

Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in Thailand

Although a Mormon missionary resided in Bangkok for some four months in 1854, the work of the Latter-day Saints (LDS) did not begin in Thailand until 1961 when two American couples unofficially formed its first group in Bangkok. That group was given official recognition in 1962 and grew steadily during the influx of American military and civilian personnel during the Vietnam War. In 1966, the LDS baptized its first Thai convert in Thailand, Nangnoi Thitapooa, and in that same year it organized the Thailand District of the Southern Far East Mission. The Bangkok group was also reorganized as the Bangkok Branch, the first branch in Thailand; the branch purchased the first SDA property in Thailand in 1967. In February 1968, the first group of full-time Mormon missionaries arrived in Bangkok, and by the end of the year they had initiated a program for translating and publishing SDA literature. The team soon began to win a number of converts, most important among them was Srilaksana Gottsche, known as "Sister Sri," in 1968. She played a key role in the translation of numerous SDA publications, esp. the Book of Mormon, which was published in Thai in 1976. The SDA opened Thailand's first chapel, the Asoke Chapel, in 1974.

Meanwhile, in June 1972, an SDA missionary was photographed sitting on the neck of a Buddha image in Sukhothai by another missionary. The photograph came into the hands of the Thai press, and a national scandal occurred, which proved to be a disaster for the SDA in Thailand. The two missionaries were jailed and then deported, and all hope for the SDA becoming officially registered with the government was lost.

The SDA organized its Thailand Mission (renamed Thailand Bangkok Mission) in 1973, and during the 1970s, the SDA took various steps to improve its images, and in 1980 it initiated work in the refugee camps in the Northeast, which were then rapidly growing in numbers. Theological work began in the late 1970s. In 1988, Anan Eldridge became the first Thai President of the Thailand mission, and during the late 1980s and the 1990s the SDA began experienced increased growth so that by 1995 it numbered over 6,000 members. In that same year, the SDA formed the Bangkok Stake, the first stake in Thailand, with Thipparat Kitsaward as its first president and Pornchai Juntratip as its first patriarch.