

Thai Church: If You Build It They Will Come?

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One of the more interesting things that I have come across in Thailand is the church planting strategy of a group of zealous Asians (not Thai) who have been working to plant churches in the nation.

They seem to be operating in a very different paradigm than most others, in that they build tremendous buildings and facilities from the ground up, but many times, don't even have more than 50 believers to fill them.

Other times we have heard that same groups have gone out co-opting smaller churches with promises of new buildings. Their only stipulation is that they change their name to the one that will be given to them by the outside group.

Is this New Testament church planting?! I don't think so!

I am not against buildings and facilities. I love buildings, especially those that serve a big vision. I hope to have some myself one day. **But my vision is not to have big buildings for the sake of having something to show back home. There are massive numbers of people still waiting for the Gospel.** We don't need to take things that another man/group worked hard for and co-opt them under our "brand" of Christianity.

Is this the motivations of those who build large buildings and say that they have planted a large "church" in Thailand? Is it the motivation of those who engage in thieving another man's or organization's labor?

I'm not going to judge but merely make some observations.

First, I think we should always remember that **the church is not a building, it is the people of God.**

The people of God can gather 2 or three in the name of Jesus and he promises to be with them. They can gather anywhere, inside or outside, in freedom or under persecution, with beautiful facilities or under a tree. God does not look on the outward appearances like man does.

If we as Christians in a nation like Thailand had to compete with “temple” architecture in order to plant churches, we are never going to be able to reach the other 99% of Thailand who don’t know Jesus as Lord.

We don’t need to compete.

The Scriptures tell us that as believers we are the “temple of the Holy Spirit” and as we meet as the church we are built into a habitation of God, with Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone!

If we give people the benefit of the doubt, maybe these groups are preparing for a “future awakening or revival” here.

But isn’t there a more strategic focus that we can be involved in rather than building super structures in a land where less than 1% are born again?



Another Example of a "Church" in Our City With Less Than 50 Believers!

Consider the underground churches in nations like China, they don't have large buildings but they are among the fastest growing segment of the Church in the world today. **As we look among the places where the population is less than 5% followers of Christ, maybe we should focus on following some other more practical church planting strategies that are much more easily reproducible and are not dependent primarily on a large amount of finances.**

Finances will always be needed, but the question is, "what should be the priority for their use"?

If we do have large buildings, shouldn't they be "hubs" of outward focused ministries that are moving out all over the land to reach the people for Jesus; and not merely for the use of a "faithful few" and maybe an occasional conference or two?

The group that we are joined with in Thailand is an example of this kind of strategic base. There is not one small congregation meeting there, but three thriving ones! There are ministries coming and going all the time and a staff of administrators who are making it possible for other people from a rich variety of backgrounds are able to serve others.

There needs to be many more people who are out with the people who don't know God, who are focused on building "the" Church more than just "a" church or organization. But the problem is building with that paradigm and then having the work co-opted by another group simply because of financial considerations. This makes some even reluctant to start in church planting.

Thankfully, our work is with the Lord and not with the book keeping and statistics of men.

Again, don't get me wrong. **I am not anti-organization or anti-building.** With proper perspective both can be healthy.

In fact, my home church in the States is building right now and we are super excited about it. But they have earned it! They set up and broke down each Saturday and Sunday in rented spaces with volunteer help for years and years with no promise of a building. My Pastor preaches three times on Sunday just so more people can come to hear the Word of God.

They focus on building people day in and day out through preaching, teaching, small groups and even releasing people into ministry (like us!) long before others felt they had the resources to do it.

My point is that they didn't start with the building then try to add the people. **They started with the people and then by necessity, they added the buildings.** I believe God is pleased and involved.

But no matter what, the focus will and should always remain; God first then people. **And when you focus on people, focus on the people who are disconnected from God and not merely trying to re-coral the sheep from other pastures.** Amen?