleitner 2010, 289-290). A non-Western partner had just finished paying off loans from missionaries when he decided to borrow more money. To the surprise of missionaries, he said: “I want to borrow more money from you to show you that I am committed to a long term partnership with you” (Lederleitner 2010, 297-300). How then can missionaries foster local independence when values about money differ so widely? These different ways of viewing money and financial resources have certainly caused tension between missionaries and Thai leaders.

Throughout the research and interviews, I discovered that missionaries who worked with Thai lay leaders had much less, or almost no conflicts in the area of finance. Most Thai lay leaders who had jobs, were financially independent, and were using their evenings and weekends to serve in the church. The financial difficulties cropped up in partnerships between missionaries and Thai seminary graduates who needed salary from churches. In most cases of pioneer church plants, the money came from missionaries.

Several interviews with missionaries showed that Thai pastors often have a stronger focus on expanding church buildings and helping church members find jobs and initiate projects that generated income. Missionaries who worked with these Thai leaders wanted to place more emphasis on evangelism and discipleship. It is possible that some Thai leaders have a more holistic approach to ministry, including financial development and long-term security, while missionaries tend to have a narrower focus. Missionaries want to start churches, but they must recognize the importance of developing a plan to help churches and Thai pastors become self-sufficient. This is a process that requires

patience, planning and cultural understanding. Simply encouraging Thai leaders to “have faith in God” may be unhelpful, since missionaries have been well supported and financially secure in recent decades.

Some Thai leaders questioned why missionaries who work in local churches have not been tithing to the local churches. This matter is complex. Missionaries have discussed this issue at various times and have not agreed among themselves. Some see that giving too much to local churches will only hinder growth and create dependency, while others feel that to tithe or give generously is a good model for Thai Christians. These differences ought to be communicated and discussed further between missionaries and Thai leaders to reach a certain consensus and understanding.

It is interesting to discover that Thai churches and leaders themselves disagree about the matter of financial support. Some Thai leaders favor ongoing support from missionaries. They like to invite missionaries to work with their churches, simply because missionaries bring income and resources. Some Thai churches however see the importance of financial independence. They work hard towards being self-sufficient. These differences have caused confusion, dissatisfaction in partnership, and disagreement among the Thais themselves.

Some Thai leaders voiced concerns about the vast difference in lifestyle between missionaries and Thai pastors these days. Missionaries come with nice vehicles and all the financial backing that they need from a very early stage in ministry, while Thai pastors often struggle for a long period of time and still lack many resources. A Thai leader explained that she does not feel envious about missionaries. She is content with what God has provided for her. However, she is often baffled as to why missionaries

complain so often about hardships and difficulties of life in Thailand. She said: “Sure, there must be the pain of being separated from loved ones and one’s own culture...But missionaries have all the financial resources to deal with difficulties in life: money for medical expenses, children education, nice homes, vehicles, vacations, and computer gadgets.” When I asked her: “What should missionaries do then?” She said: “Look at all that you have compared to Thai pastors, you have resources to make life so convenient...use what you have to serve others!”

Moral and Ethical Conflicts

Throughout the interviews and research, conflicts specifically related to morality and ethics were present. In several situations, Thai leaders were involved in sexual misconduct. In most of these cases, missionaries tried to confront Thai leaders but were unsuccessful. Confrontation of sin often resulted in the Thai leaders becoming angry, defensive, and launching verbal attacks at the missionaries. It is important to note that some missionaries, too, have been involved in sexual immorality. Some other moral issues include financial fraud and work ethics. Some missionaries and Thais were unwilling to do the job or fulfill responsibilities given to them. When there were no improvements after many reminders, dismissal was the only solution.

Moral and ethical conflicts happen frequently in all kinds of partnerships and work situations. They are, however, more confusing and difficult to deal with in cross-cultural partnerships. There are at times different ways of interpreting ethics. For example, what is seen as bribery by one society may be an acceptable form of gift giving in another culture. Ways and methods of dealing with immorality may also differ in

various cultures. For further studies, *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World* by Bernard T. Adeney is useful in helping missionaries evaluate ethical issues (Adeney 1995).

In this chapter, I discussed the six major areas of conflict in partnership between missionaries and Thai Christian leaders. I believe missionaries need to reflect upon these causes of conflict in order to prepare themselves for effective partnership.

CHAPTER 5

PATHWAYS TOWARDS FORMING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Now that I have discussed and examined the six major areas of conflict, I proceed with some resolutions. I propose four keys to working effectively and happily with Thai Christian leaders in church planting. These suggestions are all based on interviews with experienced missionaries and Thai leaders. For the sake of making the ideas memorable, I have categorized the findings into four C's: culture, community, comprehensive phase-out plan and communication.

In Depth Understanding of Culture

The first key to working effectively and happily with Thai leaders in church planting is for missionaries to develop an in depth understanding of Thai culture. A Thai pastor stated: "Since you missionaries are serving in Thailand, you should adopt the Thai culture as a basis for your ministry. For example, if you eat with Thais in a restaurant, only one person will pay the bill. In America you may split the bill." This comment seems simple and reasonable. However, adapting to Thai culture is much more complex than just paying restaurant bills. It involves investigating different aspects of Thai worldview, and how these views affect Thai preferences in church planting. Before missionaries accept Thai ideas, they need to first understand, and then evaluate culture in light of biblical values. As stated in the Lausanne Covenant: "Culture must always be

tested and judged by Scripture. Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he has fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic."

The Influence of Thai Religious Culture

As an example, I would like to discuss how elements in the Thai religious culture may impact Thai preferences in church planting, and how these practices should be examined and evaluated before partners proceed to work together.

The Thai religious life is centered on the Buddhist temple. The temple is a "form," but what are its deeper functions and purposes? The temple serves as a place for people to gather for social events. It strengthens the community and gives people a sense of identification. Its function is to pass on religious and cultural traditions. There is also a strong emphasis on the sacredness of a location. Could some functions of the Buddhist temple be carried into the Christian faith? For example, all sorts of events may be held at the church premise simply for social purposes. Thai believers tend to view the physical sanctuary of the church as sacred rather than the people of God.

Some preferences of Thai pastors may also be linked to the Thai traditions and functions of monkhood. The four purposes of Buddhist monks are to bless followers with merits, preserve the Buddhist religion, teach the Buddhist beliefs, and seek their own deliverance. Could Christian ministers in Thailand unknowingly slip into these expectations of monkhood given by the Thai society? For instance, Christian ministers may become mediators—ones who pray and bless—while lay Christians become mere recipients. Some pastors may be more concerned about preserving the church than

pioneering and spreading the gospel. Like monks, some pastors prefer to teach rather than to train lay leaders and elders. Buddhism emphasizes self-deliverance. Some Thai Christian leaders may have fallen to immorality because of isolation, unwillingness to depend on God's grace and the help of other believers for spiritual victory.

It is true that church buildings and paid pastors were traditions in church history long before Christianity came to Thailand. Early missionaries introduced these practices to Thailand when they first came. However, both missionaries and Thai Christian leaders may have adopted traditions without sufficient evaluation of the functions of church buildings and pastors. In order to resolve these conflicts on both local and national levels, missionaries and Thais all need to dig deeper and evaluate the reasons for their preferences. For example, some missionaries may prefer house churches because they are not gifted to be pastors. Some may have seen the futility of empty historical church buildings in the west. However, are missionaries willing to acknowledge and encourage effective Thai pastors and church members who are gifted in building projects? Understanding the religious culture of Thailand and our own religious culture is important as we approach partnership in church planting.

Student of Culture

An experienced missionary affirmed the importance of being a student of culture in the interview. “Understand as much as you can about the cultural perspective...Especially how they see issues of security, what they can and cannot do...Listen to them, see the deeper patterns of their life, as well as understand yourself: What are your basic values?” He goes on to suggest that when we learn and understand

the culture, we can move into anticipating the problem rather than reacting. “I am more prepared, we will have tension here and there, I can anticipate how they respond, how I can adjust to it...This is a hierarchy society, I am egalitarian. How they see it and how they feel it, that’s really important. Try to get into their shoes to see the world from their perspective.” This kind of attitude is essential to cross-cultural partnerships. We may not necessarily agree or become “Thai,” but we must seek to understand the Thai cultural values and accept them for what they are. When there is mutual respect and acceptance, it becomes possible to introduce new ideas or new perspectives from God’s word.

At the same time, it is important to remember the “do’s and don’ts” in Thai culture: Be careful not to cause a Thai leader to loose face in public. There are more effective ways of confrontation. Do show honor to leadership and those who are above us in the hierarchy.

Ministering Cross-Culturally gives missionaries a realistic and worthy goal to pursue, which is to become one hundred and fifty percent persons (Lingenfelter and Mayers 2003, 121-123). It is impossible for missionaries to loose their home cultural identity, and biblically, missionaries are not instructed to do so. It is also improbable that anyone will fully adapt to another culture one hundred percent. However, it is possible and worthwhile to become seventy-five percent home culture and seventy-five percent host culture as missionaries are motivated by the love of Christ to communicate and incarnate the gospel among the people they serve.

Genuine Community

The second key to working effectively with Thai leaders is to develop genuine relationships or community. The interviews consistently showed that missionaries who worked effectively with Thai Christian leaders focused on relationships. Those who worked in more rural settings were able to spend a lot of time with the Thais. Visitations or appointments with Thai leaders lasted for a few days and nights at a time, so that discussions about life issues and ministry challenges flowed out naturally without a sense of hurry.

For those who worked in urban settings, spending time with Thai partners looked different. It required much sacrifice and self-discipline to reduce busy schedules. Both urban and rural partners gave allowance for relationships to flourish and develop over time. Thai leaders also needed to know that missionaries are committed to a relationship for the long term. In some situations, it was possible for effective partnerships to develop in spite of distance in residency. However, there was a sense of consistency in relationship building and a commitment to see the other person grow and blossom. Flexibility was essential in fostering genuine relationships.

Besides spending quality time together, experienced missionaries shared that going through pain and crisis together have helped strengthen the relationships. Some missionaries supported the Thai leaders when they faced family crises. Some Thai leaders suffered oppositions, persecutions and ministry crises. Missionaries who stood by the Thai leaders over time reaped the harvest of enduring friendship.

What are some other ways to develop a sense of genuine community? I discovered that praying and studying God's word together were foundational in effective

partnerships. Fellowship based on God's word and biblical values honored God, and allowed Christ to lead and strengthen the ministry. Partnerships that focused on money or other matters rather than God's kingdom truths tended to deteriorate and end in dissatisfaction. Missionaries and Thais need to guard and nurture their times of worship, prayer and fellowship based upon God's word.

Kingdom Communities

Leading Cross-Culturally introduces the concept of building kingdom communities (Lingenfelter 2008). Kingdom communities are cross-cultural partnerships based on kingdom values and practices introduced by Jesus. Missionaries and local partners can only endure through crises and become productive when they are willingly to put kingdom values first. Personal and even cultural preferences must become secondary when partners commit themselves to abide by kingdom principles stated in the Bible.

Having a kingdom mentality includes willingness to serve one another, learn from one another, honor one another, accept one another, and all the “one another” commands in the New Testament. Accepting and honoring one another was very high among the Thai responses during the interviews. As stated before, Thais value peaceful relationships, which is also supported by Ephesians 4:2-3. However, kingdom values as demonstrated by Jesus also include such things as servant leadership and confronting religious hypocrisy, which may be harder practices in some Thai cultural contexts. This is why partners must have fellowship around God's word on a regular basis, so that

conflicting values can be examined together, and commitment to kingdom truths be upheld by partners.

Community and Lifestyle

Being in a genuine community also means to share with one another, and this includes material possessions and financial resources. As stated in the previous chapter, conflicts over finance are common in partnerships. Thai leaders at times find it difficult to relate to missionaries who have a different standard of living which includes many physical comforts and securities. Missionaries ought to remember that loving one another must go beyond superficial exchanges. “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

Being a genuine community does not necessarily require us to live on equal salary, or to donate all our possessions to the Thai churches. The principle was implied by Peter when he addressed Ananias and Sapphira, “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?” (Acts 5:4a). The main sin of this couple was not their unwillingness to give, but lying to God. Thai leaders themselves have expressed that they do not expect missionaries who have more financial support to not use the resources given by God. The kingdom principle here is to share our resources freely and generously. Missionaries who have vehicles should always think of Thais who need a ride when they go to places. Missionary homes should be open for Thais to visit. Missionaries should be sensitive and responsive to the unspoken needs of Thai leaders, such as important travels or medical expenses for sick

children. At the same time, those who serve Christ should avoid excesses and overindulgence in material comforts. It is striking in the Gospels that Jesus and the kingdom of God sided with the poor. The lifestyle of missionaries should therefore identify with, and support the needy as much as possible. In the end, God's servants should not compare, but know that each one of us will be judged by God for our stewardship of resources and our demonstration of love (Matt. 25:14-46).

Benefits of Community

What are the benefits of strong relationships? A missionary shared that relationship allows one to have credibility in saying things. Thai leaders tend to listen to ones that they respect and trust. If missionaries want to see changes and improvements in church planting, they must begin by focusing on relationships. Strong spiritual communities are also protective against moral failures. As discussed in the previous chapter, moral conflicts were common in partnerships. Spiritual encouragement, victories, growth and ongoing accountability can all be fostered in a context of community.

Genuine relationships or kingdom communities are also restorative. In many situations, both missionaries and Thais have shared about moral failures, splits or broken relationships. When missionaries and Thais are committed to the relationship in spite of personal hurts, they will experience God's grace in healing and restoring. Keep in mind that we are sinful human beings who naturally offend and hurt one another. Commitment to genuine relationships means to forgive one another and continually accept one another's weaknesses. When missionaries or Thai leaders are willing to persevere

through crises with each other, there will be growth and fruitfulness in the long term. The four stages of team development affirm this: Teams tend to form, storm, norm and perform (Sinclair 2005, 36-38).

Comprehensive Phase-Out Plan

In the previous chapter, I discussed the various conflicts over strategy. The best way to avoid unnecessary conflicts over strategy and goals is to start church planting with a comprehensive phase-out plan. Having a plan does not mean that missionaries become inflexible. Strategies often change, especially when we are new to the work. However, it does mean that we need to have some clear objectives. It is also essential that church planters and Thai partners understand the different phases of church planting, from team forming to evangelizing to gathering to developing to installing, and last of all, to reproducing (Sinclair 2005, 55-59). Having a phase-out plan and actively communicating the church planting stages empowers Thai leaders and ensures smoother transitions.

Benefits of Clear Roles and Strategies

Several experienced Thai church planters have shared along the lines of having a clear plan from the start. Clearly defined roles for all the team members help avoid unnecessary conflicts between missionaries and Thai leaders. For example, missionaries who agreed to focus on evangelism or discipleship should continue in their role without getting entangled in church policies or other matters outside of their agreed-upon role. When missionaries and Thai leaders settle on certain strategies in church planting, plans

should not be changed casually without serious discussions. Having clear and agreed-upon strategies builds trust. I have observed that missionaries and Thai leaders who began church planting together without discussing strategic details and values often clash at a later stage. Differences in strategies may lead to distancing and finally separating.

A Thai church planter shared that missionaries and Thais in partnership should open their hearts to one another. In order to work effectively together, they first need to agree upon the goals. Once the goals are agreed upon, there should be no problem too difficult to solve or work through together. Missionaries should not hide problems or think that they need to handle it on their own with other missionaries. Being open and vulnerable towards one another, accepting one another, and pouring out their lives together towards the goals are the ways to effective partnership.

Having a comprehensive phase-out plan helps missionaries to think through the various stages of church planting in order to phase out effectively, leaving a church or churches in the hands of strong and capable Thai leaders. A few effective missionaries shared with me some realistic timeframes for phase-out. Some thought that ten years should be sufficient to phase-out from most church plants. Some have taken longer to phase-out, some shorter, and some phased-out physically while they took longer to withdraw all financial support. The concept of phase-out pushes missionaries to develop effective strategies in training Thai leaders.

For example, a missionary underscored the importance of having reproducible methods. Evangelism and discipleship methods should be reproducible. Materials and methods should be packaged in such a way that the Thais can easily pass it on without further help from missionaries. Training methods should always go beyond the

classroom setting, as we see in the disciple-making of the Lord Jesus. This missionary also shared about meeting a rural leader in the rice fields for one whole day a month. He and this leader discussed one concept or Scriptural truth throughout the day as they worked together on the fields. The Thai leader was able to take this method and train many other rural church planters. Another urban Thai pastor shared how the various on-the-job trainings in street evangelism were crucial to his growth and development.

Having a comprehensive phase-out plan also affects the attitudes of missionaries. Instead of constantly leading and developing missionaries' abilities, they are actively involving the Thais. Thais should be included in decisions. Decision-making gives Thai leaders a sense of ownership, and is an integral part of training. Not all decisions or activities may be done well or to the liking of missionaries. But by including the Thais, it gives them a chance to learn, make mistakes, and eventually lead effectively. Many effective missionaries reflect an attitude of humility and self-effacement.

Avoiding Financial Conflicts

Financial conflicts in partnerships often stem from a lack of clear policies. I have observed in some situations that money was distributed unequally, causing jealousy or comparisons among the locals. A benefit of having a clear phase-out plan is to have financial support policies worked out and communicated to locals beforehand. For example, if a Thai church planter or church knows and agrees to receive one hundred percent support in the first three years, seventy-five percent in the next three years, and fifty percent in the following three years and so on, it may help avoid confusion and assist Thai leaders and church members to prepare to stand on their own.

A senior missionary suggested that in some situations, it may be helpful to have these policies stated on paper and signed. In some partnerships, it may not be ideal or necessary to provide ongoing financial support. One-time gifts to a church plant or project may be a good gesture of friendship with no strings attached. The important thing is to decide upon a financial strategy for phase-out to avoid misunderstanding.

Communication

The final key to effective and happy partnerships lies in communication. Missionaries must be willing to make the effort to communicate, as well as use the appropriate methods of communication in Thailand. As discussed in the previous chapter, there were several partnerships when communication was lacking. At certain times, either missionaries or Thai leaders were unwilling to open up and discuss issues with the other. Lack of communication may be due to fear, pride or busyness. The result was lack of trust, misunderstanding, distancing and lack of synergy.

It takes real effort to communicate. It is important to start with the basic commitment to be open with one another. I have observed throughout the research, as well as from personal experiences, that many issues—from goals, strategies, finances, culture, leadership styles, theology and ethics—can be discussed within a context of a Christ-centered and kingdom-minded community. Once there is courage, humility and effort to communicate, the methods of communication also need to be honored.

In a Thai cultural context, missionaries should be sensitive to Thai communication methods. Making a Thai friend loose face publically will only destroy the process of communication. Private confrontations are more helpful. Indirect methods

of communication may be used when confronting older partners. At various times, third parties can be brought in to reinforce communication and avoid misunderstandings. Communication through Bible studies and prayer on regular bases will help bring about convergence of values and even strategies between partners.

On certain occasions, missionaries can bring Thai leaders to conferences and meetings that may introduce new perspectives and open up topics for discussion. When there is confusion or doubt about the meaning of some Thai expressions, actions or motives, it is important to inquire before judgment. A more experienced missionary or Thai friend can be called upon to help explain and clear things up. *Cross-Cultural Conflict* provides helpful principles for managing conflicts and communicating cross-culturally (Elmer 1993, 171-182).

Conclusion

It has been an exciting journey for me to reflect upon the biblical foundations of cross-cultural partnerships, find out the various types of conflicts, and discover the keys to effective and happy partnerships between Thais and missionaries. As a church planter and leader of other missionaries, I feel more equipped to tackle this challenging issue, and help others who are still struggling. Partnership is a crucial topic in the current advancement of God's mission to redeem the nations. In no way have missionaries learned all that we need to learn in order to work more effectively alongside of the Thai leaders that God is raising up for this country. I hope that my suggestions will be of help to fellow missionaries in Thailand, and to those laboring to plant Christ's church in cross-cultural contexts. To God be the glory!

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background/warm-up questions:

1. How many years have you been in the ministry?
2. Where are some of the places that you have worked? Organizations or churches?

Opening/grand-tour question:

1. What are some of your joys and pains in working with Thai church leaders? Or what are some of your joys and pains in working with missionaries?

Questions about specific partnership situations:

1. Could you give me a description about the background of the person that you worked with?
2. Could you give me a description of the location or ministry setting?

Questions about specific areas of conflicts:

1. What were some of the conflicts you faced in partnership?
2. What were some of the conflicts you encountered in the area of culture?
 - A. Did you struggle with differences in how you view time?
 - B. Did you struggle with differences in the way you communicate?
 - C. Did you struggle with differences in how you plan or work?
3. Were there differences in leadership style, if yes, what were they?
4. Was the use of finance an area of conflict, if yes, in what way?
5. Were there difference in goals and strategies, if yes, what were they?
6. Were there difficulties in communication? If yes, please give an example.

Questions about keys to effective partnership:

1. In your opinion, what are the keys to a happy and effective partnership with Thai church leaders?
2. In your opinion, what are the keys to a happy and effective partnership with missionaries?

APPENDIX B

SURVEY ON PARTNERSHIP WITH THAI LEADERS

Years of ministry in Thailand _____

Locations served _____

1. Please list four areas of struggles or challenges that you have experienced in working with Thai leaders:

2. From your personal experiences, please rate these areas of conflict from the scale of 1 to 7. 1 being the least difficult, 7 being most difficult (put a number next to it):

- Differences in vision or goals for the ministry 1 to 7:

- Differences in personality/leadership style 1 to 7:

- Financial dependency issues 1 to 7:

- Cultural related conflicts 1 to 7:

3. From your personal experiences, please rate these areas of cultural conflicts from the scale of 1 to 7. 1 being the least problematic, 7 being the most challenging (put a number next to it):

- How time is spent 1 to 7:

- Direct versus indirect ways of communication 1 to 7:

- Relational versus task oriented conflicts 1 to 7:

- Planning versus being spontaneous and easy going 1 to 7:

4. Do you prefer to work with seminary graduates or lay leaders? Could you list some reasons?

5. In your view, what are the secrets to happy and effective partnership with Thai leaders/missionaries?

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VITA

David Dao-Ming Chang was born in Taiwan in 1973, and immigrated to the United States at the age of ten. He grew up with his father, mother and younger sister in Wayne, Pennsylvania, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Music Performance from Temple University.

In 1996, he joined OMF International as an associate and went to Thailand. From 1996 to 1999, he studied the Thai language and served as an evangelist and assistant in church planting. In 1999, he went to Singapore Bible College and Seminary. There he met Gladys Solis, and they were married in December, 2000. In 2002, He graduated from SBC with a Master of Divinity.

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In 2007, during the year of home assignment, David started the Th.M. degree in Fuller Seminary, School of Intercultural studies. From 2007 to 2011, he studied part-time while engaging in full-time ministry in Thailand. Upon completion of the Th.M. degree, David will continue with his responsibilities as a missionary in Thailand.