ASIA PACIFIC THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A CHURCH STRUCTURE
TO FACILITATE SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING IN BANGKOK

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BY

ANTHONY WARE

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This Thesis entitled
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Written by
Anthony **Ware**

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Has been read and approved by the undersigned
On behalf of the Faculty of
Asia Pacific Theological Seminary

Thesis Adviser
Dr. Chin Do **Kham**

Reader

Dr. Nonna J. Lam

Reader

Dr. **Pieter** Conradie

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PREFACE

Over the last couple of years I have been privileged to work with two passionate, successful Thai pastors as they have begun to seriously commence church planting in Bangkok. As these two mother churches have grappled with issues and periodically asked for advice or input, I have become increasingly burdened to help facilitate them in every way possible. Together with these churches, my passionate desire is to see Thailand—particularly Bangkok—significantly impacted with the Gospel. We are dissatisfied with the status quo, desiring to see fruitfulness well beyond anything that has ever been achieved in this country before. I believe God's answer and method is the multiplication of local churches.

At the same time, a range of personal feelings, observations and experiences, together with a number of books and mentors, have raised questions in my mind about church as we currently practice it. Autonomous pioneer churches often struggle to grow. A large proportion of people in full-time ministry lack the level of relationship with peers and leaders that could provide accountability, advice and mentoring. Many members seem bored in our services, often sleeping or talking through sermons. The gifts of a few seem disproportionately used, while the gifts of most members seem comparatively underused. And delegation of responsibility often lacks the corresponding delegation of authority and permission-granting, both within staff teams and with lay leadership. In grappling with these issues and wanting to help strategise for increased church planting, I have become increasingly keen to study a broad range of church models and to examine the use of alternative church structures.

This background gives this thesis topic a very practical flavour. After proposing a church structure that I believe could best facilitate saturation church planting in Bangkok, it is my intention and desire to go out with one or more church planting teams over the next few years, to

assist and guide as they actually pioneer a new work in the style(s) proposed in this thesis. One goal of this thesis is therefore to provide a blueprint for actual church planting.

Finally, perhaps a couple of editorial notes would not be out of place: Firstly, despite many dictionaries now reporting the term 'Pentecostal' as a proper noun such as Anglican, Methodist, etc., I have opted to follow Clark in using the term 'pentecostal' as an adjective with a lower case letter (Clark 1997:3). The pentecostal movement is a grouping of a diverse range of churches and beliefs centred around a common ethos rather than being a unified organisation or group. It is noted that convention followed by most dictionaries uses the terms 'evangelical' and 'charismatic' as adjectives with a lower case letter rather than as proper nouns for precisely this same reason. And secondly, it should be noted that I have opted to follow British Commonwealth rather than American spelling conventions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AG   Assemblies of God (USA)

AOG   Assemblies of God (Australia)

AOGWM   Assemblies of God World Missions (Australia)

CCC   Campus Crusade for Christ

CCT   Church of Christ in Thailand

C&MA   Christian & Missionary Alliance

CPM   Church Planting Movement

DAWN   Discipling a Whole Nation

DFM   Division of Foreign Missions, Assemblies of God (USA)

FFFM   Finish Free Foreign Mission

FGA   Full Gospel Assemblies of Thailand (associated with the PAOC)

FGC   Full Gospel Churches of Thailand (associated with the FFFM)

G-12   Groups of Twelve

HCN   House Church Network

PAOC   Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

SBC   Southern Baptist Convention

SCP   Saturation Church Planting

TAG   Thailand Assemblies of God

GLOSSARY

Apostolic Leadership—A term used by C Peter Wagner, George Hunter, Eddie Gibbs, David Cannistraci and others to speak of visionary pastoral leadership prioritising outreach to the unchurched. Wagner sees that these 'apostles' also have great spiritual authority, and that their role is in church planting and developing other local church leaders through organic, relational networks. Hunter emphasises that the focus in 'apostolic churches' is on mobilising lay ministry.

Celebration Service—A (preferably large) church service with a focus on high quality music, singing and presentation, designed to inspire participants to come before God in an extended time of worship and thus see their lives changed and be motivated and empowered for ministry.

Cell Church—A simple model of church built around mid-week cells and Sunday celebration services. It is designed to release lay people as ministers and accommodate rapid growth by overseeing everything through cells. All cells have a similar purpose, vision and basic format. Weekly celebration services are emphasised equally with cells. The key roles of paid church staff are in lay-leadership development and managing the church.

Cell Group—One of the mid-week small groups of a cell church, comprising 5-15 people meeting in a home, office, school or almost any other location, for worship, prayer, mutual edification, teaching and outreach.

Church Planting Movement—A rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment, the fastest means toward the goal of *saturation church planting.*

Church Structure—The basic pattern or design of a local church, how it functions as a body, and how it is related to other leaders or bodies. It includes the leadership structure, the type, ideal size and frequency of various meetings within the church, and any formal lines of relationship or oversight that extend beyond the local church to a mother church or central body.

House Church—A small congregation meeting in a home (or sometimes an office, etc), taking on the responsibility to fulfil *all* the basic purposes of the church. House churches may be completely autonomous, or part of a wider house church network.

House Church Network—A network of house churches, which may be loose and highly decentralised or very close and somewhat more centralised. Close, centralised house church networks may be centred around either a) a single team of leaders and full-time staff, administrated and led like a single local church, or b) a mother church and her pastoral staff. Regular (quarterly, monthly or weekly) combined meetings for large group worship are considered important for most house church networks.

Large Group / Small Group Church Structure—Any one of a number of church structures in which the whole church (large group) is comprised completely of small groups (5-50 people, depending on the model of church considered). The large group is the sum of the small groups, and all members of the large group are (or should be) members of one of the small groups.

Local Church—Any group of believers in the one locality, who determine to meet together and fulfil the purposes of a local church: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and evangelism.

Meta Church—Model of church devised by Carl George and modelled by *Willow Creek* and *Saddleback Valley Community Churches,* designed to overcome the structural limitations in mega-churches to allow almost unlimited growth in major urban centres. Small groups or cells (up to 15 people) are the core of church life. Different small groups may have different focuses. Groups are given freedom to choose their own agenda and curriculum, with pastoral staff training leaders and administrating the system. Weekly celebration services tend to be more evangelistically focussed.

Meta Group—One of the small groups of a meta church. Often also called and confused with cell church cell groups.

Program Based Church—Term coined by Ralph Neighbour (1990) to describe churches which are based primarily around departments and Sunday programs more than a large group / small group church structure.

Saturation Church Planting—The goal of seeing churches geographically and culturally close enough to every person on earth to afford everyone the opportunity of responding to the gospel; of there being a culturally accessible church within walking distance of every person on earth.

Seeker Sensitive Services—These may either be: a) services that intentionally and completely target non-Christians in every element of the service (sometimes called *seeker focussed* or *seeker driven* services); or b) services designed for believers but adopting methods and styles relevant top the unchurched person and removing as many barriers and traditions as possible.

ABSTRACT

After over 180 years of Protestant witness in Bangkok, it is time to shift our focus from pioneer missions strategy to planning for saturation church planting. To do this, several major obstacles must be overcome—particularly the property barrier, the full-time professional leadership barrier, and the '40-barrier'—and a rapid multiplication of church planting must commence. This research sets out to propose and evaluate a model of church structure for church planting that will overcome or minimise the greatest number of obstacles, and therefore best facilitate the planting of a church planting movement. A framework is established for evaluating church structure models, proposals and practice against sound ecclesiology, biblical models, church growth research, and relevant socio-cultural factors. A wide range of models, proposals, and practices of church structures proposed or used in Bangkok and around the world are then reviewed. Two contextual models of church structure are then proposed for church planting in Bangkok, both comprising a synthesis between cell church and house church network models. The opinion of an expert review panel is that, while there are some obstacles to overcome in each model, both proposed models should both work well in the context of Bangkok—and that these models possibly comprise the greatest hope so far in reaching this great city.

STATEMENT ON SOURCES AND AUTHORSHIP

I hereby certify that this thesis represents my own work and thought, except for things considered general knowledge or where otherwise acknowledged. I have sighted and used in one way or another used all the works mentioned in the bibliography.

CHAPTER 1

THE CHALLENGE—THE OPPORTUNITY

1.1. BACKGROUND: NEEDS AND OBSTACLES

> The world Christian movement has largely stalled in relation to the Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist blocks of unreached people. We cannot reasonably expect to achieve the marvellous goals of the AD2000 Movement without a significant change in strategy. More of the same will not be enough.
>
> — Ralph Winter, *AD2000 GCOWE '97*

Many have categorised Thailand as a difficult or resistant field, and it has even been referred to as the missionaries' graveyard.[1] Compared to the progress on many other fields, progress in Thailand has been slow.[2] After over 180 years of Protestant missionary work in Thailand there are today only 176 congregations for an estimated 12 million people in Bangkok,[3] and 1,200

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1. Wirachai Koware, founder and former National President of the Thailand Assemblies of God, made this comment at the meetings of AGAMA (Assemblies of God Asian Missions Association), in Bangkok 2000. His context was the slow growth of the church in Thailand, despite great missionary endeavour. Respected missions researcher Patrick Johnstone comments that the growth of the church in Thailand has been "disappointing" (Johnstone 1993:531). Veteran missionary to Thailand Alan Johnson suggests, "The Thai people still appear in missions publications as an unreached people group …on the whole the Thai culture still has not responded to the Gospel in large numbers … many of the numbers that we see are for the whole Church in Thailand and reflect a large number of tribal peoples who are believers. This means that among the ethnic Thai the percentages are even smaller" (Johnson 1998:9)

2. Pioneer Protestant missions to the Thai began as early as 1816 (Smith 1981 :xxiii). Bible translation was commenced in 1823, and the first resident missionaries arrived in 1828 (Smith 1981:14). By 2001 the *Thailand Christian Directory* could list just 1779 Protestant churches of all denominations amongst 63 million people nationally (*2001 Thailand Christian Directory*:25-27). It should be noted that well over one third of these churches are located in the 4 northern most provinces (of 76 provinces), and the membership of these churches is almost entirely drawn from animistic tribal groups that make up less than 5% of the total Thai population. (These 4 northern provinces are: Chaing Mai, Chaing Rai, Mae Hong Son, and Dak.) Thus after 173 years of resident Protestant missionary endeavour in Thailand there are barely 1100 Protestant churches of all denomination amongst almost 60 million Thai Buddhists and Muslims!

3. *2001 Thailand Christian Directory.* Some data and information in this church directory is known to be several years out of date, but it does serve as a good general guide.

evangelical and pentecostal congregations for 63 million people across the country.[4] Many good

things have happened over the years in the Thai pentecostal church, nonetheless after 54 years of

pentecostal work in Thailand[5] there are today probably no more than 40 pentecostal and

independent charismatic churches in Bangkok city,[6] and an estimated 46,000 pentecostals and

charismatics in the whole of Thailand.[7] The financial cost of evangelism in Thailand has been

calculated at $US 127,500 per baptism! (This is much higher than for neighbouring countries.)[8]

It has often been pointed out that if we just keep doing what we have always done, the best result

we could possibly hope for is more of what we have always had. But if the goal of the church in

Thailand is to truly reach the nation, then the work has barely begun. New models and new

forms will be needed. When we allow for the fact that society is changing around us, we are in

fact more likely to reap ever-decreasing results if we don't adapt and try new approaches.[9]

Some of the most widely acknowledged obstacles to the growth of the Thai church include:

- An expectation that every church, no matter how new or small, must have its own church

   building—rented or owned—for public meetings (e.g. Hovey 1993:3; Johnson 1998:10;

   Persons 1982:12);

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4. See Patrick Johnstone (1993:531).

5. The first pentecostal missionary to Thailand was Verne O. Raassina of the Finnish Free Foreign Mission, who arrived in 1947 (Smith 1981:251). He commenced work in Central and Northern Thailand.

6. Figure derived from the *2001 Thailand Christian Directory,* and from phone conversations with national office staff or missionaries in each pentecostal movement.

7. See Patrick Johnstone (1993:530).

8. See Barrett (2001:734). Thailand—$127,500—compares unfavourably with cost per baptism in neighbouring countries: Myanmar—$61,100; Cambodia—$4,300; Laos—$10,700; Vietnam—$8,000.

9. Howard Snyder (1975:15-16) observes that, "Every age knows the temptation to forget that the gospel is ever new. We try to contain the gospel in old wineskins—outmoded traditions, obsolete philosophies, creaking institutions, old habits ... It seems almost a law that things initially created to aid the gospel eventually become obstacles."

- An expectation that every church, no matter how new or small, must have a full-time pastor with formal bible school training (e.g. Hovey 1993:3; Johnson 1998:10);

- The inability of a vast majority of pastors to lead their churches to grow beyond 30-40 members—what we will call the "40-barrier" (e.g. Hovey 1993:3; Persons 1982:12);[10]

- Lack of accountability structures and cultural difficulty bringing discipline, compounding moral failures amongst leaders (e.g. Johnstone 1993:531);

- Younger leaders being overly dependent on senior leaders, and tending to have a lack of personal vision and strategy. This is accompanied by excessive control and lack of delegated authority and autonomy, although it is unclear which is the cause and which is the effect (e.g. Hovey 1993:3; Taylor 1997);[11]

- Uncritical use of Western forms and structures, with insufficient contextualisation to the local culture and stage of development of the church (e.g. Davis 1998; Smith 1981:275);

- Cultural factors including social solidarity, and the Buddhist connotations of Thai words used to explain the gospel (e.g. Smith 1981:274-276);

It will be noted that all but the last of these obstacles are at least in part issues relating to church structure. If our aim is to reach as much of this nation with the gospel as possible within our generation, then it is imperative we find ways to stimulate a new level of rapid church planting. To do that we desperately need a model of church structure for church planting which will largely

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10. C. Peter Wagner (1990:131) notes that group dynamic theory suggests forty people is the ideal group size for members to maintain face-to-face relationships with everyone else. Taylor (1997:1) notes that the majority of churches in Thailand have 30 to 50 members. In personal conversation on 28 April, 2001, veteran Assemblies of God missionary to Thailand, Alan Johnson, observed that most Thai churches seem to grow to 10-20 members when lay-led (in the absence of a full-time formally-trained pastor), and that most would increase to 30-40 members where a full-time formally-trained pastor was added. DAWN strategist Wolfgang Simson concurs that an important sociological barrier is faced as a group grows beyond 20 people, and that a very large number of churches worldwide struggle to get passed 25-45 members (Simson 2001:26-29). Toyotome reported in 1985 that the *average* Sunday attendance in churches in Japan was 19 people (Toyotome 1985).

11. Missionary Stephen Taylor recently completed a master's thesis on this very topic, entitled *Patron-Client Relationships and the Challenge for the Thai Church* (Taylor 1997).

overcome these obstacles, and facilitate church planting which is as close to endlessly reproducible as possible.

In his book, *The Decision Makers,* Lyle Schaller notes that in making decisions we get to exchange a set of problems that we don't want with another set of problems we would prefer to deal with.[12] No new church structure would be without its own set of difficulties. The challenge is to minimise the number and scale of the new obstacles. Robert Fitts notes that, "The growth of the church in any given area will be in direct proportion to the number of obstacles that we allow to hinder the planting of new churches" (Fitts 1994:1).

Models and structures in themselves cannot produce increased church planting and church growth. Joel Comiskey (1999a:44) warns, "Don't think that a new model will cure your church." But structure *is* very important. White suggests that, "few areas of church life are as important to rethink as structure" (1997:105).[13]

The aim of this thesis is to simplify church planting by removing as many barriers as possible. The goal is to present a church structure for church planting that comes as close as possible to allowing endlessly reproducible church planting in Bangkok. This research focuses primarily on structure in church planting—not because spiritual dynamics or methodology are any less important, but because serious study of structures appropriate for urban Bangkok is lacking. Schwarz (1996:14) points out that it is equally a mistake to underestimate as to overestimate the significance of structures and methods.

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12. Quoted in Hovey (1993:3).

1.2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this paper the term *church structure* will refer to the basic pattern or design of a local church, how it functions as a body, and how it is related to other leaders or bodies. It includes the leadership structure, the type, ideal size and frequency of various meetings within the church, and any formal lines of relationship or oversight that extend beyond the local church to a mother church or central body.

Saturation Church Planting is a recent missiological concept designed to move missions strategy beyond merely planting a self-supporting, self-governing and self-replicating church in each people group on earth. The goal of *saturation church planting* is to see churches geographically and culturally close enough to every person on earth to afford everyone the opportunity of responding to the gospel. The need is to find "an evangelistic method that could efficiently and inexpensively lead to the multiplication of churches" (Montgomery and McGavran 1980:59), until there is a culturally accessible church within walking distance of every person on earth (66-67).[14]

To achieve the dream of *saturation church planting* within a single generation would require a model of church planting that was endlessly reproducible, no matter how rapid the church growth; endlessly reproducible in terms of finance, buildings and leadership. This is an ideal, which in practice may not be fully attainable. The challenge is to come as close as possible to the

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13. Snyder adds that, "All church structures should in fact help the Church be the Church and carry out its mission. They should be structures which promote community, build disciples and sustain witness" (Snyder 1977:141)

14. In numerical terms, Montgomery suggests that the goal of saturation church planting is to see a church for every 400-600 people in rural areas, and a church for every 1,000-1,500 people in cities, with churches distributed among all cultural, ethno-linguistic and societal groupings (Montgomery 1989:77).

ideal. The form of church most often discussed and planted under this banner of saturation church planting is some form of house-based church.

One presupposition inherent in the concept of *saturation church planting* should be made explicit, namely that multiplying the number of quickly **self-reproducing** churches (even small churches) is more strategic than increasing the number of large churches, or further growth (even exponential growth) of already large churches.

Definitions of *church* that have elements not required by Scripture may unwittingly blind us to some possible structures. For example, stipulating a minimum number of members, a minimum level of formal training for the leader, a need for a pastor to be full-time, or the type of building, may exclude options such as a house church **model.**[15] Likewise, preconceptions that churches must be autonomous and self-governing may exclude options such as the satellite church model.

To minimise such preconceptions, in this research a *(local) church* will simply be defined as any group of believers in the one locality, who determine to meet together and fulfil the purposes of a local **church.**[16] These purposes could best be summarised as: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and evangelism (Warren **1995:105-6).**

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15. Johnson (1998:10) makes the statement that, "One of the problems that we face in expanding our church base in Thailand is with a narrow definition of church that has elements in it not required by Scripture. In my experience when we say 'church' in Thailand there are two things in particular that we are thinking about. The first is some kind of building, whether rented or owned, which acts as the regular meeting place. The second is the presence of a full-time paid pastor who has some kind of formal ministerial training. Neither of these areas are required by Scripture."

16. Henry Thiessen, in *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1979:312), defines a local church as, "the group of professed believers in any one locality." Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology* (Berkhof 1941:556) similarly defines a local church as, "a circle of believers in some definite locality." Fitts (1994:10) quotes Tertullian (without reference) as defining a local church while commenting on Matt 18:20, saying, "Where there are two or three believers, even laymen, there is a church." DeNeui (DeNeui 1991:13) notes that the definition of local church used by the Evangelical Covenant Churches in Northeast Thailand is, "any village where we have believers."

1.3. SCOPE, APPROACH AND OBJECTIVES

Scope of the Research

The topic of this thesis is: *Analysis And Development Of A Church Structure For Saturation Church Planting In Bangkok.* This title is significant in defining the scope of this research.

Research in this thesis will be restricted to developing a church structure to be used and applied in church planting. While it is highly desirable that existing churches grow, and probable that improvements to the structure of established churches could facilitate greater growth, this is beyond the scope of this paper. This research will seek the most effective church structure to use in church planting in Bangkok; the one that could bring us closest to the goal of achieving saturation church planting. It is possible that once planted using a particular structure, churches may potentially adopt or evolve a different structure later in their life cycle.

This research will focus on developing a *church structure* that allows rapid church planting, as opposed to a methodology or evangelistic strategy for rapid church planting. Methodology will only come into the scope of this research where it is directly implied by an aspect of church structure or it itself implies something about church structure. Methods *are* important,[17] but many aspects of good church planting methodology in general, and contextualised methods for Bangkok in particular, lie beyond the scope of this paper.

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17. In relation to the importance of methods for Thailand, Ford argues that, "Where peoples are very responsive or very resistant, methods are not so important for whatever one does will in the former produce results and in the latter produce none. It is where people are indifferent that the right method is so important. For depending on the method employed the people may reject of turn to Christ. Probably most would agree that the people of Thailand are basically an indifferent people. Many have heard and are ready to listen, therefore, the right methods are of the utmost importance in Thailand" (Ford 1982:20-21).

This research will focus on finding a church planting structure for Bangkok. Insofar as the model of church planting suggested by this research is contextually determined, this proposal will be contextual for church planting within the urban area of Bangkok city. It may turn out that the model is more widely applicable across the rest of Thailand or in other countries, but contextualisation issues would need to be considered.[18]

The aim of this research is that, in conjunction with the author, at least one Thai pastor will adopt the proposed structure(s) for church planting in the near future. The review of the proposal will therefore be conducted almost entirely by pastors and missionaries within or working with the Thailand Assemblies of God. This is done deliberately, because the author's sphere of influence is greatest within this circle, and one aim of the review is publicity for the proposed model(s).

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18. It is most likely that the proposed model *will* actually be widely applicable across Thailand, urban Asia, or even rural Asia—and possibly even worldwide. This is because much of what is being proposed here as a "mode!" for church planting is not a specific methodology, but principles. Several other authors make this sort of claim about their similar models, for example:

- Wagner (1990:11) claims that planting new churches is the single most effective evangelistic method anywhere in the world, on both new and old ground.

- In the foreword to Del Birkey's book, *The House Church,* Dean Arnold of Wheaton College claims the house church structure is just as applicable in any culture because: 1) the institution of the family is a universal phenomenon, hence a house is a culturally appropriate location in any culture, and 2) when a church meets in a home in any culture, the environment communicates a message non-verbally about intimate personal relationships, care, support and nurturing (Birkey 1988:13-14).

- Snyder claims that, "The basic structures of charismatic leadership [leadership based on gifting] and small-group-large-group gatherings are always cross-culturally viable" (Snyder 1975:165)

- Beckham makes the claim that, "the cell works everywhere—it will multiply in every type of culture" (Beckham 1995:74). I would suggest that cells in different cultures may need to be different, although many of the *principles* defining cells and which church structure works better may be transferable between cultures.

- Cho (1981:73) also claims his cell system will work anywhere in the world, and is transferable into any culture.

To the extent that methods and culturally specific data are included in this proposal, this model would need to be re-evaluated before application to any other context. Regardless of how widely the proposed model may or may not be applicable, this paper is written within the specific context of the church in Bangkok.

Approach to the Topic

This topic falls clearly within the realm of applied research. This thesis will approach the topic from a qualitative rather than quantitative perspective, using an historical-comparative method to develop a proposed model of church planting for Bangkok. An expert review panel of experienced pastors and missionaries will then be asked to evaluate the proposed model as a 'virtual' field-test. My methodology can be summarised by the following diagram:

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┌──────────┐
│literature│
│ survey   │─────┐      ┌──────────┐    ┌──────────┐    ┌──────────┐    ┌──────────┐
├──────────┤     ├─────▶│analysis of│──▶│ initial  │──▶│evaluation│──▶│  final   │
│local data│─────┘      │ existing  │    │ proposal │    │by experts│    │ proposal │
│collection│            │  models   │    └──────────┘    └──────────┘    └──────────┘
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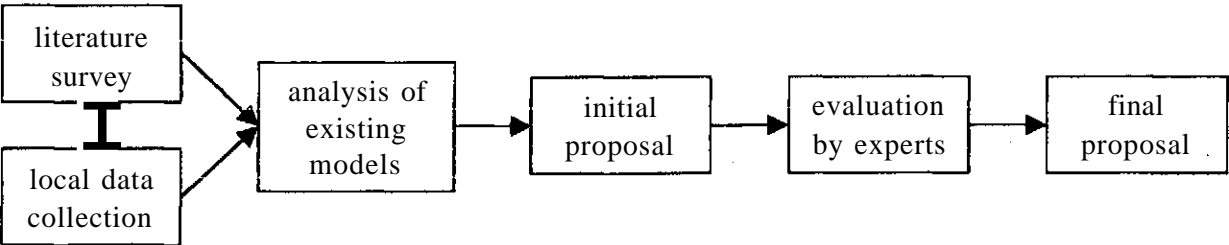
Significance and Objectives

It has already been noted that Thailand is usually considered resistant and unreached. However there are many signs the tide is turning. The national church is maturing with very capable leaders being raised up.[19] Churches are growing and being planted faster than ever before.[20]

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19. The national pastors proposed for the expert review panel at the end of this thesis are a good example of capable and gifted pastors within pentecostal circles.

20. In his history of the Thai church, Alex Smith (1981:279) observed twenty years ago that there was "a great increase in evangelistic activities among all denominations". The rate of responsiveness and church planting appears to have increased further since then. For a more recent example on increased church planting, consider these figures for the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG):

1990	51 registered churches	1996	53 registered churches
1992	51 registered churches	1998	56 registered churches
1994	53 registered churches	2000	60 registered churches

At the April 2001 TAG National Conference it was announced that 17 new churches had been pioneered in the prior 12 months! Further, a TAG "Church Planter's Boot Camp" in April 2001 attracted 51 people for a 4-day seminar on church planting.

Veteran AG missionary Alan Johnson (1998:9) suggests that, "the Thai Church is in that transition area between being unreached and reached ... it may be most helpful to consider the Thai a reached group." His point is that the church now needs to move its focus from that of pioneer missions, to thinking about how to reach the goal of saturation church planting. As the climate and focus change, new studies and models are particularly appropriate.

This study is significant in several other ways too. There are few proposals (none detailed) as to how the church in urban Bangkok should overcome either the property barrier, the leadership barrier, or the "40-barrier."[21] This study is also significant in its attempt to produce a synthesis between the widely implemented models of meta-church, cell church and house church. It would appear that each of these models have strengths, but in their current form none in themselves fully overcome the obstacles to church planting and church growth in Bangkok.[22]

C. Peter Wagner has claimed that, "The single most effective evangelistic method under heaven is planting new churches" (Wagner 1990:11). If this research were able to present a more effective church structure for church planting, then this thesis would be able to offer some very important suggestions for the growth of the kingdom of God in Thailand.

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21. The only detailed study is that of Ford almost 20 years ago, which targeted only slum-dwellers (Ford 1982). Other far less detailed proposals have been presented by Persons (1982), Johnson (1998) and Hovey (1993). No serious attempts have ever been made to implement these proposals. Studies of ways to overcome these in rural Thailand include DeNeui (1991), and Smith (1977). Each of these proposals will be considered later in this paper.

22. The meta church and cell church models do not overcome the building barrier, and may or may not sufficiently overcome the leadership obstacle. The house church model does both these, but has insufficient leadership of a style required to lead the Thai church into growth. We will return to this in detail later in this paper—but for now see Zehner (1987).

The objectives of this research are to:

i) Identify significant implications from ecclesiology that are prescriptive on church structure;

ii) Review major church growth research and trends in the contemporary church that relate to church structure;

iii) Study models of church structure in both Old and New Testaments;

iv) Compare and contrast various contemporary models of large group / small group church structure;

v) Survey church structures previously proposed for saturation church planting, with a particular emphasis on models previously proposed for Bangkok city;

vi) Examine research into group dynamics in Thai/Bangkok society, and other **socio-cultural factors** which would have bearing on critiquing the relevance of church structures;

vii) Review the church structures currently used for planting churches in Bangkok;

viii) Propose and evaluate through expert review a model of church structure for church planting that overcomes or reduces the greatest number of obstacles, and is therefore most able to facilitate an ongoing rapid multiplication of churches with a minimal diminishing of vision or leadership ability;

CHAPTER 2

AN INITIAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS FROM ECCLESIOLOGY FOR CHURCH STRUCTURE

The Need for a **'Theology of Structure'**

John Davis recently released a new edition of his book ***Poles Apart?*** (1998) in which he added a new final chapter to call for the development of a *'theology of structure'* (247). Davis notes that all structures have a symbolic significance in communicating **values**[23] (247). Dean Arnold agrees, suggesting that, "Although churches may proclaim God's message of love, community, and care in a verbal way, the church structure may convey the opposite message. Church structures strongly affect the kind of relationship among people within them" (Birkey 1988:12).

As a first step towards such a 'theology of structure', Davis proposes that structures must be, *"first* dynamically equivalent [to those in New Testament churches] and *second* culturally appropriate (if that is possible without **compromise**)" (1998:261). Davis argues that God revealed several prescriptive principles in the New Testament, including that church structures: be organic not institutional, lend themselves to servant leadership, facilitate plurality of leadership, release the priesthood of all believers, and give facility for all to use gifts of the Spirit.

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23. Davis strongly criticises the use of secular structures that make it easy for people to 'lord it over' others and inherently promote "corrupt values regarding status, prestige, position, power and pomp" (1998:250). He adds, "Where I do not suggest that NT structures were the *cause* of the incredible growth of the church either quantitatively or qualitatively, I do, however, strongly posit that such structures enabled, facilitated and contributed toward such phenomenal growth" (Davis 1998:253).

A detailed *theology of structure* is well beyond the scope of this present work. However, a few

further observations and implications from ecclesiology are appropriate before any analysis of

existing forms of church structure and church planting is undertaken.

The Purpose of the Church

In *The Purpose Driven Church,* (1995), Rick Warren proposes 'Five Purposes of the Church'

demonstrated in the early church, and around which he suggests the church today should be

organised: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and evangelism (105*f*). George Barna, in

The Habits of Highly Effective Churches (Barna 1999) gives a similar list of 'six pillars of church

ministry', namely: worship, evangelism, Christian education, community, stewardship and

serving the needy (17*f*).[24] In a book applying the principles of reengineering[25] to Warren's 'five

purposes', James White (1997) very significantly adds a chapter about the need to reengineer the

structures of the church in order to better fulfil the purpose of the church.[26]

Any proposed church structure must facilitate each of these basic purposes of the church.

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24. In his *Systematic Theology,* Theissen (1979: 330ff) lists the mission of the church as being to: glorify God through worship and holy living; educate, edify and purify its members; evangelise the world; and, restrain evil and promote all that is good. Joseph Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism* (1981), suggests the purposes of the church are to be: a learning center, a healing communion, a responding community, and a deploying agency. There is a great similarity between these and those given in the text.

25. White says that he has drawn his approach to the rethinking the church from Michael Hammer and James Champy, 1993, *Reengineering the Corporation,* and Michael Hammer, *Beyond Reengineering.*

26. White comments that, "A church's structure can either serve the church or bring it to a standstill. It can energize a community of faith or lead it toward ever deepening levels of discouragement. It can enable men and women to use their gifts and abilities for the kingdom of God or tie the hands and frustrate the most dedicated efforts of God's people. Why? Because the structure of any organization directly affects morale, effectiveness, and unity … Structure works in an organization like grease to a wheel—it enables the working parts to operate smoothly and efficiently." (White 1997:94-95)

F. F. Bruce (1977:63) notes that the first church called themselves "the Way", and relays an argument that this term was borrowed from Essene communities such as the one at Qumran. That being the case, the implication would be that early Christians shared a depth of communal life that rivalled that of the more monastic Qumran community.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together,* makes the point that, "It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren" (1954:20), noting that, "Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone" (18). He goes on to significantly point out that our fellowship must truly be with any other person redeemed by Christ, not just with those like us and those we like (25).

It is noted that *community* or *fellowship* is given by Warren and others as one of the foundational purposes of the church. It is also widely recognised that both discipleship and ministry (to one another and to the world) happen best in or through small groups and face-to-face relationships. To facilitate these basic purposes of the church then, any church structure must place a high priority on building a sense of community and in-depth personal relationships. Larry Crabb sees the need for this so strongly he suggests, "The future of the church depends on whether it develops true community" (Frazee 2001:11).

Howard Snyder, in *Community of the King* is one of many who would argue that genuine community is in fact the *first* priority of the church (1977:73-75). He argues that evangelism and

mission spring from a sense of being a community of God's people (73-5), and that mission is more efficiently undertaken as a community than as individuals (155).[27]

Frazee calls evangelism done corporately like this, "Jesus' idea of 'community evangelism' " (2001:84). He contends that authentic community requires that we connect around a common purpose (shared beliefs and practices), a common place (people must be living in close proximity to each other, to facilitate spontaneity, availability and frequency), and common possessions (commitment to one another, rather than pooled resources). To facilitate this he strongly advocates weekly cells and midsize meetings of 5-7 cells based on geographical areas, as opposed to the current trend toward homogeneous cell groups (98,158).

Robert Banks, in *Paul's Idea of Community,* argues that mission is a by-product flowing out of being community (1994:89-90). He concludes that the primary purpose of Christian gatherings is mutual edification. By studying Paul's three most common analogies of the church (*ekklesia*[28], family[29] and body) Banks concludes that:

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27. Since the essence of the church is people, Snyder believes churches must be organic and marked by flexibility, interpersonal relationships, and mutuality (1977:67). He goes on to suggest that many problems of contemporary Christianity stem from an institutional model based on impersonal relationships, formality and a hierarchy with delegation of authority (1977:11,67). He suggests that some of the key obstacles to rapid church planting and growth include dependence on buildings, and inflexible unbiblical traditions as to time and form of church gatherings (1977:118).

28. After examining the pre-Christian use of *ekklesia,* as well as its use by Paul, Banks finds that the word *ekklesia* was a quite ordinary and general term for any formal or informal gathering. Banks is confident: "It is clear that it has no intrinsically religious meaning" (1994:28). He points out that Paul specifies the purpose of Christian ekklesia by adding "in the Lord", or "of God".

29. Banks argues that the church being a family implies many things. Within a family we must be responsible for one another and accountable to each other. A family will live together, know each other, and continue to forgive and accept each other despite obvious weaknesses. Families share close fellowship, carry each others burdens, and know what is going on in each other's lives. Being a family implies open communication. Within a family people have designated roles, chores, and responsibilities. And there are rules. The head of the household and those much older than us must he obeyed! And being a family implies loyalty and protecting one another from hostile forces outside—especially the young, weak, and even the guilty (as much as possible). Banks argues that it is not possible to generate this level of intimacy and relationship in large meetings, but that this depth of relationship only grows when we interact in depth with a small number of people regularly. This family atmosphere is best generated in the context of small meetings such as cell groups or house church meetings.

a) Paul did not wish church gatherings to be dissimilar in nature to other sorts of everyday gatherings (1994:44);

b) Joining the church implies personal commitment to brothers and sisters, solidarity with other members, and for leaders the responsibility to run things as a simple "steward" of low status;[30] and,

c) All members must be involved in ministry.

Each of these has implications in church structure. Elsewhere Banks has emphasised the participatory nature of Paul's church meetings (1998:35*ff*).

Swiss theologian Emil Brunner attempted to highlight the huge gulf between the institutional Church and the church of the apostolic age in *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (1953). His basic thesis is that "the *ecclesia* of the New Testament is a communion of persons and nothing else.... not an institution" (1953:74). He makes the significant observation that the church is not a means to an end, but an end in itself (10); the purpose of the church is community life (10-11). Brunner suggests the primary purpose of early church meeting together was to build each other up through "reciprocal giving and taking" where "all were active in it" (61), and "reciprocal subordination" (54).

House-church advocate Del Birkey notes that, "Nearly fifty references [in the New Testament] encourage active attitudes believers were to exhibit to one another" (Birkey 1988:137), which he notes include to love, honour, devote themselves to, serve, submit to, bear with, instruct, encourage, and be members of, one another. He argues New Testament churches were

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30. Banks notes that Paul speaks of himself as an *oikonomos*, which originated as a designation for a person employed by a family to be responsible for their affairs (Banks 1994:50).

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communities deeply committed to one another (137*ff*). Cell church advocate William Beckham writes

> The facets of community are personal intimacy, accessibility and availability, physical contact, communication, care and help, accountability, relationship, conversation, unity, focus, and group ministry. They can't be duplicated in the same way and intensity in a large group or in the life of one individual. Cell groups are essential to the church because of these qualities, not because of the small group structure itself.
>
> (Beckham 1995:61)

Jean Vanier, founder of the Catholic *L'Arche* communities where the mentally handicapped are cared for through live-in communities, has documented his ecclesiology and experiences in *Community and Growth* (Vanier 1979). He notes that communities need to exist for a purpose beyond themselves (21),[31] but as with Snyder and Banks, emphasises that building community must come before ministry to others (199). Vanier highlights the need for adaptable structures focused on the growth of individuals (77), and for structures that allow everyone to be able to contribute their gifts (39). Nonetheless, he notes the importance of having clearly appointed leaders within a community (156*ff*), as well as the need for communities to submit to external authority (94).

Because the church is called to be a community of God's people, the meeting schedule and whole church structure proposed by this research *must* place a high priority on building a sense of community through facilitating in-depth, mutually edifying personal interaction. This must be central to the design of the small groups in the large group / small group structure.

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31. James White agrees in *Rethinking the Church* (1997), suggesting that communities function best when undertaking tangible tasks together, and tend to experience a breakdown in relationships when they lack a clear sense of purpose (119).

The church is called to be a community of God's people. However, every community should exist for a purpose beyond just itself (see above, Snyder 1977:146-6; Vanier 1979:21). Banks insists, "vision for community and vision for mission are closely connected" (Banks and Banks 1998:228). The Great Commission and the Great Commandment are very clear instructions to engage in mission. The famous catchphrase attributed to Emil Brunner sums it up succinctly: "The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." Mission is a well-established doctrine of the Church.[32]

One significant implication is that mission is the responsibility of the *whole* church. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts, and passages such as Ephesians 4:11-16 are all widely used to show that all members should be involved in ministry according to their spiritual gifts, with minimal or no clergy-laity division. Elton Trueblood explains this well: "The only kind of lay ministry which is worth encouraging ... must erase any difference in kind between the lay and the clerical Christian ... not by the exclusion of professionals from the ministry ... but rather by the *inclusion* of all in the ministry (1961:62)

For other examples, see Banks (1994:88*ff*), Birkey (1988:104*ff*), Brunner (1953:50), Cho (1983:23*ff*), Conner (1999:96-141), Elseroad and Svendsen (n.d.), George and Bird (1994), Gibbs (1981:221*ff*), Hunter (1996:119*ff*) and many others.

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32. See for example Theissen (1979) Chapter 28, and the whole of George Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (1972).

This doctrine is widely established. However, the fact that this doctrine has implications of church structure not often considered must be noted here. Any structure proposed by this research for planting new churches *must* readily facilitate effective ministry and mission by all members of the community of God's people, according to their spiritual gifts and with minimal clergy-laity division.

2.2. CHURCH GROWTH RESEARCH AND CONTEMPORARY CHURCH TRENDS

Probably the most rigorously scientific study of church growth ever undertaken was the research project conducted by Germany's *Institute for Church Development* between 1994 and 1996. In this study 30 members from each of 1,000 different churches in 32 countries on 5 continents were surveyed using 170 variables. In an attempt to derive truly universal church growth principles they used quota sampling techniques to include the widest possible cross section of churches in the survey, including: large and small, growing and declining, persecuted and state-subsidised, charismatic and non-charismatic, and prominent and unknown churches; as well as churches from a wide range of countries, including everything from countries experiencing revival to those resistant or indifferent to the gospel. The results of this study were published by Christian Schwarz in his book, *Natural Church Development* (1996).

Schwarz criticises most church growth research for assuming that churches growing numerically are automatically "good" churches (1996:46), and for a tendency to use only large churches or rapidly growing churches as models (42, 46). Beginning with the belief that it is God who grows a church, but that our job is to create a healthy environment within which a church can grow, the study sought ways to quantify qualitative factors in church life.

Schwarz found that no single factor in isolation will lead to church growth; church growth comes from an interplay of a number of factors relating to both church structure and spiritual dynamics (1996:38). However, analysis of the 4.2 million survey responses was able to correlate a basket of 8 'quality characteristics' with church growth or decline. He found that churches with high scores in all 8 of these 'quality characteristics' were <u>always</u> growing churches (40-41). Schwarz claims that, "the results put into question much of what until now has been marketed as 'church growth principles' " (15). In summary, the 8 quality characteristics correlating to church growth were:

1. Empowering Leadership
2. Gift-Oriented Ministry
3. Passionate Spirituality
4. Functional Structures

5. Inspiring Worship Services
6. Holistic Small Groups
7. Need-Oriented Evangelism
8. Loving Relationships

It will be noted that each of these *quality characteristics* (except maybe 'passionate spirituality') have some fairly clear implications on church structure.

Beyond this major study conducted by Schwarz, a number of other authors have recently written about a number of major trends in the contemporary church, which they consider to be related to church growth. Amongst the most useful discussions are: George Hunter, *Church for the Unchurched* (1996), C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake!* (1999), and George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (1999). Hunter and Wagner in particular both write out of extensive study of what they call *apostolic* churches. Wagner makes the claim that these 'new apostolic churches' are the fastest growing group of churches on all six continents (Wagner 1999:7). From personal experience and research, Robert Logan, *Beyond Church Growth* (1989), has produced

his own list of 10 church growth principles. It is interesting how well these correspond with Schwarz's worldwide statistical research.[33]

In terms specifically relating to church structure, the study results and observations of each of these authors could be summarised under three headings: large group / small group structure, inspiring relevant celebration services, and empowering leadership that multiplies ministry.

Large Group / Small Group Structure

While Schwarz observed that no single factor in isolation would lead to church growth (1996:38), he also observed that the principle showing the most significant correlation to church growth was the multiplication of holistic small groups within a larger group environment (38). By 'holistic', Schwarz means the small groups should entail discussion amongst members out of which questions of immediate personal concern can rise, allowing the Bible to be applied to daily life (32). He notes the importance of small groups to discipleship (32) and dealing with personal problems (33). De Ridder (1979) suggests that a common denominator for successfully reaching contemporary urban society is using small group outreach (81). Another of Schwarz's eight universal principals was loving relationships (1996:36f), which can also only be built and maintained in small groups and smaller meetings. Frazee (2001) points out that while small groups do not automatically achieve authentic community, you cannot have community apart from a small group experience (20-22).

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33. Logan's 10 church growth principles are are:
1. Visioning Faith and Prayer
2. Effective Pastoral Leadership
3. Culturally Relevant Philosophy of Ministry
4. Celebrative and Reflective Worship
5. Holistic Disciple Making
6. Expanding Network of Cell Groups
7. Developing and Resourcing Leaders
8. Mobilizing Believers According to Spiritual Gifts
9. Appropriate and Productive Programming
10. Starting Churches That Reproduce

Large group / small group structures have been advocated by a very large number of researchers. Church growth authority Carl George contends that a structure of small groups within a larger group is, "the most strategically significant foundation for spiritual formation and assimilation, for evangelism and leadership development, for the most essential functions that God has called for in the church" (1991:41). Wagner strongly agrees, observing that, "virtually every new apostolic church sponsors small groups of one sort or another" (1999:219). Howard Snyder (1975) argues that small groups are, "a common element in all significant movements of the Holy Spirit throughout church history" (139). Yet at the same time he contends that, "The church must meet together regularly as a large congregation ... small group fellowships, essential as they are, are not in themselves sufficient to sustain the life of the church" (107).

Tom Holliday, associate pastor at the highly respected *Saddleback Valley Community Church,* explains his perspective on this:

> Growing churches cannot afford to add staff or build facilities fast enough to reach the world or to support the growth that is already happening! Using homes and gifted laity is the better way to employ the physical and human resources already entrusted to us. The home groups strategy is infinitely expandable.   (Hunter 1996:91)

Many other writers also advocate a large group / small group structure for church growth and multiplication, and a number see strong evidence that large group / small group structures were commonly adopted within the New Testament. (See, for example, Banks and Banks 1998:25*ff*,134*ff*; Beckham 1995; Birkey 1988:58; Cho 1981; Comiskey 1999a; Conner 1999:79*ff*; Fitts 2000:27; Logan 1989; McGavran and Arn 1973:103*ff*; Neighbour 1990; Prior 1983b; Stockstill 1998; Wagner 1999:218-9; and Warren 1995:235-6).

Given the overwhelming evidence that a large group / small group structure is significant for church growth, this research will not further question whether a large group / small group

structure would be most effective towards saturation church planting; rather, this research will ask the question, what type of large group / small group structure will most effectively lead us toward saturation church planting in Bangkok.

However, before we proceed two further significant observations made by Schwarz should be noted, both relating to small groups and church structure:

Firstly, Schwarz observed that in churches which had a high score on their quality index and which were growing numerically there was a greater tendency to give small groups priority over worship service attendance (Schwarz 1996:32). Hunter has observed the same thing, concluding that for many, "small groups are even more important in their identity as a church than the large worship service" (Hunter 1996:82).

Secondly, Schwarz documented a very strong negative correlation between church size and growth (1996:47).[34] We will return to this point again later, but his conclusion was that large, high quality, growing churches are so "unique" and "exceptional" that we should, "avoid making these churches into models for others. ... [It would] be far more helpful to carefully examine the countless smaller churches manifesting high quality, strong growth, and innovative multiplication" (48).

Schwarz's results clearly show there is an issue of church size, not just of having or not having small groups. The big question left unanswered by Schwarz's data is whether the problem for larger churches lies more in areas of opportunities for members to participate in fellowship and

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34. Schwarz notes that of their 170 variables, "church size turned out to be the third strongest negative factor, on par with factors like "liberal theology" and "traditionalism" (Schwarz 1996:46).

ministry, in areas relating to leading and administrating larger churches, or a combination of both. This could an important question when we propose a church structure for Bangkok.

Inspiring, Relevant, Celebration Services

Schwarz's research determined another universal church growth principle: worship services should be an inspiring experience (1996:30-31). By 'inspiring' Schwarz means both the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and a sense that going to church is 'fun' as opposed to being boring (31). Conner speaks of the importance of worship services being celebration events "characterised by enthusiasm, excitement, inspiration and joy" (Conner 1999:78). Logan emphasises the need for these services to be both celebrative and reflective (Logan 1989:76*ff*). Barna notes that 'highly effective churches' have services which "[enable] people to experience God in a tangible, practical, but highly spiritual way" (Barna 1999:87), and in a style that engages people's hearts (101).[35]

Wagner uses the term 'plugged-in worship' (Wagner 1999:155*ff*), but he agrees that being relevant to people's needs seems to be most important factor (179). Hunter speaks of 'culturally relevant contemporary worship' (Hunter 1996:55*ff*,73), and makes the statement that, "Apostolic congregations adapt to the language, music, and style of the target population's culture" (32).

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35. Schwarz acknowledges that, "there is probably no area of church life [than models for worship services] in which the important distinction between 'models' and 'principles' is so frequently ignored" (30). As an example he cites the way so-called *'seeker services'* have recently been promoted and adopted by many as if they were a church growth principle. His research clearly demonstrated that 'seeker services' do not in themselves universally correlate to church growth. However, another of the 8 universal church growth principle he identified was to focus evangelistic efforts on the questions and needs of non-Christians (34-35). The clear implication is that where church services are a major component of a church's evangelistic strategy, it is important that these services are sensitive to the fears, questions and needs of non-Christians.

Beyond the need for worship services to be inspiring, celebrative, fun, relevant and engaging, Snyder notes the importance of seeing and feeling part of something big, important, and God-sized—to sense something of the magnitude of being the people of God (Snyder 1975:107f). His point is that at least occasionally, all Christians greatly benefit from participating in large, celebration services. For most people the atmosphere generated by a large gathering adds to the fun and exciting aspect of church, which Schwarz identified as being important for church growth.

Empowering Leadership that Multiplies Ministry

Two further universal church growth principles identified in Schwarz' research were 'empowering leadership' and 'gift-oriented ministry' (1996:22-25). He observed that growing churches concentrate on empowering members for ministry, in areas appropriate for each individual and their gifts. Training lay members for ministry had a very high correlation to church growth. One final universal church growth principle he identified was 'functional structure' (28-29). He speaks of the need for "continual structural self-renewal", to develop "structures which promote an ongoing multiplication of the ministry" (28-29).

Over the last few years there has been a surge of interest in and promotion of a style of leadership many are calling 'apostolic'. Some recent books on this topic include: C. Peter Wagner, *The New Apostolic Churches* (1998), *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation is Shaking Up the Church As We Know It* (1999) and *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church,* (2000); Bill Hamon, A*postles, Prophets and the Coming Moves of God,* (1997); and David Cannistraci, *Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement,* (1996).

To both Wagner and Hunter, 'apostolic' implies visionary leadership prioritising outreach to the unchurched (Hunter 1996:28; Wagner 1999:45-46, 55ff). Wagner sees that these 'apostles' also have great spiritual authority. He sees that their role is in church planting and developing other local church leaders through organic, relational networks (103-153), and hence they often lead an organic church network (2000:25,33,43). Hunter emphasises that 'apostolic churches' focus on mobilising lay ministry (1996:119ff). Barna agrees that "one of the most impressive" elements of every highly effective church is "the depth of its lay leadership" (1999:45), and suggests that while pastors of these churches are characteristically very passionate and driven by strong vision, they do raise up lay leaders and delegate most day to day decisions (39-42).

Schwarz concurs that leaders of growing churches have clear goals and vision (1996:44-5) and "invest the majority of their time in discipleship, delegation and multiplication" (23). However, he is careful to separate models of leadership-style from principles of church growth, saying:

> Church growth literature on the topic of leadership typically states that leadership style of pastors in growing churches is more *project-* than *people-oriented,* more *goal-* than *relationship-oriented,* more *authoritarian-* than team-oriented. In their search for models worth imitating, some authors probably gravitate more towards *large* churches, which tend to employ this kind of leadership, than *growing* churches.
> (Schwarz 1996:22)

Many hesitate to use the designation 'apostle' in contemporary church life, largely because of examples or fear of misuse of power if individual leaders are invested with a large amount of authority. Whether we accept this label or not, the key point to be derived is that effective leadership resulting in church growth is leadership which empowers others and multiplies ministry, both through training members to minister according to their gifts and by mentoring full-time pastors and leaders. Empowering for ministry appears to be the key concept.

However, the issue of ongoing oversight and leadership development by such leaders does deserve further exploration. One model we will shortly be considering in detail is that of house churches, and it will be noted that the majority of house church proponents advocate a decentralised network of house churches and reject any form of centralised leadership or consistent oversight by one or more leaders. The UK house church movement, by contrast, has developed a structure in which apostles oversee chains of churches within a region, each house church being lead by elder-pastors who meets regularly with their apostle (Walker 1984:162-5). Some house church proponents, such as Edwards (1974:73-74) and Simson (2001:86), see the need for apostolic leadership in *planting* new churches, but oppose them having an ongoing oversight role over the churches.[36] As a further contrast, Wagner and Hunter note that most large meta-churches or cell churches have totally embraced a centralised, visionary, oversight leadership role for their senior pastor.

Thailand is a hierarchical society.[37] Thai patron-client relationships[38] have a number of features that make the leadership of patrons and the 'apostles' Wagner describes at least outwardly quite similar.[39] Taylor (1997) and Zehner (1987) have each written very insightful theses on the Thai

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36. Edwards believes that, "One of the characteristics of *any* Apostle is this: he will eventually, *always,* leave the work he raises up" (Edwards 1974:214)

37. see Zehner (1987:8)

38. Zehner describes the Thai patron-client system as "an ongoing stream of favors", material and services, "building a moral debt of bunkhun [บุญคุณ] (a trait of meritorious magnanimity possessed by the giver)," which the client feels indebted to repay through loyalty and obedient service (Zehner 1987:7-9).

39. These would include similarities such as:
   - a leader-centric structure (cf. Wagner 1999:81ff; Zehner 1987:5)
   - vision setting being primarily the domain of the leader (Taylor 1997:125; cf. Wagner 1999:86; Wagner 2000:33-37; Zehner 1987:92,95)
   - a charismatic leader (in the sociological sense) (Taylor 1997; cf. Wagner 1999:114)
   - the leader possesses authority, others receive delegated authority while submissive to the leader (Taylor 1997:28-29,87-90; cf. Wagner 1999:88-90.106-7; Wagner 2000:25-6; Zehner 1987:83,86)
   - leaders maintain close person-to-person relationships with those directly under their authority, to generously enhance their position and effectiveness (Taylor 1997: 29-30,90-92,96-100; Wagner 1999:127-8; cf. Wagner 1998:20-21; Zehner 1987:34-37,92)
   - an expectation of honour, respect, trust and loyalty from followers (Taylor 1997:30-31,92-95)

patron-client system as it relates to leadership structures in the Thai church, and this cultural

dynamic needs to be kept in mind during the development of ideas on leadership and oversight

structure for the networking of small groups.

Zehner appears to cautiously endorse the use of patron-client relationships by Thai Christian

leaders, noting, "effective leaders in any culture can be expected to operate within the

expectations which the members of that society hold for the behavior of their leaders" (1987:2).

Probing a little more deeply, Taylor concludes that the patron-client system must be significantly

modified to include values of unconditional relationships and equality, to avoid manipulation and

to promote servant leadership and shared leadership forms before it could be adopted into the

church (134-146).[40]

Maybe the answer lies in adopting what Gibbs and Coffey (2001) call "a hierarchy of mentoring

relationships," rather than a hierarchy of authority and control—a decentralised structure where

permission is granted and accountability is maintained, rather than work simply being delegated

(74,84,87-92).[41]

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40. Taylor offers two fundamental objections to the patron-client system for Christian leadership: the unequal, hierarchical nature of such relationships, and indebtedness (110ff). He argues that, "Church leaders should avoid being regarded as superior at all costs" (111), and that the New Testament instructs us to "own no man anything" (Rom. 13:8) (112). He is concerned patron-client relationships imply to Thai leaders that they must constantly project an image of success and superiority—whereas Christ-like leaders must be able to admit fault and weaknesses, and display a full range of human emotions (115-6). He also notes that the patron-client system can easily create dependency rather than discipleship (116-117), lead to favouritism and jealousy (121), promote individualism rather than a team mentality between leaders (122-124) and discourage initiative (127).

41. Gibbs & Coffey (2001) provide a useful definition: "Control is deciding what people can and can't do. Accountability is rendering an account of what a person has or has not already done. Control is more of a power issue. Accountability is more of an integrity issue" (74). They agree that healthy networks are concerned not with control but with empowerment (91-92).

Summary

Based on the strength of the research into church growth principles and major trends in the contemporary church, the church structures to be proposed for saturation church planting by this research must include the following factors:

- small groups that go beyond just meeting to developing authentic community;

- large, inspirational, culturally relevant celebration services;

- visionary, empowering leadership that genuinely multiplies ministry by training up lay ministry, leaders and other pastors to minister according to their gifts.

Because of patterns in both Thai culture and the wider contemporary church, consideration should also be given to a leadership structure in which one leader takes the primary role in vision casting, leadership training, and delegation of authority. However, because of it's similarities with the Thai patron-client system and potential for abuse, great care must be taken in adopting any form such as this. The style must be one of empowerment and permission-giving, rather than of control.

MODELS OF LARGE GROUP / SMALL GROUP CHURCH STRUCTURE

3.1. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE OLD TESTAMENT, LIFE OF JESUS, AND EARLY CHURCH

The Old Testament Era

Robert and Julia Banks observe that God's plan for His people in both testaments of the bible was that they gather before Him in both small group and large group structures (Banks and Banks 1999:25-30). From the time of Abraham and the Exodus God had his people to come before him as households (eg. ceremonies of circumcision in Gen. 17:10, the Passover in Ex. 12 and the Sabbath). From the time of Moses they were also instructed to gather before Him in large gatherings around the tabernacle, in events that became enshrined as festivals (eg. Ex. 23:14-19, Lev. 23). Fathers were effectively given the role of priests to their household, and it should be noted that even when the Levitical priesthood were appointment with responsibilities for sacrifices and the large corporate worship events, the responsibilities of fathers within their households was never removed (eg. the Sabbath and Passover, Deut. 14:26, 26:11).

During the Exile, when the Jews formed synagogues, the synagogues originally met in people's houses. They were simply an extension of the household. When synagogues moved into separate buildings after the time of the Exile, these buildings resembled houses and included accommodation for visitors (Banks and Banks 1999:25). After their return to Jerusalem, the Jews recommenced large festivals and worship at the Temple while still maintaining the small synagogue meetings of just 10 families or more.

In the Life and Ministry of Jesus

It should be noted that Scripture records Jesus consistently participating in both the periodic,

large group festival events and the much smaller, weekly synagogue meetings. Beyond Jesus'

participation in weekly synagogue meetings, which often attracted crowds the size of medium-

sized congregations, Jesus regularly gathered his disciples into their own small group for

instruction—and that this often occurred in homes (Banks and Banks 1999:26). Beckham makes

the suggestion that Jesus modelled the prototype cell group with his twelve disciples, to set a

pattern for the early church to be cell based (Beckham 1995:159).

The New Testament and The Early Church

In Acts 2:46-47 we see that the church in Jerusalem followed the small group / large group

pattern Jesus had set: they met daily in the Temple, and daily in homes. In the larger temple-

based meeting there was teaching by the apostles and broader interaction with other believers. In

the smaller house or apartment-based meetings they praised God, encouraged one another and ate

a common meal together. Banks and Banks suggest that there was a high level of enjoyment in

God, food, and one another in these house meetings—and a close connection between the quality

of their common life and the inflow of new disciples (1999:27). Guy (1979) notes that the Lord's

Supper began with the first Passover in homes by households, and continued in the New

Testament as a meal celebration by household groups in homes for the first 300 years of the

church (121).

This two-tiered approach to meeting became common among early Christians in other places too,

wherever possible (Banks and Banks 1999:27). Certainly, ministry in houses remained very

prominent throughout Acts: Paul was prayed for in a house (Acts 9:11-17), Peter preached in

Cornelius' house (Acts 10:24-48), the church met for prayer in houses (Acts 12:12), in Philippi the church began in the house of Lydia (Acts 16:11-15,40), the Philippian jailor's household was converted in an evangelistic house meeting (Acts 16:31-34), the church in Thessalonica appears to have begun in Jason's house (Acts 17:5-7), and the church at Corinth appears to have begun in Titius Justus' house (Acts 18:7). In summation to the elders at Ephesus before his arrest, Paul declared that he had taught them "publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:20). In the final chapter of Romans Paul sends his greetings to the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:5) and those in the household (house church community?) of Narcissus (Rom. 16:11). There was also a church in the house of Nympha in Colosse (Col. 4:15).

It should be noted that very often the early Christians worked as well as lived in their houses (Banks and Banks 1998:41), making the home a natural place for worship as well. Commenting on Acts 18:6-7, Keener writes:

> The church met in houses for the first three centuries. Synagogues also sometimes gathered in homes until the Jewish community could afford a special building, and between persecution and the need for funds to free slaves, feed the poor and support missionaries, the church had no money left for buildings anyway. Patrons homes in Corinth normally seated nine in the *triclinium* (the best room) and as many as forty others in the adjoining *atrium* (the largest furnished room). (Keener 1993:375)

Beckham notes that "small group meetings were the primary way the church functioned" in the New Testament (Beckham 1995:122). Birkey agrees,[42] and notes that the household structure "enabled Christians to gather together without dependence on temple or synagogue styles," and completely avoided the obstacle of having to build buildings (Birkey 1991:72). He concurs the approximate size of New Testament churches: "archaeological evidence suggests the average size

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42. Birkey writes that, "Biblical and missiological studies cannot ignore the fact that the movement which conquered the Roman empire was in reality a movement of small house churches" (Birkey 1991:74). He gives an excellent survey of each of the house churches seen in the New Testament in *The House Church: A Model for Renewing the Church* (Birkey 1988), p.40-54.

household could accommodate about 30 to 35 comfortably" (Birkey 1988:55). However, Banks and Banks suggest they were somewhat smaller: "probably twelve to fifteen persons meeting in 'the church in the house' and no more than sixty to eighty as 'the whole church' "(Banks and Banks 1998:29), with which Simson agrees (Simson 2001:40).

Birkey gives details of the only church building found to date that unquestionably dates to pre-Constantinian times, located at Dura-Europos in the Syrian Desert (Birkey 1988:55-8).[43] It is clear that a normal house was renovated sometime between A.D. 232-256, by removing a wall to make two separate rooms into one larger room to accommodate a larger Christian gathering. Hemer (1977:58) suggests that up to one hundred people could possibly meet in this newly enlarged room.[44] It is unclear whether this venue was used for the primary meetings of a single church, or for combined meetings of a group of house churches in that city.

The church itself is described as a house (e.g. Heb. 3:6). "The family-household basis must have had an overwhelming effect on the earliest believers' understanding of the church as family, the very 'household of God' " (Birkey 1988:55). Edwards (1974) suggests that home meetings were so informal they would probably have been considered 'gatherings' more than 'meetings' (50).[45] And while some claim that the early house churches had no formal leaders,[46] Birkey notes that

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43. From at least this time on there must have been some other buildings too. In his *Church History,* written only shortly after the conversion of Constantine, Eusebius speaks about large new buildings being constructed in all the cities to replace "the ancient buildings" (Eusebius 324:417 {Book 8, Chapter 1}). The implication, if the information is accurate, is that by A.D. 324 there were at least some church buildings considered quite ancient.

44. Birkey shows a diagram of the renovated house, indicating the final room size was 12.5 x 5 m. It is unlikely as many as one hundred people could congregate in a room this small.

45. Edwards postulates that, "The home meetings were to the church what sitting around with Christ had been to the twelve" (Edwards 1974:50).

46. For example, see Edwards (1974:135).

households of the time always had clearly defined leadership and suggests that, "hosts of the

churches became the natural leaders of the church. They were most likely persons of sufficient

education and practical administrative ability" (1988:58-59). He suggests this household

structure had implications for church planting strategy: "It is reasonable to assume that when Paul

began missionary work in a city, his primary objective was first to win a household" (Birkey

1991:74).

Both Banks (1994:30,41) and Birkey (1988) find evidence that early house churches were

networked, with regular large combined gatherings: "When [Paul] refers to the "church" in a

given locality, he infers that the house churches of the city gathered together from time to time as

part of the larger fellowship of the city *ekklesia"* (Birkey 1988:58). Banks suggests that, "Paul's

rather vague way of referring to meetings of the *whole* church suggests that it met less than once

a week" (Banks 1994:34). He sees a pattern of regular household worship with periodic large

gatherings as basic to God's people in both testaments (Banks and Banks 1998:25-27).

Atkerson (n.d.) makes the interesting point that the early church did not have 'worship services'.

While worship was the chief reason for corporate gatherings in the Old Testament, he suggests

that church meetings in the New Testament were simple, interactive, informal and small, with the

primary aim being edification not worship (1 Cor. 14:26).

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47. **Birkey notes that, "A typical household consisted of a number of families—and sometimes individuals—who were bound together under the authority of the senior male of the principal family.... Households operated under a clearly delineated hierarchy of authority" (Birkey 1988:38). If this was the case, each 'household of God' almost certainly had a principal leader and clearly delineated authority even before elders were formally appointed (e.g. as per Paul's instructions to Timothy).**

48. **Both authors suggest Paul always uses the plural for *ekklesia* when more than one church was in view, uniformly speaks of *ekklesia* as the church which assembles in a particular place (Banks 1994:41). Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology* (1941), would disagree with this point, suggesting that in one case in the New Testament (Acts 9:31) the word *ekklesia* in the singular is used for the churches of Judea, Galilee and Samaria (556). This reading is debated: the plural form is used in the Received Text, but the singular in the NA26.**

Simson (2001) notes that the early church did not utilise 'seeker-services', conducting evangelism outdoors or person-to-person. In fact, he emphasises the degree to which early church meetings were aimed at edifying believers rather than reaching unbelievers by noting that

> from the mid-first century onwards pagans were usually neither admitted to Christian meetings nor invited at all. After the persecution under Nero in the 60s of the first century, most Churches closed their doors to outsiders. (Simson 2001:42)

Beckham summarises what he calls *Jesus' New Testament small group design* as follows:

- The met in homes.
- Worship was by participation rather than by being a spectator.
- Teachings often reflected a small group context.
- The agape meal was observed from house to house.
- Gifts were exercised in a small group (cell group) context.

(Beckham 1995:107)

Recognising that the epistles were written to house churches not congregational churches makes interpretation of these books much easier. This is probably clearest in the case of 1 Corinthians, because the problems in the church at Corinth were so much more relational than theological. Paul was dealing with the relational aspects of Christian life within a network of house churches. For example, 1 Cor. 12 and 14 clearly outlines house church worship patterns. 1 Cor. 11 describes and corrects excesses within a house church love feast. 1 Cor. 5 discusses church discipline by excluding a blatant sinner from the community life of a small, intimate house church.

It is interesting to note the qualifications for (house) church leaders Paul gives to Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. 3, Tit. 1). In all three lists of qualifications is to noteworthy that being a good example and being hospitable are listed before being able to teach—and no mention is made at all of being able to preach!

One additional point of interest can be seen when Paul spoke at a house church in Troas late into the night (Acts 20:7-12). Young Eutychus fell asleep in an open window on the third floor while Paul spoke—and fell out the window to his death. Paul prayed for the lad and he was raised back to life, but the question here is why he fell asleep. Many assume it was because it was hard to sit through Paul's very long sermon. But despite the King James translation using the word "preached", and saying Paul made a speech (v. 7), Paul clearly did not deliver a long, boring monologue. The main purpose given for their coming together was for the breaking of bread, and when it came time to speak the Greek text uses the word *dialegeto* (διελέγετο), meaning Paul taught, conversed, and discussed. This was clearly an interactive small group gathered around a fellowship meal, and with a dialogue, inductive style of teaching and exhortation. It would not be unreasonable to assume this was probably the model used throughout the early house churches (see Job n.d.). It seems significant that Jesus himself appeared to prefer dialogue over monologue instruction, which becomes less possible as group size increases.

3.2. CONTEMPORARY MODEL I: THE META-CHURCH

The first major contemporary large group / small group church structure is the 'meta-church' model. The greatest proponent of the meta-church model, and the person who coined the term, is Carl George of the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. He defines the model clearly in his books *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (1991) and *The Coming Church Revolution: Empowering Leaders for the Future* (1994). Other primary advocates of the model are Robert Logan, *Beyond Church Growth* (1989), and The *Church Planter's Toolkit* (1991), and George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (1999). The two most well-known

examples of meta-churches are Willow Creek Community Church[49] and Saddleback Valley

Community Church, and books discussing the application of these principles in their churches

include: Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (1995) and George G. Hunter, HI, *Church for*

the Unchurched (1996).

George adopted the term 'meta-church' to describe principles of church structure and a philosophy

of church which, in his opinion, could allow churches in major urban centres to experience

almost unlimited growth, overcoming what he sees as structural limitations in today's mega-

churches (George 1991:49-53; Johnson 1997:6). George stresses that this term does not imply

size but organisational structure; a structure capable of supporting unlimited growth (George

1991:52; George and Bird 1994:33-35).[50]

Large group celebration services are considered important within a meta-church, and are even

referred to as the front door of the church (George 1991:73-74; Johnson 1997:9).[51] Nonetheless,

meta-churches would usually describe themselves as churches *of* small groups rather than

churches *with* small groups (for examples see George 1991:87; Hunter 1996:85,93), where, "the

small group or cell becomes the very core of the church life and is the foundation upon which all

ministry is built" (Johnson 1997:14).[52] George coins the analogy for this church structure as

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49. Simmonds (1996) writes, "When Willow Creek was desperate to find a structure for their small groups that was mission-oriented, they found that cell church principles (as interpreted by Carl George) were a source of inspiration" (5).

50. George writes, "A Meta-Church could be, as it grows, the size of a large church [200-1,000], superchurch [1,000-3,000] or megachurch [3,000 plus]" (George 1991:52).

51. Johnson notes that, "Cell groups will seem to lack significance if they are not linked with or joined to a praise celebration of worship.... Bigger is better in celebration, there is excitement, sense of bigger purpose that God is accomplishing ... " (Johnson 1997:9).

52. Rick Warren, whose Saddleback Valley Community Church is the largest meta-church which would stop short of calling itself a 'church of small groups' (Hunter 1996:90), does still suggest that, "The main program for the congregation is our small group network.... We tell people, 'You won't really feel a part of this church family until you join a small group' (Warren 1995:142).

being like a 'convention-of-mice' (George 1991:52): churches with an emphasis on both large celebration services and cell groups (George 1991:59-61; Johnson 1997:8). While George would consider cell churches as a specialised type of meta-church,[53] for the purposes of this paper we will treat the cell church and meta-church models separately.[54]

Different small groups within the meta-church model often have different focuses, and would only be considered sub-groups of the church not churches in themselves. Warren sums it up well:

> Rather than force everyone to conform to a "one size fits all" mentality, we allow people to choose the type of small group that best fits their needs, their interests, their stage of life, or their spiritual maturity. We do not expect each small group to fulfil every purpose of the church, but we do require that each one must be organised around at least one purpose of the church. (Warren 1995:146-7)

Different meta-church small groups can have different focuses, including seeker groups, recovery support groups, care groups, study-discipleship groups, or ministry task groups (see Comiskey 1999b:105; Hunter 1996:95-96; Johnson 1997:17; Warren 1995:146). Meta-church small groups usually have no more than fifteen members (George and Bird 1994:70; Johnson 1997:18), and meet at least twice a month (Hunter 1996:95; Johnson 1997:15), in homes (Johnson 1997:18). Groups may be given the freedom to choose their own agenda and curriculum (Hunter 1996:91), and should focus on participation not teaching by an individual (Johnson 1997:18). George suggests that the start point for an existing church to adopt a meta-church model is to identify all existing care and task oriented groups (e.g. bible study, committees, sports groups, ushers, etc.) and turn these into cells (see also Comiskey 1999b: 105; George 1991:88-89).

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53. For example, George refers to Cho's cell church in Seoul, Korea as a good example of the application of his meta-church principles (George 1991:52).

54. Comiskey also draws a clear distinction between cell church and meta-church models (Comiskey 1999b: 103-111).

Because of the emphasis on and delegation to small group leaders, one key feature of meta-churches is a desire "to build relationship-based, leadership development structures" (George and Bird 1994:74). Pastoral staff become trainers of leaders, managers and communicators of the vision (George 1991:181ff; Johnson 1997:5,21). Leaders of cells meet at least twice a month for ongoing training from a pastor (Johnson 1997:18), and leaders of leaders are structured in a hierarchical pattern (the 'Jethro principle') where leaders may oversee and coach up to 10 other leaders (George 1991:121-6; George and Bird 1994:54-57) through on-the-job training (George and Bird 1994:76-78).

Beyond the small groups and the large group celebration services, large meta-churches will often run congregational size events. Following George, most writers call these 'fishing pool' events (George and Bird 1994:79-93; Johnson 1997:9; Logan and Ogne 1991:9-2,9-10), where cell leaders and overseers can recruit people into their small groups.

George believes meta-church principles will allow a church to structure itself for unlimited size (George 1991:51-2). However, while describing meta-church growth principles Barna notes one very important limitation to the meta-church model:

> One of their [highly effective churches] most important structural insights is one that most of them stumbled onto: *You must limit you annual numerical growth.* ... Our research on congregational dynamics suggests that growing by more than 15 percent per year puts untenable stress on a church.   (Barna 1999:65-66)

3.3.   CONTEMPORARY MODEL II: THE CELL CHURCH

Primary textbooks on the classic cell church model include: Paul Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (1981); Ralph Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church* (1990); and William A. Beckham, *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the*

Church for the 21st Century (1995). More recently Joel Comiskey has written about a variant cell oversight and leadership development cell church structure referred to as the 'Groups of Twelve' model (G-12 model) in three books: *Home Cell Group Explosion* (1998), *Groups of 12: A New Way to Mobilize Leaders and Multiply Groups in Your Church* (1999a), and *Reap the Harvest: How a Small-Group System Can Grow Your Church* (1999b). Larry Stockstill has also written on his application of the G-12 model in the largest cell church in America, Bethany World Prayer Centre, in *The Cell Church: Preparing Your Church for the Coming Harvest* (1998).

Given Barna's observation noted above, that meta-churches which grow by more than 15% per year face "breakdowns in support systems" and "significant assimilation problems" (1999:66), it is significant that one of Stockstill's chief arguments for the cell church model is an ability to accommodate rapid growth (1998:13-24). Stockstill says that cells in his church aim to multiply every six months (21). This ability to handle rapid growth and assimilation of new members is attributed to a simpler church structure (Stockstill 1998:26-7), which reduces church administration by overseeing everything through the cell-system (Comiskey 1999b:74; Stockstill 1998:45). Beckham suggests that a cell church should become less complex as it grows rather than more complex, and even be able to survive without *any* administrative oversight in the event of persecution (Beckham 1995:28).

Cell churches would say cells are not *a* program of the church, but *the* program of the church (Cho 1983:35); that there is a world of difference between a church with cells and a cell church (Comiskey 1999b:118). Nonetheless, large celebration services are emphasised equally with

cells.[55]   The simplicity that allows rapid growth is attained by building the church out of cells which are all very similar, as opposed to the plethora of small group types offered by meta-churches (Stockstill 1998:33).[56] Variation can be catered for by allowing both homogeneous and geographical cells (Cho 1983:39-41; Comiskey 1999b:42-3), and allowing members to move to different cells according to personal relationships and preference (Comiskey 1999b:46). Comiskey believes this simplicity and quality control gives the cell church the ability to sustain "endless church growth" (Comiskey 1999b: 19).

As in the meta-church model, there is an emphasis on cells meeting in homes wherever possible to reinforce the nature of the church as the family of God (Comiskey 1999b:54,76-78), although many also meet in factories, schools, offices, restaurants, etc. (Cho 1983:34). The key roles of paid church staff are management and lay-leadership development (Stockstill 1998:33,74).   Cell churches also commonly use the hierarchical 'Jethro Structure' for oversight and development of cells and cell leaders (see Figure 1 below) (Beckham 1995:187-9; Comiskey 1999b:54).

One factor considered extremely important by cell church advocates is that the senior pastor must personally oversee the cell-system (Comiskey 1999b: 122). Advocates suggest leaders should not be appointed as church staff until they oversee 25-30 cells (Beckham 1995:189; Cho 1983:42).

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55. Comiskey argues that, "The cell/celebration paradigm was preferred until persecution made it impossible, and this fact holds implications for today's cell church. When possible, it's preferable to offer both cell and celebration. These two types of meetings provide the spiritual fiber essential to every believer. The house-church model (independent churches meeting in homes) makes sense in places like China and other restricted-access countries where Christians are not permitted to gather for official 'church' services. Some point out that the early house churches met occasionally for celebration gatherings even during the persecution of Christians" (Comiskey 1999b:86-7). Many other proponents argue strongly for celebration services as well as cells, see for example (Beckham 1995:25ff; Cho 1981:16-7; Comiskey 1999b:85-86; Neighbour 1990:197-208).

56. Stockstill writes, "It obviously takes management skills to manage cells, but the job is easier when everyone is focussed on performing the same task with the same philosophy" (1998:33). Comiskey agrees, saying, "Cells reproduce more easily when 'quality control' is maintained through the cell system. Quality control means that all cell groups maintain similar components or characteristics" (1999b:49). He speaks of, "multiplying the same type of cell group ... [in which] the same genetic make-up or 'quality control' is transferred from cell to cell" (50).

"1000's"

DISTRICT PASTORS
AND INTERNS
over five zone pastors

"100's"

ZONE PASTORS
AND INTERNS
over five zone supervisors

"50's"

ZONE SUPERVISORS
AND INTERNS
over five cell leaders

"10's"

CELL LEADERS
AND INTERNS
over 5-1i Christians
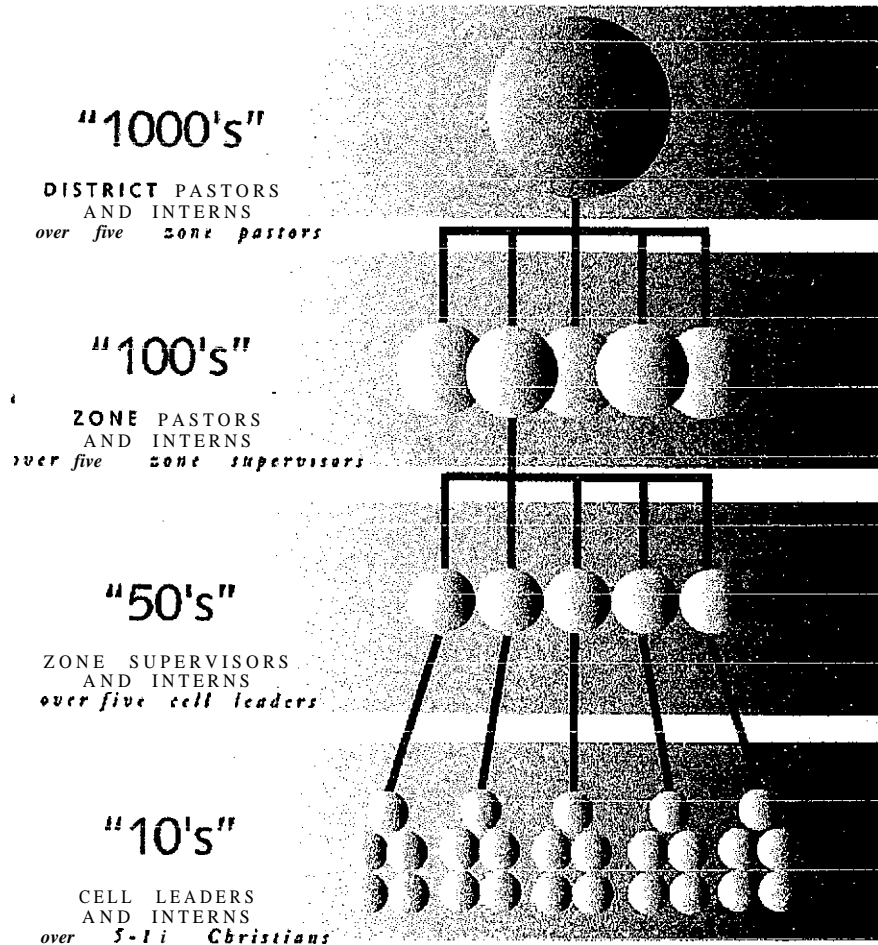
Figure 1: The Jethro Cell church Structure (taken from Beckham 1995:188)

Beckham considers that growth approaching exponential multiplication is possible within this cell church model (Beckham 1995:189). However, Stockstill suggests it is still more possible again to approach exponential multiplication using the 'Groups of Twelve' model (G-12 model)[57] (Stockstill 1998:65).

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57. The G-12 model is a term used to describe the cell-system initially developed by the very large and fast growing International Charismatic Mission in Bogata, Colombia. Begun in 1983, by 1999 ICM had 45,000 attending weekly services and 20,000 people in cells each week (Comiskey 1999a:25).

The G-12 model is a recent alternative model for cell multiplication and leadership development. Its basis is a belief that every Christian has the potential to lead an evangelistic cell, provided they are given adequate training and supervision (Comiskey 1999a:90-93; Stockstill 1998:97-98). This can be explained alternatively by suggesting that winning souls and discipling new converts to a basic level of leadership is the responsibility of every Christian (Stockstill 1998:100-101).[58] The model is built around open evangelistic cells (Comiskey 1999a:45-49) and closed meetings between cell overseers and cell leaders (51-61). From the time of conversion, all new members are trained for cell leadership (65,93-4).[59] Cell groups therefore have no interns or assistant cell leaders, since all members are being prepared to be leaders (135). As soon as members are trained, these young Christians are sent out with up to 1-2 other members to pioneer a new cell amongst their own circle of contacts (78-82). All members are invited to join their cell leader's closed 'G-12 group' as soon as they go out to pioneer a new cell. This G-12 group is a closed cell where a cell overseer meets the cell leaders under their care to provide mentoring and oversight to those just planting their cells (Comiskey 1999a:55,59).

The open evangelistic cells tend to be small homogenous cells led by newer Christians, meeting weekly or fortnightly for an hour at a time, and fairly rigidly following teaching sheets prepared by the church—often based on the previous Sunday's sermon (Comiskey 1999a:46). G-12 groups are closed leadership meetings (55), where up to 12 cell leaders meet together with the leader who was formerly their cell leader (23). G-12 group meetings have a great deal more

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58. It is noted that, "not everyone will lead a group for a variety of reasons. But as soon as a small group system is infected with the thinking that only certain people can lead a group a great deal of broken marble will continue to dot the church landscape, forever classified as incapable" (Comiskey 1999a:93).

59. At ICM 6 months from conversion to being a cell leader is standard (Comiskey 1999a:65).

flexibility.[60] In many respects the G-12 groups become the believers' meetings where real community develops through fellowship, discussion and a more open format. Long-term relationships are able to develop which never need be broken during the process of cell multiplication (Comiskey 1999a:78-82; Stockstill 1998:97). However, advocates stress the need to keep the evangelistic cells as the primary focus rather than the G-12 groups, to maintain momentum in evangelism (Comiskey 1999a:113-114).

G-12 model cell churches usually conduct large weekly celebration worship services in the same manner as other cell churches (Comiskey 1999a:40,53). Both forms of cell church usually dream of growing into large, citywide churches. The unspoken philosophy of both forms of cell church therefore appears to be that the multiplication of centralised cell groups is a more effective way to achieve the aims of saturation church planting in a major urban centre than the planting of daughter churches.[61]

3.4. CONTEMPORARY MODEL HI: HOUSE CHURCHES AND HOUSE CHURCH NETWORKS

In his classic text, *Understanding Church Growth* (1970), Donald McGavran suggested that church planters should always consider the option of planting clusters of house churches. He listed several advantages of house churches over other church structures, including an ability to multiply very rapidly and cost effectively, using lay leaders, and without facing any building

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60. For example, at ICM G-12 leaders have the freedom to decide what to teach their cell leaders (Comiskey 1999a:59).

61. Comiskey writes that, "ICM believe the only viable way to conquer an entire city is through the multiplication of cell groups" (Comiskey 1999a:76).

barriers (McGavran 1970:192-3)[62] His protege, C. Peter Wagner, however, believes time has proven his mentor wrong on this point,[63] writing that, "the idea of house churches' was advocated in the 1960s and widely experimented with in the 1970s, and the evidence is now in: they did not work well" (Wagner 1990:122).

However, not everyone agrees with Wagner.[64] Writing in the mid-80's, Toyotome reported strong growth of house churches in Japan (1985). In recent years Brown advocated them for the Muslim world (1997), as has Hovey for Thailand (1993). Recent reports have been received of strong house church growth in countries as diverse as Sri Lanka (de Silva 1991), the United States (Goodstein 2001),[65] and Vietnam.[66] Cell church advocate Joel Comiskey feels that house churches lack the balance and effectiveness of cell churches, yet nonetheless feels compelled to mention the "growing House Church Movement around the world" (1999b:51). Urban ministry advocate Charles Van Engen speaks of a "growing interest in planting and growing house churches in the city," even while bemoaning his personal feeling that most of these churches don't have the resources or vision to transform the community they are part of (Van Engen 1994:247).

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62. **Part of his motivation in saying this was a belief that, "the physical fact of the house church should be taken into consideration in any assessment of the causes of the growth of the early church" (McGavran 1970:192-3).**

63. **Shortly after McGavran died, his protege C. Peter Wagner undertook a revision of McGavran's text *Understanding Church Growth* (McGavran 1990). Unfortunately, one of Wagner's alterations was to completely remove McGavran's section on house churches!**

64. **One wonders whether Wagner's stated strategy of looking for churches displaying significant growth (see Churchquake! Wagner 1999:9), has turned his 'church growth eyes' into 'big church eyes'. By design, networks of house churches are less visible and have a lower profile—and will never be big churches! But the literature strongly suggests there are a mushrooming number of house church networks—as does the ballooning number of internet web sites promoting the house church model!**

65. **Goodstein notes the growth of the house church movement in the United States of America in recent years, and suggests at least 1,600 different house churches are listed for the USA in web pages.**

66. **In personal conversation with AG DFM missionary Scott Fontenot, on 14 May, 2001. Scott observed that the Vietnamese AG in rural areas meet weekly in house churches, with combined regional celebration meetings monthly. In some locations, simple buildings have even been erected to house the combined monthly celebration meetings. See also Birkey (1991:76).**

The 'House Church Movement' in the UK has been widely reported, such as when Davies reported their strong growth in the mid-80s (1986). However, Walker (1985) suggests the house church movement in the UK is largely a misnomer: he suggests these were churches beginning in houses but growing into their own buildings or rented halls as opportunity permitted, or at least desiring their own building (18,98). It is noted that, at any rate, these churches maintain a cell church structure (99). Regardless, it was estimated that in 1984 that there were a hundred thousand house churches or cell groups meeting in the UK alone (112).

Many scholars, church planters, and missions organisations continue to strongly advocate house churches. Recent works advocating a pure house church model include: Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches In Their Cultural Setting* (1994); Banks, Robert and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home* (1998); Del Birkey, *The House Church: A Model for Renewing the Church* (1988); Gene Edwards, *Beyond Radical* (1999); Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House: A Return to Simplicity* (2000); Nate Krupp, *God's Simple Plan for His Church— and Your Place In It: A Manual for House Churches* (1993); Jim Montgomery, *DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go* (1989); Gerald Rolands, *Build My Church!* (1996); and Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Change The World: The Return of the House Churches* (2001).

Trueblood (1961) does not advocate a house church structure, but does question the place of buildings in the contemporary church. His makes the allegation that church buildings are often idolised, ministering to the pride of the leaders and members and contributing to the ecclesiastical power struggle (4).

Banks feels the cell church model is a transitional form from God, to ultimately bring the church back to a house church structure (Banks and Banks 1998:4). Simson agrees, expressing it:[67]

> I see the Cell Church as one of God's half-way houses, giving some limited focus and vision, so that we in our own limitations can better glimpse the way ahead. It may be also God's gracious hand to slow down our traditional and global church bus to negotiate the more radical bend to housechurch Christianity ahead. (Simson 2001:95)

Significant to this discussion is the research of Schwarz, already discussed in detail. One important finding, which he called an 'astonishing result', was that "church size turned out to be the third strongest negative factor [correlated to church growth], on a par with factors like 'liberal theology' and 'traditionalism' " (Schwarz 1996:46). His results gave average growth rates over 5 years for churches of different average sizes as follows (47-48):

Attendance	Growth	% Growth
1-100	32 new people	63%
100-200	32 new people	23%
200-300	39 new people	17%
300-400	35 new people	7%
1000+	112 new people	3.9%

He also observed that, "On nearly all relevant quality factors, larger churches compared disfavorably with small churches" (Schwarz 1996:48). This result is an average, and Schwarz noted that some large churches are growing and do score high on the quality index. However, this research would suggest that, on average, and provided other church growth factors were adequately met, multiplying the number of small churches through continual daughter church

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67. Simmonds (1996) suggests the opposite. He suggests that the future of the UK house churches birthed out of the charismatic renewal in that nation lies in becoming cell churches.

planting is a far superior means of sustaining a rapid rate of church growth than growing existing churches.[68]

Whereas cells within the meta-church and cell church model are not considered separate church congregations with a responsibility to fulfil *all* the basic purposes of the church (Warren 1995:147), "house churches are small congregations in their own right ... 'house church' refers to an indigenous and self-functioning church small enough to gather together in a home or similar surroundings" (Birkey 1991:70). Birkey suggests that, "house churches can not do everything sanctuary churches can, but they can do what is essential more excellently" (1991:78).

Fitts sees house churches as the best way to overcome barriers to church planting:

> Our goal is not just to start a church. Our goal is to start a church planting movement. We believe this can best be done by focussing on the simplest and most reproducible form of church planting. The house church meets that need. We believe the house church concept is the best way to train pastors and leaders. The simplicity of small congregations makes it easy to multiply congregations.... In most countries today it is the only way to get a church planting movement going. We cannot possibly do saturation church planting if we are thinking in terms of traditional church.
> (Fitts 2000:64).

Hovey sees house churches as the way to break the property barrier in urban centres:

> The current needs of the world, especially as concentrated in urban centres, and the cost of real estate in those situations often means that until we can overcome that property barrier, we don't have an answer for the half of the world's population that live in those centres. I believe that House Churches give us the barrier breaking strategy we are looking for. (Hovey 1996:1)

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68. **Schwarz challenges that we should not take large churches as our models for church structure and methods, but rather "the countless smaller churches manifesting high quality, strong growth, and innovative multiplication" (Schwarz 1996:48).**

Simson is convinced that house churches have the potential to multiply endlessly, provided they are given adequate leadership:

> Housechurches are a multipliable structure. They can literally multiply endlessly, as long as they are provided the essentials. One of the essentials for housechurches are biblical quality and leadership. Most of today's leadership developing structures are addition based. (Simson 2001:79)

Banks and Banks (1998) note that synagogues originally met in people's houses, and that the separate buildings used in the time of Christ were built to resemble houses and included accommodation space for visitors (25). Yet even when this functional design for synagogue buildings is in view, several authors see significance in the fact that both Jesus and Paul rejected use of the word 'synagogue' for the church and instead chose to fill a general word like *ekklesia* with new meaning (Atkerson and Wilson n.d.; Fitts 2000:18).

Simson notes that Jesus strongly identified the church with houses, and did not anywhere even imply the church could resemble 'Christian synagogues' or center around buildings (2001:30). Trueblood agrees (1961:74), noting that, "the word 'synagogue' referred to a building, whereas the word 'church' had no such connotations" (38). "We are wise when we see some central feature of early Christianity which helps to account for its success, to ask whether this can be incorporated into our present practice" (29). Gene Edwards (1999) issues a strong call for a return to a house church model, noting that the early church was the only religion in history to be a lay led movement meeting in homes with no set rituals.[69]

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69. Edwards writes, "Until a Roman emperor named Constantine came along (about 300 years after Pentecost), the Christian faith was the only religion in history that met in homes. It was the only 'lay' led movement in the history of religion. Christianity alone had no institutions, no set rituals, no temples. That was unprecedented in human history. It is what made Christianity unique. And virile. And elastic, flexible, and adaptable. It had low overheads! Costs were minimal" (Edwards 1999:19)

While many house church advocates argue for largely autonomous house churches with only loose connection with other house churches,[70] a good number also do advocate what we will term 'house church networks' (e.g. Banks and Banks 1998:126-151; Birkey 1988:79-81; Fitts 2000:45-6; Simson 2001:9-10,98-100). Most would prefer to see these as 'decentralised' networks (e.g. Banks and Banks 1998:135; Fitts 2000:45-6) with no formalised leadership structure over or between separate house churches. There are some, however, who advocate a more centralised network structure overseen by a team of leaders administrated and led more like a single local church (e.g. see Hovey 1993:8; Prior 1983b:106).

Banks and Banks describe various ways to pioneer or transition existing churches into a "congregation of home churches" (1998:127-155). They observe that such a centralised network of house churches may be registered with a denomination as if it were a single local church, and be seen to be such by outside observers (Banks and Banks 1998:127-138).[71]

Most advocates for networks of house churches would encourage regular (quarterly, monthly or weekly) combined meetings for large group worship (Banks and Banks 1998:138; Hovey 1993:5). Banks and Banks insist these combined meetings should not be too large and should be interactive (Banks and Banks 1998:106). Hovey disagrees, suggesting they could take the same 'celebration' service format used by cell churches (Hovey 1996:2), what Wagner calls 'contemporary worship' in 'new apostolic churches' (Wagner 1999:155-81). A large number of

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70. Such autonomous house churches do not fit our presupposition that a large group—small group church structure is required, and therefore will not be considered here in detail.

71. Hovey suggests this is actually not that dissimilar to Cho's massive Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, known as the pioneer of the cell church structure,[71] where people are only able to attend the large celebration services every third week on average due to space limitations and actually spend two of every three weeks meeting only at the cell / house church level (Hovey 1993:6). Interestingly, Cho himself did initially call his small groups 'house churches' (Cho 1981:19), but later backed away from this because of the common concept of house churches being autonomous (Cho 1983:35-6).

house church advocates also suggest house churches should be somehow connected relationally to 'apostles', gifted leaders, or have their own full-time pastors and leaders over a network—to provide vision, leadership training, and stability for the group (e.g. Banks and Banks 1998:138,153-5; Fitts 2000:54-5; Hovey 1996:2; Simson 2001:58-9,88-9,98-100).

Because of the nature of the community developed within the life of a house church, sending out a few members to plant daughter house churches is considered a better church planting strategy than separating a large house church into two groups of equal number (Banks and Banks 1998:181).

3.5. THE QUESTION OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

The question of church buildings for urban churches is usually tied into the question of church structure—particularly whether the house church model is advocated or rejected. Roger Greenway includes a chapter entitled "The Pros and Cons of Church Buildings" in his book *Cities: Mission's New Frontier* (1989). He objectively discusses several significant advantages of church buildings, including that they:

- create a sense of identity, both amongst members and within the community;

- provide convenient facilities for worship, classrooms and offices;

- offer privacy for counselling and various meetings;

- communicate a sense of long-term commitment to the local community; and,

- spur the loyalty and enthusiasm of members.

Jim Montgomery, founder of the DAWN movement, agrees that there is "psychological advantage" when a church owns its own church building (Montgomery and McGavran 1980:74).

However, against these advantages Greenway raises two questions:

- Is the tremendous cost good stewardship?

- And, what message is conveyed to the poor by the buildings we erect?

Greenway personally leans toward churches having their own buildings wherever possible, but makes several significant suggestions to churches and mission agencies (240-243):

- direct finance and energy to ministering to people and spreading the Gospel as a priority over obtaining buildings;

- put the needs of pastors and Christian workers before property acquisition; and

- continually experiment with new strategies that do not depend on buildings.

PREVIOUS PROPOSALS FOR SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING

4.1. SIGNIFICANT UNIVERSAL PROPOSALS FOR SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING

McGavran (1955, 1970,& 1981)

Donald McGavran is widely known as the father of the church growth movement.[72] One of his greatest contributions was an understanding of people movements, in which "a wave of decision for Christ sweeps through the group mind, involving many individual decisions but being far more than merely their sum" (McGavran 1955:11). In a people movement, converts are won as families, groups, villages, etc., without having to cross socio-cultural barriers (McGavran 1981; McGavran 1990:163-178, 221-249). McGavran notes that, "To Christianize a whole people, the first thing *not* to do is to snatch individuals out of it into a different society. Peoples become Christians where a Christward movement occurs *within that society*" (1955:10). He notes that within a people movement, it is important for husbands and wives, parents and children, etc., to sound each other out *during* the process of making decisions for Christ (11).

McGavran claims that most evangelism in the New Testament, particularly of the Jews and Samaritans, was with people group dynamics (1955:17-19). He further claims that Christendom arose out of people movements, and that people movements have provided over 90% of the growth of mission field churches throughout the world (1955:38,68; 1970:298). He argues that people movements are the normative pattern of church growth, and if instructed and led well they produce the strongest churches, win the most people to the Lord and are the least costly to

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72. For examples see Fitts (2000:38) and Montgomery (1980:16).

produce (1955:97; 1970:296-301). However, McGavran observes that, "The nurture of new People Movements is difficult. Few know how to rear them" (1955:87); people movements "have actually been resisted by the leaders of the church and the mission where they are started" (89).

McGavran lists several important, practical principles that apply for people movements:

a) any one group is usually small in numbers (1955:12);

b) each member of the group has received much instruction in the faith (1955:12);

c) large numbers come from conversion of a series of groups over several years (1955:12);

d) in (people movements) the new Christians seldom see the **missionary—they** are immersed in their own cultures (1955:88);

e) Enough individuals ... must be converted in a short enough time and a small enough area that each Christian comes into the church with some of his kindred (1955:129).

McGavran's strategy is to see "a cluster of growing congregations" planted concurrently, rather than simply planting individual churches (McGavran 1981:622). The most important church structure principles he notes are:

a) use small groups (McGavran and Arn 1973:103,161);

b) begin in homes and/or rented facilities (McGavran and Arn 1973:130); and

c) always consider planting house churches which only ever intend to be a cluster of house churches (McGavran 1970:192-3).

McGavran's vision was

> the establishment of a cell [church] of committed Christians in every community, every neighbourhood, every class ... establishing millions of congregations of practicing Christians, ideally one in every small community of men and women.
> (qtd. in Montgomery 1989:14-15)

McGavran offered two proposals of church structure appropriate for saturation church planting throughout rural parts of the Philippines. His first proposal was to plant a network of simple churches in each village, each with its own building and ordained full-time pastor, all paid at local rates and drawn from the same or a similar village, and networked for resources and support (Montgomery and McGavran 1980:143). His second proposal was to plant simple lay-led house churches in each village, with a cluster of village churches being overseen by experienced, ordained, full-time pastors in larger city churches (145).

For urban contexts, McGavran proposed that "the building must always be regarded as a secondary matter", suggesting maybe a hundred small churches using houses or rented facilities work together to erect a central building.[73]

Guy (1979)

Calvin Guy (1979) felt the need for a pattern that was infinitely reproducible with local resources and local leadership within a major urban context. He believed that history had brought us back to the house church pattern of the New Testament (115). He noted that private homes were often small and crowded (118), but there were built-in advantages in using homes for the rapid spread of the gospel (116):

1. Space, such as it was, was immediately available;

2. Emphasis was almost entirely on people;

3. The total family was involved, with fathers' role as teacher-priest preserved and enhanced;

4. More frequent instruction, discussion and prayer led by more people than if services were in some distant building.

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73 . Personal correspondence quoted in Greenway 1989:234.

Guy suggests there is a more scriptural basis for the house church than for other models of church (121). Since the growth of the Church has not been all we desire, the message, interpretation, or way the message has been delivered must be at fault (121). Guy suggests that the effectiveness of house churches "has been limited because the process of starting has been too complicated and inadequately shepherded" (125). To overcome this, he makes the following suggestions (125):

- establish many house churches simultaneously or in quick succession;

- encourage the natural local leader of the group to lead;

- outside missionary or pastor should never lead or takes charge of the group;

- a missionary or pastor should meet with the local leaders weekly to encourage and train.

Montgomery (1980 & 1989)

Jim Montgomery, founder of DAWN (Discipling A Whole Nation), developed the concept and goal of *saturation church planting* (Montgomery and McGavran 1980:59, 66-67). Working with Donald McGavran, he proposed then led an effort to plant rural churches in the Philippines along the lines proposed above, utilising lay-led evangelistic small group meetings of at least 50% unsaved attending, using systematic week-by-week teaching in homes, encouraging whole families to consider the Gospel together. As members became Christian, elements of worship were added to the meeting and the lay group leader began to function as the pastor-teacher (55-56). After 10 years advocating and using this form in the Philippines, Montgomery was able to claim that, "this method (used in one form or another under various names) is at the heart of virtually every effective denominational program of evangelism now going on in the Philippines" (1980:55).

Patterson (1981 & 1993)

George Patterson, famed for his development of Theological Education and Evangelism by Extension (TEEE), has done a lot of work developing strategy for church multiplication. He prefers the phrase *spontaneous church multiplication* rather than *saturation church planting,* because he wants to stress strategies for multiplication rather than church planting by addition (Patterson and Scoggins 1993:6). Patterson and Scoggins (1993) note that healthy, living churches naturally reproduce healthy, living churches. Patterson says that an obedient church *has* to grow and reproduce by its very nature (Patterson 1981b:613). His concept is that the fastest and only sure way to achieve saturation church planting is through multiplication of churches, not addition—in other words, mother churches that plant daughter churches, which in turn plant their own daughter churches, that plant daughter churches, and so on.

Church Planting Through Obedience Oriented Teaching (Patterson 1981a) is a practical workbook to train national church planters using church multiplication ideas. *Church Multiplication Guide* (1993), written together with Richard Scoggins, is a much more detailed explanation of his ideas. Significantly Patterson and Scoggins assert that churches actually multiply more readily where money, costly buildings, specialised education of leaders, and executive leadership are lacking (7)!

A summary of Patterson's church planting principles would include:

- plant churches in homes;
- depending on the context, consider planting a house church that intends to indefinitely remain a church meeting in a house, without paid pastor or building, but with strong discipling input into the life of the leader(s);

- plant daughter churches as early as possible in the life of a church;[74]

- a strong relationship between mother and daughter churches, with leaders of mother churches training the leaders of daughter churches one-to-one on the job, who immediately teach the same material to leaders of their own daughter churches;

- continuous accountability and reporting back to the leader in their mother church;

- evangelism of heads of families and whole families in their own homes;

- don't start services until locals (heads of households) are able to take them.

Garrison (1999)

David Garrison[75] has re-written ideas and principles discovered by Southern Baptist missionary Curtis Sargent in the book, *Church Planting Movements* (1999). A *church planting movement* is defined as, "a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment" (Garrison 1999:7). By this definition, a *church planting movement* is the fastest means of achieving the goal of *saturation church planting.* Garrison and Sargent observed church planting movements around the world in an attempt to discern general principles, and then proposed lists of universal and common elements of *church planting movements,* as well as suggestions on how to begin such a movement.

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74. Patterson (1981b:614) says, "Do not accept the argument, 'We can't start a daughter church yet; our church is too weak; we must wait until we have a strong home base first.' No church is too young to obey Christ. As soon as a worker is available, send him."

75. David Garrison is Associate Vice President for Strategy Coordination of the International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention.

Their findings in relation to church structure in church planting can be summarised:

Universal Elements (33)	Common Elements (37)
• Local lay leadership	• People Movements / *Oikos* Evangelism[76]
• Cell or house churches	• On-the-job leadership training
• Churches planting churches	• Leadership authority decentralised
• Rapid reproduction	• Outsiders keep a low profile
• Balance between worship, outreach, discipleship, ministry and fellowship	• Develop multiple leaders within cells

We could summarise Garrison's recommended church planting strategy as:

- members of an existing cell / house church to plant daughter cells / house churches;

- use evangelistic small group home meetings led by unpaid local lay people (especially new converts), to

- evangelise their own web of relationships with family and close friends;

- ensure overseeing leaders and outsiders keep a low profile in the new cell / house church;

- providing adequate on the job mentoring to develop several leaders within the new cell / house church.[77]

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76. Garrison used the phrase "evangelism has communal implications". However, what he describes is identical to what McGavran taught as *people movements* or *web movement* (see McGavran 1970:221-249). McGavran defines a *people movement* as a "multi-individual, mutually interdependent conversion", and a *web movement* being a *people movement* that spreads through webs of relationships between families and close friends. Neighbour would call this *Oikos* evangelism (Neighbour 1990:114). McGavran gives a more full technical definition of a *people movement* as:

> The joint decision of a number of individuals all from the same people group, which enables them to become Christians without social dislocation, while remaining in full contact with their non-Christian relatives, thus enabling other segments of that people group, across the years, after suitable instruction, to come to similar decisions and form Christian churches made up exclusively of members of that people.
> (McGavran 1970:223)

See also the section *People Group Dynamics* on page 130 of this thesis.

77. Garrison uses the acronym POUCH: Participative Bible study and worship groups, Obedience to the Bible, Unpaid and non-hierarchical leadership, meeting in Cell groups or House churches (Garrison 1999:43). Some additional suggestions from universal and common elements (above) have been incorporated into this summary.

Fitts (1994 & 2000)

In *Saturation Church Planting: Multiplying Congregations Through House Churches* (1994) Robert Fitts writes, "Our goal (in planting house churches) is not just to start a church. Our goal is to start a church planting movement," (29). In his revised work, *The Church in the House* (2000), Fitts gives an analogy of large churches and house churches being like supermarkets and convenience stores respectively, arguing that both meet very different needs within the modern city (53).

Key principles of Fitts' proposed house church planting structure include:

- plant simple churches in houses (2000:26-28) in conjunction with and under the oversight of apostolically gifted leaders (2000:54-5);

- appoint unpaid lay pastor-elders to lead (not teach) the house churches, to be selected and trained from amongst the local believers (2000:37-44,62);

- submit to spiritual authority (2000:59) by maintaining a minimal but real level of oversight and input from full-time apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (2000:40-2);

- such full-time leaders help oversee multiple house churches (2000:55);

- plant daughter churches under the oversight of apostolically gifted leaders by sending out 1-2 families with a trained elder (i.e. don't just divide the group in half) (2000:54-5,65).

Simson (2001)

In his new book *Houses that Change the World* (2001), Wolfgang Simson suggests that,

> For many Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists entering a church building itself is a spiritual, cultural, social and philosophical problem.... of all possible church structures, housechurches have by far the greatest potential to grow amongst Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist people groups.   (Simson 2001:135)

Simson notes that, "in many cultures 20 is a maximum number where people still feel 'family', organic and informal, without the need to get formal or organized," and that as soon as a group grows larger than 20 people, "effectiveness in relationship and mutual communication goes down, and the need for someone to coach and lead the meeting goes up" (26-27). Simson suggests that the most important essential ingredient for the endless multiplication of house churches is apprenticeship-style multiplication of leaders (79-82).

Simson's proposed church structure could best be described as house churches led by lay elders (87-89), networked organically through mother-daughter relationships and relationships with 'five fold ministers' who circulate between house churches (58,84,88-89), and sharing regional or citywide large combined celebration events (11-13). [78]

4.2. SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING PROPOSALS SPECIFIC FOR BANGKOK

C&MA Proposals—Persons (1982) & Ford (1982)

Twenty years ago Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) missionary co-workers Larry Persons and Norman Ford both wrote papers, entitled respectively *Urban Strategy for Church*

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78. His proposed methods of church planting for this model include:

- Use Luke 10—actually stay in the house of a 'man of peace' for several weeks, someone not yet a Christian but interested after witness or a public event, and model a house church by eating, praying, sharing and teaching them, rapidly training leaders as people convert, and quickly linking with larger celebration events (176-7).

- Advertise that you are ready to pray for anyone with problems. If someone requests ministry ask for two conditions to be met:
  1. the whole family must be present, so nothing is done behind anyone's back, and the whole family feel happy;
  2. you will explain what you are doing when you pray in the name of Jesus, so they know this is not magic (178).

Planting in Thailand (May 1982) and *A Strategy for Church Planting in Bangkok, Thailand* (July 1982). Both missionaries note that the C&MA at that time planned to target less well-educated and rural immigrant workers living in Bangkok slums.

Persons believes that the two greatest obstacles to church planting in Bangkok are a "horrifying dearth of capable respected leaders" (11), and a lack of funds for church buildings (12). He suggests several keys to church planting in Bangkok, including:

- visionary leadership (implication of one prime vision setter);

- mother churches planting daughter churches;

- strong focus on lay leadership training;

- beginning as churches meeting in houses.

Nonetheless, Persons cannot see any alternative to using overseas funds to pay pioneer pastors and provide facilities for churches once established, ending his paper with the comment, "As the establishment of a building might be crucial sociologically speaking (because of the Thai infatuation with beautiful temples), the need for almost prohibitively expensive structures may be vital" (Persons 1982:12).

Ford (1982) likewise notes the need for visionary leadership. He proposes forming mobile church planting teams to commence evangelistic bible studies simultaneously in the homes of 5-10 interested but unsaved families in the one community, with the goal of establishing a network of house churches (up to 50 members per house church). He emphasises the need for a strong beginning to provide the network model from the outset, and suggests slum house churches in the same network ought to be within walking distance of each other. He suggests two possible structures: first, a larger central church surrounded by house churches under its care; and second,

a networked group of house churches lead and administrated as if it were one larger church. Ford suggests that in addition to weekly house church meetings, each house church network should meet monthly for combined celebration services in a central location (Ford 1982:16-17).

Ford claims that this model fits well with the Thai scene because:

- neighbour evangelism in the atmosphere of a home is effective in Thailand;

- family decisions should be sought, without asking children to act independently of parents;

- the model can be endlessly reproduced without relying on "expert" trained leaders;

- it can be reproduced with limited resources.

With regard to buildings, he notes that individual churches within a network would be better to divide and begin new house churches of the same size rather than obtain buildings. However, he allows that a few individual central churches may be able to grow, rent facilities, and eventually have property purchased for them.

In the light of these proposals, an evaluation of the Mahaporn Sukhumvit church founded in 1983 by Ford and other C&MA workers will be essential to the local data collection component of this research.

Assemblies of God Proposals—Hovey(1993) & Johnson (1998)

More recently Australian Assemblies of God missions field consultant, Kevin Hovey[79] made a fairly detailed proposal to the Thai missionary team, entitled *House Churches in Thailand:*

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79. At that time Kevin Hovey was Director of Training and Field Consultant for Assemblies of God World Missions Australia. He is now the Director of Assemblies of God World Missions Australia.

Response to Frustration or Shape of the Future (Hovey 1993). Hovey noted most of the

commonly cited challenges to church planting in Thailand, and then proposed a model that was

very similar to that of Ford. Specifically, Hovey proposed:

- a network of lay-led house churches;

- people movement dynamics to largely see family decisions;

- a single senior pastor as leader of a team of staff who use a very structured training and

  visitation program to develop and facilitate the lay-leaders and house church meetings;

- weekly, closed group leadership meetings between leader and trainees at each level, to

  allow detailed weekly instructions to pass down to newer and less-well trained leaders;

- monthly or quarterly combined celebration services in rented facilities.

Hovey strongly emphasises the role of the structured training component (Hovey 1993:7).

Unfortunately, due to the **resignation** of several key missionaries, Hovey's suggestions were never

implemented by the Australian missionary team.

More recently, veteran American Assemblies of God missionary Alan Johnson wrote a short,

privately circulated article entitled, ***Saturation Church Planting in Bangkok: Finishing the Task***

Among the Thai—A Proposal for Fulfilling the Great Commission in Thailand (Johnson 1998).

He comments that, "The harvest that God wants to bring us should not be limited by how many

buildings we can rent, buy or build. Nor should the harvest be limited by how many people we

can graduate from degree granting Bible programs" (Johnson 1998:11).

Johnson proposes that we think in terms of saturation planting of small "cell" type groups;

multiplying small groups that meet in homes, schools, businesses, and restaurants (11). He does

not fully face up to the challenges of the building barrier and the need for new church planting, suggesting this should normally be done through existing congregations which commence multiple services as the size of the celebration service expands, until they can afford to purchase land and build a larger building. But he does note that multiplying leaders of this level can be done quickly, and that this form of multiplication best utilises the abilities of full-time leaders and our existing churches and resources. Johnson calls for the planting of 20,000 new cells in Bangkok, to see one cell for every 500 people across this vast city (Johnson 1998:19).

Reongjareonsook *(1997)*

In 1997 Wannapa Reongjareonsook completed a doctoral dissertation project entitled *Effective Strategies for Bangkok Evangelism* (1997). While this thesis does not propose a church planting strategy, its findings are still relevant to church structure. Reongjareonsook identified 27 churches within Bangkok city with a decadal growth rate of at least 50%, and surveyed these churches as to their primary strategies to communicate the gospel. The findings indicated that the most effective evangelistic strategy in Bangkok was friendship evangelism using testimonies and printed material. The significance of this is that the church structure to be proposed by this paper must be a structure facilitating relationship evangelism with family, friends and neighbours in preference to structuring evangelism through large meetings.

4.3. PROPOSALS OR MODELS FOR RURAL THAILAND

Smith (1977 & 1981)

OMF missionary Alex Smith listed a number of useful ideas for effective rural church planting in a book entitled, *Strategies to Multiply Rural Churches: A Central Thai Case Study* (Smith 1977). Several years later, at the end of his authoritative history of the Thai Church, *Siamese Gold: A History of Church Growth in Thailand 1816-1982,* (1981:281-283) he gives a further list of suggestions he believes will lead to church planting growth in Thailand. Many of his proposals appear to be adaptable to the urban environment. His structure and strategy for planting churches (1981:197*ff*) could be summarised:

- provide concentrated witness over several days or weeks in a community known to be responsive—make the gospel the centre of conversation throughout the community;

- witness or conduct studies with heads of families and whole families—try to avoid individual decisions wherever possible;[80]

- establish a new church immediately out of converts—if only a few are saved, network this cell or house church to an existing congregation who provide leadership oversight and resources, and together with other similar cells or house churches;

- send someone back to help with the first few weekly meetings, but only the first few;

- train up local unpaid 'pastors' to lead the meetings as quickly as possible;

- provide frequent visits by missionaries and national pastors.

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80. Speaking about their church planting efforts in 1957, Smith writes, "Families becoming Christians were a crucial factor in the growth of the church in Uthai. It indeed appears generally true that where family units have been gathered into the Church, especially in webs of extended families, there the church stands in solidarity. Where only unrelated, individual, scattered believers are found, the church generally struggles to survive" (Smith 1977:138).

*Campus Crusade for **Christ—Rosedale** (1989)*

A journal article by Roy Rosedale entitled, ***Mobile Training Centres: Key to Growth in Thailand*** (Rosedale 1989) is worth mentioning. He claims that 2,338 house churches and 16,632 'new life groups' comprised of some 134,228 Christians were planted in northeast Thailand between 1983 and 1988. Rosedale's strategy was:

- form a large impact team, to "saturate a specific area with the gospel";

- form new believers into 'new life groups', as whole family units wherever possible;

- form one or more 'new life groups' into a house church, led by men already respected in the local community.

This report is both interesting and perplexing. Missionaries in the northeast today find difficulty identifying any of these churches. The question is, did the problem lie with the strategy or with follow-up? It is probably significant that the question of oversight, networking and follow up of the house churches is not addressed in the article.

*Evangelical Covenant **Churches—Franklin** (1983) & DeNeui (1991)*

First Franklin (1983) and then DeNeui (1991) have studied and written papers on the interesting, highly contextualised and very successful model adopted by the Evangelical Covenant Churches (non-pentecostal) in rural Northeast Thailand.[81] Franklin and DeNeui describe their very successful means around the cultural, financial, building and full-time leadership barriers:

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81. **From their beginning in 1977, DeNeui notes that the Covenant Churches had now grown to over 2,700 members by 1991.**

- Village house churches of 2 to 12 families, led by older, [82] socially respected lay elders in conjunction with church leadership teams (typically 7 people). Elders are almost always completely unpaid. Meetings are semi-formal, and utilise a dialogue teaching style.

- T.E.E. training of elders and church leaders given in the villages, by full-time Thai staff from a central church planting and church growth centre.[83]

- Mother-daughter church planting, with mother churches responsible to pass on the training they receive to their daughter church leaders. Weekly training focuses on development of the leader and specific preparation for the following Sunday house church meeting.

- Evangelism of new villages is undertaken at the initiative of the churches. Centre staff only involved in helping organise these converts into churches, and training leaders.

- An agricultural business enterprise (set up with foreign funds) supports the church planting centre, and is a centre for the dissemination of agricultural development to the villages— village church elders having the dual role of bringing this development to their village.

- Profits from agricultural development projects are sometimes used to pay part-time church leaders (in larger mother churches only).

- Extensively use of indigenous music, dance and drama.

DeNeui notes that in 1991 similar work also commenced in the slums of provincial capitals.

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82. Elders and leaders are appointed by the congregation and endorsed by the centre. Such leaders are always at least fifty and more usually sixty years old (Franklin 1983:81).

83. Note, village elders never need attend training in the centre—all contact between the centre's staff and local Christians takes place in the villages. Training in the villages is done by Thai leaders, with missionaries *not* going to village churches to minimise the sense of this being seen a foreign religion

GROUP DYNAMICS & **SOCIO-CULTURAL** FACTORS IN BANGKOK

5.1. GROUP DYNAMICS IN THAI CULTURAL CONTEXT

Citing anthropological reports from many different cultures, Bass **(1990:5)** says that leadership occurs among all peoples, but that "the patterns of behavior that are regarded as acceptable in leaders differ from time to time and from one culture to **another.**" Research by Hofstede on 116,000 employees of a multinational corporation in. 40 countries showed that managers in different cultures applied different values in their leadership (Hofstede 1984:8-9). Commenting on these findings from a Thai perspective, **Suntaree Komin** (1994:8) concludes that national culture cannot be ignored in determining leadership style. Clearly group dynamics differ in differing cultures to the extent that leadership structures must be different in different cultures.

What would be most useful at this point, therefore, would be a thorough overview of socio-cultural factors in urban Bangkok relating to group (big or small) dynamics, as a guide to how well the various large group / small group structures and proposals would function within urban Thai culture. **Socio-cultural** values and practices in urban Thai society will have a significant influence on how the proposed models will actually work.

Lack of Literature and Research

Unfortunately, very little research into Thai society has been undertaken on this topic. Veteran missionary Alan Johnson conducted a thorough literature review in 1999 as part of a research proposal on the topic *Leadership Characteristics of Thai Small Group Leaders* (1999b). He concluded that there is, "virtually no research on small groups and their leadership in Thai

society", noting a "lack of literature dealing with small groups and leaders other than at the national political or village level" (Johnson 1999b:2,5). Johnson writes,

> there are definite gaps in the literature in Thailand related to leadership, small groups and group dynamics ... The literature dealing with group processes covers the same ground as western books ... not developing a Thai perspective ... There is virtually nothing that can be found under the subject of small groups. (Johnson 1999b: 4-5)

Controversy: A "Loosely Structured" Society?

Unfortunately Johnson did not pursue this topic for his thesis, leaving a continuing gap in research into group dynamics and small groups in the Thai context. He did, however, suggest a cause for the lack of research.

In 1950 sociologist John Embree described Thai society as "loosely structured" (Embree 1950). By this he meant a social structure where "considerable variation of individual behavior is sanctioned" (182). This assessment of Thai social structure caused considerable controversy and dominated most of the subsequent research and writing of anthropologists and sociologists. Evers (1969) notes the "challenge posed by a society whose social structure seems to defy attempts at analysis" (1), which Embree's classification implied. Johnson summarises that,

> Differing conclusions are reached depending on the interpretive angle and presuppositions. For instance, Piker (1969) can say that groups in rural Thailand are absent or functionally unimportant and those that do exist are not enduring social groups (pp. 62-63). Evers (1969), on the other hand, points out that there are numerous groups, including schools, Buddhist associations, government officials, police and military forces that are functionally important groups which are ignored by those who adhere to the loose structure view (p. 119). (Johnson 1999b:5-6)

Mulder (1969) notes that this controversy "seems to have discouraged students of Thai society from looking for the structural regularities in Thai society" (23).

In 1991 Komin commented that, "[Embree's] model remains the most widely accepted characterization of rural Thailand." Komin goes on to summarise the findings of a number of subsequent sociological and anthropological studies about the characteristics of rural Thai society, all of which claim there are no natural, clearly identifiable, abiding social units. Family is nebulous, political boundaries are arbitrary, the monkhood is voluntary, and both rural labour and social groups are not enduring (1991:4).[84] She notes others who see the Thai as individualistic and self-reliant loners,[85] and that many suggest the Thai are not group oriented "because of the Buddhist emphasis of working for one's own karma" (8).

If the rural Thai can be categorised as individualistic and rural Thai society is loosely structured, then urban Thai society would only be more so. Komin (1991) herself conducted probably the most thorough sociological study of values and behavioural patterns of the Thai. She established that rural Thai farmers place a greater importance on communal values and depending on one another than do urban and educated Thais (71). We might thus expect Bangkok churches of any structure to struggle to build a committed membership with a sense of corporate identity and belonging, due to the lack of defined and enduring social groups in society. Building a sense of community could be quite difficult in Bangkok. However, this difficulty should be least in church structures that best facilitated meaningful relationships between members—suggesting finding the best church structure to facilitate in depth community should probably be a very high priority.

We could even hypothesise that a loosely structured society may result in most people having largely superficial relationships, creating a felt need for closer relationships and such a sense of

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[84] Studies by Sharp (1953), Wilson (1962), Phillips (1965,1969), Piker (1968,1969), and Hanks (1972).
[85] Wichiencharoen (1976).

community. Komin established that the Thai people give a higher priority to community values than Americans (1991:113-117). Given that the individualism of Americans has not prevented the widespread effectiveness of small groups in both secular and Christian applications in America, we could expect culturally appropriate small groups to be effective in urban Thai society too.

Despite this widespread characterisation of Thai society as "loosely structured", Komin herself challenges this calling it a "myth" (1991:5). She notes a number of studies whose findings do not support this "loose structure" model.[86] One researcher even described Thai society as an " 'affiliative society' in which people are highly dependent upon each other ... the basic drive of individual behavior is to establish networks of personal relationships ... [they have a] strong need for affiliation" (10-11).

Bunkhun (បុណ្យគុណ) *Relationships*

One very significant paper on this theme is that of Suvannajata (1976). Suvannajata distinguished two distinct types of social relationships: voluntary, transitional and transactional relationships; and, close, enduring, and stable relationships. The difference she found between the loose-structure and enduring relationship patterns was that close relationships were always based on a *bunkhun* (បុណ្យគុណ)relationship (gratefulness or obligation) one to another.

Komin confirmed this important role of *bunkhun* in close relationships. From her research into Thai values, she describes *bunkhun* as:

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[86]
   Examples she gives are Moeman (1966), Tambiah (1970) and Mizuno (1971).

> a psychological bond between someone who, out of sheer kindness and sincerity, renders another person the needed helps and favors, and the latter's remembering of the goodness done and his ever-readiness to reciprocate the kindness. The *Bunkhun* relationship is thus based on the value of gratitude … it is an ongoing, binding of good reciprocal feelings and lasting relationship. Therefore, being **Grateful** to *Bunkhun* constitutes the root of any deep, meaningful relationship and friendship
> (Komin 1991:139)

This research would imply that enduring and stable small groups are possible and desirable amongst Thais, but need to be built around a deep sense of gratefulness towards each other and mutual obligation. Komin notes that this kind of relationship has the potential to either be very close in a positive sense, or to be manipulative (1991:140-142), so teaching on Christian values may be essential. But Komin found manipulative patron-client relationships were not the only kind of close, stable *bunkhun* relationships—although without this trait of mutual obligation, relationships or groups will only relate superficially.

5.2. USE OF HOUSES OR CHURCH BUILDINGS IN BANGKOK

In 1988 the Caleb Project conducted a study of Bangkok entitled, *Reaching the Peoples of Bangkok.* After a detailed study of the characteristics of the major people groups in Bangkok, the authors commented on the advantages and disadvantages of using houses and church buildings for church meetings in Bangkok. Speaking specifically about the sociological and cultural context of Bangkok, the authors suggest,

> Home meetings afford several advantages … informality and social intimacy … less threatening … than to attend the same event in a church building … may well help to build maturity in Christ more quickly than might otherwise be accomplished … the single most conducive environment to the rapid spread of the gospel along the natural family and social networks of believers … [and] financially advantageous … might be a difficult place in which to bring together people of differing status and ethnicity in the highly stratified Thai society.
>
> Church Buildings … give maximum versatility and space … [but] the disadvantages of a church building are too often overlooked … the constant peril of lapsing into a mentality

which equates the church, the body of Christ, with a building and the events which takes place within it once a week ... distorting the true nature of the church ... are generally quite expensive, particularly in **Bangkok** ... will almost certainly bring with it considerable financial burden. (*Reaching the Peoples of Bangkok,* 1988:64-5)

It should be noted that just like the early Christians, in many parts of Bangkok people work as well as live in their houses (see Banks and Banks 1998:41). **Homes-come-workplaces** made a natural place of worship for the early church. We could infer they should also be a natural place of worship for believers in Bangkok.

5.3. GROUP DECISION DYNAMICS

Evers (1969) ranked 13 Southeast Asian villages then only recently studied by anthropologists, for the frequency of extended family units living together (120). He noted that while in each case nuclear family units living together were the most frequently found units in each village in each country, Thai villages had a comparatively higher proportion of extended family units living together than did other southeast Asian peoples. While this finding applied to rural Thai villages, it undoubtedly still has bearing on social relationships in urban Thai society, and on ideal evangelistic and conversion patterns.

The authors of the Caleb Project report on Bangkok found that the church in Bangkok consists primarily of Chinese and Chinese-Thai, but that the Thai and Isaan peoples remain very largely unreached. They suggest that this is the result of our evangelistic techniques:

> ... a Chinese person is hard to convince, but once he makes a decision for Christ he tenaciously sticks with his commitment. A *Thai-teh* [authentic Thai], on the other hand, is more easily persuaded to receive Christ, but has a difficult time successfully carrying out this commitment. Many, perhaps most, evangelism methods employ a model of decision for Christ which heavily emphasizes the moment in which the decision is made. Having made such a decision the new believer is expected to stand by it ... [many] have

presented decision for Christ in a form which is far more viable to a Chinese person to a Thai ...   *(Reaching the Peoples of Bangkok,* 1988:70,72)

They make two suggestions to help overcome this problem: a) aim for group or family decisions rather than individual decisions, and b) have a relational rather than event orientation. They conclude, "it is very important that the methodology not revolve around going to an event, and that the people are treated as a part of a family not as isolated individuals" (73).

Many researchers have noted the strong need to use these group dynamics for evangelism in Bangkok. After writing the authoritative history of the Thai Church, *Siamese Gold: A History of Church Growth in Thailand 1816-1982,* Alex Smith (1981) suggested it was essential to witness or conduct studies with heads of families and whole families, and to try to avoid individual decisions wherever possible (281-2). This is very consistent with the missiological research of McGavran[87] and others above, as well as with the findings of secular anthropologists studying Thailand such as Evers.[88]

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87. See p. 53 above.

88. See p. 74 above.

CHURCH STRUCTURES CURRENTLY USED TO PLANT CHURCHES IN BANGKOK

6.1. LOCAL DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

The strategic importance of church multiplication in achieving the goals of *saturation church planting* has already been established. Church multiplication requires mother churches to plant daughter churches, which in turn plant their own daughter churches, and so on indefinitely. A *church planting movement* does this rapidly. Since these are the goals of this paper, my local data collection focussed exclusively on mother church / daughter church models of church planting, rather than mission team models. In his book *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* Wagner includes a discussion on the advantages of church planting using a mother church / daughter church model (*modality* model) over the mission team *(sodality* model) (Wagner 1990:60).

Local data was collected by personally interviewing pastors of churches in Bangkok who had a clear vision for or history of planting daughter churches, and who are widely considered to have sufficient training, skill and resources to fulfil such a vision in the not too distant future. The list of pastors interviewed was selected after discussion with a number of denominational leaders and long-term missionaries. The pastors interviewed were largely from charismatic or pentecostal cell churches, as it was widely observed that most of the successful church planting was being done by these churches.

The aim of these interviews was to better understand the plans, practices and insights of pastors who have far greater cultural understanding and ministry experience than I do, and who are most likely to have the largest influence on the future direction of church planting in Bangkok.

Pastors   Interviewed

The following pastors were interviewed (listed in alphabetical order):

- _Anuparp Wichitnuntana_. Senior Pastor of Bangkok Liberty Church, which has 2 daughter churches, and National President of the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG).[89]

- _Chatri Jittasopee_. Senior Pastor of the Thonburi Full Gospel Church (FGC),[90] the first pentecostal church in Bangkok with many daughter churches.

- _Krisada Chusakultanachai_. Senior Pastor of Romyen-Thonburi Church (TAG), overseeing a network of 6 daughter churches planted under his leadership within the last two years.

- _Manoonsuk Kamolmatayakul_. Senior Pastor of the Jai Samarn Church, which has 2 satellite congregations and 12 daughter churches, and National President of the Full Gospel Assemblies of Thailand (FGA).[91]

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89. The Thailand Assemblies of God has 56 officially registered churches as of April 2001 National Conference. However, many new pioneer churches are not included in this figure. The best estimate of the National Executive Committee for both registered and new pioneer churches is 80-90 nationally (given at the April 2001 National Conference), with 3,500 adult members nationally. According to the 2007 *Thailand Christian Directory*, the Thailand Assemblies of God have 16 churches in Bangkok city. The three largest of these churches are all represented in these interviews, being the churches pastored by Anuparp Wichitnuntana, Krisada Chusakultanachai and Wirachai Koware.

90. The Full Gospel Churches of Thailand are associated with the Finnish Free Foreign Mission. They have approximately 3,700 adult members nationally. According to the *2001 Thailand Christian Directory* they currently have 95 churches nationally, but with just 4 churches in Bangkok city. Thonburi Full Gospel Church is the largest of these four churches.

91. The Full Gospel Assemblies of Thailand are associated with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. They have approximately 2,500 adult members nationally. According to the *2001 Thailand Christian Directory* they currently have 38 churches nationally, with 12 churches in Bangkok city. The pastors of the two largest FGA congregations are both included in these interviews: Manoonsuk Kamolmatayakul and Prayoon Limahutaseranee.

- *PrayoonLimahutaseranee*. Associate Pastor of Jai Samarn Church (FGA), overseeing the large Sukhumvit soi 6 congregation, which has 2 satellite and 12 daughter churches.

- *Somkiat Kittipongse.* Senior Pastor of Bangkok Fellowship Church (independent charismatic church), which has planted 7 daughter churches.

- *Tira Janepiriyaprayoon*. Senior Pastor of the Mahaporn Sukumvit church, the largest C&MA church in Thailand,[92] with 3 daughter churches.

- *Wan Petchsongkram*. Senior Pastor of Rom Klao Church, which has 25 daughter churches across Thailand forming an indigenous independent charismatic movement.[93]

- *Winit Wongsonsern*. Senior Pastor of Emmanuel Baptist church (SBC),[94] the largest Baptist church in Thailand with 4 daughter churches over the last 10 years and a role in planting a large number of other churches.

- *Wirachai Koware*. Senior Pastor of Romyen Church, founder of the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG), and founder and head of the Romyen Mission that currently supports 37 new church plants.

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92. According to the *2001 Thailand Christian Directory* there are currently 84 C&MA churches nationally, with 7 churches in Bangkok city. The Mahaporn Sukumvit church is the largest of these.

93. Wan reported during the personal interview that the movement has approximately 8,000 members nationally, suggesting the mother church has 2,000 members and churches in the provinces average over 200 members. Many would believe this figure is quite inflated. A closer estimate of combined Sunday attendance nationally would be around 2,000-3,000 people—an average of 1,200 people in the mother church, with an average between 30-70 people attending the daughter churches each Sunday. Of their 25 churches nationally, they only have 2 churches in Bangkok city.

94. According to the *2001 Thailand Christian Directory* there are currently 68 Southern Baptist churches nationally, with 18 churches in Bangkok city. The Emmanuel Baptist church is the largest of these.

Unfortunately, Ps **Pisanunat Sritawong,** Executive Pastor of the Hope of Bangkok Church declined to be interviewed, replying in personal correspondence (3/08/01) that, *"we cannot give any information or let it be made as documents because of our policy to avoid any misunderstanding and sensitivity which may be occurred. It may have an effect to the religion of this country [sic]."* This is most unfortunate, as the Hope of Bangkok is by far the largest church in this country, with the greatest track record of church planting, and undoubtedly would have made a valuable contribution to this research. [95]

Suwimon Kongkungwalchok, Senior Pastor of the **Maitrii** Jit church (CCT)[96] agreed to be interviewed, but unfortunately a mutually convenient time could not found for the interview within the time frame.

Interview Technique and Questions

Interviews were conducted individually, face-to-face in the pastor's office, over a 4-week period during July-August 2001. Interview questions were open-ended. Interviews were 40 minutes to 1 hour long, and were conducted in Thai. Interviews were recorded on Mini-Disc, and a condensed English transcript of each interview is included in Appendix I.[97]

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95. It should be noted that Hope of Bangkok was disfellowshipped from the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand several years ago over a variety of allegations. Since that time Hope of Bangkok have tended to remain separate and suspicious of the rest of the Thai church, who themselves have tended to be critical and negative. As the largest church in Thailand a number of studies and books have looked at their growth, not all favourably. Ps Pisanunat's refusal to be interviewed probably stems from this context as much as anything else. The *2001 Thailand Christian Directory* has likewise been able to obtain any data on the Hope of Bangkok churches, leaving Hope as the only Protestant movement in Thailand thus omitted from the directory.

96. The Churches of Christ in Thailand is the largest mainline denomination in the country. According to the *2001 Thailand Christian Directory* the CCT have missionaries from 28 different missions, and have 657 churches nationally with 39 in Bangkok city. The Maitrii Jit church is the most well respected church within the CCT when it comes to church planting.

97. Condensed transcripts have been included rather than full transcripts primarily because of length. It will be noted that even with condensed transcripts, Appendix I amounts to around 18,000 words. Discussion that has

The following list of guide questions was used during each interview. Feedback was sought to ensure a common understanding of key terms, and further probe questions were often added. Answers were summarised back to the informant at the end of each block of questions, to confirm their answers had been understood correctly. The guide questions used in interviews were:

1. Describe the structure of your church. Is it meta-church, cell church, or house church?

2. What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church attracts most.

3. What is your vision for reaching Thailand? How does church planting fit into that? What are your church planting goals for Thailand?

4. What is your vision for reaching Bangkok? How does church planting fit into that? What are your church planting goals for Bangkok?

5. What has your church done to date in church planting? And in Bangkok? Do you have specific church planting goals? Do you have any church planting plans for the near future?

6. What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? How did / will you do it? Who is / will be the target group? What structure did / will you use? What size churches did / do you hope to begin? How many members on each church planting team?

7. What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok?

8. What qualifications do church planters need? Did / will church planters receive a salary? From where? Why or why not?

9. How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches? Do / will new churches usually begin with a building? Free? Rented for meeting days only? Leased? Owned? Why or why not? Is it important to have a building, or could free space in a house or office be used?

10. Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches.

11. In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting and growth in Bangkok city?

12. Each year only a small number of churches are planted in Bangkok, and most struggle to get past the "40-barrier". Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

been omitted from these transcripts are answers that moved off the topic at hand, unnecessarily repeated information, or probe questions I asked in order to have the interviewee expand more fully on a question.

*Church Structures Currently **Used**for Church Planting in Bangkok*

Rev Anuparp Wichitnuntana, Bangkok Liberty Church (TAG).

Bangkok Liberty Church is 28 years old. Anuparp has been pastor for 12 years. The church is a cell church using both open evangelistic cells and closed leadership cells, but plans to add meta-church *recovery groups* to their program in the future. They currently attract 450 people to services, and planted their first 2 daughter churches this year. They target predominantly middle-class students, young professionals, office workers and business people. Anuparp's vision is to build a large mega-church in Bangkok with four large satellite centres around the city, and to plant a daughter church in the capital of each of the other 75 provinces of Thailand by 2015. He is open to planting other satellite churches across Bangkok using different styles to target different audiences, depending on the vision of individual leaders within the church.

All churches planted in Bangkok will be expected to form one structure, sharing one budget and making up one large leadership team. All staff will be expected to attend weekly staff meetings at the mother church. The role of the senior pastor remains central in both setting vision and leadership development. The key to planting a satellite or daughter church is a leader with vision and ability as a cell overseer. Self-supporting church planters are possible. Churches should begin through mid-week cells, commencing services in rented facilities when about 30 people are gathered. In Bangkok it is preferable to rent Sundays only rather than lease, as the mother church can provide office support. Greatest obstacles to church planting and growth observed by Anuparp include: overly hierarchical, centralised leadership structures, lack of delegation of leadership to the laity, not using a cell structure, and a lack of faith that growth is possible.

Rev Chatri Jittasopee, Thonburi Full Gospel Church (FGC).

Thonburi Full Gospel Church is the oldest pentecostal church in Bangkok at 42 years, with many daughter churches. Some years ago the church adopted a geographical cell church structure with larger Sunday afternoon homogeneous age group meetings. The church is now being transitioned back into a cell church after recent events that reduced attendance to 180 people. The church now mainly attracts the lower to middle class. They have a vision to plant cell churches using members' houses as long as possible, and then leasing buildings. While Chatri is open to churches growing large, because of property and leadership barriers his preference is to multiply churches of under 100 people, utilising occasional large combined celebration services.

Bible college training for church planters is considered good, but practical training, experience, vision and burden more essential. Church planters should be full-time, first based in the mother church then gradually moving more and more to the new daughter church. Church planting should be done by teams rather than individuals, incorporating lay people too. Land values are considered a major obstacle to building facilities, but if resources are available this is felt to be good. Daughter churches should have complete freedom in planning and decision-making, and separate finances, but a close relationship should be maintained with the mother church. The major obstacle to church planting and growth Chatri has observed is a lack of practical training of both pastors and lay leaders.

Rev Krisada Chusakultanachai, Romyen Thonburi Church (TAG).

Romyen Thonburi Church is 8 years old, and oversees a very close network of 6 daughter churches, all planted within the last two years. They are a cell church using open and closed cells derived largely from G-12 principles. Their main target groups are blue-collar workers and

youth. They currently have a combined average Sunday attendance of 300 people, with a goal for 2010 of 1,000 cell groups networked in 50-100 churches in and around Bangkok. Krisada's vision is to plant churches close enough across the city so people can get to church conveniently taking only one single bus route. The key ingredient he sees to planting a new church is a sufficiently trained and capable primary leader, but a team should be sent with the church planter. The key to his success in church planting appears to lie in the close networking structure between the churches.

For Krisada, attitude and basic skill level is most important in a church planter, who could potentially be a convert of as little as 1½ years. Krisada meets with the church planting team one whole day a week for ongoing oversight, advice, accountability and on-the-job training; central training seminars for members are held monthly; and visits each church every second month. Self-supporting church planters are best, until the demands of the church require them to be full-time. Using members' houses or renting is preferred over purchasing buildings. Daughter churches handle their finances separately, and have a high degree of freedom in decision making under mentored oversight. In one provincial centre close to Bangkok a lay-led house church network is being experimented with, having monthly combined worship, and being centred around a central city church with a leased building and full-time staff. The major obstacles to church planting and growth Krisada has observed are: lack of educated and trained leaders, lack of networking and on-going leadership training, cost of facilities, and travel times and distances to churches.

Rev Manoonsuk Kamolmatayakul & Rev Prayoon Limahutaseranee, Jai Samarn Church (FGA).

Jai Samarn Church is 30 years old, has worship services in 3 centres across the city (total 1,300 people in services), and has planted 12 daughter churches. Jai Samarn is a cell church, dividing

the city into geographical regions but using homogeneous cells with youth and children. Closed cells (no more than 1:4) are used for leadership mentoring, with classroom and seminar programs being used for further leadership development. Lay leaders are used for several levels of cell oversight. They initially attracted a large number of poor people from Klong Toey, but they now tend to attract better-educated students, families and professional people, with a smaller number of blue-collar workers. They are increasingly targeting the middle-class and up.

The greatest limitation they see to church planting is leadership. They don't find finance is a big obstacle anymore. They have a vision to plant cell churches in urban centres within a 250 km radius of Bangkok, largely according to the vision of individual church planters, beginning out of cells and houses (possibly a house rented by the mother church for the church planter). Daughter churches are overseen by the corresponding regional pastor, who helps with preaching, advice and some financial needs. The senior pastor meets daughter church pastors monthly for encouragement, teaching and accountability.

Manoonsuk (senior pastor)'s vision is to saturate Bangkok with cells, with everyone attending celebration services in one of five large facilities around Bangkok. For now these facilities are satellite centres of the mother church, but in time they will probably become separate large churches in close relationship to the mother church. He has a goal of a minimum of 500 people in each satellite church, believing that large churches attract more people and have greater impact. At the same time, he is open to planting smaller daughter churches in the city according to the burden and vision of individual staff and members. He believes church planters in Bangkok should have a tertiary-level education, and a proven ability to teach, preach, multiply cells and train up a leadership team. The greatest obstacles he sees to church planting and growth are a shortage of leaders and weaknesses in the areas of discipleship and teamwork.

Prayoon's (associate pastor, who oversees the 900-strong Sukumvit congregation) dream for Bangkok is to see networks of small churches spring up everywhere, like '7-11' stores, related to and supported by large, well-resourced mother churches. He likes small churches because of their ability to get into people's lives. At the same time he sees that large worship services are important, and that large churches can do many things smaller churches cannot do. At least for large worship services in Bangkok, he sees that large, beautiful facilities are important. If they are too expensive to build, he suggests renting. Prayoon feels that church planters need a minimum 1-year of bible school, and should be full-time supported by the mother church until the daughter church can support them. The greatest obstacles he sees to church planting and growth are lack of passion and vision, and a lack of cooperation. He believes the '40-barrier' is the result of one pastor doing all the ministry himself and not training up lay ministry or using cell groups.

Rev Somkiat Kittipongse, Bangkok Fellowship Church (independent charismatic).

Bangkok Fellowship Church is 32 years old, with 7 daughter churches and a vision to grow this to 20-30 daughter churches in 10 years. They are a cell church, with more people attending their open, evangelistic cells than attending on Sundays. They average 450 people on Sundays (2 services), with a combined 200 attending the daughter churches (over 300 in cells). They also run Sunday afternoon homogeneous age group meetings. They mostly attract lower middle class blue-collar workers, with about equal numbers of single youth and families. They receive almost no outside or foreign financial support, and devote 25% of their income to church planting. They have planted churches in other provinces by evangelising the families of members, forming a cell, and then opening a church in the house of a member and raising up a convert as the principle leader. A pastor on staff visits each daughter church every second week, the mother church sends out a team once a month, and several times a year all the church planters are

gathered for a seminar or program at the mother church. Many of the daughter church leaders have very low educational backgrounds, so a ministry training course suitable for them has been opened in the mother church. The principle church planter in each church is supported full-time. Somkiat feels that his church lacks the resources needed for church planting in Bangkok. The primary obstacles he sees are: a lack of leaders—in Bangkok they would need higher education; and a shortage of finance. He notes that houses may not be as easy to use in Bangkok due to different attitudes, with people not often using their houses for entertaining. He also notes that small size meetings in Bangkok can put people off. He believes the '40-barrier' is the result of the pastor doing everything himself and not training church members to minister as well.

Rev Dr Tira Janepiriyaprayoon, Mahaporn Sukhumvit Church (C&MA).

Mahaporn Sukhumvit church is 17 years old, and the largest C&MA church in Thailand with 350 attending services.[98] They have 3 daughter churches, with a combined attendance of 100 people. They target middle class students and young professionals. They began with weekly services and departments, but no cell or house groups. Recently they have begun to transition into a cell church and cells are now their main program, but they do not yet call themselves a cell church.

Tira's vision for Thailand includes the training of disciples and church planting, and he notes that one square kilometre in Bangkok can have more residents than a whole county in the provinces. C&MA church planting in Bangkok has always been done in conjunction with missionaries, but Tira is interested in taking a greater responsibility themselves. In the provinces the church has

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98. This is the church Norman Ford helped plant. See notes on his saturation church planting proposals (page 61). Given Ford's significant proposals in 1982, it was noted that an evaluation of this church would be essential to the local data collection component of this thesis. It will be noted from the transcript of the interview with Dr Tira that Ford's proposals were never implemented (see page 179). His comments can be found on page 208.

planted daughter churches by evangelising relatives of members and planting a church in the house of a member out of an initial single cell, then sending out a pastor.

Tira believes church planters need a good foundation in Bible, teaching and cell ministry, and should have had some full-time ministry experience. He sees that church planters should be full-time, unless a strategy for raising up local converts as leaders could be developed. Mother churches should be in contact with daughter churches weekly, with monthly written reports and personal visits every second month. Daughter churches handle their own finances and decision-making, provided they continue to receive training and input from the mother church. Tira believes it is good to begin in houses, but that after a time it may be necessary to move into their own building to minimise inconvenience to the house owner. He feels this is even more important in Bangkok, where people and homes are not as open to others as they are in the provinces. He is convinced that the cost of land is an obstacle a reasonably sized church can manage. The greatest obstacle Tira sees to church planting and growth is a lack of practical training of leaders. He wonders whether a factor in the '40-barrier' may be related to the loose social structure of Thai society.

Rev Wan Petchsongkram, Rom Klao Church (Rom Klao movement).

Rom Klao Church is 22 years old, and has a Sunday attendance of over 1,000 people and 25 daughter churches across Thailand, forming an indigenous independent charismatic movement.[99] They appear to have thoroughly mixed cell and meta-church principles, encouraging members to be involved in both Sunday afternoon age / interest group meetings (that includes time in small

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99. Wan reported during the personal interview that the movement has approximately 8,000 members nationally, suggesting the mother church has 2,000 members and churches in the provinces average over 200 members. Many would believe this figure is quite inflated.

homogeneous cells), and mid-week geographical cells. They **also** have a strong training

emphasis, with both a bible school and **weeknight** lay bible study classes.

Wan believes that the first step in church planting is to identify a principle leader, usually from

within the new group. He feels that in Thailand it is important not to plant small, independent

churches—we should aim for large churches, and work as a network. He suggests commencing

meetings in a house, but believes we should have several cells and be large enough to need to rent

a facility very quickly. But he says it is not particularly important for churches to have their own

nice facilities. He believes in the need for mentoring and practical training of church planters,

and provides a training seminar for all his church planters at the mother church every 4 months.

Wan sees that the '40-barrier' is the result of the church being one functional group—of the pastor

doing all the work rather than training the members to minister together.

Rev Dr Winit Wongsonsern, Emmanuel Baptist Church (SBC).

Emmanuel Baptist Church is 49 years old, and the largest Baptist church in Thailand with 300

people in services. Emmanuel is an inner city church, and has planted 4 daughter churches in the

last 10 years. They have had difficulty using cell groups because of traffic congestion around the

church and members living a long distance apart. They are therefore a program-based church,

relying largely on their Sunday meetings. They aim to reach all age groups, but predominantly

draw young white-collar workers. They have 17 medical doctors in the church.

Winit dreams of every district and village having its own church. Their approach to church

planting is to begin by buying land. For the outer edge of the city he would like to buy large lots

of land that was cheap and well located now, well in advance, so that when the city grows to that

location they can sell half, use the money to put up a building **and** buy more land further out, and send people to plant a church at the new location.

His vision for inner city Bangkok is to plant a network of house churches in flats and apartment complexes, centred around the mother church, and running monthly combined services. He would like to take church to people, rather than ask people to travel to church. He feels that the ideal size for house churches is 25 to 50 people, and that when a church reaches 50 they should divide into two churches. Given that the inner-city apartments of members are usually too small for such churches, he proposes purchasing an adjoining apartment and remodelling to create a large enough meeting facility. He believes each house church should have a full-time pastor. The apartment could double as pastor's residence.

He believes church planters should love evangelism and be zealously keen, but that they can be **trained** on-the-job if they lack experience or bible college training. The mother church should provide encouragement and training rather than control, yet visit or be in contact regularly, even weekly. Daughter churches (including house churches) should be separately registered as churches in their own right. Winit sees that the **'40-barrier'** is the result of meeting in facilities which can only seat about 50 people. Churches of that size should multiply into two churches or exercise faith for a larger facility. He sees that the greatest obstacle to church planting and church growth is training of church planters and key leaders. He believes that the cost of purchasing condominiums or land is ultimately not such a large obstacle.

Rev Dr Wirachai Koware, Romyen Church (TAG).

Romyen Church (Bangkok Evangelistic Centre) is 33 years old, has directly planted tens of daughter churches, and currently supports 37 church plants through the Romyen Mission. They

are a program-based church with some cell groups, but are increasingly moving away from a department structure toward a meta-church structure. Romyen has an average Sunday attendance of 450 people, and a goal of 100 churches in the Romyen Mission by 2006. They are a family church, aiming to reach all age groups and types of people, attracting both the educated and uneducated.

Wirachai's church planting strategy for Bangkok and surrounds, which Romyen have already begun to implement, is to plant a network of lay-led house churches (15 or more people) around the mother church. He notes that 'house churches' can meet in homes, townhouses, offices or anywhere members make available. He notes that a network of house churches built around a leadership nucleus rather than a mother church with a building would be possible, but he feels this would be much harder to achieve in Thailand.

Romyen's house churches are often made up of several mid-week cell groups. Staff hold regular closed leadership meetings with their house church leaders, providing assistance and training. Members of house churches are formally members of the mother church, but are not expected to attend weekly services at the mother church except for combined celebration events several times a year. Tithes and offerings are collected in the house church, which maintains its own accounts and budgets. Each house church meeting includes worship, prayer, preaching, teaching, and so on, even utilising tapes if necessary. The primary qualification for a lay house church planter is their attitude, and a heart to pioneer. Wirachai does not want to revert to a structure that requires renting facilities, except for specific outreach events. The biggest obstacle to church planting and growth that he notes is equating large numbers with success. He suggests that faithful obedience is most important, and that a large number of small churches may be more effective than a small number of large churches.

Several major conceptual and methodological trends can be observed in the church structures surveyed above. Insofar as these trends coincide with our basic framework derived from ecclesiology and church growth research, these trends should be incorporated into our proposed church structure to facilitate saturation church planting in Bangkok.

The major conceptual and methodological trends observed include the following:

- Cell Church / House Church Structure. Of the nine churches surveyed, five are cell churches, two are transitioning to become cell churches, and two are program based with some meta church principles adopted. Nonetheless, it is interesting to observe that *all* nine advocate commencing new churches from cell groups. Six advocate planting a cell church, while three advocate planting a house church network (with or without cell groups as well).

- Large Celebration Services. All ten pastors interviewed stated large celebration services are important. Those envisioning planting large churches aimed for large celebration services each Sunday. Those advocating a multiplication of smaller or house churches all stressed regular or periodic, large, combined celebration services. The key elements advocated are excitement and atmosphere in worship, sense of being part of something big, the fact that crowds attract crowds, and greater influence that greater visibility can give.

- Begin Services In Houses. When asked about commencing worship services from the cells five of the ten pastors interviewed indicated a preference for beginning services in a house if possible, two for beginning in a rented or purchased facility, and three indicated it

depended entirely on the situation. For some this was a deliberate desire to multiply house churches. For others using a house was an intermediate step before leasing and building.

- <u>Network Mother and Daughter churches</u>. All ten pastors interviewed indicated a need for good relationships and some measure of networking between mother and daughter churches. All indicated a need for encouragement, motivating and ongoing in-service training of leaders, financial support, accountability, help from evangelistic teams, and assisting with administration tasks for the new church. However, there was a wide variation in the nature of the relationship, and the degree of autonomy given new churches.

- <u>Emphasis on Leadership Training</u>. All ten pastors interviewed stressed the issue of leadership being a key for church planting, and hence most stressed leadership training through either teaching instruction or mentoring. **Emphasis** was on training in practical ministry skills over theological education, and training of both lay members and full-time workers was stressed. The need to build teams and develop teamwork even between church planters was widely observed.

- <u>Church Planter Qualifications: Passion and Practical **Ability**</u>. Nine pastors discussed the qualifications church planters need for Bangkok. Three mentioned that a tertiary education would be preferable and only two that teaching, preaching or bible college training should be prerequisites before commencing. On the other hand, eight indicated practical training and proven skill in things like evangelism, cell ministry and leadership development were essential. All nine said attitude, passion, vision or burden are essential. The pastors differed over the minimum spiritual maturity after conversion required by church planters, ranging from a minimum 1½ years to a mimmum 7 years depending on the closeness of

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networking relationship expected with the mother church pastor and the anticipated size of the church being planted.

- <u>Decentralised **Authority**</u>. Another common trend in these interviews was the need to delegate, decentralise, and give decision-making authority to daughter church pastors, mother church leadership teams, and lay leaders. The actual level of autonomy and decision-making authority given varies widely, and will be discussed below.

Areas *of Disagreement about Church Structure by Pastors Interviewed*

As well as the **major** conceptual and methodological trends observed in the church structures surveyed above, several areas of disagreement and variance in practice have also been observed in these churches. The fact there is disagreement on these areas indicates a need for careful evaluation of each of the current practices against the framework we have derived from ecclesiology and church growth research. These differences **have** been summarised in Table 1.

These areas of major disagreement include:

- <u>Church Planters **Full-time,** Self-Supporting or Lay</u>? Nine pastors discussed the qualifications of church planters. Three (all from TAG churches) indicated it was good, ideal or necessary for church planters to be **bi-vocational,** self-supporting or lay leaders. The other six indicated church planters must be full-time in ministry. It should be noted that the idea of bi-vocational, self-supporting or lay leaders planting churches does not correlate with one particular church structure. The three pastors who like the idea of bi-

vocational, self-supporting or lay leaders planting churches are each planting churches with very different structures.

- Degree of Autonomy of Daughter Churches. While all ten pastors spoke of the need to network their churches, the type of network arrangement and level of autonomy varied widely. Half the pastors give daughter churches a high degree of autonomy and independence. However, while striving for a high level of decentralisation of authority and decision-making, four of the pastors lead their network of satellite or daughter churches through a single leadership structure with the senior pastor overseeing everything. Some would describe this as being one church with multiple services in different locations. Others would speak of satellite churches or even separate daughter churches, but with a common pastoral team overseeing and dividing responsibilities to various individuals. In most cases daughter churches handle their own finances independently, although in two cases this too was brought under one budget.

- Money an obstacle? Of nine churches surveyed, six have a high proportion of middle class, white-collar workers. Of these six churches, five indicated that finance for buildings and church planting was not a major issue. However, all three churches reaching predominantly lower income, blue-collar workers indicated finances *were* a major consideration in church planting. The exception was Wirachai, who has access to funds but indicated a desire not to rent or purchase facilities because his vision was still far bigger than the funds available.

- Ideal Church Size. The question is whether multiplying smaller churches or building mega churches is considered the ideal. Three pastors had a clear desire to build mega churches

and saturate the city through cells, while five pastors showed a clear preference for limiting church size to saturate the city through new church planting. The answer appears related to the question of church income and access to money, above. The three churches who clearly indicated a goal to build large or mega churches were amongst the five churches who felt finance was not a major issue. On the other hand, three of the five pastors who clearly indicated a preference for multiplying smaller churches also indicated they felt finance was a constraining issue. This observation is an area deserving more thorough research.

- <u>Importance of Buildings</u>. While all ten pastors agreed that beginning church plants as cells was good, and eight of ten were happy to see worship services initially commence in houses, most expected the church to move into its own facility as it grew. Of the pastors who stated an opinion, those who felt buildings were important all had a high proportion of middle class members. Those who felt buildings were not so important were more likely to have a higher proportion of lower income members. This is probably a reflection of both financial means and contextualisation to the attitudes and expectations of different classes.

- <u>Obstacles to Church Planting and **Growth**, and Reasons for the **'40-barrier'**</u>. A range of structural obstacles to church planting and growth in Bangkok were suggested. The obstacle most commonly noted was a shortage of leaders (both lay and full-time) able to minister effectively. The most common reasons given for this include a lack of on-going practical mentoring and discipleship, hierarchical leadership instead of teamwork and delegation, and a lack of networking between pastors. Other obstacles noted were the cost of renting facilities, a shortage of finance to support workers, a fixation on large churches (hence equating small churches with a lack of success). Some noted that small meetings in

Bangkok could put people off. Most suggested the '40-barrier' was the result of one pastor doing all the ministry himself and not training lay ministry *or* using cell groups. Tira wonders whether a factor in the '40-barrier' may be related to the loose social structure of Thai society, while Winit suggests it may also be related to pastors' faith level and the use of facilities which can only seat about 50 people

Table 1. Areas of Disagreement and Variance in Church Structure

	Structure			Daughter Church		Finance			
	Mother	Daughter	Worker Support	Networking	Autonomy	Money Dependence	Financial Obstacle?	Ideal Size	Building Important?
Anuparp	cell	cell	self OK	satellite churches	one staff, one finances	mid	no	large	yes
Chatri	going cell	cell	full time	smaller church network	high degree	low	yes	small	no
Krisada	cell G-12	cell / HCN	self ideal	smaller church network	one staff, sep. finances	low	yes	small	no
Manoonsak	cell	cell	full time	a) satellites b) network	a) one church b) high degree	mid	no	large	yes
Prayoon	cell	cell	full time		...	mid	...	small large	yes
Somkiat	cell	cell	full time	smaller church network round mother church network of churches	high degree	low	yes	...	no
Tira	PBD to cell	cell	full time	network of churches	high degree	mid	no	large	...
Wan	cell / meta	cell / meta	...	larger church network	high degree	mid	no	large	no
Winit	PBD	HCN	full time	HCN around mother church	high degree	mid	no	small	yes
Wirachai	PBD / meta	HCN	lay ideal	HCN around mother church	one church, sep. finances	mid	yes	small	no

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS AND PROPOSAL OF A CHURCH STRUCTURE TO FACILITATE SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING IN BANGKOK

7.1. SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT OBSERVATIONS

In the first part of this thesis we conducted a survey of literature and current practice in the following areas:

- Significant implications from ecclesiology that are prescriptive on church structure;

- Church growth research and contemporary church trends relating to church structure;

- Models of church structure in both Old and New Testaments;

- Contemporary models of large group / small group church structures: meta-church, cell church, house church and G-12 models;

- Church structures previously proposed for saturation church planting, with a particular emphasis on models previously proposed for Bangkok;

- Research into group dynamics and other Thailand/Bangkok socio-cultural factors useful in critiquing the relevance of particular church structures;

- Church structures which are currently used for church planting using mother church / daughter church models in Bangkok.

This survey has done two things:

a) Helped us establish a framework by which to evaluate models, proposals and practice, based solidly on sound ecclesiology, biblical models, thoroughly scientific church growth research, and relevant socio-cultural factors; and,

b) Provided us with a wide range of models, proposals, and current practices as ideas to stimulate our own proposals for saturation church planting in Bangkok.

On the following pages the findings from Part A of this thesis will be briefly summarised, and the various models, proposals, and current practices briefly reviewed according to the framework formed from ecclesiology and church growth research. Efforts will then be made to draw on this wealth of data to propose a church structure that I would hope might best overcome the obstacles of leadership, finance, and the "40-barrier", and thereby be able to facilitate rapid and highly reproducible church planting in Bangkok.

Significant Implications from Ecclesiology

From our survey of ecclesiology as it relates to church structure, we have observed that:

- Structures inherently communicate values and affect relationships;

- Churches should seek to be dynamically equivalent to New Testament churches in structure, even before being culturally relevant;

- Structures must place a high priority on building community by fostering in-depth, mutually edifying personal relationships with deep commitment to each other;

- Mission springs out of being community, is the only legitimate focus of community life, and is better done corporately by community, rather than by individually;

- Church gatherings should not be **significantly** dissimilar to or more formal than other everyday gatherings;
- The primary purpose of meeting together should be to **build one** another up;
- Structures must be adaptable, focused **on** the growth of individuals;

- Church structures must readily facilitate effective ministry and mission by all members according to their spiritual gifts, and with minimal clergy-laity division;
- *Community* is probably the key word.

Church Growth Research and Contemporary Trends

From our survey of church growth research and trends in the contemporary church that relate to church structure, we have observed that:

- Quality of church life correlates strongly with church growth, showing that church growth can be better fostered by focusing on essential quality factors not techniques and numbers;
- The multiplication of holistic small groups within a larger group environment is an essential component of a successful church **structure—and** that growing churches even tend to give these small groups priority over large services;
- Church size and **church** growth are strongly negatively **correlated**, meaning:
  - o High quality small churches with strong growth and innovative multiplication should be seriously investigated as models alongside or **before** large churches;
  - o The multiplication of small churches through continual church planting should be seriously considered over growing churches larger;

- Worship services must be **inspiring—church** should be exciting, engaging and 'fun';
- Large celebration services are important;

- Structures must promote an ongoing multiplication of the ministry—must facilitate leaders training lay ministers, leaders and pastors—must facilitate leaders empowering people;

- People must be released to minister according to their gifts;

- Consideration should be given to a leadership structure in which one leader takes the primary role in vision casting, leadership training, and delegation of authority. However, in adopting this form care must be taken to protect against abuse.

Models of Church Structure in both Old and New Testaments

Our study of models of church structure in both testaments revealed that:

- Weekly small group meetings in households were God's revealed plan for the people of God in all eras of the Bible;

- Whenever possible, regular periodic large group celebration gatherings were also held by God's people in both testaments;

- The primary meeting of the New Testament church for about three hundred years were meetings homes—apparently led by the lay head-of-the-house where the meeting was held;

- The most common descriptors of the church use household terminology—the church being the household of God;

- New Testament house church meetings were apparently primarily for edification (as opposed to worship), and teaching was based on dialogue and discussion more than monologue discourse.

Contemporary Models of Large Group / Small Group Church Structure

Our survey has revealed three basic models of large group / small group church structure:

- <u>Meta-Church</u>. This model was designed to overcome the structural limitations in mega-churches, with the aim of almost unlimited growth in major urban centres. Small group or cells (up to 15 people) are the core of church life, but different small groups have different focuses. Groups are free to choose their own agenda and curriculum, with pastoral staff training leaders and administrating the system. Congregational size events are held periodically to recruit people into various small groups, small groups often forming for a limited duration. Sunday large group celebration services are considered to be the front door of church, often making these meetings somewhat or largely evangelistic. However, researchers suggest annual numerical growth must be limited to no more than 15 percent, or there is untenable stress on the church.

- <u>Cell church</u>. This model uses a simpler church structure, and is designed to reduce **administration** and accommodate more rapid growth by overseeing everything through cells. All cells have a similar purpose, vision and basic format; variation comes through having homogeneous and geographical cells, and different personal leadership styles. Weekly celebration services are emphasised equally with cells, and the key roles of paid church staff are in lay-leadership development and managing the church.

- <u>House Church Network</u>. House churches are small congregations meeting in homes (or offices, etc), each taking on the responsibility to fulfil *all* the basic purposes of the church. It should be noted that house churches and churches meeting in homes need not be the same thing. Many churches begin in homes, using the same forms as larger building-based churches. The term 'house church' is usually reserved for a far more participative, less formal style of church which decides to reproduce itself in the houses of members indefinitely, and has no ambition to ever lease or own its own worship facility.

Most advocates prefer house churches to be networked in a 'decentralised' manner, but another option is a centralised structure overseen by a single team of leaders and full-time staff, administrated and led like a single local church. Regular (quarterly, monthly or weekly) combined meetings for large group worship are considered important. Networked house churches require a greater emphasis on leadership development, but have the greatest potential to multiply very rapidly and cost effectively by using lay leaders and bypassing any building barriers. This model fits the concept of multiplying small churches through rapid, continual daughter church planting. The house church movement is a growing movement around the world.

The G-12 model is a cell multiplication and leadership development system, developed within cell church structure but transferable to any of these three structures above. It assumes every Christian has the potential to pioneer and lead an evangelistic cell, given adequate training and support; hence all church members are trained to be cell leaders. It combines sending people out to pioneer small, open, homogenous, evangelistic cells, with a system of closed meetings between a cell overseer and a group of cell leaders under their care to provide mentoring. No more than 12 cell leaders may be supervised by any one person.

Previously Proposed Church Structures for SCP

We considered universal proposals for saturation church planting put forward by six fairly well respected authorities.[100] Key principles of their proposals can be summarised as:

- Plant churches that plant daughter churches, which in turn plant daughter churches;

100.Donald McGavran, Jim Montgomery, George Patterson, David Garrison, Robert Fitts, and Wolfgang Simson. See page 53.

- Plant daughter churches rapidly, even when the mother church still has minimal resources;

- Minimise reliance on money, specialised education of leaders, costly buildings, and executive-level professional leadership;

- Multiply local lay leaders through apprentice-style on-the-job training;

- Decentralise leadership authority;

- Begin in homes, or cheaply available facilities;

- Begin by conducting evangelistic small group home meetings;

- Always consider planting lay-led house church networks that plan to always remain house churches, facilitated and guided by experienced full-time pastors, possibly based out of a larger church;

- Adopt either a house church or cell church structure;

- Plant a cluster of churches in an organically linked network—don't plant single congregations (particularly important if a house church structure is used);

- Run regional or citywide large combined celebration events;

- Maintain strong network relationships between mother and daughter churches, providing continuous accountability and on-going training.

Four other proposals that attempt to apply the goals and principles of saturation church planting specifically to the context of Bangkok were surveyed.[101] Johnson proposed a cell church model be used to saturate the city with cells, based out of mega-cell churches. His proposed approach is very much that which Bangkok Liberty Church (Anuparp Wichitnuntana), Jai Samarn (Manoonsuk Kamolmatayakul), and Hope of Bangkok churches (amongst others) are currently

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101.Larry Persons (1982), Normal Ford (1982), Kevin Hovey (1993) and Alan Johnson (1998). See p 61. Persons only made a few basic observations rather than a detailed proposal.

doing in Bangkok, with fair success. His proposal focussed primarily on overcoming the leadership issues, but failed to address the question of a property barrier.

Ford and Hovey each made very similar suggestions, both substantially different to that of Johnson. Both proposed:

- Plant churches that plant daughter churches, which in turn plant daughter churches;

- Emphasise local lay leadership, and leadership training;

- Begin by initially conducting evangelistic bible studies simultaneously in 5-10 homes of interested but unsaved contacts;

- Attempt to use people group dynamics to achieve conversion of whole families;

- Plant a lay-led house church network using one of two possible structures:

    o A larger central church surrounded by house churches under its care;

    o A network of house churches (no central church), lead and administrated by a single leadership team with a single senior pastor. Use a very structured training and visitation program with weekly closed group leadership meetings, and run monthly or quarterly combined celebration services in rented facilities.

Group Dynamics and Socio-Cultural Factors in Bangkok

Our survey of research into contextual group dynamics and socio-cultural factors in Thai/Bangkok society revealed that:

- Compared with other regional Asian societies, the Thai appear very loosely structured and individualistic; however,

- Relationships and small social groups built on a sense of gratefulness and mutual obligation are enduring and stable—those without this sense of mutual obligation tend to be transient and relate more superficially;

- 'Grateful' relationships have the potential to be either very positive or quite manipulative;

- Compared with their Asian neighbours, the Thai have a comparatively high rate of extended families living together;

- Chinese-Thai are often slow to make a decision, but then maintain a strong commitment to any decision—Thai and Isaan (northeastern Thai) people find it much harder to continue in a decision in the face of family opposition; meaning,

- It is important to aim for group or family conversions, based on relationships more than people attending an event;

- Meeting in houses is the most conducive environment to the rapid spread of the gospel amongst the Thai, because it is less threatening, more informal, facilitates social intimacy, and cheaper financially—the disadvantages of church buildings are often overlooked in Thailand.

Current Church Structures used for Church Planting in Bangkok

Ten well-known Bangkok pastors were interviewed, each having a clear vision for or history of planting daughter churches. Each is widely considered to have sufficient vision, skill and resources for church planting. Several major trends were observed concerning the church structures they were using and advocating, including:

- A cell church or house church structure;

- Regular large celebration services;

- Begin services in houses wherever possible;

- Strong networking between mother and daughter churches;

- Emphasis on leadership training, both of lay and full-time leaders;

- Church planter qualifications: passion and practical ability over theological training;

- Decentralised leadership authority.

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Several areas of major disagreement and wide variance in practice were also observed, namely:

- Church planters full-time, self-supporting or lay?

- Degree of autonomy of daughter churches;

- Is money an obstacle?

- Ideal church size;

- Importance of buildings;

- Obstacles to church planting and growth, and reasons for the '40-barrier'.

7.2. EVALUATION OF MODELS, PROPOSALS AND CURRENT PRACTICE

Before submitting any new proposals regarding effective church structures to facilitate saturation church planting in Bangkok, it would be pertinent to evaluate the major models, proposals and practices previously presented by others, in the light of the framework of ecclesiology , biblical practice, church growth research, and cultural context, as summarised above.

Meta-Church

The meta-church model is now widely adopted in many places in the West, but is not being strictly followed by many if any churches in Thailand. Romyen (Wirachai Koware) and Rom Klao (Wan Petchsongkram) churches both appear to incorporate many meta-church principles

into their own unique structures, and Bangkok Liberty Church (Anuparp Wichitnuntana) also appears to be beginning to adopt some meta-church principles into their otherwise cell-church structure.

The meta-church structure has many advantages, but also some major weaknesses for Thailand. On the positive side it naturally facilitates gift oriented ministry, has a strong small group base, runs weekly inspiring worship, can easily multiply ministry through releasing lay leaders, and has a functional structure which can be further developed by releasing leaders to facilitate the various ministries they feel burdened about.

However, members who are not involved in the one meta-group long term can lack long-term in-depth relationships and a sense of community. Given the Thai tendency toward short-term, superficial relationships where mutual obligation was not involved, this model could have serious limitations for the Thai church. In addition, the ministry focus of some meta-groups may distract from building close relationships between group members, and run the risk of undermining the 'passionate spirituality' of the church. The Rom Klao church overcomes these weaknesses by combining both meta and cell church models.

Also, the meta-church structure was designed primarily for mega-churches. Attaining large church size in Thailand is not easy, and once attained the church size itself may mitigate against further strong growth. Using a meta-church format in no way alleviates any property barrier. And finally—and probably most importantly for the Thai context—the range of leaders with different visions and distinct ministries can make leading and administrating a meta church much more difficult than other church structures.

For these reasons, a pure meta-church structure is not **highly** recommended for the Thai context—although incorporating some meta-church ideas into other structures does appear to be a viable option.

Cell Church

The cell church structure is widely used and advocated in Thailand. The largest churches in Bangkok all use a cell church **structure,**[102] several cell church seminars are held here each year, and Alan Johnson (1998) advocated this as the model for saturation church planting in Bangkok. The churches of eight of the ten pastors interviewed in this research are either cell churches or are transitioning into cell churches.

The cell church structure has a range of major strengths: it has a stronger small group base (more members involved) than the meta-church structure, and promotes a more unified vision amongst team and members. More rapid assimilation of members is possible, and the fact that it is easier to lead and administer should assist rapid growth. Large, inspiring worship services are possible every week, building atmosphere and vision in the **church.** And multiplication of ministry can easily be achieved by training and releasing lay members as cell leaders and cell overseers. Strong relationships and a good sense of community can be developed through the cells, although brief cell meetings alone may not be enough for this. All cells having the same focus and basic format can restrict ministry according to gifting, and it is possible that the large church size may mitigate against strong growth rate. However, this model has many advantages.

102.For example, large well-known cell churches in Bangkok would include: Hope of Bangkok, Rom Klao, Jai Samarn, Christ Church, Bangkok Liberty Church, and Bangkok Fellowship Church.

The one obstacle a cell church structure does not deal with at all is the property barrier, which was quoted as a significant obstacle by the cell church pastors in Bangkok who are ministering to lower income people. It will be noted that in the Jai Samara church, Manoonsuk's comment that finance for buildings is no longer such an issue coincides with Prayoon's assessment that the largest group of people attending the church has shifted from the poor to the middle class and above. The large reliance on foreign finance to purchase or construct buildings by almost all cell churches in Bangkok has already been noted.

This obstacle has the potential to restrict this church structure from the ideal of multiplication of both cells and churches to merely multiplication of cells (to the size limit of the current building). Addition of new churches could become limited to by the means Of foreign donors. This is particularly true if new churches don't attract a significant proportion of middle class and above people to the church.

Nonetheless, this is a widely advocated and widely used structure with major advantages, and worthy of serious consideration.

House Church Network

The extent to which this model has been advocated and is being utilised in Thailand was surprising, given that so many other pastors are very sceptical of its practicality. It has been advocated by Ford (1982), Persons (1982), and Hovey (1993). Pastors Wirachai and Krisada have both begun experimenting with it for new church planting in the districts around the edge of Bangkok. Together with pastor Winit, they are planning it as a strategy for church planting within the city.

A house church network model has many strengths. It is the model most dynamically equivalent in structure to New Testament churches. It facilitates building community better than any other model, allows a greater degree of participation in ministry one to another in meetings, and minimises the division between laity and clergy. The multiplication of small churches could potentially produce a stronger growth rate, and it can easily multiply ministry and release lay leaders. A house church network could minimise or bypass the property barrier, as well as sidestep the 40-barrier entirely by making 40-50 people the ideal-size church.

There are also several potential weaknesses of a house church network structure. A greater number of leaders would be required at a leadership level somewhat above that of cell leaders. Without care the multiplication of churches of with **15-40** members could actually reinforce a kind of clergy-laity division where one minister or key lay-leader does all the ministry while other members don't become involved at all. Weekly worship services would be less formal, but they may also lack a necessary inspiring, exciting dynamic. Nonetheless, with more time available to prepare the regular, large, combined celebration services and a greater sense of novelty, the combination of less formal house church worship services with regular and very well prepared large celebration services would have the *potential* to be *far more* inspiring and exciting than the weekly cell church format!

Probably the biggest obstacle could be a difficulty of finding enough private homes, factories, or shop-fronts large enough and made available for free for use for church meetings in Bangkok. This concern was raised by several pastors, who conjecture that small apartments and a different attitude towards visitors and hospitality in Bangkok as compared to rural areas would work against the model. However, several other pastors did not feel this to be a major obstacle. Apart from anything else, this would provide additional motivation to see whole families saved, including heads of families, so houses would indeed be made available.

This is a very interesting model, with the greatest potential for rapid multiplication, and thus also worthy of strong consideration. For many reasons, including resources, leadership, ongoing training and vision, it would be essential for house church networks in Bangkok to be strongly networked around a strong mother church or a solid team of full-time leaders.

Mega-Church Satellite Model

This is a structure utilised by the large Hope of Bangkok church, and being adopted by Jai Samarn and Bangkok Liberty Churches. In all three cases, the reach of a large or mega-church is being expanded and problems of limited facilities overcome by offering additional worship services in the same style in other quarters of the city. This reduces travel time for members and puts off the need to move into a larger facility. The churches are administered as one church with one leadership team, with the alternate venues being treated as additional multiple services. Each of the churches currently adopting this style are cell churches.

This model has a range of strengths. These include comparative ease of church planting (particularly for cell churches), opening new, challenging opportunities for developing leaders, delegation and decentralising authority in a large church, shared resources, ability of daughter churches to maintain the inspiring worship service format and quality of the mother church, and clear communication that each of the congregations is clearly on the same team (with only teamwork and synergy between staff and members, not competition). This last point is important. It has been noted that mission is best conducted together by people in a community, and this structure provides a level of community between pastors pioneering or overseeing different congregations comparable only with the house church model outlined above. By working closely with a proven leader, developing leaders can gain an effectiveness they would

not achieve alone. By still being 'within' the senior pastor's church, they also naturally provide ongoing supervision and on-the-job training to all their pastors.

However, potential weaknesses include real authority never being delegated sufficiently for developing leadership to be fully empowered, and the ministry style and preferences of the senior pastor precluding younger leaders developing and ministering according to their own gifts and style. This may ultimately stifle leadership development. It also appears to be predominantly an *addition* strategy for leadership and new congregations, rather than true multiplication. Can satellite churches open their own satellites or plant daughter churches, or is this all controlled through the senior pastor and mother church? Still there are a lot of strengths to this model.

Multiplying Networked Small Churches

Several pastors talked about multiplying small churches till they are as common as "7-11" stores. Some suggest using houses or apartments, meaning a house church network—but others suggest multiplying smaller churches in rented or leased facilities. The basic concept of what they are doing or propose are similar to those of multiplying house churches above, except that other building are being used and meeting size could be up to 70-80 people. It should be noted that this is the multiplication of small churches, not addition—meaning that churches don't grow to this size and stop. Rather, as every daughter church grows to the ideal size it sends out a church planting team to form a new daughter church, thus perpetuating the need and ability for further growth in both the mother and daughter churches.

This is in fact what pastor Krisada has done with his church planting program to date, and what both Prayoon and Chatri propose. It is also very similar to Winit's vision to plant a network of apartment churches, and Wirachai's network of house churches. Networks based around a

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leadership team (Krisada) or a mother church (Prayoon, Wirachai, Winit, and Chatri) are both possible. Networks may or may not hold large combined worship services. It should be noted that three of these advocates are talking about multiplying small *dell* churches—small churches each made up of even smaller cells.

This model has many of the strengths of house church networks. By planting churches everywhere, they make travel and access easier and potentially penetrate the community more effectively. Their small size can facilitate a greater sense of community amongst members and informality in meetings, as well as greater participation rates (although this is not automatic— many small churches in Thailand appear to have even lower participation rates than medium size churches). With a high reproduction rate, their small size may also better focus the network on true multiplication principles and higher church growth, and force the churches to strongly develop and utilise lay ministry.

There is an interesting comparison here with the retail sector in Thailand: *both* small "7-11" convenience stores and large supermarkets seem to be thriving, with large numbers of customers and new stores opening continually. However, medium-size stores do not appear to be competing well in either range of goods or convenience, and are quickly disappearing from the scene. If these dynamics are transferable to the church, which is probable but not certain, we may hypothesise that close networks of small church and mega-churches may *both* succeed well in Thailand while mid-sized churches increasingly struggle. At present, it would appear that a large number of pastors aim to build mid-sized churches.

Pastors Wan, Somkiat, Anuparp and Manoonsuk all warned that small churches face big obstacles. Krisada's church network has proved that the things lacked by small churches can be overcome by forging a close network between small churches meeting and working together as a

single leadership team, and with periodic, large, celebration services and combined training programs. Alternatively, they can be overcome by networking small churches closely with a mother church. Either way, resources can be shared, ongoing accountability and training can be provided, and combined celebration worship services held periodically. By organising either network as a single leadership team with weekly meetings, less-well trained leaders can be sent out to plant churches under very close supervision. This is a major advantage. Also, even more than within the satellite church structure, this networking provides a major sense of community for church planters. This sense of a community of peers is empowering for the church planters individually, and as has been noted, is the best place out of which ministry should be conducted.

Again, this structure is quite similar to that of the house church network. While this model avoids the potential problem of homes not being readily available in Bangkok, the greatest weakness of the model is that is multiplies rather than alleviates the obstacle of financing church facilities.

7.3. PROPOSAL OF CHURCH STRUCTURES

Criteria for Proposals

The key requirements of any church structure to be proposed in this thesis are to:

- Match our framework derived from ecclesiology, biblical models, church growth research, and cultural context;

- Facilitate genuine multiplication of churches rather than simple addition;

- Facilitate multiplication as endlessly and rapidly as possible;

- Overcome the most major obstacles to rapid and extensive church planting and growth noted throughout this thesis, namely:

    o   Insufficient capable leadership;

    o   Insufficient finance to support buildings and workers in new church planting;

    o   The sociological '40-barrier'.

Each of the five church structures evaluated in section 7.2. above readily allow mentored leadership development, and opportunities for ministry at a range of graduated levels of responsibility. With careful attention, each has the potential to minimise the leadership obstacle and produce capable leaders in sufficient numbers for rapid church multiplication—although it would be easier to multiply leaders for small churches than for larger churches. Through the extensive use of small groups and lay leadership training, each of these five church structures also has the potential to move beyond being just one sociological group with one leader doing most of the ministry, and hence pass the '40-barrier'. Each has the ability to fit with good ecclesiology and biblical models, and to utilise church growth principles.

The determining factors in making the following proposals are therefore:

- The building and finance obstacle;

- The need to facilitate genuine *multiplication,* as rapidly and endlessly as possible—i.e. churches planting churches that plant churches, avoiding all possible growth limitations;

- The need to foster family and group level decisions as naturally as possible.

Ford noted that, "Methods are a means to an end—churches in Bangkok. If the end is not realised, we must not hesitate to use other methods. No method is sacred" (Ford 1982:21). God is a God of variety and diversity. There is no one, universal 'right' church structure or method of planting and growing churches. Having said that, I note the number of pastors who do not feel they yet have the resources to plant successful daughter churches in Bangkok. Bangkok Fellowship Church, with 450 people attending on Sundays, feel they do not yet have the resources to plant churches in urban Bangkok. Bangkok Liberty Church have waited until they have 450 people attending on Sundays before they feel ready. Even the large Jai Samarn church feel they lack leaders able to take on their satellite centres as separate daughter churches—and the large Rom Klao church have only planted one daughter church in the city. The reasons most commonly given were lack of leaders of high enough calibre, and lack of finance.

The consensus in the interviews was that training leaders for groups of 10 was easy, for groups of 50 was not hard, but for groups of 100 or more was difficult. I also note that few if any churches in Thailand have been able to purchase adequate facilities through their own internal financial means alone, and many cannot meet rental expenses without assistance. The property barrier is even more acute for churches ministering predominantly to the poorer people of the city. Outside financial assistance is limited, and will eventually plateau if rapid and sustained church multiplication is achieved. Hence if we use a church structure that relies on having some sort of church facilities, we *must* find a way to multiply church property and finance beyond simply multiplying the number of members.

House Church Network, or Cell Church?

Given these realities, my suggestion is that perhaps we need to consider a simpler model of church for church planting in Bangkok, one with simpler leadership requirements, greatly reduced overhead costs, and a highly reproducible structure. Of all the options considered, the centralised house church network seems to do each of these best. However, the house church network structure commonly proposed also has some major weaknesses in the Thai context.

Most house church advocates (particularly in the West) argue for a very loose, decentralised network structure, with only irregular, relational input from full-time workers. It has been observed that loose relationships like this tend to be transient and superficial in Thai society. Meaningful relationships in Thai society seem to need the 'grateful' (*bunkhun* บุญคุณ) sense of mutual obligation.

Western house churches usually have a high proportion of members with a Christian background and basic bible knowledge, making a high level of shared leadership responsibility possible and requiring less intensive discipling of converts and leaders. However, rapid reproduction of churches in Thailand means that members are often newer converts with no previous Christian background. A loose, decentralised house church network would be very weak in Thailand. Leadership structures in growing churches in Thailand *must* adopt a more intimate, *bunkhun* structure simply to provide adequate discipleship for new Christians and to continually mentor new leadership. Biblically it would seem more appropriate for us to speak of a hierarchy of mentoring relationships where permission was given and people held accountable, rather than a hierarchy of delegated control and authority. Nonetheless, these factors would imply that the more hierarchical leadership form adopted by most cell churches would be far more appropriate

in Thailand. This is a far more centralised and hierarchical structure than most Western house church advocates would be happy with.

The ideal church structure for new church planting leading to saturation church planting in Bangkok would therefore appear to be a hybrid between G-12 cell church and house church forms. As hybrid forms, it is hard to give these church structures accurate names. Two models are proposed below. Either of these models could be described as a type of G-12 cell church which happens to meet for small house-based services more often than large celebration services (see for example Neighbour 1990). They could equally be described as a centralised house church network (see for example Banks and Banks 1998; Hovey 1993) that has adopted G-12 model leadership development structures.

It would appear that the following proposals are actually closer to the cell church model than a house church one, despite the house church terminology. I would expect that most cell church advocates would see some differences between what is proposed here and their normal practice of cell church, but would accept these models as viable cell church models. I would be equally confident that most house church advocates would feel the following proposals do not do justice to their idea of what constitutes a true house church.

Regardless, two such hybrid G-12 cell church / house church structures will now be presented in some detail (in order of preference), and then several suggestions made for those who may prefer to continue using other building based church structures. It should be noted that since the issues of property and leadership development seem more acute in churches reaching predominantly poorer people, these models might seem more appropriate to this context. It is suggested here they may be the best models for new city churches trying to reach any social class.

Preferred Model: ~~The Mother Church—Christian Communities Network~~

(A Hybrid G-12 Cell Church / House Church Network, Built Around a Mother Church)

It must be stressed again that this proposal seeks to identify a church structure for use in planting *new* churches. There is no intent that existing churches should necessarily transition into a different church structure, but simply that new churches could be planted with the church structures being proposed here. It should also be stressed that this proposed church structure is really a hybrid between a G-12 cell church and a house church network, and draws heavily from both. Finding an appropriate title or name for the hybrid model is difficult, particularly as the term 'house church' creates such a negative image in the minds of many pastors.

This proposal could be described as a tight network of lay-led house churches, planted out of and facilitated by full-time staff in a strong central mother church. It could also be described as a type of G-12 cell church that meets for small house-based worship services most Sundays and has less regular large celebration services. This church structure was proposed over two decades ago by McGavran (Montgomery and McGavran 1980:145). It is the structure being used by pastors Wirachai and Krisada (in Ayuttaya) as they plant churches, and is very similar to the proposal of pastor Winit for inner city Bangkok To avoid confusion between the terms 'mother church' and 'house church', Krisada has adopted the term 'community' for his house churches around the Ayuttaya mother church. We will adopt the same terminology here.

In this proposal 'communities' (house churches) of approx. 15-50 people meet for worship weekly in homes, offices, factories or any venue made freely available by members. A venue in or attached to a family living area may be preferable for the sense of informal social intimacy and the image of being family—but this is not essential. As with both Wirachai and Krisada's house

churches, these 15-50 people (depending on size of venue) are comprised of *at least* two or three cell groups—a 'district' of cells or miniature, lay-led cell church.

Each 'community' (house church) should be considered a church in its own right, in the sense that members should not be expected to attend weekly services at the mother church as well as attend their weekly 'community' meeting—the 'community' is their primary, weekly church service. Yet the communities are not totally independent entities but are still part of a larger church structure we could call the 'mother church' or 'the network'. There should be one membership list, and 'community' members should share the name and identity of the mother church.

Communities (house churches) are lay-led, using less formal, more participative meeting formats, each seeking to fulfil all the basic purposes of a local church: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and evangelism (see page 13). Because of the time spent in these small-sized groups and the comparative informality, the concept of community life should be able to remain central. Close and lasting 'grateful' relationships between members and with the leader must be built within these groups, and wherever possible 'communities' should be build around families who have come to the Lord together.

The small and limited size of 'communities' need not limit growth or bring complacency in evangelism. As with cell multiplication, the principles of witness, incorporating and discipling converts, and multiplying the number of small groups must become core values imbibed by every member. The unifying purposes of the fellowship and community life must be outreach and the multiplying of leaders and pioneer workers (to plant not just cells, but new 'communities'). This is one important reason for close networking around the strong leadership in a mother church: to keep this vision strongly in focus and prevent 'communities' (house churches) turning inward on themselves.

The networking aspect with a mother church is also very important for things such as on-going leadership training and accountability, provision of teaching resources, and particularly, regular combined celebration services. About once a month all the 'communities' (house churches) need to come together for large corporate worship. If possible, this would ideally be a combined meeting together with all the mother church members (who meet weekly at the mother church) and members who meet most weeks in 'communities' (house churches).

The 'communities' (house churches) should be facilitated by full-time staff in the mother church, who attend staff meetings and are considered regular staff members within the mother church leadership team, but whose portfolio is largely or exclusively focussed on the 'community' (house church) network. 'Community' meetings should be lay-led, but with staff members bringing occasional input and special ministry, and training and developing leaders.

In a sense, the structure being proposed here is like China and Hong Kong—One Church: Two Systems. To make this work both the mother church and the 'communities' (house churches) must see themselves as being one, single church, and must understand and be proud of both the two systems being used. It is essential that the senior pastor has as much vision for the 'communities' as the larger, building-based mother church. House church members should never be allowed to feel like second-class members of the church. Developing these lay-led 'communities' should not be considered a first step in planting traditional style, autonomous daughter churches with buildings and full-time pastors.

There are a range of benefits of this two systems structure for both the mother church and the 'communities' (house churches). The mother church benefits by gaining:
- More efficient use of existing buildings, allowing multiplication of members to a larger size before meeting the building barrier;

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- A structure promoting leadership and pioneering vision amongst lay members and staff;

- An ability to expand over a greater area of the city and surrounds more cost effectively by multiplying worship venues—particularly into the inner city and at greater distances from the mother church;

- An ability to target very different social classes and homogeneous groups with worship services and styles tailored to them—e.g. slum dwellers or the very rich;

- A church planting structure that results in a nett financial gain into the church's mission program, not one that places a continual financial drain on the mother church resources.

The 'communities' benefit by receiving:

- Shared resources, such as teaching material;

- Continual leadership input, maintaining vision and a high quality of leadership training;

- An identity. A shared identity with a large church and known senior pastor minimises any potential identity crisis and pull on house church members to move to larger, building based churches. It also helps legitimise house church members and their leaders to outside observers and authorities.

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To facilitate such a network of 'communities' around a mother church, leadership should adopt a hierarchical mentoring oversight structure similar to that of a cell church, administered out of the leadership team within the mother church. A closed cell leadership development system based on the G-12 model would seem most appropriate for the ongoing mentoring and leadership development at all levels.

Several potential weaknesses in any house church model have already been noted (see page 110). The fact that lay leaders are required to lead weekly services of up to 50 people, and hence

function at a slightly higher leadership level than cell leaders, should be taken as a challenge and an opportunity. Meeting this challenge has the opportunity to further reduce the clergy-laity division and live out the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It also has the potential to raise the standard of leadership training, which will be important as the church network expands anyway. The risk of reinforcing a common fault of small churches—one leader doing all the ministry for the group—can be avoided by strongly emphasising continual training of new leaders and church planters and participative forms of worship.

The question of whether enough homes would be available in Bangkok for 'communities' (house churches) to meet in, and whether these would have the welcoming and relaxed atmosphere necessary, can only be answered by conducting a trial of the model. It is noted that many Bangkok cell churches run most of their cells in houses now, and few of these problems are encountered in these. This problem can be further addressed by emphasising people group dynamics to see family conversions, being flexible on meeting venues, and following the early church example of cultivating hospitality as a leadership attribute in the church.

It is an open question whether not having a temple-style building (a *bōt*—โบสถ์) is an advantage or a disadvantage in Thailand. Many Thais, both Christian and non-Christian, certainly do consider such a building as almost essential to religious practice. Yet non-Christians will often more readily attend a Christian meeting in a home than in a church building. It is possible that a church structure not relying on buildings may actually be helpful in communicating the fact that Christianity is primarily a personal relationship with God, and is vastly different to their pre-Christian concepts of 'religion'. As with the early church, a church that clearly does not rely on sacred buildings and a professional priesthood may provide a very useful contrast with 'religion' as popularly conceived in Thailand.

Alternate Proposal: The Apostolic House Church Network

(A Hybrid G-12 Cell Church / House Church Network, Built Around a Leadership Team)

Again, the structure being proposed here could be described in either house church or cell church terminology. Using house church language we could say this is a fairly centralised house church network, in which house churches of about equal size and resources are networked around a central leadership team y an apostolic pastor: an 'apostolic house church network'. Alternately it could be described as a G-12 cell church with weekly Sunday meetings in smaller congregations in homes, and monthly combined worship services in a large venue.

This model is distinguished from the preceding model by the absence of a strong, central congregation or mother church. While the preceding model could be built around an existing church to extend its reach, this second model would need to be pioneered from scratch.

It has already been noted how widely advocated house church network models are. Advocates in the literature we have surveyed include: McGavran (1970), Patterson (1981a; 1993), Prior (1983b), Fitts (2000), Simson (2001), Ford (1982) and Hovey (1993). This model is very practical, and will work within the Thai context. This is demonstrated by Pastor Krisada's development of a strong, tight network of 7 small churches, built around a senior pastor and single leadership team rather than a large mother church. None of his churches currently draw more than 80 people to Sunday services, including the Romyen Thonburi 'mother church'! Yet their church planting continues to expand outward on a strong base.

However, the view of pastor Wirachai about this model should be kept in mind: he suggested that a house church network centered around a leadership team is possible, but is almost certainly harder to reproduce in Thailand than a house church network connected closely with a mother

church. It should also be noted that pastor Krisada did not commence planting a network of small churches until he had built his single mother church over 6 years, to about 100 people attending on Sundays. So while this structure is possible and widely advocated, I would at this stage recommend it far less strongly than the previous house church network structure centred around a strong mother church. Where we have mother churches with a vision to pursue a program of planting house churches, we should adopt that form first.

Most of the comments about strengths and potential weaknesses of a network of Christian 'communities (house churches) discussed above also apply to this form. Additional obstacles for this structure include:

- Potentially suffer more identity problems and more misunderstandings at the hands of other Christians;

- Must develop more of their own resources from the ground up;

- Must pay rent on the auditorium for monthly celebration services, and develop all their own musicians and leaders for these meetings;

- Need a leadership *team* from the first stages of initial church planting.

One major advantage is the greater potential to add another dimension of multiplication by planting not only new house churches, but also new house church networks. A house church network built around a mother church would only naturally reproduce itself if the mother church planted a building-based daughter church in the traditional way, which itself adopted the 'two-systems' structure and became a mother church for a new house church network.[103]

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103. Maybe the answer for networks built around mother churches would be a network of networks—a network of mother churches, each being the centre for a network of house churches. This will in fact be the final form of Krisada's church network if each of the small building-based churches adopt the house church network structure currently being tested in Ayuttaya (by planting house churches around themselves). New mother churches could

Anticipated Objections and Problems

Gibbs and Coffey point out that the church is an inherently conservative institution, and encourage us to not hold on to ineffective ways forms out of conservativism (2001:26). In his document proposing a house church network structure be adopted by the Australian AOGWM missionaries in Thailand, Hovey (1993) gave a good description and response to the key problems and objections a house church network structure (network of Christian 'communities') would face in Thailand. Some of his points are also pertinent to these proposals. Drawing from his list we could summarise the key objections likely to be raised against these church models:

- Insufficient houses will be available, since in most cases only some members of families are saved and there is often a high level of opposition from the rest of the family;
- Thais like to be part of something big;
- The job is only half done.

The feeling that insufficient houses will be available has already been partially dealt with above. Two things suggest this objection is not valid. Firstly, a high proportion of new church planting outside Bangkok is already now done in houses. Sometimes this is done by the mother church or other sponsors paying rent on a house, but more often these churches begin in the homes of members. This was brought out in the interviews with pastors. And secondly, as will be discussed in the implementation section below, a key to using these structures will be releasing *people movement* dynamics to see whole families saved rather than just isolated individuals.

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be planted either in the manner they have planted churches to date, or by hiving off a cluster of house churches in close proximity to each other as each mother church grows.

The second objection, that Thais like to be part of something big, is also not a valid objection to these proposals. The vast majority of churches in Thailand struggle to grow beyond 30-40 members—the *average* TAG church is around 40 people, and the most Jai Samarn/PAOC churches are under 35 people on Sundays.[104] In other words, a house church movement would not be reproducing churches any smaller than the vast majority of churches in Thailand already are—it would just aim to reproduce churches this size far, far more rapidly, and with a strong self-identity, vision and spiritual health.

Further, by networking the house churches the members *are* part of something much, much bigger. If the house churches are networked to a mother church, their large corporate identity is exceedingly clear. But even without a central mother church, the once a month large celebration services of the network should be far larger and more exciting than the vast majority of churches Thailand currently enjoy.

Feelings that the job is only half done, that churches have only been half planted, come from a misunderstanding of the nature of the house church network. Hovey explains this point well:

> People will misunderstand the objective, and therefore judge its effectiveness by the standards of some other program, especially traditional church programs.... When judged from the point of view of traditional church, which uses a building as the glue to hold the structure together, House Churches look like the beginnings of an incomplete traditional church. But in this House Church model, the glue that holds the structure together is the visitation, relationships and training that are the foundations of the model.
> (Hovey 1993:3,4,5)

This point highlights the greatest problem and obstacle these church structures would face, and the key reason why so few attempts have been made to plant churches in this format anywhere in

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104. The TAG estimate 3,500 members nationally, and 85 church. The PAOC / Jai Samarn have 38 churches nationally, with 2,500 people attending—but the flagship Jai Samarn church alone accounts for 1,300 people.

the world: namely, most church leaders and Christians will evaluate the success of this model, *and* the pastors and missionaries using it, by traditional church measures. Because these churches will not meet traditional expectations, pastors and missionaries adopting this form risk being seen as failures by most of their peers in the short-term, regardless of the actual success achieved. Because most outsiders will view the model with suspicion, those who use it will be putting their reputations on the line. Together with Hovey (Hovey 1993:4), I suggest that this is the single greatest obstacle to these models being adopted.

Implementation of a Strategy Using Proposed Church Structures

<u>*Simultaneous Church Planting*</u>

McGavran suggests a strategy for planting a church network similar to those outlined above: train a church planting team to plant 5-10 evangelistic home groups simultaneously in the homes of interested non-Christians (1981:622). Interestingly, C &MA missionary Ford (1982) and pastor Wan both suggest very similar strategies. The suggested approach is to make a very deliberate and strong beginning, planting a network of churches concurrently rather than one after another. Ford quotes Skivington[105] and adds his own thoughts, saying,

> 'Nothing has a more deadening affect on Christians and church than thinking that growth must be slow ... A weak beginning in planting a local church is most difficult to overcome in later stages of development' ... A number of simultaneous home Bible studies can give us that strong beginning. (Ford 1982:23)

McGavran (1955:88), Garrison (1999:37) and DeNeui (1991) all observe that Western missionaries and outsiders must take a low profile in this process, or even rarely be seen in the

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105. S. Robert Skivington, 1977, *Mission to Mindanao: A Study in the Principles of Church Planting Strategy for the Philippines,* Conservative Baptist Publications: Quezon City, Philippines, p.53, 223.

group, while local leaders (heads of families or groups) must take the lead in these groups as early as possible. From the outset church planters should attempt to use the home of unsaved heads of families or groups, and use these pre-existing leaders to lead discussions even before they are personally saved. The role of missionary or outside church planter lies in winning and mentoring the group leader(s).

The concept of planting multiple churches simultaneously out of a number of evangelistic home Bible studies is an ideal concept for planting either form of church network.

People Group Dynamics

Alex Smith (1981) proposed a church planting methodology very similar to that **above**.[106] He goes on to give three relevant points of strategic planning for Thailand (1981:281-283), being:

- Evangelise families and units of people;
- Multiply new church cells;
- Stimulate lay movements.

McGavran (1955), Garrison (1999:37-8), Hovey (1993), and Ford (1982:24) all agree with him on the need to evangelise families and units of people rather than simply extracting individuals from their family and social context. McGavran notes that each family or group should be given a good deal of teaching and discussion time before being called to make a decision (1955:12). Ford (1982:24) suggests, "Parents must be reached. Young people and children should be discouraged from acting independently of their parents. Families should be encouraged to

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106.See page 66.

discuss the matter and any decision delayed until all or most of the family are ready to receive Christ" (24).

Donald McGavran describes such a *people movement* as "the joint decision of a number of individuals ... multi-individual mutually inter-dependant decisions for Christ" (McGavran 1970:297,302-303)[107]. Hovey points out that using people movement dynamics "makes it possible to use family dynamics to assist the church rather than having those dynamics working against the church" (1993:9). Garrison notes that people movements are a very common element in *church planting movements* (Garrison 1999:37-38).

McGavran goes on to discuss *web movements,* in which decisions are not made by a group together on the one day but rather one after another in rapid succession (McGavran 1990:243-247)[108]. Ford suggests that, "As each new believer comes in his or her unsaved contacts should be focused on immediately in prayer and visitation" (Ford 1982:25). This is the same concept Neighbour calls *Oikos* evangelism (Neighbour 1990:114), and according to the research of Reongjareonsook (1997) is the most effective evangelistic strategy for Bangkok.[109]

Both *people movement* conversion of families and *web movement* conversion of friends and contacts must be made to work if a rapidly expanding house church network is to be planted in Bangkok. There is already a strong emphasis among many Bangkok churches on evangelism along lines of relationship, often called *Oikos* evangelism. When this works, *web movement* conversions are possible. But with many authors as above, I contend that *people movement*

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107. See also footnote 76 on page 58 of this thesis.

108. See also footnote 76 on page 58.

109. See also page 65 of this thesis.

conversions of whole family units at the same time is equally important. This would require a major adjustment in evangelistic methodology for most churches.

For example, to foster *people movements,* visitation and evangelism of contacts who live as a family is best done in the home at a time when the head of the family is **present—and** should target the head of the family primarily. The family should only be invited to make a decision after receiving a substantial enough amount of teaching, and after having had time to discuss their opinions amongst themselves first.

Likewise, the commonly used practice of altar calls in Sunday services may need to be altered. To foster *people movements* no preacher or evangelist should ask people who live as close family to make an instant decision for Christ without first consulting or discussing the decision with family. If it was still felt important to have weekly altar calls, modifications would need to be made. For example, an altar call could challenge visitors to express their sincere desire to seek God by coming forward for prayer, and then lead them in prayer that includes a petition for wisdom as to how to share their new thoughts and interest in the Gospel with their family. Leaders could follow these people up in a manner similar to usual, only making a time to visit the home when the whole family will be present and realising these people are genuine seekers but not yet saved.

Leadership Structure and Leadership Training

The importance of building these new churches around a strong leadership team has already been noted, as well as the need to base growth on continual mentored leadership development of lay members and converts. Hovey provides a good analogy when he suggests that we see "local church structured training as the warp ... [and] visitation as the woof of the fabric of the House

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Churches" (Hovey 1993:7-8). By visitation, he is suggesting full-time staff act as mentors, regularly visiting the lay-led house churches and meeting with their leaders.

Clearly a multi-tier leadership structure must exist to facilitate accountability, ongoing training and rapid communication throughout the network. The G-12 model (see page 43 of this thesis) or some adaptation of this would appear to be the best structure to facilitate this. Every week the senior pastor meets with the leader regional leaders, who each meet weekly with the area leaders under their care, who each meet weekly with the house church leaders under their care—or something similar to this. As well as providing ongoing training and accountability at every level, it allows the senior pastor to be able to inject vision and leadership principles to all his or her house church leaders and members on a weekly basis—despite only seeing them face-to-face in monthly meetings. These contacts should both be corporately in closed cells, and from time to time involve leaders visiting the ministry meetings of those under them. To be effective in long-term mentoring, these relationships must be of the 'grateful' (*bunkhun*) mutual obligation type, not the more common superficial, 'loose' Thai relationships.

Despite having a strongly hierarchical G-12 system for mentoring and communication, a good measure of freedom in decision-making (with advice and mentoring) is essential to truly decentralising authority and empowering ministry within the network. It is essential for community / house church leaders to truly be granted permission to minister according to their gifts and personal style rather than a prepackaged formula; they must be delegated authority, not controlled. Without this these models will not be able to achieve their potential in leadership development and reaching different homogeneous target groups.

Financial Relationship

Cho (1981:31-47) warns of the dangers of misappropriation of funds if offerings are collected in cells. However, one of our aims must be to have communities / house churches think of themselves and act as churches in their own right, not merely cells of a larger church, on issues of reaching their local community, planting daughter churches, etc. If we want them to take responsibility on this level, delegating responsibility to take up tithes and offerings in their weekly meetings sends a strong picture. For everyone's protection, very clear guidelines and accountability systems need to be implemented for the collection, checking, banking, use and monthly reporting of tithes and offerings. Communities / house churches also should have control over the use of at least some of the money they collect. They should also have a responsibility to contribute towards the wages of full-time pastors serving them, and to administrative costs.

I suggest that clear guidelines stipulate a percentage of offerings that communities / house churches may control and use themselves, within very clear specifications of use and with full monthly reporting required. The rest of the tithes and offerings should be forward to central pool to contribute to staff wages, office and administration expenses, etc. and to share in the missions giving of the network. Given the much lower overheads than regular church planting, it would be expected that communities / house churches within a network would almost all quickly be nett contributors to mission funds rather than recipients. Such a network should be able to generate substantial additional funds to support other outreach, evangelistic and mercy programs. Communities / house churches requiring more than their regular percentage of their tithes and offerings for local projects should be able to submit a budget application to the network for additional funds.

Suggestions if Using Building Based Church Structures

In conclusion, I would like to draw together a few suggestions and observations from this research for those who may prefer to continue using other building-based church structures.

1. We should adopt a close networking structure between mother church and daughter churches, to facilitate ongoing leadership input from an experienced leader, on-the-job training for church planters, accountability, resource sharing, and the ability to hold period large combined celebration worship events.

2. The training and release of lay people is essential. Apart from teaching, lay leaders need mentoring people in practical ministry skills and then to be delegated real leadership responsibility (in the sense of permission-granting and accountability, not in the sense of control—see p.29).

3. The church must *be* a community. Mission and evangelism must flow out of being a community. Our church structure must strongly facilitate deep, open long-term relationships between members.

4. A large group / small group church structure is *essential* for this. The meta-church structure looks less appropriate for the Thai context. If the models proposed in this paper are not adopted I would strongly advocate the cell church model.

5. We must attempt to utilise *people movement* dynamics to see whole families saved, rather than isolated individuals coming to Christ.

6. Our church planting methods must aim for the rapid *multiplication* of new churches, therefore:

- While the mega-church satellite model (as modelled by Jai Samarn church) is a good model for large churches planting large daughter churches by stages in urban Bangkok, it is not a good model for indefinite use in that it potentially stifles true multiplication of churches where the satellite churches themselves begin to take an independent responsibility for further church planting;

- Unless we find a way for churches in Bangkok to be able to finance their own land and buildings using *only* funds donated locally by their members, we *must* find a way to multiply our land and building assets—or we place major financial limitations on our rate and extent of church planting. This is especially important for churches with members mainly from lower income groups. Somehow, some long-term form of investment in property or other assets must be made, as proposed by pastor Winit (see page 187*ff*). The greatest hurdle for this is that we must begin at least 10 years in advance, with an initial investment of capital which we can then use to later help fund land and building projects! Most churches would struggle with both the capital and investment time needed for this approach.

REVIEW BY EXPERT PANEL AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

To evaluate the proposed models a virtual field test was administered by inviting an expert review panel of experienced pastors and missionaries to read the initial model proposals (Chapter 7. above). Each panel member was then invited to discuss their opinions and concerns in semi-unstructured 1:1 interviews individually with myself personally.[110] While a closed survey questionnaire utilising a Likert scale would have enabled more direct comparison and objective analysis between the responses of the different respondents, it was felt to be more important that the reviewers not feel constrained by specific questions but were able to express their feelings and concerns freely. It was also considered important that the respondents not be led to form opinions by the questions or response forms themselves, but be given broad scope to determine for themselves the issues they feel need comment. Further, it was considered vital that the panel not be required to state a formal opinion on this research overall at this point.[111] Despite the obvious advantages of *focus groups* or *nominal groups* in arriving at a consensus of opinion, group discussions are both impractical and inappropriate in this situation.[112]

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110. It was not possible to sit down with two of the respondents face to face due to our separate travel obligations. In these two cases, the proposal chapter and questions were emailed to the willing respondent at least a week prior to discussion, and the interview was conducted by telephone.

111. Research by Robert Bohm (1990) suggests that making an opinion public inhibits people from changing it later—even when they are confronted with overwhelming factual information in support of making a change. The proposed participants in this virtual field test (influential pastors and missionaries) are the very individuals I would hope may take up the final model. Bohm's research would suggest that asking these people to declare an opinion about the initial model may prevent them from listening to any further arguments or modifications to the model made in the final draft of the thesis, and prevent any subsequent personal discussions and persuasion from potentially changing their opinions after the thesis has been completed. While it is unclear whether stating an opinion face to face or on paper has the same effect as in a public context, this research poses a warning in the administration of this expert review.

112. While group discussions would both save time and allow a better flow of additional ideas, they are ruled out on several grounds. Firstly, some of the individuals for the expert review panel now reside or are temporarily located overseas. Secondly, the individuals proposed are all very busy people with senior positions, making it

The criteria used for selecting members of the expert panel were: senior pastors or key mission personnel, who are fluent in English,[113] known for strategic thinking in missiology, preferably have a higher degree, were personally known by the author, and were readily contactable. The expert panel were all drawn from people working with and influential amongst the Thailand Assemblies of God, with the exception of Norm Ford of the C&MA who was included because of the significance of his own SCP proposal for Bangkok (Ford 1982).

Apart from time limitations, the reason for this restriction was that one key aim of the thesis is that someone may take up the model in a church planting effort. My involvement with the Thailand Assemblies of God gives me best access and greatest influence within this sphere.

The Expert Review Panel

Pastors and missionaries who participated in the virtual field test were as follows:

- Alan Johnson—DFM missionary to Thailand 15 years, two M.A. degrees, Ph.D. (candidate) (Oxford Centre of Missiological Studies, University of Wales).

- Bruce Nugent—AOGWM missionary to Thailand 6 years, M.A. in Inter-Cultural Studies (Fuller Theological Seminary).

- Kevin Hovey—Director of AOG World Missions Australia (AOGWM), M.A. in Inter-Cultural Studies (Fuller Theological Seminary), author of one book used in this thesis and two articles proposing house churches in Thailand.

- Krisada Chookunthanachai—Senior Pastor of Romyen-Thonburi Assembly of God Church and the House of Grace network of churches, with an M.Div. (Bangkok Bible College).

- Monte Martin—DFM missionary to Thailand 14 years, M.A. (candidate).

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more likely to gain their cooperation if I visit them individually. But thirdly and most importantly, it is essential to avoid having these decision-makers declare their position on the proposed model publicly at this point (see footnote 111 above).

113. Despite the interview session being able to be presented in Thai, the chapter from this thesis proposing the models was only available in English. However, this limitation will not be as severe as it seems. Even though only a small minority of Thais are fluent in English to this level, most pastors of larger churches in Bangkok are fluent to this level.

- Norman Ford—veteran missionary to Thailand 33 years, field leader for C&MA in Thailand, and author of one key article used in this thesis.

The Review Process and Review Questions

The following list of review questions was put to the expert review panel:

1. What are some of the greatest obstacles you can see for the proposed models, culturally, practically or attitudinally?

Obstacle	How large an obstacle? (1=minimal / 10=major)
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0

2. What are some of the greatest advantages you can see for the proposed models?

Advantage	How large an obstacle? (1=minimal / 10=major)
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0

3. Do you feel they could work? Why or why not?

4. Do you think many pastors would use these models in planting new daughter churches?

5. What do you think would be their strongest reasons to accept / reject them?

Reason to accept / reject	How strong do you think the reason would be? (1=minimal / 10=major)
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the proposed models to make them more effective? More acceptable / desirable to senior pastors?

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These six review questions were submitted to each panel member in advance (without the Likert scales), together with the proposal (current draft of Chapter 7. at that date). In the interview the questions were asked informally, not as closed questions. Each time the reviewer raised an obstacle, advantage, or reason for acceptance or rejection, a follow up question asked them to assess the strength of that point on a scale of 1 to 10. This allowed a greater degree of comparison between panel members, while still allowing the respondents to name and raise issues rather than leading the respondent by raising issues myself. Comparison of frequency of responses and of the Likert scores to different issues highlight which issues are the key issues identified by the expert review panel. Their further comments or suggestions on these issues are also noted.

Interviews were between 30 minutes to one hour long. Interviews were conducted in either English or Thai depending on the interviewee. Because of a range of restrictions, interviews were not generally recorded. It will be noted that Alan Johnson was interviewed by email with a follow-up phone call.

8.2. **RESULTS OF REVIEW BY EXPERT PANEL**

The individual responses to each question in the expert review are found in Appendix II, including their Likert scale responses. Below is a collation of the responses of all panel members under each of the 6 questions:

1. · _What are some of the greatest obstacles you can see for the proposed models, culturally, practically or attitudinally?_

Clearly the most common obstacle to the proposed models cited by the expert panel was an unwillingness to change from the traditional 'Temple model' of the church having a full-time salaried pastor and a building in which weekly services are held. This one factor was cited by all 6 respondents, and given a high average Likert score. The other obstacles cited most regularly and given the highest weighting were: fear of change and loss of face; maintaining the sense of being part of something big; need for a very capable leader over the network; acceptance of informally-trained lay house church leaders as credible; pastors feeling they need to be in control more than model allows; and, desire of pastors for status from being head of a visibly large church.

The full list of obstacles raised by the respondents to this question is given below, with the number of respondents citing this obstacle and the average of their Likert scores.

	Cited (times)	Likert Score (ave)
Tradition:		
• Unwilling to change from traditional concept of full-time salaried pastor and building for weekly services—acceptance by unsaved of a religious organisation not fitting the 'Temple' model	6	8.1
• Fear of change (especially of being first) / risk of losing face	3	6
• Hard to bring change	1	7
• Feeling this is not a complete church—members being invited to visit a _real_ church	1	6

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Leadership of the Network:

• Maintaining sense of being part of something big	4	3.5
• The model needs a very capable leader over the network, to build unity, present clear vision, and be able to train leaders	3	5.7
• Community accepting informally trained lay house church leaders as credible	2	9
• Most pastors feel they need to be in control more than model allows	2	7.5
• Desire of pastors for status, from being head of a visibly large church	2	6.8
• Moving people from management leadership style to body ministry and sense of community	1	8.5
• Moving people from event, to relationship and discipleship base	1	8.5
• Providing training for full-time leaders, particularly financial issues where trainees are heads of families	1	8

Other:

• Leaders opposing because feel threatened by model	1	10
• Social networks of mid to upper classes revolving around job more than locality	1	8
• Leaders opposing the model because of individuals first advocating or adopting the model	1	6
• Leaders offended that a missionary is doing something not told to do	1	6
• Time pressures on working people with families	1	5
• Pastors feeling forced into adopting the model	1	4

average score assigned (33 issues): 6.8

It would seem from these responses that the expert panel feel at least half the obstacles to the models lay in the attitudes of pastors and Christians. Gaining a broad enough base of understanding and acceptance of these models by Thai pastors will be essential, even where pastors are not adopting the model themselves at this time for daughter church planting.

The other half of the obstacles cited for the model relate to difficulties inherent in the proposed church structures themselves, and socio-cultural challenges for such structures in the Bangkok environment. It is interesting that no one in the expert review raised the question of availability of houses as meeting places for the networked churches, which was a concern raised by some of the Thai pastors interviewed about their current church planting work (see Chapter 6.).

Combined, the respondents noted a total of 33 issues as obstacles, with a combined average Likert score of 6.8 assigned to the obstacles.

2. *What are some of the greatest advantages you can see for the proposed models?*

The greatest advantages seen for the proposed models were clearly: greater ease with which leaders could be trained, particularly lay leaders; reduced financial barriers, particularly for property; and greater evangelistic impact due to greater proximity to the non-Christian community and ability to foster people movements. Each of these factors were cited by at least four of the respondents.

The full list of advantages cited by the respondents are given below, with the number of respondents citing each advantage and the average of their Likert scores.

	Cited (times)	Likert Score (ave)
Leadership Training:		
• Naturally facilitates training of leadership: forces us to do training, makes training step by step, but makes it easier than if training for independent daughter churches	6	9.1
• Rapidly deploys lay Christians in leadership, facilitating them in ministry	2	9

- Rapid training possible within the local church   1   10

Finance:

- Overcomes many of the financial problems associated with church planting, particularly the property barrier, avoiding dependence on outside finance   6   9.2

    8

- Less draining on mother church resources   1

Impact:

    9

- Penetrates local communities, and puts Christians in close proximity with non-Christians   2

- High potential for church growth by naturally aiding evangelistic impact   2   8

- Only model proposed to date with the potential to reach the whole of Thailand   1   10

- Fosters family decisions and people movements   1   10

- Allows newcomers to come into homes rather than religious buildings   1   9

- Enables people to travel to church more easily   1   7

Other:

- More biblically sound—is the dynamic equivalent of the New Testament church   1   10

- Flexible, reproducible, sustainable   1   8.5

- Overcomes persecution barrier   1   1

average score assigned to 31 issues raised: 8.7

Combined, the respondents noted a total of advantages 31 of these structures over existing structures, with a combined average Likert score of 8.7 assigned. This significantly higher average score for the advantages over that of the obstacles (above: 6.8) verifies an overall positive assessment of the proposed structures by the expert review panel. Bruce Nugent,

however, insightfully stressed that the obstacles need to be overcome *before* the advantages are worth anything.

3. *Do you feel the models could work? Why or why not?*

Each of the respondents strongly affirmed the potential of these proposed structures to work well in Bangkok. Kev Hovey stated his firm belief that this is the *only* proposal to date with the potential to reach the whole of Thailand, meaning that we simply must have strategies to counter the obstacles. It was pointed out that these models are very biblical, and similar things are already being done elsewhere with good success. The importance of the strong central leadership team or mother church was reinforced, as was the need to overcome the key obstacles noted above before the advantages have a chance to make the models work well. It was pointed out that leadership and follow-up are vitally important for this kind of grass-roots movement to succeed. It was also pointed out that personalities and how things are presented are very important within Thai society, meaning that who presents the ideas and how they are presented may significantly effect the acceptability of these ideas amongst Thai church leaders.

Monte Martin made the suggestion that these models may work better in rural areas and amongst poorer people and blue-collar workers than amongst urban professionals and middle-to-upper class residents. This is an idea worth further consideration.

4. *Do you think many pastors would use these models in planting new daughter churches?*

It was felt that if the model were simply proposed and left to the Thai pastors, it would never be done. Without a very clear presentation and some clear examples of these, structures being implement successfully in Bangkok, not many pastors would even consider using these models.

However, with clear presentation and successful models including good training materials, potentially up to half the local pastors may be willing to adopt the proposals in time. It was felt that pastors more likely to consider these proposals would be younger pastor, particularly those who are risk takers with a strong desire to grow the Church, and who were trained within a network structure with by mentors who continually held them accountable.

5. _**What do you think would be their strongest reasons to accept / reject the models?**_

It was felt that the success of the models would hinge on Thai leaders not feeling threatened by them. The strongest reasons suggested by the review panel for Thai pastors to either reject or accept the proposals are listed below.

Reasons Thai pastors would accept the proposals:

• see a successful working model in Thailand	3	8
• willing to try new things because hunger for growth / strong desire for a breakthrough	2	8
• convicted from Scripture about the true nature of the church	1	8
• see the financial advantages	1	**8**
• presented in a way they really understand	1	8
average score assigned to 8 reasons suggested:		8

Reasons Thai pastors would reject the proposals:

• desire to retain power and be in control / no desire to mobilise people	2	7
• desire respect a pastor of a big church with a big, nice building	1	8
• personalities: who the first people are to accept or reject the proposals	1	8
• popular opinion	1	8

- set in their ways   1   **8**
- don't believe in their own ability to bring change or do anything substantial   1   6

<div align="right">average score assigned to 7 reasons suggested: 7.4</div>

Overall, it would appear the panel felt Thai pastors may be marginally more inclined to accept than reject the proposals, although the difference between probable acceptance and rejection was only marginal. How the model was presented, **when** and by whom were felt to be the key.

6. *Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the proposed models to make them more effective? More acceptable / desirable to senior pastors?*

The review panel did not come up with any suggestions of alterations to the proposals themselves. What the panel did do was suggest a number of potential ways to promote the proposals more effectively amongst Thai pastors, to aid in their acceptance of the ideas. These suggestions include:

- slowly build a support base of pastors endorsing the proposes, targeting existing church leaders who are opinion leaders so that authority structures champion the models rather than oppose;

- have this thesis translated into Thai, or rewrite the ideas in Thai using popular language;

- write a shortened paper in Thai to be printed in the leadership magazine, ***The Leader's Friend (Puen Puu Num*** เพื่อนผู้นำ*)*;

- present the two models very clearly, either as: a) a single model in which the principles are clearly described but the individual nuances only later given, or, b) present the to models completely separately;

- highlight local examples of the models working successfully in Bangkok;

- ensure pastors understand cell group principles first, then help them see the various models and the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Kev Hovey also came up with a number of very useful suggestions on ways to overcome the key obstacles (see).

CONCLUSIONS

9.1. CONCLUSIONS

The Thai are usually considered an unreached people group, but there are many signs of an increase in the rate of church growth. After over 180 years of Protestant witness in the country, now is the time for the church to move its focus from pioneer missions to strategising for saturation church planting. However, the church is faced with major obstacles in the form of the property barrier, the full-time professional leadership barrier, and the '40-barrier'. This research set out to propose and evaluate a model of church structure for church planting that would overcome or reduce the greatest number of such obstacles, and therefore be most able to facilitate an ongoing rapid multiplication of churches with a minimal diminishing of vision or leadership ability. This research set out to propose a model of church structure capable of facilitating saturation church planting.

A framework was established for evaluating church structure models, proposals and practice against sound ecclesiology, biblical models, church growth research, and relevant socio-cultural factors. A wide range of church structure models, proposals, and practices currently used in Bangkok and around the world were then reviewed before making our own proposals for saturation church planting in Bangkok.

Two models of church structure were proposed, both of which aim to facilitate rapid church planting as endlessly as possible to facilitate the beginning of a church planting movement. Both of these models comprise a synthesis between cell church and house church models. The opinion of an expert review panel is that, while there are some new obstacles to overcome, both these

models should work well in the context of Bangkok and possibly comprise the greatest hope so far in reaching this great city.

The first of these two models has been described in this thesis as a *mother church—Christian communities network.* The concept is that a network of small churches be planted around a central mother church, drawing upon the leadership, staff, facilities and resources of the mother church. It is proposed that these small churches of approx. 15-50 people meet weekly (Sundays) in homes, offices, and factories, and adopt a structure somewhere between a G-12 cell church and a house church network. To avoid confusion in discussing the central mother church and the house churches, the small churches have been called 'communities' for in this thesis.

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Communities should be lay-led, using less formal, more participative meeting formats—but they should be seen as separate churches in their own right rather than cells in the sense that members not be expected to attend another service on a weekly basis. Offerings, baptism and communion should all be the responsibility of the communities—yet the communities should share one membership list, name and identity with the mother church. Each community should itself be made up of at least 2-3 cells. Monthly celebration meetings combined with the mother church and other communities is considered essential, as is a philosophy of multiplying both the number of cells and communities. Training lay-leadership to this level should be taken as a challenge rather than an obstacle, and the leadership in the mother church should adopt a hierarchical mentoring-oversight structure similar to that of a cell church. A closed cell leadership development system based on the G-12 model would seem most appropriate.

The second model proposed in this thesis has been labelled an *apostolic house church network.* This model is actually very similar to the first, distinguish solely by the absence of a strong, central mother church with her facilities and resources. In it's place, the 'communities' (called 'house churches' in this model) are networked around a strong, central leadership team. The same

principles apply to style of meeting, lay-leadership, hierarchical mentoring-oversight training, monthly combined celebration services (in a rented auditorium in this case), and the multiplication of both cell and house church. This model has the advantage over the first in that it more naturally facilitates true multiplication of networks too, and fully overcomes the building barrier. However, this model is less strongly advocated that the first because of a number of inherent difficulties it would face in Thailand: being able to commence with a strong leadership team to, building all resources from the ground up, and the level of misunderstanding the church network would almost certainly face from other outside Christians and church leaders.

These two proposed models were both evaluated by a panel of experts, between them possessing extensive missionary experience, **missiological** training, and familiarity with the **socio-cultural** context of Bangkok and the TAG. Each assessing these models independently of other panel members, the panel unanimous concurred that the models have a very high potential for success. According to some members of the panel, these church structures are the *only* models proposed to date with the potential to reach all of Bangkok. Given their level of endorsement, it would be reasonable to conclude that these models should work.

The expert panel pointed out challenges which would be faced in implementing these models, particularly in the areas of ability to change tradition away from buildings and full-time pastors, acceptance of lay pastors, fear of change / loss of face, and the need for a very capable leader to head the network. These obstacles will have to overcome. However, the panel noted very significant advantages to the models, particularly including: overcoming leadership barriers, reducing or overcoming financial barriers (particularly for property), and greater evangelistic impact (particularly through ability to foster people movements). The consensus appears to be that the advantages of the proposed models outweigh the obstacles to be overcome.

The formal conclusion of this study therefore is that these models should be attempted. The final proof of this research will be in successfully implementing and modelling these new church structures in Bangkok, and seeing a church planting movement established through them. To this end, the next step will be the development of a full strategic plan covering methodology for pre-evangelism, evangelism, church planting, discipleship and leadership development for church planting with this structure.

9.2. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Expert review panel member, Monte Martin, suggested these models may work better in rural areas and amongst poorer people and blue-collar workers than amongst urban professionals and middle-to-upper class residents. His suggestions deserve further investigation. He suggested urban professionals tend to be fairly mobile with their own means of transport, and tend to draw their primary social relationships from friends from their workplace or school/university. Because of this and low traffic congestion on Sundays, many middle-to-upper class educated Thais are less likely to mind travelling some distance to church. This characterisation led him to suggest that large city-wide mega cell churches may be the most highly contextualised church structure for this group of people. His suggestions deserve further investigation. Central to any assessment of his suggestions, however, are two issues: a) the property barrier must somehow be overcome, and b) the mega cell church model should be fully critiqued against the framework of sound ecclesiology, biblical models, church growth research, and relevant socio-cultural factors derived in Part A of this thesis.

Monte's question, however, takes us back to the foundational assumption of this thesis. Rather than asking what church structure best facilitates *saturation church planting* in Bangkok, a better

research question may have been to ask what church structure would best see Bangkok evangelised and discipled into churches. In other words, further research should question the assumption of whether multiplying churches in urban Thai society really *is* essential to reaching the city. Could the city better be reach by growing very large cell churches? Is there a place for strategising not a local church within walking (or very short commuting) distance of every person in the city—but for a major city-wide church with cells in every workplace, faculty, school, and ultimately, social peer group within society? Personally, while this is a good vision for a local church, I don't believe it is sufficient to reach a whole city. I believe a multiplication of churches across the city is essential. But the question has not been answered by this research.

Quite possibly the mega church and small church network models can coexist and compliment one another, each meeting a different need—as do the small number of major department stores with large shopping malls, and the very large number of small convenience stores on almost every street corner of Bangkok. The citywide cell church targeting educated and professional people will still face major financial hurdles in acquiring property, but as this research has hinted at, for this demographic the goal is a little more attainable. Research is needed into how Thai churches targeting educated and professional people could realistically become fully self-supporting in terms of purchasing buildings and land without foreign assistance.

There are several other important research questions regarding church growth rates that would compliment and help answer the forgoing questions. Firstly, do churches of various sizes in Thailand tend to grow at the same average growth rates that Schwarz found in his *Natural Church Development*? His finding have been reasonably central to the findings and proposals of this research. Many suggest that the large group dynamic of large churches is very important in Thailand, and that there are a large number of small churches in Thailand that are not growing. Does the Thai data basically concur worldwide averages, or does it contradict Schwarz's results?

Statistically, is small size an impediment or aid to church growth in Thailand? Thorough

statistical church growth data for Thailand based on church size would be very relevant.

Secondly, does the diminishing growth rate of larger churches (on average) as observed by

Schwarz hold equally for cell-based and non-cell based churches? Or do cell-church structures

significantly improve the growth rates of large churches, reducing the difference in growth rates

between large and small churches? This is a significant question currently only answered by

anecdotal evidence.

And thirdly, do these church growth rates based on size of the church hold equally regardless of

meeting place, or do some of the psychological issues surrounding a church meeting in a house

by choice, meeting in a house out of necessity, renting / leasing an auditorium, or buying /

owning their own facility have a significant impact? It would be most useful to research church

growth rates broken down according to these factors, particularly if also broken down by size and

specific to Thailand!

Further, it has already been noted that there is a major gap in the [research literature in relation to

group dynamics within Thai urban culture. Further research is desperately needed on the nature,

formation, leadership, and depth of relationships, etc. in both large and small sociological groups

within Thai society. These findings may significantly alter the conclusions of this paper.

And finally, demographic and sociological research is needed into the practice of Thai

hospitality. Based on social class and type of accommodation iJ urban Bangkok, how regularly

do Thais entertain in their home or apartment, and if/when they do how comfortable does the host

and guest feel? How regular and long a meeting would be OK for different classes and types of

accommodation? When does the Thai concept of *krieng jai* (consideration of the feelings of

others) lead the guest to feel they should leave? What positive and negative implications for building community in the church does meeting in houses and apartments have for urban Thais, over meeting in cells in non-residential building (eg. at school, workplace, restaurant, etc.).

Thus there are several gaps in the current literature as well as in this research, suggesting that further research could have some impact on the conclusions and proposals presented to date. Further research in each these areas would yield very useful information for the further contextualisation of the church in urban Bangkok.

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH PASTORS:

(listed in alphabetical order)

i

1. Rev Anuparp Wichitnuntana, Bangkok Liberty Church, TAG

Details: Pastor of Bangkok Liberty Church for 12 years, and National President of the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG). Bangkok Liberty Church planted its first 2 daughter churches in mid-2001 (Chiang Mai and Bang Na). The mother church currently his an average Sunday attendance of 450 people. Interviewed 4 pm, 13 July 2001, at Bangkok Liberty Church, Hua Mark, Bangkok. Length: 31 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

Our church is a cell church. The senior pastor is the principal leader setting vision and training core leaders. He delegates leadership authority through the cell system. We use both open cells for evangelism and nurturing, and closed cells for leadership development. I am not sure if you would call our closed cell system a G-12 structure or not. However, we do believe that there are some types of people a strict cell church system is unable to help without specialised *recovery groups.* At present we don't run such recovery groups, but we have not discounted adopting this meta-church concept into our structure as we continue to develop.

What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church attracts most:

In the past our primary target group was tertiary students. Today we also target business people, young professionals and office workers in general. Our morning service aims to cater to the widest group possible. Our afternoon service more specifically targets young professionals.

What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? Do you have specific church planting goals?

I believe that for Thailand to change, there must be church planting right across the country. Church planting is the answer. Therefore we are determined to plant churches right across Thailand while at the same time not forgetting Bangkok. I am not sure how many churches have really decided to try to reach Bangkok itself.

We don't want to race into church planting too fast. Short of God bringing persecution to scatter us, we want to build a strong mother church and reach our Jerusalem first rather than spreading ourselves too thin. The church leadership will plan a step-wise outward expansion. At the same time, as people are led by the Holy Spirit to have a burden for a particular place we are keen to send and support them.

We have set a goal to plant a church in each of the provincial capital in Thailand by 2015. [Note: There are 76 provinces in Thailand.]

What is / will be your strategy for church planting?   What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok?

In Bangkok, we want to build a mega-church using a cell church structure, but adding meta-church recovery groups. Our goal is 10,000 members in the mother mega-church by 2015.

We probably won't use a daughter church planting model in Bangkok, but satellite churches. We want to start a minimum of four large satellite centres with simultaneous worship services, one meeting in each of four quarters of Bangkok. We should easily be able to build a mega-church out of this section of the city. We will maintain one structure, one budget, and one leadership team. In this way, we don't need to build everything from scratch when we start a new church.

We plan to adopt this structure in part because we see Bangkok residents are looking for a fairly high level of ability in leaders. We also believe that team ministry—a sense that our different churches and leaders are a large family—we can have a greater impact and voice.
We want to achieve success with one satellite church before deciding on our satellite strategy in detail. However, beyond four or more major satellite centres with similar style and target groups to the mother church we would be open to planting many, many more satellite churches right across the city each with their own style and target groups. In this way, we would be open to having satellite churches open even just a kilometre apart. These satellite churches should not begin too small—at least 30 people in 3 cells before begin services: people attract people.

Outsiders may look at these satellite churches as more like daughter churches in close relationships, but we want to emphasise team and unity in our variety. Our vision is one church with one philosophy and set of core values, but with many services, target groups and locations.

I believe in apostolic leadership. In the past the Thai church had a big problem because we lacked apostolic leadership. Everyone did what they individually saw to do, without a sense of common goals and direction, and without someone to motivate, train or encourage.

What qualifications do church planters need?

In planting a satellite church, the key is having a leader—a leader who is able to lead a cell well, and is experienced as a cell overseer. A satellite church can borrow musicians from the mother church so long as meetings times don't clash. Hence, it is not necessary to have many people on an initial church planting team.

If church planters were able to support themselves while church planting, that would be ideal. However, I am not sure how many church planters we will have who will be able to do this. Hence, we anticipate that most church planters will need to be financially supported full-time by the mother church.

How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

I don't think we should begin churches too large. As a cell church, we begin church planting by running mid-week cells in members' houses first. When we begin Sunday services, we will usually need to find a building to rent—unless a member's house is large enough. I believe we should usually be able to rent facilities that are not too expensive.

In Bangkok, buildings are more expensive. Hence we should begin satellite churches using the houses of members. Then, as we move to rented auditoriums we should consider renting one day a week in preference to leasing. We can do this, because as satellite not daughter churches these churches can share office facilities and resources with the mother church.

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

In Bangkok we want to build a single church with multiple services, locations and target groups. We anticipate that offerings will all run through a single account and budget, just as we currently have a single budget over different zones of the church. Each satellite church would need to prepare its own budget submission. But determining this is a process, and we may change the system as we progress.

Staff in satellite churches would be expected to attend weekly staff meetings in the mother church indefinitely, to build unity and teamwork, and to receive encouragement, challenge, advice and training.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

The major problem to church planting in Bangkok is overly hierarchical leadership. Churches are too centralised, rather than decentralised. Churches speak about the priesthood of all believers, but most ministry and leadership functions remain in the hands of full-time staff.

The second issue is a lack of structures to facilitate and assimilate growth, to help people and develop leaders. Many churches in Bangkok are currently transitioning into a cell church model. Other obstacles are lack of vision and lack of faith that growth is really possible.

We must plant churches out of cells, and using cell system. Church planters need to be able to evangelise and run cells well. We must also have a very clear leadership training process.

2. Rev *Chatri* Jittasopee, *Thonburi Full Gospel Church, FGC*

<u>Details</u>: Senior Pastor of Thonburi Full Gospel Church, the oldest pentecostal church in Bangkok

with a current Sunday attendance of around 180 people and a number of daughter churches in

Bangkok and around Thailand. Interviewed 1:30 pm, 20 July 2001, at Thonburi Full Gospel

Church, Bangkok. Length: 52 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.
Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

During the 1970s Thonburi Full Gospel Church was not a cell church, although it did run a single
weekly home fellowship meeting. During the time Ps Wanit and then several others pastored the
church, assistance was sought from the Rom Klao church. In the end the church adopted a
geographical cell church structure midweek with a range of larger [homogeneous activity groups
meeting on Sunday afternoons. Today the church runs a range of such Sunday afternoon groups,
including older youth, younger youth, young marrieds, ladies', and men's groups, although today
only about twenty percent of the church members are involved in the mid-week cells.

Before I arrived back at the church, the church was fully a cell church. They had three full-time
leaders each overseeing one *district.* In the end there was a problem. The two pastors with the
strongest cell system in their *districts* led their cells out to plant daughter churches, leaving only a
single district with only 2 functioning cells. Since I have arrived I have begun the work again, to
turn the church into a cell church again. We currently have 6 cells, and next week will train our
next group of cell leaders. We have observed that there are many churches in Bangkok that use
the cell structure and are producing great fruit. As we convert again, Sunday afternoon activity
groups may or may not continue.

What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church
attracts most:

Because we already have 5 distinct groups in the church, we have a goal to win souls in each of
these groups. We have the goal to grow from 6 to 10 cells this year. Most of the members of this
church come from the lower and middle classes. We have some in salaried jobs in government
and working for companies. We also have a good many hawkers and people running their own
micro-businesses. Many of the people who moved to the daughter churches were people with
their own small businesses.

What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? What has your church done to date in church
planting? Do you have specific church planting goals?

My vision for Thailand is that the Thai church will change; we cannot continue to do things in the
old way. For this church, we must strategise to plant churches. Over the last twenty years we

have planted many churches in other provinces, but most have closed within 3 years because of a lack in two areas: 1) preparation of leaders, 2) financial support. Our vision of the church must change, taking on cell church characteristics.

In the past we tended to send out individuals to plant churches, and tended to send them out without proper training. Often they did not have the heart or vision. There are many who are more capable than I am, but their work is inconsistent. When they went out, we would rent them a large house and run a crusade.

What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok?

As we go out to plant churches, I will take a new approach. Rather than renting a house or building, we will begin as a cell in a member's house, and use personal evangelism in place of crusades. By cell multiplication, within 2-3 year we could have a strong church. Only when it has 3-5 cells would we consider renting a house to use for combined meetings. And only when it grew to 70-80 would we consider building. If we don't have the resources to build, don't worry: rent—but to reduce the rent sign a long-term lease. If we filled the facility with 80 people, simply plant a second or third church. It is not necessary to build churches of thousands! If churches don't have the resources to grow large, it is better to multiply smaller churches. If they have the financial resources to build a larger church, then OK. But if a church does not have the financial resources to build a larger auditorium, they can still plant and look after daughter churches. In my opinion we plant churches for evangelism, and do evangelism to plant churches. We can never feel satisfied with what we have achieved. If we multiply the number of smaller churches like this, they should come together for larger worship services once a year.

What qualifications do church planters need?

Those who plant churches need training. When I first gave myself to serve the Lord, I did not know what to do. I waited for my pastor to lead me. Only after I had several years experience and had moved to the provinces did I realise I needed a vision, a burden to really work, and training in various practical ministry skills (particularly evangelism and follow-up). If they have a chance to study at Bible school first, that is good. But in my opinion, the key ingredients are vision, and practical training in evangelism and following-up contacts. It is important to know the Bible. It is also important to know how to minister practically.

Church planters must be full-time. When a mother church plants a daughter church from cells, a pastor goes to pioneer the first cells. No extra funds are needed. If the pastor is not going to take on the new church, a convert should be trained and taught the Bible. Alternatively, bible college students of interns could be used. However, no pastor should work alone. They should work as a team of at least two people. A team may consist of two full-time and two lay people.

How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

Buildings are important, but not the most important. The most important things are leading people to Christ and planting new churches. In Bangkok today, the traffic is not too bad on Sundays. But on other days there are traffic jams and we cannot schedule other church activities. We cannot say that transport will get any better in the future. And land values are increasing. We can't know whether we will have the financial power to purchase land for new churches.

If a church has the resources, it should build a building. If it does not have the resources, it should rent—on a long-term 5-10-year lease. Renting a facility for Sundays only can be done, if necessary, but is not such a good option. This will require two locations: lease on an office and once a week for meetings. Rent on two facilities may not save over lease on a single facility. If a member has a house or office available for use for free, this could be used. However, this could be awkward in the sense of people coming and going into someone's house—and it is difficult to arrange seminars or special meetings.

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

We need a good relationship between mother and daughter churches; it cannot be substituted. However, if a daughter church really wants greater independence we should give it. Daughter churches should have complete freedom to manage their own affairs. They need freedom to think and plan their own ministry. But if they cannot manage their own affairs, the mother church should assist. There should be a close relationship. Within 3-5 years a daughter church should be completely self-supporting, except when it comes to the church building, but until the daughter church can support itself the mother church should help. A daughter church should have its own separate accounts and budget. When a daughter church wants to build or expand its facilities, if they cannot afford this on their own the mother church should assist, or help raise funds from contacts in Thailand and overseas.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

One major obstacle to church planting in Bangkok is that members have busy lifestyles, and don't really have the time to follow up new converts and contacts. Another is that many pastors have been given a position as leaders but have not been given adequate practical training to complete their ministry; hence they don't fulfil their responsibilities.

If we want to see a greater percentage of Christians in Bangkok, we need to see old Christian attitudes wiped out. We need to see lay people give themselves to ministry, together with staff, particularly in leading cells, following people up, and practical service in the church.

3. Rev Krisada Chusakultanachai, *Romyen-ThonburiChurch*, ṬAG

Details: Pastor of the 8-year old Romyen-Thonburi Church (TAG), and overseeing a close network of 6 daughter churches all planted under his leadership within the last 2 years (Bang Khen, Prabradaeng, Om Yai, Arunyapratet, Ayuttaya, and Samut Sakorn). They currently have a total combined average Sunday attendance of over 300 people. Interviewed 11 am, 13 July 2001, at Bangkok House of Grace Church, Bang Khen, Bangkok. Length: 34 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

Our strategy gives great weight to cell church principles, but we do need to define what we mean by cell church. We use small groups, but we are not necessarily the same as cell churches in Singapore or elsewhere. We have taken good points from Singapore, and from the G12 model, but have tried to contextualise them. We emphasise using cells for pastoral care and evangelism, but not to the extent that we have no other programs in the church. For example, we have teaching classes that probably follow Rick Warren more than strict cell church patterns.

What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church attracts most:

There are two groups of people that the church is reaching most (50:50), which are our main target groups: youth (who we are increasingly targeting), and blue-collar workers. We have very few high class or professional people in the church.

What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? Do you have specific church planting goals?

My vision for reaching Thailand has 5 aspects. My goals is that by 2010 we will have:
- at least 1000 cell groups in Bangkok and its hinterland, divided into separate churches wherever we have a natural grouping of cells—with an aim of about 10 cells (100 or more people) per church;
- daughter churches in the 10 largest provincial capitals around Thailand;
- pastoral ministry training institutes in these 10 local churches in the provincial capitals;
- churches or outreaches to Thais living overseas, in Singapore, Taiwan, China and elsewhere;
- cross-cultural work to hill-tribe and ethnic minorities within Thailand.

What is / will be your strategy for church planting?   What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok?

Over the last 2 years we have planted 6 daughter churches, in Bang Khen, Prabradaeng, Om Yai, Arunyapratet, and most recently in Ayuttaya and Samut Sakorn. In Bangkok and its immediately surrounding districts, our concept for church planting is that whenever someone is saved from a new area we attempt to establish a group of converts around them. This new group would either become a cell of an existing church or be planted as a new church depending on distance from existing churches. In the hinterland surrounding Bangkok we presently aim to plant churches about 20km apart. In Bangkok city, we believe each group of people should be able to get to church conveniently using only one single bus. If they have to change buses, we need to plant a new church.

For a new group to be considered a church, not just a cell group, they must have a leader who is sufficiently trained and capable. With the right leader present we may consider even a single cell to be a new church, whereas we would not consider a cluster of two or three cells to be a church if they were without a capable leader. We look at leaders. The number of churches we have is limited only by the number of capable leaders we have. The number of people on each church planting team is not a major issue; the real issue is having a key leader that is capable. We need a key leader, and hope to have at least two to three others who can assist to plant the church.

What qualifications do church planters need?

Key leaders planting a church must be adequately prepared in a range of areas. I believe that a committed new convert who passes through six months discipleship training followed by a year of ministry training and experience as a leader within the church could be capable of planting a church. Those who complete this training displaying the right heart and skill-level should be ready to be a good pastor or church planter.

If we could choose, the best church planters would be people planting a church while supporting themselves with a respectable, professional career—until the demands of the church mean they needed to be fully supported by the church. As much as possible I want to send out church planters who have good occupations, because of the respect this generates in society as much as to reduce the expense of church planting. As long as they can have evenings and weekends free for ministry, they should be able to plant a church. However, if they don't have a career we are prepared to send people out with part-time work, or even fully supported by the church.

How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

We know that new churches will need a building once a certain number of people attend. But we will now only rent buildings, not purchase, until there are no more rental facilities available. And we only want to rent buildings that need little or no renovation. We are happy to rent a building just for Sundays, or lease, depending on the situation—but we don't want to have to outlay a large sum for deposit, purchase or renovation at the beginning of a church plant. Our concept is to minimise the financial outlay needed to commence a church as much as possible, or finance will become an obstacle to continuing growth. We want to put off renting buildings as long as possible, fully utilising houses of members for cells and meetings first.

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

I am very careful to meet with the people planting daughter churches each week. I need to discuss progress, and give ongoing advice and further leadership training to the church planters— and I like to input into the members of the churches through training in a central location each month, and through on-site visits to each church once every second month.

In terms of finance, we want daughter churches to be as self-supporting as possible with as little dependence on the mother church as possible. When we see they are doing their best to be self-sufficient, we are prepared to help with shortfalls to the best of our ability. Each daughter church handles its own finances separately, reporting monthly to the mother church. Our goal is that daughter churches are self-supporting in regular expenses within 12 months, while the mother church covers any salaries for the church planters. Daughter churches should be able to fully meet all their own needs and support their own staff within 2 years.

Daughter churches have a high degree of freedom in decision-making. When they have difficulties or uncertainty, they bring issues to our weekly church planters' meeting for advice.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

One major obstacle to church planting in Bangkok as opposed to the hinterland is that people in Bangkok don't have many strong relationships with neighbours, making it harder to witness along lines of relationships. Another major obstacle in Bangkok city is travel times. I believe that if we plant more churches we will see more people come more regularly, simply because their travel times have been reduced.

The cost of renting facilities in Bangkok has not been a major problem yet, in that we don't have many churches in Bangkok. But I am beginning to think about this, and realise this could be an obstacle of sorts. However, I think this can be overcome if we find ways to use our facilities effectively, and as other sources of income. For example, making money by running English teaching classes in our church facilities. We can do many things like this. Our aim is to both offset expenses for the church, and raise our image in the community.

However, the biggest obstacle to the growth of the church in Bangkok is a lack of leaders. In urban centres surrounding Bangkok, people with less education and skill can still be well received by the society. But in Bangkok, it is harder to achieve credibility and respect as a leader.

I believe the key to breakthrough in Thailand is better training and development of leaders. Many pastors lack vision for growth and church planting, but if we are able to help them develop, they are able to make progress. The biggest obstacle to growth in Thailand is a lack of networking between pastors, and hence interaction and ongoing training and development. By adopting a network structure, we overcome competition, facilitate the sharing of ideas and advice, and foster ongoing leadership development. I don't mean we need more organisation, but we do need to become a spiritual, organic network.

Summary of further discussion with Krisada over lunch, 27 July 2001, regarding latest development of a church planting structure in Ayuttaya: (not recorded)

The 7-month-old church in Ayuttaya has grown very well, with a Sunday attendance of around 50 people. As part of that growth, four cell groups have now been opened in three rural communities between 10 and 25 km from the provincial capital itself with many people coming in to the Sunday service from these communities. However, transport from these areas is limited, meaning that many new or interested people in these communities just don't get in to the Sunday services in the city. To get around this problem and facilitate further growth, the Ayuttaya church will adopt a new structure from next month. They will continue to hold the same cell groups and Sunday morning worship services as previously, but on Sunday afternoons they will open house churches in these three rural communities. These house churches will aim to grow to 3-4 cell groups, meet in members' houses and hold worship services. Members will be welcome, but not expected, to attend both a house church and the city-based Sunday morning service. Once a month or once a quarter they will have a combined celebration service in a larger auditorium in the city. The house churches will be overseen and administrated as separate services of a single church in Ayuttaya, with a single leadership team and church membership.

4. Rev Manoonsuk Kamolmatayakul, Jai Samarn Church, FGA

Details: Senior Pastor of Jai Samarn Church, overseeing the Ramkhamhaeng 68 congregation.
Also National President of the Full Gospel Assemblies of Thailand. Combined, the Jai Samarn
Church has an average Sunday attendance of 1,300 people (in 3 different locations), and has
planted 12 daughter churches. Interviewed 2 pm, 25 July 2001, at Jai Samara Ramkhamhaeng 68
Church, Bangkok. Length: 47 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

Five years ago we altered our structure to become a cell church, training leaders who had a vision
for cells to become our 'pastoral leadership team'. Bit by bit we have brought all our ministries in
line with our cell structure. We have changed our constitution to stipulate that all leaders must be
active cell members. Today we no longer have homogenous age group meetings on Sunday
afternoons, but do everything through cells. We have divided the church into 7 'regions', with a
full-time pastor in charge of each region. (One district pastor is a lay pastor, who runs his own
business.) Six of these districts meet as geographical cells; our youth and students meet as
homogeneous cells. Under each regional pastor we have 'district' leaders, who are also full-time.
Under these we have section leaders, who are not full-time. Section leaders oversee 3 cells,
district leaders oversee 4 sections, and regions are made up of 3 districts. This is the structure of
our spiritual life side to the church.

Another very important side we have is leadership training, which is overseen by a full-time
pastor who does not oversee a separate cell-region. He oversees training and development, both
of lay people for ministry and full-time leaders who will become trainers of people for ministry.
We don't use a G-12 structure, feeling that is too heavy a load on the people. Leaders meet those
under them 1:3 or 1:4 in closed cells within our cell structure for mentoring. We also have a
separate training structure that is primarily bible school classroom training or seminar based.
Spiritual parents and cell leaders are trained by district and section leaders.

Beyond this we have a support ministry side, looking after facilities, finance, administration, and
so on, to support our Sunday services and whole structure. We use our cells as welcoming team,
and so on, but much of this side is separate to our cell structure.

*What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church
attracts most:*

We emphasise evangelism along lines of relationship. Therefore, we have a range of target
groups according to the relationships of our members. Our Sunday service program is designed
to cater for the widest possible audience. The largest groups who attend on Sundays would be

office workers (we have some who own their own businesses, but most are employees), and blue-collar workers who work in factories, etc. We have about equal numbers of white and blue-collar workers. But over the last 4 years or so, we have begun focussing on campus ministry too. We have about 100 tertiary students involved now, and want to increasingly emphasise and grow this work. We are also developing our children's ministry, particularly ministry to the children of Christians. All of this is done through cells.

Our goal would be to increasingly reach people who are middle-class and up.

What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? What has your church done to date in church planting? Do you have specific church planting goals?

We are a missions church, that wants to expand the Kingdom of God through church planting across Thailand. However, as a part of a denomination our focus is on expanding our own cell base in Bangkok and on planting churches in the region around Bangkok. We don't want to reach too far; we have set our boundary at about 250 km from Bangkok. We feel that if we reach too far networking is difficult. That the region around Bangkok still needs many, many more churches, so we will focus on planting churches in this area. There are also people from every region of Thailand moving into this area, making this a strategic area.

We do not want to form our own separate movement. Once we have brought daughter churches to a point they are self-sufficient we will have them register with the denomination. We are a local church that wants to raise children who can in time enter the movement as mature adults.

We have not formed numerical goals for church planting, but are constantly praying and looking for people with vision and burden to send. We have had many people suggest good places to plant churches, but we don't have enough leaders to plant churches there yet. I don't feel money is a big issue anymore. And neither is evangelism and gaining converts. The big issue is leadership. If we have a good leader, in a short time a new work will be self-supporting.

About 10 years ago I felt God give me a strategy to plant churches in the area around Bangkok, by training people and sending them out. Since then we have planted 9 daughter churches, in Nawanakon, Samut Prakarn, Chonburi, Samut Sakorn, Thonburi, Nontaburi, Hua Hin, and Ladlumkaew, as well as the Agape deaf church. We have also planted Thai churches in Hong Kong, and Singapore, as congregations of existing churches there, and sent a missionary family to plant a church in Cambodia. We did not intend to plant a new church here at Ramkhamhaeng 68. It was an issue of space, so we bought and built here while still using our old location.

What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok? How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

We have used two methods in church planting in the past: planting a cell from the mother church and growing it into a new church; and sending out a church planter to pioneer from scratch.

My vision for Bangkok is to pioneer and saturate the city with cells, with combined celebration services in our church each Sunday. The cell is the door, the cutting edge of the church with which we saturate the community. I don't want to open many satellite centres like this one, because that requires a lot of money. But we do need some centres. We want to build churches in four quarters of the city. We already have soi 6, here and Vipavadi Rangsit in the north. In the future we want to open another 2 centres over on the Thonburi side of the river, in the north and

south, so we can cover the city. Our cells will penetrate the small communities, and we will have multiple services in 5 locations around the city.

In the long term I would like to see each of these churches as separate daughter churches in close network relationship rather than administrated as one single church in 5 locations, because I feel the ability to independently develop their own ministry will help them reach their communities. We would like to see each of these churches with a minimum of 500 people in services. I feel that large churches have a particular attraction in a mega-city like Bangkok, and have the power to impact the community in a greater way. But this does not close the door on us also planting smaller churches. Some people prefer smaller churches. We would support any members or staff going out to plant other types of churches. Everything depends **on** how God leads, and on the leaders we have. I believe in variety.

In urban centres surrounding Bangkok we can either begin by taking an existing cell or by sending someone specifically to pioneer. In **Samut Sakorn** we began by renting a house and sent a church planter in. The house is used for accommodation and worship services. In some locations, we begin by using the house of a member. But if that is not convenient, we need to rent from the outset.

What qualifications do church planters need?

Firstly, for Bangkok they need an appropriate educational standard. I would like to see them have bachelor's degrees. If they don't, we can talk. But I see that in Bangkok people with a tertiary education are better able to relate to people in all levels of society. Secondly, they need to have the ability to teach and preach. Thirdly, they need to be people who can build a leadership team. We should test them within the cell structure first: they must be able to lead and multiply cells, train up cell leaders and lead other lay cell leaders.

To meet these criteria, they should probably be at least 30 years old. Church planters should be full-time, rather than people with other jobs or a business, as church planting requires great commitment to be fruitful and grow.

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

Our mother church is divided into geographical regions. We assign the pastor over a region to look after any church plants in his region, linking the mother church work with the daughter church work. The regional pastor assists with visitation and preaching, and is a spiritual parent to the church planting pastor. Once a month I call a meeting of all the pastors of our daughter churches, in which I teach and encourage, they report on their progress, we pray together, and so on. Once a church has registered with the movement in their own right, they have the choice of either coming or not coming to these meetings. Daughter churches manage their own finances and budgets, reporting back to the mother church monthly. Support from the mother church reduces over time. Special needs can be promoted by the overseeing pastor within the region of the mother church, to raise special fund through the cells. When a work first opens we call it a preaching point. Once they have 30 people involved, with their own elders and leaders, we call it a church. Churches **should** be fully self-supporting within 5 years of becoming a **'church'**.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

Our greatest obstacle is a shortage of leaders. At present, rents are cheap and there are so many empty buildings. For myself, even though rental costs are higher in Bangkok itself I feel that finding money to support is not hard—whether from our members or from overseas. We are able to raise funds. But the greatest limitation is qualified leaders. We have people ready and able to be part of a team, but we don't have pastors.

Churches in Thailand are small because of a lack of emphasis on discipleship. Leaders don't understand concepts teamwork and building team, so they tend to do all the work without delegation or equipping others. God sends us people continually, whether we have small or large churches, but most leaders don't understand how to keep, train and use these people. Most of our problems are internal.

Details: Associate Pastor of Jai Samarn Church (FGA), overseeing the Sukumvit congregation of 900 members. Prayoon has over 30 years ministry experience in a number of churches. The Jai Samarn Sukumvit church has planted 12 daughter churches, and has satellite services at Ramkhamhaeng 68 and Vipavadi 9. Interviewed 2 pm, 19 July 2001, at Jai Samarn Sukumvit Church, Klong Toey, Bangkok. Length: 46 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

Our church structure has two sides, pastoral care and support ministries. The pastoral care side covers all the spiritual areas, including cells, lay ministry, training programs, church planting and missions. Support ministries cover things like building maintenance, sound, lighting, and so on. The whole church is overseen by the senior pastor, and by myself as associate pastor, with a business committee of 4 elders. We then have a pastoral team of 9 other pastors, 8 of who are full-time. Our pastoral care side functions entirely through cells. With the exception of one homogeneous 'region' made up of student cells at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, our cells are divided strictly into geographical regions, with a pastor over each region. We have a pastor over the support ministries, with responsibilities such as greeting people at the door being assigned to cell groups.

The members of Jai Samarn church have increased to the point we needed additional worship services. So we now have meetings at the new location at Ramkhamhaeng 68. Members who live in that region of the city now have a worship service there. Likewise, another 100 members who live in the Vipavadi 9 region now have a worship service there. In the future these may become 3 separate churches, but for now we are one church with one senior pastor and pastoral team, one membership, and one budget. We say we have three worship locations. We don't feel that we have leaders capable of pastoring these new locations as separate churches, but we can do it as a team. Combined, we have around 1300 people attend weekly services: 900 at the Sukumvit facility, 400 at the Ramkhamhaeng 68 facility, and 100 at Vipavadi 9.

What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church attracts most:

We would like to be able to target the whole country. But to realistically be able to look after people, we have limited our scope to people living within 200 km of Bangkok—whether through

planting churches or expanding our cell network. We don't have a specific goal to reach a particular type or class of people. We emphasis evangelism along lines of relationship, and therefore members naturally tend to reach people of similar type and class to themselves. At one time we had a large number of low-income people attending from Klong Toey, but not any more. Now we tend to attract more well educated people, students, families, and people working in professional or office jobs.

What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok?

My vision for Thailand is to see Christians sit down and explain the Gospel with Thais who do not know or understand about God. I feel that responsibility for their decision is theirs and God's, but we must persevere in love until they understand. My vision is that Thais would *understand* the Gospel.

I have no specific vision regarding church planting. If we talk about my dream, I *would* like to see new churches spring up like 7-11 stores. Wherever a 7-11 store opens, people go in and buy things. Lots of small stores everywhere, so that if anyone has any urgent need they know where to go for prayer and help. I would like to see churches like this, because of their ability to help and get into people's lives. At the same time, if you ask if I would like to see large churches, I would say 'yes'. I am working in one of the largest churches in Thailand! Large churches are able to serve God in many ways that small churches cannot. But small churches are better able to get into the lives of people in a local area. Maybe I am talking about seeing a large number of cells or small churches come into being, which can be part of or receive help and support from a mother church or other large church in the city. I would like to see us network and really work together as the body of Christ.

Bangkok *is* different to the rest of Thailand. Our strategy for church planting in Bangkok should be similar to elsewhere in Thailand. But Bangkok residents value [large, beautiful facilities and meetings. Hence I see that it is important to have a facility for large, combined worship. It may be too expensive to build our own facilities, but at least we can rent venues like sports stadiums, etc and hold combined meetings. Apart from cells during the week, one means of reaching people in Bangkok is to have large worship services on Sundays. The atmosphere of large worship services is important. Having our own beautiful facility is of secondary importance.

What has your church done to date in church planting? What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? What is /will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok? Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

Apart from the new worship venues at Ramkhamhaeng 68 and Vipavadi 9 already mentioned, we have planted daughter churches at Rattanatibet, Nawanakorn, Ladlumkaew, and Samut Prakarn. These are churches that were planted by members of our team, with our support, but planted as independent churches. The vision for each of these came from the church planters themselves, and they had to apply for any financial support from us. The vision for Ramkhamhaeng 68 and Vipavadi 9 churches came from the whole leadership team, and they are under the oversight of the team. The reason we have expanded to Ramkhamhaeng 68 and Vipavadi 9 is because our facility at Sukumvit soi 6 is overfull, and these new venues are effectively extra multiple services. We are not ready to release these as daughter churches because we don't feel we have leadership of adequate calibre to pastor these churches.

If possible, we should begin with a cell in a new local community and expand the number of cells until there are enough believers in a local area to open as a church. When we open a new church

in a new locality in this way, the pastor overseeing that work can be seen as the pastor of that new church. Once the group is self-supporting and has its own leadership team, we can consider it a separate daughter church.

In the case of the Rattanatibet church in Nontaburi, we had several families in cells (10 to 20 people) who lived some distance from the mother church. Once we considered they had appropriate leadership potential we decided to plant a church. A house was rented, and worship services were begun in the house by one of the pastors of the mother church. Once one of the local believers was trained to be the pastor the other pastor returned to the mother church. The church is now up to 50-60 people, and rents it's own facility.

What qualifications do church planters need?

Church planters or pastors of daughter churches need to have graduated at least 1 year of Bible school, and demonstrated sufficient basic understanding. They should be full-time while church planting. Initially they will need to be supported from the mother church, with the daughter church gradually taking an increasing share of the support.

How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

For Thailand, I consider that having our own building is very important. This may be a building we only use for church meetings, or a building we use for other activities during the week but with a room available for services and meetings. We could use buildings such as old warehouses. I see that buildings are particularly important for Thais, since most people do not come to Christ with their whole families. Hence, most of the time we cannot use the houses of members. Where whole families are saved and have a house large enough, we certainly can use houses for cell meetings and so on. But cell meetings can be held anyway, including public places such as schools, universities, parks or KFC. Another reason buildings are important is that when Thais think of religion, they think of buildings designed for specific religious use. This is a very strong feeling. We should have an auditorium used exclusively for worship. This is important.

If we begin a church with just 10 people, we don't need much in the way of a building. If we have a hundred people, even in Bangkok, someone in the church is bound to know someone who has a suitable facility for rent at a very reasonable price. Hence the more members we have, the more our opportunity to obtain cheap rental facilities. And if we have a rich person in the church, they may donate land and help us build a building. But everyone who plants a church will need a building.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

I think there are several such obstacles. Firstly, most churches don't have the vision and passion to see goals of church planting come into being. Another obstacle is a lack of cooperation between churches to work together towards goals of church planting. The "40-barrier" is the result of one pastor doing all the ministry and visiting all the members himself. The ability of any one person is limited to about that many people. But if we shared the responsibility between all the members, through cell groups, I believe the smallest churches in Bangkok would be 150 people, and many would be 300 to 500 people—with some churches 5,000 to 8,000 or more people.

I am 53 years old now, and have served the Lord over 30 years. I have seen the old way of serving the Lord. The old way only grows a church to 30 or 50 people—at most 120. And if we reach 120 people, fights and problems erupt creating major headaches. Now I serve in a church of 1,300 people, with smooth relations and a confidence for future growth.

6. Rev Somkiat **Kittipongse,** Bangkok Fellowship Church (independent)

<u>Details</u>: Senior Pastor of Bangkok Fellowship Church (independent charismatic church), which has planted 7 daughter churches during his time on staff. The mother church currently has an average Sunday attendance of 450 people (2 services), and the combined attendance of the 7 daughter churches totals another 200 or so people (over 300 in cells). Interviewed 1:30 pm, 26 July 2001, at Bangkok Fellowship Church, On Nut, Bangkok. Length: 53 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

We are a cell church. We have three basic meetings: Sunday morning worship services, Sunday afternoon homogeneous age group meetings, and mid-week cells. We currently have 9 Sunday afternoon age group meetings, such as youth, young adults, women, men, and businessmen, and about 60-70 cells. Our cell attendance is higher than our Sunday service attendance, because many unsaved people attend evangelistic cells without yet coming to services. There are some who attend services without attending cells, but not many.

What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church attracts most:

We mostly attract blue-collar workers. In the early days I did a lot of work with students, but it is like God has re-directed us. We have a lot of people working as maids or in factories. They are not at the level of slum-dwellers, but lower middle class. We have only a very small percent that would own their own business. We have about equal numbers of singles and marrieds. We have a large youth, but a lot of families too.

What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? What has your church done to date in church planting? Do you have specific church planting goals?

We have determined to the most we can possibly do. I have a vision to see our church here in Bangkok grow, but our big limitation is not enough land. Nonetheless, I am convinced we can continue to grow our mother church. We have opened 7 daughter churches now, in Kanchanaburi (x2), Prachinburi, Ayuttaya, Thonburi, Kalasin, and Pitsunalok. If we have the resources, I would like to open more than this. I have said to several people that within the next 10 year, if God gives us the ability, we would like to have 20-30 daughter churches. Maybe not one in every province, but this should be a realistic goal.

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Quite a large number of people have suggested we plant daughter churches in Bangkok, but I feel that we don't yet have the strength to do this. I feel that God only reveals so far ahead to us at any one time. When we get there he shows us more. I have a lot of dreams, but dreams and vision are not always the same thing.

What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok?

My heart is to not build a church on anyone else's foundation—I really don't like that—but to build churches out of people who did not know God before. At first I thought we should wait until we had at least 500 members before trying to plant churches, but in 1992 when we only had about 200 people God encouraged me to not wait any longer. We had several people in our church whose parents in Minburi were interested in the Gospel. So we took our Friday evangelism team to Minburi to follow-up on these interested contacts.

This has become our church planting strategy. We have members who come from other provinces. They go home over Songkran and witness to their families, and sometimes people are really interested. So we take our evangelistic team to visit them and proclaim the Gospel to that whole village. If a few people get saved, we go back on again and again until we establish a cell group there. We don't have many bible college students in this church we can use, and nor do we have enough pastors or staff. So we need to raise up one of the converts to be the principle leader of the new work. But I do have had another pastor on staff since 1994, Ps David (a Thai), who does a circuit visiting each of our daughter churches to teach and train. We have to raise up local believers as leaders because we don't have the people to send out as church planters or pastors ourselves.

If we have bible college students to send, that is better. Over the years I have sent students to different bible schools, and we have had some classes at the church for some time. Just last year I opened a ministry training course in the church. We currently have 13 students in a 2-year program. When these students have finished, we expect to have people to send out as pastors. And when we see local believers with good potential we are able to bring them in to train them more effectively here to go back and lead their church.

Quite a few years ago we opened a work in Nakorn Nayok. Bobby [Nishimoto] was with us at that time. We had a Thai worker and a missionary working with us up there for 2-3 years, but in the end the work failed. My observation was that if we send someone out who God has not really called, they wont stay long. And when they leave, the work may well fall apart immediately. But while someone from the local community may have limited knowledge, they aren't going anywhere else. Hence, wherever possible I like using local converts. If we have a local convert who is able, we have a bible school ready to train them now. One problem with most of the other bible schools is that the entrance requirements are high. We have opened our course so that even those who only have Grade 4 can enter. Many of our people have very low educational background. They have been preaching and leading, yet unable to go to bible school.

We don't have any foreign support for our work, and have to depend on our own people's giving. We currently use over 25% of our tithes and offerings in church planting. When I say I want to open a new church the board groans. So it is important our daughter churches become self-sufficient. When we plant a church we need funds for the church planter, at least to cover expenses. In some locations we are able to use the house of a member, in some places we have had to rent a facility. And we need to cover the expenses of David, as he visits the churches.

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What qualifications do church planters need?

Currently all our church planting pastors are full-time. In Minburi we now have 7 cell groups, with about 30 average in Sunday services (many are not free on Sundays), and have two people in full-time ministry. However, several of our workers have asked permission to do extra work to augment their low income. Usually we have only allowed them to work on Mondays, on their day off, to earn extra income. We don't have any leaders who make their living from a business and give their time to ministry.

How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

In each case we have begun by using houses. Only in one case did we purchase a building from the beginning: in Kalasin we bought a house. We took a team into the schools and community there, and discovered the house we stayed in was actually for sale at only 200,000 baht. Several neighbours were saved during our time there, and we had a couple who had just graduated from bible school who were from that region, so we decided to buy the house as a church and send the couple up there.

In each case we have begun using cell groups, and used a house of a member for combined Sunday services. Only two of our daughter churches rent facilities, according to the decision and vision of the church planter.

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches.

The relationship between mother church and daughter churches is very close. We are the ones who have opened the work in each location, and we feel that the leaders in each location really don't know very much. So we need to parent and look after these churches. Ps David visits each of the different churches regularly, seeing each church planter about every second week. Every month I take a missions team from our mother church to one of our daughter churches, for 1-3 days at a time. About 3 times a year we have seminars or programs in the church here which we invite all the church planters in to attend, for about 3-4 days at a time.

What would you do differently to plant churches in Bangkok?

At present, we feel our resources are too limited to plant churches in Bangkok. But if we did, we would work in a very similar manner. The main differences would be that the quality of leaders would have to be higher, with higher education to draw greater attention to themselves and the church. In addition, in Bangkok we probably need to start with a team of workers, not a single planter. Probably 5-6 people.

In Bangkok we would probably have to have our own buildings, more than use the houses of members. In our experience, houses are good in the beginning. But after a time they are not so good, in that some people who come into the meetings are afraid they are inconveniencing the owner of the house. If the owner of the house is very generous and open, then it is OK. This is more of an issue when the owner of the house and the leader of the church are different people. But if the members feel they don't want to interrupt the family, or stay too long, this can have a negative effect on church growth. We've never had a problem with cell meetings in member's houses, but the difference between cells in houses and church in houses is that cells are short and not many people. But if there are a lot of people and people stay most of the day Sunday, there can be a problem. However, in our part of Bangkok most of our members live in houses rather

than apartments. Houses may not be large, but would be available for meetings. We have very few members who live closer in towards the city.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

One obstacle I see is small size, because when we are small we lack workers and variety. And if we are small and lack good systems, our members can be drawn off into larger churches. I have noticed that many of the large churches in Bangkok were large from the time they began, or within just a few months. It is hard to build something from scratch in Bangkok because there are already so many strong churches people are drawn to and can choose from.

Our biggest obstacle to growing the church or multiplying the number of cells is a lack in the number of leaders. I believe the rate of our church growth is equal to our rate of producing leaders. Our second obstacle is finance, meaning we must find ways to increase our financial effectiveness. Bringing our daughter churches to full financial self-support is important in this.

The problem of the '40-barrier' is a structure in which the pastor does everything. Many pastors run around visiting people, doing everything, preparing sermons, and so on. But to grow beyond this level we must train church members to minister as well.

7. *Rev Dr* Tira *Janepiriyaprayoon,* **Mahaporn** *Sukumvit Church,* C&MA

Details: Senior Pastor of Mahaporn Sukumvit Church, the largest C&MA church in Bangkok, with 350 people in regular attendance and with several daughter churches. Interviewed 10 am, 2 August 2001, at Mahaporn Church office, Phaya Thai, Bangkok. Length: 46 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Please describe the origins and planting of the Mahaporn Sukumvit Church:

Over 30 years ago the Mahaporn church moved to Saphan Kwai. At that time Ps [Norman] Ford [missionary] and myself both went to study at Fuller for a time, then returned to the Mahaporn church. Since we already had an associate pastor looking after that church, we became burdened to plant a new church. At the same time the C&MA had a worldwide program to plant churches in 10 strategic cities worldwide, in which they chose to include Bangkok. Ps Ford initiated the vision to plant a new church using the facilities of the Sukumvit *soi* 10 English language evangelical church. There were already a number of Thais attending this church, and facilities were available for free in the afternoons.

We began with Ps Ford teaching a morning bible class in Thai in that church. This group quickly grew to 10 people. In 1984 we began afternoon services, with over 30 people at the initial service. Ps Ford, a Campus Crusade for Christ missionary, and myself were the leaders. We began with about 70% university students.

While at Fuller, Norman Ford proposed planting a church in Bangkok using a house church network structure that did not depend on having a church facility. Describe the structure of the Mahaporn Sukumvit Church both in its founding stage and now:

Our church structure has actually not changed much since the founding stage. I held the position of pastor, while lecturing full-time at Bangkok Bible College. We began with a worship service on Sunday afternoons, and a Wednesday night prayer meeting. We began by trying to run meetings in houses, but did not succeed. So for a time we had no cell meetings in houses. Instead we tended to emphasise departments such as youth, women, etc. Over the last 10 years we have begun to change on this, but still would not consider ourselves a cell church. We emphasise cells as our main program, but only 50-60% of our members are in cells. We are looking for ways to overcome this problem. We try to organise cells in members' houses as much as possible, but sometimes use offices or other locations. Our groups tend to be homogeneous.

**What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church attracts most:**

In the beginning we targeted students and young professionals—the middle class. Now we do not have a specified target group, but God seems to be bringing this same type of people to us most. We have not deliberately tailored our program for this group in particular, but if you looked at our program you would find it works well with these people.

**What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? What has your church done to date in church planting? Do you have specific church planting goals?**

I recall the words of Jesus: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." I feel that the thing Thailand needs most is new life; life that is abundant. Thailand has deteriorated in every area of life, and most clearly in morals and spiritually. Nothing else can solve this except salvation and abundant life in Jesus Christ. The first aspect of our vision is to bring abundant life to our community by proclaiming the Gospel with love. The second aspect of our vision is to multiply the training of disciples. The third aspect of our vision is to increase the number of quality churches. We have not yet set a goal as to how many churches we want to plant, just that we want to plant quality churches—although we are in the process of formulating such goals.

We have planted 3 daughter churches thus far: 7-8 years ago in Rangsit (70 people), 1 year ago in Chaiyaphum (25 people), and 1 year ago in Chanthaburi (6 people)—a combined attendance of around 100 people. This Saturday I will go to Roi Et, to survey a new location. Our goal is to plant churches in districts without any church.

Bangkok is the capital city, with a huge number of people—some 10 million- meaning there are many districts that are very interesting for church planting in that they don't have any churches. One single square kilometre of Bangkok can have more people than a whole county in the countryside. We would like to plant as many churches as possible, but to this point most [C&MA] church planting in Bangkok is still done by the mission more than mother churches planting daughter churches—although once they start we try to be involved and to send people to help. When they plant a church, they usually do so by sending in several missionary families— although they are now saying they have made a mistake using this strategy and want to plant churches more in conjunction with Thai pastors.

**What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok?**

In planting the Rangsit church, we worked together with a missionary church planter and Campus Crusade. We had a member who lived in that area who was a lecturer at Rangsit University, and was very interested in planting a church there. We began with a student group at the university, meeting on campus as a cell on Sunday mornings. After about a year we rented a town house. Each Sunday we also sent someone up to help teach and lead.

Our other two church plants we did without missionary assistance. We had a student from Chaiyaphum who was saved, who then went home and witnessed to his family who were also saved. The parents then became very active in witnessing to their neighbours, until a good number of people had been saved. We sent several teams up to evangelise in that area together with the family, travelling back whenever the student went home to visit. Over 6-7 months we saw a large number of converts, even though they only held meetings when we had a team there. Many of the converts were related to each other. So in the end we sent up a minister from here as

a full-time pastor to begin cells and worship services church there. Today we have 4 cells and over 20 adults in services each week.

What qualifications do church planters need?

A church planter must have adequate biblical foundations, understanding and being able to teach the bible. They must have a good foundation in cell ministry and following people up. They must understand local church and have enough skill to form a church, establish worship services, set up structures, and so on. They should have had some full-time ministry experience already, and should be full-time while they are planting the church. If they are not full-time, how else could they live? What would they do? They are not farmers! A better way, if possible, may be to train up a lay local **person—that** may be more appropriate for small churches in the provinces. They may never be able to support a full-time pastor of their own.

In Bangkok, a church planter need not necessarily be full-time initially. A lay leader could potentially commence a work, by expanding the number of cells. This would be a better way.

How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

In Chaiyaphum we still meet in the house of a member who is influential in that community. We use a house because there is nowhere else appropriate, it is free, and people will go to a house very easily. There is some aspect of people being afraid they are inconveniencing the owner of the house, but overall in the initial stages we find it is far easier to bring a new person to a house than into any other Christian facility. The owner of the house is very generous and genuine in inviting people to come, which tends to negate any obstacle. It is a very natural, informal environment.

But after a time, using a house could be an obstacle because of the increasing number of people. And the owner of the house may become annoyed at the number of people coming and going, and the length of time they stay. I feel that as the number of people increases, we really should look for another location for worship.

In Bangkok, the easiest and most appropriate way to begin is with cell groups. When we have 2-3 cells, we could meet for worship in a **home—but** homes in Bangkok are different to homes in the provinces. They are not as open as in the provinces where people come and go all day. In Bangkok homes are considered to be for the family only, and they don't like too many other people coming. You may be able to use a house for a period of time in the beginning, when there are not too many people and if the owner of the house has a vision for planting the church. It is a good place to start, but in the long term you will need another place of worship. This is my opinion **anyway—we** have no experience of church planting in Bangkok yet, only of people sometimes becoming tired of hosting cell groups.

Having your own building is important in it being a central location all can get to conveniently, and that you can have a lot of people and can run special programs. Thais feel good when they go to the temple; they feel it is holy. So Thais tend to feel that having a special place of worship is good. The cost of land is clearly an obstacle to churches in Bangkok, and is the reason churches keep moving further out from the city centre. But even though it is an obstacle, for reasonably sized churches it is still manageable.

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

Mother churches must look after their daughter churches, contacting and enquiring of the churches every week—whether by phone or in person—to let them know we are there to support. We should meet with them in person at least once every second month, and have them report back in writing every month.

Daughter churches open their own bank accounts and handle their own finances. If they have any special needs they would like supported, they need to present a budget to us as a project. Daughter churches have freedom to make their own decisions about all they do, with the provision that they continue to receive training and input from us here.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

This is a good question, which I too would like to know the answer for! One obstacle I see is in that things like evangelism and church planting have not yet become core values to most Christians, both pastors and members. Pastors may have a 'vision', but it has not yet gotten into their bones—it is not in their blood; not in their spirit. People know evangelism is important, but don't really do it. A second obstacle I see is in strategy. Strategy is not most important, but it is important. Many people, many pastors, don't know how to evangelise; don't know how to plant churches. They want to do it, but don't know how. That is a problem with bible schools; students study generalised theory for several years, but when they finish they still cannot do it.

Why are most Thai churches small? I don't know, but I do wonder whether this has to do with the structure of Thai society, in that we don't really think in terms of being part of a large group. Some say Thais don't really form into groups so much. They suggest Thailand is a loose-structured society, loose in the sense of not connecting to form groups in which you commit yourself to close relationships within that group. I don't know, but that may be a factor.

Details: Founder and pastor of the 22-year old Rom Klao Church, which has a Sunday attendance of over 1,000 people and 25 daughter churches across Thailand. Wan reports that he has approximately 2,000 members in the Bangkok church, and approximately 8,000 members nationally. Interviewed 1:30 pm, 22 July 2001, at Rom Klao Church, Din Daeng, Bangkok. Length: 58 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

We are a church that incorporates a range of models. For example, in evangelism we emphasise both personal evangelism and church based events. The church's evangelistic events build a concept that we are zealous in evangelism. But what really produces fruit is personal evangelism by the members.

Thailand must be the easiest place in the world for evangelism, but it is very hard to see these converts commit themselves to the church. We have found that converts will keep coming back to the church only if they make many friends. Converts often lose their non-Christian friends, so we emphasise being a community with close-knit small groups where people can make new friendships. We have tried to design a church that best encourages people to get into groups: informal groups of friends, study groups of 2-4 people and, nurture groups with a spiritual parent whom we have trained well. On Sunday afternoons we break the church into about 10 homogeneous group meetings of between 30-100 people. This is where the spiritual parents find and meet with their younger Christians. These homogeneous groups include: businessmen, older men, older women, housewives, youth, secondary students, and so on. The church organises these homogeneous group meetings, appointing leaders over each group. But we allow the spiritual parents to build their own small group from within these larger homogeneous meetings.

Beyond this, we have mid-week cells in homes. We have divided Bangkok into 12 geographical districts, with a team of 3 full-time workers assigned to each district. Within each district we have a number of areas. Two to three cells make up an area, and two to three areas make up a district. We separate our Sunday small groups and our cells. One church member may be involved in a homogeneous group meeting on Sunday afternoon, including being part of a small group within that meeting, and then also be involved in a geographical cell during the week. Children and youth are encouraged to participate in the geographical mid-week cells.

We also run a full-time Bible college 5 mornings a week, and run open Bible study classes 5 evenings a week that attract 40-50 members each time. We have one more class in the church, which we emphasise most strongly, which is our discipleship group. This is a close training

group for lay leaders, working through a curriculum and being given practical training in ministry skills. These people are likely to be cell leaders, spiritual parents who lead nurture groups, etc.

We only have about 5 pastors on staff. Pastors oversee the Sunday afternoon homogeneous groups, and the cell districts.

What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? Do you have specific church planting goals?

I would like to see strong local churches. Because Thailand does not have a Christian heritage, without strong local churches the community is not able to evaluate what Christianity stands for. Thailand is probably the easiest country in the world for evangelism, because people have problems and are very hungry. But if the church is not strong it cannot hold converts. A strong local church must emphasise the Bible as the Word of God, and take it seriously. And it must clearly teach and apply basic doctrines.

I think that in church planting, we need to begin by raising up leaders from within each new group. If local leadership is not clear, we will have to abort the church plant. Once a group has started we must provide encouragement and training to the leader(s). We provide training for our church planters every 4 months.

I am at an age where I am doing less now, so I personally don't want to plant any more churches. But I do want to help others who go out. I am happy to help any church of any denomination plant churches in Bangkok.

What has your church done to date in church planting? What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok?

Today we have approximately 2,000 members. However, a large number of members have moved home to live in the provinces, so we have planted churches in 25 provinces.

Planting churches in Thailand is really fairly easy. Firstly, pray and be certain God is calling you to plant churches. Secondly, find a principle leader, one or more people. If you don't have a leader, don't begin! The church will fail, or at least will never grow beyond 20 people. We have not actually planted any daughter churches in Bangkok, but my formula for Bangkok would be that you should have 100 people coming within 1 year. You don't have to go anywhere to witness—you could just stand at a bus stop for 3 hours and put out 1,000 tracts. From the 1,000 you should have 10 people who are interested, and 2 who get saved. When we plant a church, we send out teams from here—maybe they could go out twice a week to help witness. On Sundays you should run a full program—maybe 9am to 3pm—as well as a mid-week program. It is very hard to get commitment from people unless the church has activities for people to commit themselves to. If the church has little program they will spend their time elsewhere—if the church has a busy program they will adjust their schedules to be more involved.

Maybe once a month we can take a whole cell to visit someone who is interested at their house or work place. When someone is first saved they should open an evangelistic cell by inviting all their unsaved friends. And then we have normal nurturing cells. On the day of a cell, the church planting team should be out witnessing in that area in order to bring people back to the cell.

I would like to suggest that in Thailand, don't plant small churches. Small churches are not good in Thailand. Here we have small groups that combine to be a big church. This is the right way. But small independent churches wont survive; they are too weak. If we have only a few

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members, when a new person comes they often feel they don't relate to anyone in the group. Hence a small church lacks the gifts needed to follow up contacts.

You could start renting a building or in a house, but the importance is not in the location. But it is important that we visit people in their houses, and the houses of members are like a second and third church. So even if we begin in a house, in no time we now have the church meeting in five houses. By the time we have 5 houses, you should look for a building for large meetings. Trying to start larger meetings immediately doesn't work, because we don't have the people or money for expenses. We need to start in houses where there are few expenses.

Church planting should begin with training the members we have now. They need mentoring. It you wanted to plant 10 churches, you should start by finding 30 people to train. By dividing these 30 people into groups of one strong leader with two helpers, you would have 10 church planting teams. You then become the trainer of these 30 people. Money is only a small issue, because when we do big things God provides.

How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

Really, it is not that important for churches to have nice buildings. For our first 10 years we did not have our own building. We moved 10 times in 10 years, using hotel conference rooms, schools, and other venues we could rent just for Sundays. It was hard. Apart from that we just used houses. When we have a lot of people meeting in houses already, when we do begin a larger meeting it is easier to maintain discipline and good relationships within the church.

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

I live in Bangkok. We have 25 daughter churches. But I don't have to visit those 25 churches. For the last 22 years the leadership teams of each of our daughter churches (5-10 people per church) come to Bangkok every 4 months for a 3-day networking and training seminar. The leaders of daughter churches must have a relationship with the mother church to receive nurture and training, and to facilitate unity. Our relationship must be in spirit, not by law. As they learn, observe and understand, they themselves want to participate. We cannot base the relationship on regulations, or then it does not come from the heart.

In helping churches in the provinces, our primary means of assistance is by advising them over the phone as to how to overcome their problems. If necessary, we will send a representative to help them. But we have divided our network of churches into 4 districts—north, northeastern, central and southern—with a committee appointed to each district. So the churches we have planted in those districts are no longer my personal responsibility.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

The problem is people! Hence we need to realise that the best way to solve the problem is to give them friends. People must be involved in groups in the church. The problem is people trying to teach other people, not trying to really help them or listen to them. We need to teach discipline.

The "40-barrier" is the result of the church being one functional group. It is wrong. One pastor doing all the work—a one-man show. Most Bible schools teach people to do ministry rather than teaching pastors how to train their members to do ministry. The answer has to be solved in the

Bible schools and in training, and in using teachers with experience in practical ministry. And, many pastors are scared to let their people do ministry for fear someone in the church may do it better than they do, and may end up leading the church. I want to see all the members trained to minister together as different parts of the body. If we train people in disciple, the whole church can be involved in ministry without creating problems. But without discipline, there may be growth for a time then everyone will end up fighting, and everyone will leave. That fear is why many pastors end up doing it all themselves, and their churches don't grow.

9. Rev Dr Winit *Wongsonsern,* Emmanuel Baptist Church, SBC

<u>Details</u>: Senior Pastor of the 49-year-old Emmanuel Baptist Church (SBC) for the last 35 years, Winit has an earned doctorate degree from the Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans. Emmanuel is the largest Baptist church in Thailand with about 300 people in weekly services, and has planted or participated in planting a number of daughter churches. Over the last 10 years, Emmanuel has planted 4 daughter churches. Interviewed 10:00 am, 20 August 2001, at Emmanuel Baptist Church, Phayotai, Bangkok. Length: 50 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

In the past we had just one group of lay leaders in the church, but we have now divided this group into 3 groups: *elders* are older members who are pillars of the church, and oversee the spiritual life of the church, give counsel and may preach if they are so gifted; *overseers* oversee the spiritual life of the church on a daily basis, with weekly meetings, and provide counselling and generally act as spiritual parents of the church; and, *deacons* who help with business and maintenance in the church.

Wednesday and Friday evenings we have prayer meetings, and Saturday afternoons we have informal "Impact" outreach dinners. Our Sunday program includes prayer meeting, Sunday school, worship service, homogeneous age group meetings (of 30-50 people), and outreach meeting for our English students. On Sunday evenings we have "church in the park", in Lumpini Park, with outdoor preaching points.

We have tried using cell groups, but have not had the results we feel we should have. Forty to fifty years ago we moved from Chinatown to our current location, because this was the best land we could afford. Now, forty years later, this is regarded as central Bangkok. Most of our members cannot afford to live near here, because land and rent values are so very expensive. Our members have spread out across the city, making it inconvenient for most of them to travel in to cell group meetings. So we rely on our Sundays very heavily, with most of our groups meeting on Sundays. For most of our members, only some family members are saved, making it not practical to use members houses for cell meetings to a large extent. We have younger families in the church whose whole family believe, but they are busy with children. And the traffic is very congested around this part of the city. So we have found cell groups on the whole don't work, except for those who live close to the church where people can walk to cell group.

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<u>*What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church attracts most:*</u>

We would love to focus on reaching the educated and wealthy, but we must recognise the fact that the church is a family and cater for everyone from the smallest children to the elderly. Churches with predominantly youth or students seem to lack a certain depth. We run a nursery for 300 children during the week, and teach English a large number of young people. But we aim to reach all ages.

The majority of our members are white-collar workers, many with young families, from about 20-35 years of age. We have about 17 medical doctors in the church. We emphasise evangelism along lines of relationship.

<u>*What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? What has your church done to date in church planting? Do you have specific church planting goals?*</u>

I would like to see churches spring up in flats and apartments all across the city, so that people don't have to walk anywhere to get to a church. If we look at the evangelical church in soi 10, they are raising 40 million baht to put up a new building. We see New Vision church raising 30 million baht to put up a new building. If we have a vision to go this way, we could buy 10 units at 1.5 to 2 million baht a unit and open an apartment church. People don't have to go anywhere to go to church. The members we have who live in that apartment complex can witness to other residents and visit each day. We need to learn this approach from other large cities, such as Hong Kong, who are already doing this; this is not a new idea. We are surrounded here by apartments, which makes us ask the question of how we will reach these people unless we get into those apartment complexes.

If we speak about the whole of Thailand, I have a dream that every district and every village has its own church, beginning in the house of a family who become Christian and witness to their neighbours. Ten years ago we set a goal of planting ten churches in ten years, but we did not reach that goal because we did not have enough leaders to send out. Instead we planted four churches during that time, three of which have remained; these each have at least 30 people in them now, and are in Muang Thong, Thonburi and Surin.

There are about 50 Baptist churches in Thailand, with a good number more preaching points. We have played a role in the planting or developing of a large number of these, if only in supplying them with a pastor.

<u>*What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok? How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?*</u>

We begin by buying land. We think that if we will have a church, we should begin like Abraham and buy land so that when we have the people we can plant a church in the new location. I mean buying land that is cheap now because of distance from the city, but in a good location for a church in the future. Or, it may be that someone donates land or a house in Bangkok, such as a single older person who wants to donate their house to be used as a church. This is how we began the Muang Thong church. In the other locations we bought land first.

We learned this approach from the Catholic Church, who have bought more land than anyone else. When they begin with land, they are able to begin by transplanting a community of people

to build a new church there. They have so much good land because they bought so much land when it was cheap and some distance from the city. When the city grows out to their land they sell half of it at a large profit, which they use to buy another piece of land further out. They have been doing this continually, until now they own hundreds of thousands of rai of land.[114]

Rick Warren did a survey asking pastors, "If you had your time over what would you do differently?" Everyone answered that they would have bought more land. Not having enough room for a parking lot, nursery, Sunday school, guest room, etc. can mean people don't come. But there is no reason not to have a fully rounded centre including gymnasium, snack bar, stage for drama presentations, large meeting room, etc. When people come to church, they spend the whole day in different activities there.

When we bought this land here 50 years ago, we paid 200,000 baht. We recently enquired about buying that block of land behind the church. They asked 200 million baht for it! This lesson stirred my heart. We don't want to buy expensive land—we want to buy cheap land in good locations for the future. When the city expands and new roads are cut in that area, we can plant a good church there.

In the inner city, we are looking at buying apartments in which we! have members living, or which have a lot of vacancies and are selling cheaply. It is easier if we already have members living there.

We must not get stuck on a form of worship. If we look back 2000 years ago, we never see a church like this—they met in houses, with ordinary believers teaching and encouraging one another. In Acts they had house churches. I like house churches. My dream is to see as many house churches come into being as possible—but at the same time we also need mega-churches and large churches to facilitate these small churches meeting together in celebration. Maybe people meet in cell groups of 10-20 on weekdays, with combined meetings on Sundays. But by house church I mean a true church in its own right, with its own Sunday meeting. But once a month or once every second month we facilitate a combined service together—if possible together with the members of the mother church—so that they don't feel like they are just a small group of believers but feel part of something big.

If possible, we would like to purchase condominiums to use as house churches. We would like to see the city saturated with churches like this, in every building. Most apartments or condominiums are small, so we would expect to need to buy and renovate 2-3 apartments to make a location suitable for a house church. A house church of only 10 people lacks strength—but with 25 or more people they could support a pastor. I think house churches should have a full-time pastor, which they could do if they had 25 members. When they reach about 50 people, they should have a heart to split into two groups. I have heard of churches dividing to multiply the number of small churches with great effectiveness. Just like the way God multiplied the number of small churches when he scattered the Jerusalem church through persecution.

What qualifications do church planters need?

They must be Christians who are truly born again, who love evangelism, are committed to fulfilling the Great Commission, and are zealously keen to plant a church. Other qualifications

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114. One rai equals 1,600 square metres (0.16 hectares, 0.40 acres).

could be negotiated, but these are basic. It may be possible to use people who are not full-time, who are lay people, or who have not completed bible college studies. Today we have many media tools to help train people on the job. The Bible says we should not put new believers into leadership too quickly; I feel church planters should have been Christians a minimum of 5-7 years or so. I believe that if a layperson plants a church, within a certain time they will see the need to give themselves full-time to their church. Initially that may not be necessary.

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

During the first 3 years, we will give full-support to a daughter church. Within 3 years they must be self-supporting. Daughter churches handle **their** own finances, and have **100%** freedom in decision-making. Before sending out a church planter, whether a layperson or full-time staff, we need to check that person carefully to be certain they can do the job. We need to be certain they have the necessary abilities, so we can be confident to release the work. We will go and visit them, at least 2-3 times a year if they are a long way off. If they are close, we can visit regularly, even ever other week or so. Our role is not as their overseer, but as their **friend—to** provide encouragement rather than control. For house churches, in hosting combined meetings each month or two, we simply invite the pastors of each house church to work together with us in planning or to participate in this event. We don't believe in forcing daughter churches into an ongoing relationship. If churches feel they receive benefit by participating with us, they will come. If they don't want to come, that is OK too. Daughter churches or house churches should registered as churches in their own right.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

The main reason for this obstacle is facilities. When churches meet in a facility that can seat 50 people, they only grow this big. To grow they either need to exercise faith for a larger facility, or they need to multiply into two churches this size. This is another good option.

Another big obstacle is that members often lack vision, or don't understand the vision. When the pastor suggests the church should by a condominium, they reject the proposal. The problem is waiting for the unsaved to come to us, rather than us to going to them, taking the church to them.

To achieve saturation church planting in Bangkok, we must remember that the most important factor in church planting is training church planters or key **leaders.** We must have a church planter or primary leader before we can open a new church. Man looks for a **strategy—God** looks for a man.

In terms of the cost of land, buildings, condominiums, etc, we should recognise that if our members can afford to purchase these, the church (which is much larger than one member) should be able to as well. We may begin by planting a cell in the house or condominium of a member first, which several members are inviting me to do at present. But as the church grows, because a single apartment is so small, we may need to purchase an adjoining apartment and renovate to have sufficient space. The family could potentially use the **enlarged** facility themselves, and having the church meet in their house should increase their burden to minister.

10. Rev Dr Wirachai Koware, Romyen Church, TAG

<u>Details</u>: Pastor of 33-year old Romyen Church (Bangkok Evangelistic Centre), founder and former National President of the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG), and founder and head of the Romyen Mission. Romyen Church has directly planted tens of daughter churches, and currently supports 37 new church plants through the Romyen Mission. The mother church currently has an average Sunday attendance of 450 people. Interviewed 2:30 pm, 17 July 2001, at Romyen Church (Bangkok Evangelistic Centre), Klong Tan, Bangkok. Length: 70 minutes. Interview conducted in Thai. Recorded on Mini-Disc.

Condensed English Transcript of Interview:

Describe the structure of your church:

Over many years we have developed a flexible church structure to conveniently serve our members, rather than expect our members to serve our church structure. At one time we had a structure based on departments, but we found that departments forced people to adapt to fit a profile rather than being released to use their gifts. Participation was low, and some leaders over exercised their authority. I would describe our structure now as being one of natural growth and development

I have read books about cell church, meta church, and so on, and what they write is good in their own context. But we can only use their principles, not adopt their structures. Since we are not able to do everything, we begin by asking what gifts people we have now possess. On Sunday afternoons we have *interest groups* which we hope will facilitate everyone to be involved in ministry according to their gifts. Interest groups include groups like I.T. [information technology; i.e. computers], social ministry, manual work (maintenance). Groups can be begun by members with an idea or burden. Sometimes I see a need and preach this vision until someone comes forward with a burden to begin it.

We believe the mission of God must be done by the whole church, not a department. Nurture, evangelism, discipleship, etc., should be shared by the whole church, not done by a specific department.

What is the target group of your church? Describe the class and type of people your church attracts most:

Our church is a family church, with elderly, families, youth, children, and so on. We have both educated and uneducated. Therefore, we aim to reach all types of people.

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What is your vision for Thailand, and Bangkok? What has your church done to date in church planting? Do you have specific church planting goals?

I believe God called me to take the good news across Thailand. God is certainly using all the pastors, churches and movements in Thailand for this. I believe the local church is God's means, God's headquarters, through which we fulfil the Great Commission. Hence, my emphasis is on planting self-supporting, self-governing, **self-propagating** local churches, which are ready to network together for greater effectiveness, and which have a vision to plant daughter churches of their own. My vision is for these churches to be wholistic, in dealing equally with people's spiritual and physical needs. Hence we have a mobile medical clinic, work with orphans, work with the blind and so on.

My opinion is that we need to flow with the Holy Spirit. I don't want to proscribe that we do or don't specifically work in Bangkok. However, God did call me to work in Bangkok first. Our approach to church planting and ministry in Bangkok and in the provinces is the same.

We have directly planted and helped facilitate the planting of many churches. I don't have figures as to how many we have directly planted ourselves, but we are currently assisting almost 40 churches through the Romyen Mission. There are a number of churches we planted ourselves in the past that have now grown to the point they are no longer a part of the Romyen Mission. There are other churches that we did not begin, but who have networked with us for support and assistance. My personal goal is to see the Romyen Mission expand from **planting/assisting** 40 churches in **2001** to **planting/assisting** 100 churches by 2006, largely through churches we have previously supported now planting their own daughter churches.

What is / will be your strategy for church planting (out of the mother church)? What is / will be your strategy for reaching Bangkok?

One strategy we are using now is planting house churches in members' houses when members move too far away, or new people from a long way off are saved. We currently have members who live 50 km from the church, which is an obstacle to them coming on Sundays and even more of an obstacle for them to bring their friends. If such a group is not too far from the mother church, we consider it a cell group. Currently if a group is more than 40-50 km from the mother church we develop it as a house church. We now have 5 such house churches in the hinterland around Bangkok. Each house church must have at least **15 people** committed before it commences. A cell can have as few as 3. Members of our house churches will most likely also be members of a cell, several cells combining to be a house church. Some of our house churches have up to 30 members.

In each of these cases we did not see the need to plant new sovereign local churches, but neither did we have the staff to run meetings for them. So we send our staff to stand beside the local Christians for a time, to train, advise and motivate local lay leaders, till they can largely run house church meetings on their own. Members of these house churches remain members of Romyen church, but are not expected to attend services here. Their house church meeting (which may be mid-week) is considered their church service. They pray, worship, take up offerings, have Sunday school, and have preaching and teaching in each house church meeting.

If these house churches continue to grow they may ultimately rent a facility and become independent daughter churches, but at this stage we have not set out to plant separate daughter churches. The goal is rather to begin as many outreach centres as possible.

I am just now beginning to apply the same house church strategy in Bangkok. This is our only church planting strategy for Bangkok at this time. Wherever members have opened their house to us, we want to use that facility to touch the community with the Gospel. In Bangkok we may be limited by people living in apartments than more houses. If all we can begin in a location is a cell, we will begin a cell. But to the extent we have houses, **townhouses,** or offices open for us to use we want to expand by commencing house churches. I am suggesting to all our cell groups that as well as meeting as a cell during the week, they should work towards having a house church meeting on Sunday nights in that house.

What qualifications do church planters need?

House church leaders do not need to be staff. If possible, I would like to see all house churches being entirely lay-led. Staff have the responsibility to facilitate house church leaders, not to direct. As for house church leaders, I am more interested in their attitude than any other qualifications. A heart to start a house church is more important than ability.

Each house church should be different, according to the gifts and ability of the leader. If they want to sing hymns, then sing hymns. If they can't preach or teach, they can use tapes.

How important are buildings, and what type of buildings should be used for new churches?

Our goal for Bangkok is more to multiply the number of house churches connected to the mother church, rather than grow these house churches into sovereign local churches with their own buildings. This is because: house churches are able to have a greater impact on more local communities than larger churches, house churches are an ideal ground to train leaders, and members have more opportunity to use their gifts at the level they are at in house churches than in larger churches. House churches are easier to run, because they don't need the complex structures of a larger church.

Renting facilities to plant daughter churches is an old methodology we don't want to use, except possibly for specific forms of outreach. If we have to rent in order to church plant, a billion baht would not be enough to get the Gospel out to **people!**

Describe the relationship between mother and daughter churches:

It is important for house churches to be centred around and related to a strong mother church, with regular closed leadership meetings between house church leaders and church staff. Alternatively, a tight **network** of house churches around a strong leadership core and senior pastor could work, with regular closed leadership meetings between lay house church leaders and full-time network staff. However, in Thailand I suspect this would be 2-3 times as difficult as centring the house churches around a strong mother church, because of the concept most Thais have of needing a *temple.* Combined celebration meetings several times a year are important.

Tithes and offerings are taken up each week in house church meetings, and accounted by a committee from that location. They can use this money themselves in any expenses and outreach of the house church. If they have needs beyond their offerings, **the** mother church may help. If they receive more than their expenses, they forward the remainder to the mother church. Either way they must provide regular detailed financial reports to the mother church.

In your opinion, what are the major structural obstacles to church planting in Bangkok city? Do you have any other suggestions about overcoming the "40-barrier" and having a greater impact on Bangkok?

One big problem is a worldly understanding of success: an assumption that we must have a lot of people before we are succeeding. For some people, leading 5 or 10 people is a great success for them. No one can lead another to Christ apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Churches don't grow simply because of money, programs, good administration or praise and worship. I believe very much in the sovereignty of God, and the need to be sensitive and obedient to the Holy Spirit. Numbers do not simply depend on the ability of a leader. I am most interested in whether we are being faithful to what God has called us to do; in doing what God would have us do rather than doing things for God. There are times of sowing and times of harvesting. Having a large number of small churches may be greater success than a smaller number of large churches. They may bring in more people, train more leaders, and allow more Christians to be involved. The size of churches should not be our measure of success.

APPENDIX II: RESPONSES OF EXPERT REVIEW PANEL

(listed in alphabetical order)

Reviewer	Review Date	Page
1. Alan Johnson, Ph.D. (candidate), DFM missionary 15 years	24 Oct 2001	196
2. Bruce Nugent, M.A. (Fuller), AOGWM missionary 10 years	9 Sept 2001	198
3. Kevin Hovey, M.A. in Missiology (Fuller Theological Seminary), Director AOGWM	4 Feb 2002	200
4. Krisada Chookunthanachai, M.Div. (Bangkok Bible Seminary), TAG pastor	9 Sept 2001	203
5. Monte Martin, M.A. in Ministry (Assemblies of God Theological Seminary), DFM missionary 14 years in Thailand	23 Aug 2001	205
6. Norman Ford, M.A. in Missiology (Fuller Theological Seminary), C&MA missionary 33 years, C&MA Siam Mission Field Leader	31 Aug 2001	208

1. Alan Johnson

Qualifications:

Ph.D. (candidate) (Oxford Centre of **Missiological** Studies, University of Wales)
M. A. in Biblical Studies (Assemblies of God Theological Seminary)
M.A. in Social Studies (Azusa-Pacific University)
DFM missionary to Thailand 15 years

Details: 24 October 2001. Review conducted in English, by telephone from USA, not recorded. 40 minutes.

Review Results:

1. *What are some of the greatest obstacles you can see for the proposed models, culturally, practically or attitudinally?*

Assessment of size of obstacle:
(1=minimal / 10=major)

i) Resistance from pastors not wanting to give away
   control.
                             1 2 3 4 5 (6 7) 8 9 10

ii) Fighting the old model of one church, one pastor,
    one building.
                              1 2 3 4 5 (6 7) 8 9 10

iii) Hierarchical leadership model; wanting status as

    an important 'adjarn'.
                         1 2 3 4 (**7**) 6 7 8 9 10

2. *What are some of the greatest advantages you can see for the proposed models?*

Stressed that the obstacles need to be overcome before the advantages are worth anything.

Assessment of size of advantage:

i) Able to provide a seed bed in training leaders.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (1 0)

ii) Allows rapid deployment **of** lay Christians.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (1 0)

iii) It is possible to rapidly train leaders to the level   1 **2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9** (10

    required within a local church.

iv) Greater evangelistic **impact—structure** puts those
    who have something from God in close
    proximity with those who don't.   1   2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (1 0)

v) Roots the gospel locally in people's lives,

    providing networks of local relationships.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (9) 10

3. Do you feel the proposed models could work? Why or why not?

Definitely yes, because:
   a) It is a biblical model based on small groups and the church as a community;
   b) It is already being done successfully elsewhere;
   c) It takes advantage of networks in society—i.e. people are converted as family units or as groups in the same area rather than isolated individuals.

4. Do you think many pastors would use these models in planting new daughter churches?

It depends on the pastor. Some pastors would, *if* they can see value in it. It depends on the kind of leader they are, and how much they are out there doing it.

5. What do you think would be their strongest reasons to accept / reject the models?

Accept:

Strength of Reason:
(1=minimal / 10=major)

i) If they see a practical working model.　　　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5　　6　　7　(8)　9　　10

Reject:

Strength of Reaso(6)7　　8　　9　　10

i) Many pastors don't believe in mobilising people,　　1　　2　　3　　4
   want to be in control and run everything
   themselves.

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　(6)7　　8　　9　　10
ii) Mental roadblocks that they personally cant do　　1　　2　　3　　4

anything different or substantial.

6. Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the proposed models to make them more effective? More acceptable / desirable to senior pastors?

Write up or promote the concept by highlighting what is the same about all the models, and only later noting the different nuances of each model.

2. Bruce Nugent

Qualifications:

M. A. in Inter-Cultural Studies (Fuller Theological Seminary)
AOGWM missionary to Thailand, 10 years missionary experience

Review: 9 September 2001. Review conducted in English, by telephone from Khon Kaen, Northeast Thailand. Not recorded. 30 minutes.

Review Results:

1. What are some of the greatest obstacles you can see for the proposed models, culturally, practically or attitudinally?

Assessment of size of obstacle:
(1=minimal / 10=major)

i) **Status—prestige**. Feeling by pastors that they
need to make *their* church a *big* church.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8 9) 10

ii) Pastor feeling they need to be in control, unable to _____

release others into true leadership.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8 9) 10

iii) Shifting the focus from event to relationship and _____

discipleship base.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8 9) 10

iv) Moving people from '**Hollywood**' and _____
management styles to idea of body ministry   1 2 3 4 5 6 **7** (8 9) 10
and nature of church as community of God.

v) People want to be part of something big. Convin-

cing people **that this is** big, **not** just small.   1 2 (3—4) 5 6 7 8 9 10

vi) Finance. When and how people receive salaries?

Combating attitude all pastors need salary.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8 9) 10

2. *What are some of the greatest advantages you can see for the proposed models?*

Assessment of size of advantage:

i) Flexible, reproducible and sustainable.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8 9) 10

ii) Reduced overhead expenses, enabling to be not _____

dependent of outside finance.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8 9) 10

iii) Overcomes property barrier.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8 9) 10

iv) Provides for multiplication of leadership.   · 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8 9) 10

Stressed that the obstacles need to be overcome before the advantages are worth anything.

3. *Do you feel the proposed models could work? Why or why not?*

Yes, if you can overcome the obstacles, which are largely attitudinal obstacles.

4. *Do you think many pastors would use these models in planting new daughter churches?*

It depends on the younger pastors.

5. *What do you think would be their strongest reasons to accept / reject the models?*

Accept:

Strength of Reason:
(1=minimal / 10=major)

i) A perceived strong need by the pastor for a breakthrough.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9 10

ii) Convicted from Scripture about the true nature of the church.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9 10

iii) See success with the model somewhere else in Thailand.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9   10

Reject:

Strength of Reason:

i) Set in their ways.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9   10

ii) Loss of power and control.

6. *Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the proposed models to make them more effective? More acceptable / desirable to senior pastors?*

Pastors need to see working examples and models before they would accept these ideas. The challenge is, who can we raise up as examples to lead a model?

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3. Kevin Hovey

<u>Qualifications</u>:
M.A. in Missiology (Fuller Theological Seminary)
Director of AOGWM

Author of one book and two SCP proposals used in this thesis

<u>Review</u>: 4 February 2002. Review conducted in English, in person at Southern Cross College, Sydney, Australia. Not recorded. 90 minutes.

Review Results:

1. <u>*What are some of the greatest obstacles you can see for the proposed models, culturally, practically or attitudinally?*</u>

Assessment of size of obstacle:
(1=minimal / 10=major)

Leadership Dimension

i) Risk of loss of face. If it works too well, loss of face because it was a missionary's idea. If it fails, loss of face because they allowed it or were connected to it.

1 2 3 4 5 © 7 8 9 10
(Based on being my 3ʳᵈ term and my relationship with TAG leadership. If was my 1ˢᵗ term, would give this a 10.)

ii) Feeling offence that a missionary is doing

something we did not tell them to do.

1 2 3 4 5 (6) 7 8 9 10
(Based on the strength of relationship between TAG leadership and myself. If not as good, would give a 10.)

iii) Leadership deciding the model is a threat.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ©

Wider Society

iv) The temple model of Thai religion. Whether not having a building could be made attractive to Thais.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ©
(But note suggestions in Q.6 to overcome this obstacle.)

v) Thais want to be part of something big.

© 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(Because see no other option to reach Thailand, and because most churches in Thailand are not big **anyway!**)

vi) How accepted will lay pastors be? Thai's don't have part time monks.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (10)

2. <u>*What are some of the greatest advantages you can see for the proposed models?*</u>

It is the only model proposed to date with the potential to reach the whole of **Thailand!**

Assessment of size of advantage:

i) Overcomes financial barrier.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   (10)

ii) Overcomes property barrier.   1 2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   (10)

iii) Overcomes leadership barrier. It gets past the
'fragile Thai male', by giving responsibilities   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   (10)
commensurate with ability, and gradually
builds confidence until leaders are prepared to
take risks. This is the reason for the '25-barrier'

iv) Overcomes the persecution barrier. There has
been minimal persecution i n Thailand because (1) 2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   1   0
of minimal success. If this works and there is   (1 now - higher if this model succeeds)
much greater success, would foresee much
greater persecution too.

3. _Do you feel the proposed models could work?-- Why or why not?_

There isn't much other option! The years since '93 when I proposed this model for
Thailand have only further convinced me this is the only option. The only problems are to
find creative solutions to the obstacles. It should only fail if we don't have a strategy to
counter the obstacles.

4. _Do you think many pastors would use these models in planting new daughter churches?_

If it is proposed and left to the Thai pastors, it will probably never be done—more because
of busyness than because the model is bad. However, after it is up and running ... will they
use it? Yes! But it must be a working model first.

5. _What do you think would be their strongest reasons to accept / reject the models?_

It will stand or fall on the leadership protocols. If leadership decide it is a threat, it will
never even get started.

6. _Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the proposed models to make them more
effective? More acceptable / desirable to senior pastors?_

Suggestions for each of the five obstacles raised:

i) To counter the risk of loss of face: The model will not succeed without including Thai
leadership. Neither can the model afford to fail. If it is not working, with their input it must
be adapted until it does work.

ii) & iii) To counter the feelings that a missionary is doing something without Thai leaders advising him to do it: Must discuss and refine the model with Thai leaders, until they own the model.

iv) To counter the problems of the Temple model of Thai religion: Need to make house-based religious meetings attractive and desirable! There needs to be some mass marketing of a new concept, much like no one wanted to drink Coca-Cola until Coca-Cola created a new desire through marketing.

Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that Christian radio ministry provides effective evangelism in Thailand. It may be possible to develop your own weekly radio program, or input into the programming of others. The model used to plant radio house churches in China may be a good model: at the end of programs listeners were advised that if they enjoyed the program, they should gather a group of family and friends to listen next week. In this way house churches of converts were naturally formed.

Bruce Nugent has contacts regarding radio broadcasts.

The Internet may be a contemporary urban alternative. The beginning point may be posting web sites with interesting local content for each of the local communities targeted. From these, evangelistic web pages, evangelistic video on demand, web radio or video conferencing events, or live events based in chat room discussions could all be used. These form could be used as a form of evangelism where groups of young people gather round one computer to join the web event—thus forming a natural small group. Streaming video and video conferencing could also give the senior pastor a profile over the network and solid content control into the decentralised house churches. |

This direct input from the senior leader should prevent people using the structure for a time to build their own kingdoms—if the senior leader and the local leader are both having weekly input, but are saying different things, word will get out!

v) To counter the problem that Thais like big events: Buddhists don't come expecting to attend weekly religious events (they don't do this in Buddhism). By making the monthly celebration services big and very well done, the tables can be turned. Churches trying to run weekly celebration services wont have the same time to prepare big, quality services, and hence will be at a disadvantage to the house church network model!

vi) To counter the problem of no part-time monks making it hard for lay pastors to lead: *if this* becomes too big a problem, some marketing process like the Coca-Cola examples above should be considered.

4. Krisada Chookunthanachai

Qualifications:

M.Div. (Bangkok Bible Seminary)

TAG pastor of innovative church planting movement, with over 15 years experience in ministry in Bangkok.

Review: 9 September 2001. Review conducted in Thai, in person at Bangkok House of Grace church, not recorded due to noisy environment. 35 minutes.

Review Results:

1. What are some of the greatest obstacles you can see for the proposed models, culturally, practically or attitudinally?

Assessment of size of obstacle:
(1=minimal / 10=major)

i) Tradition that must have church building and weekly service. Some may attending meetings in other churches on weeks between your celebration services.

new converts old Christians
(1) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (10)

ii) Hard to build a sense of unity between the house churches—must be a close network and need strong senior leader.

1 2 3 (4) 5 6 7 8 9 10

iii) Feeling it is not a complete church, and having Christians from other churches invite members to a *real* church.

1 2 3 4 5 (6) 7 8 9 10

iv) Need clear concepts within the leadership team.

1 2 3 4 5 6 © 8 9 10

2. What are some of the greatest advantages you can see for the proposed models?

Assessment of size of advantage:

i) Overcomes obstacle of finances limiting expansion.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (9 10)

ii) Easier to train leaders for than for independent daughter churches.

iii) Aids natural evangelism.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8) 9 10

iv) Builds community where people live, without extracting people into our new community.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8) 9 10

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Made the comment that most pastors give up on the idea of planting daughter churches because of the insurmountable costs, particularly for buildings, and because of the lack of leaders of the calibre needed. 	j

3. *Do you feel the proposed models could work?   Why or why not?*

Yes, it should work, if there is a strong leadership team or mother church at the centre.

4. *Do you think many pastors would use these models in planting new daughter churches?*

Very few would without seeing a working model first.

5. *What do you think would be their strongest reasons to accept / reject the models?*

These reactions would be based on individual circumstances and the timing of their obstacles or problems in relation to the strengths and weaknesses outlined in questions 1-2.

6. *Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the proposed models to make them more effective?   More acceptable / desirable to senior pastors?*

People need to understand cell group principles first. If they understand these principles, they could see several models. You must help them see the different models and the strengths and weaknesses of each.

5. *Monte Martin*

<u>Qualifications</u>:

M.A. in Ministry (Assemblies of God Theological Seminary)
B.A. in Missions (Central Bible College)
DFM missionary 14 years in Thailand

<u>Review</u>: 23 August 2001. Review conducted in English, in person at author's office, not recorded at his request. 50 minutes.

Review Results:

1. What are some of the greatest obstacles you can see for the proposed models, culturally, practically or attitudinally?

Assessment of size of obstacle:
(1=minimal / 10=major)

i) Tradition. **1** 2 3 4 © 6 7 8 9 **10**

ii) Unwillingness to change. It is hard to transition a
church or structure to a new form. 1 2 3 4 5 6 (7⟩8 9 **10**

iii) Feeling that a new model is being forced on them. 1 2 3 (4)5 6 7 8 9 **10**

iv) The risk of being   first. **1 2 3 4 5** © **7 8 9 10**
v) Personality conflict—people setting themselves
against it if the wrong people accept it   first. 1 2 3 4 5 (6)7 8 9 10

vi) Fear. Closed mindedness. 1 2 3 4 5 (6)7 8 9 10

vii) Size. Are monthly big events enough to convey 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
the sense of being part of something big?

2. What are some of the greatest advantages you can see for the proposed models?

Assessment of size of advantage:

i) Biblically sound. Built on stronger biblical **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9** (10)
principles, facilitating greater participation.
Dynamic equivalent of New Testament church.

ii) Facilitates community. **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9** (10)

iii) High potential for church growth. **1 2 3 4 5 6** 7 (8) 9 **10**

iv) Enables people to travel to church more easily. **1 2 3 4 5 6** (R) **8 9 10**

v) Less draining on mother church resources. **1 2 3 4 5 6 7** (8) 9 **10**

vi) Solves many of the problems of the financial cost

of church planting.   1   2 3   4   5   6 (7) 8 9   10

vii) Tends to naturally multiply leadership and

facilitate participation in ministry.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9   10

3. _Do you feel the proposed models could work? Why or why not?_

I think what you are presenting here is a good model that could work well here. It may be that it works better in rural areas, and amongst poorer people and blue-collar workers. No one model meets everyone's needs, and we need several models to reach everyone.

This could become a major thrust within the movement [the Thailand Assemblies of God], or could take years and years to begin to be adopted. It depends on who presents the ideas and how they are presented, and the unity of the leaders behind it.

4. _Do you think many pastors would use these models in planting new daughter churches?_

Would say that up to half the local pastors would be willing to if it is clearly presented and modelled. Those trained within a network structure with high accountability would be most likely to adopt it, and those trained in today's bible schools would be more likely to want to remain independent. Many would seek to avoid difficulties of transition, feel too challenged by the leadership challenge of overseeing a decentralised network, or fail to see the shift in philosophy of leadership, ministry and authority needed.

5. _What do you think would be their strongest reasons to accept / reject the models?_

Accept:

Strength of Reason:
(1=minimal / 10=major)

i) Hunger for growth, and hence a willingness to try
new ideas and progressive thinking.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9   10

ii) Presented in a way they understand.

                             1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9   10

Reject:

Strength of Reason:

i) Personalities. It has everything to do with those
who accept or reject first. People decide on   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9   10
personalities, not principles.

ii) Popular opinion.   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 (8) 9   10

6. *Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the proposed models to make them more effective? More acceptable / desirable to senior pastors?*

The presentation, including the choice of language used, is totally important. Build a strong support base slowly. Use existing authority structures to champion the models. Start doing and modelling it. Have the thesis translated into Thai, or rewrite the ideas in Thai using popular language. Have a shortened paper printed in *The Leader's Friend (Puen Puu Num* เพื่อนผู้นำ)magazine. Consider the two models separately, and highlight local examples of each.

Monte also suggested from his personal observation that in Bangkok cell churches tend to attract middle and upper class people better than other forms of church. This is one key reason many pastors gravitate towards this model. These people have less travel limitations, and with a higher educational background have very high expectations of leaders. By comparison, he notes that churches meeting in houses in Thailand usually are up country, amongst common people. They are people with lower expectations of leaders and facilities, and for whom having a group close to home is a major advantage.

Monte also suggested a major challenge may be for holding the leadership team together in these models. He suggests that there may be a large risk of leaders with higher potential wanting to take their people and break away.

6. Norman Ford

<u>Qualifications</u>:

> M. A. in Missiology (Fuller Theological Seminary)
> C&MA missionary 33 years in Thailand
> C&MA Siam Mission Field Leader

> Norm was the author of a significant paper used in this thesis, written 20 years ago whilst a student at Fuller School of World Missions, proposing a church planting structure very similar to that proposed here (Ford 1982). Ford went on to help plant the Mahaporn Sukhumvit Church with Rev Dr Tira Janepiriyaprayoon, interviewed above. It was noted that an analysis of this proposal and the planting of the Mahaporn Sukhumvit Church would be important to this thesis (see p.63).

> Following is first a transcript of an interview with Norm about his proposals and the planting of the Mahaporn Sukhumvit Church, and then his expert review comments on the proposals in this thesis.

<u>Interview & Review</u>: 31 August 2001. Review conducted in English, in person at office of Siam Mission of C&MA, Bangkok. Recorded on Mini-Disc. 60 minutes.

Summary Interview Transcript:

I would like to go back to your proposals of 20 years ago, which you wrote while you were at Fuller and before the Mahaporn Sukhumvit church was planted. You were proposing working largely with poorer people in slum districts, simultaneously planting 5-10 evangelistic cell groups, and turning this into an independent network of house churches without a building. I note from discussions with Dr Tira that when you came back and started the Mahaporn Sukhumvit church with him that it was quite a different thing that you did ... :

My time at Fuller was a learning experience, where I learned a lot about church growth principles. When we arrived here we had no strategy and no team, just a vision for a big city. I had volunteered to work in the area of church planting, so went to Fuller with the view of getting some help. I really got excited about what I was hearing from my lecturers and professors, and what I wrote in my paper was trying to apply that to here.

Coming back was more the reality of working with what we had—and as I said, we had nothing. Pastor Tira was not here; he was still at Fuller. We had just one church, that met here at the guest home. I plugged in there for a while and tried to challenge them to do something else in the city, but they weren't really interested. We did have a missionary team; I am not sure how many people at that time. But we had no Thai team since this church was not ready to move with us. So we basically went on our own as a mission.

Most of the contacts we had at that time were related through the alliance guest home here, and the evangelical church of Bangkok in soi 10. After months of trying many different options, the thing that seemed to hold the most promise was the Thai who were attending the ECB church. We were really floundering, so our regional director suggested we see if some of the Thai in that church would work with us in planting a new church. We began with a Sunday school class for about 8 months. Then when Dr Tira came back we began a Sunday afternoon service, and the

rest is history. It began to grow, Campus Crusade tied in with us and we got their contacts, we got some people who had studied abroad and come back and people a few people of real influence in the military, later Anchalee (rock-star) came and drew a few people. I know there are a lot of factors why the church grew, but I think most of it comes down to hard work and God's blessing.

The paper I did at Fuller was just ... kind of ... put on the shelf. The whole idea of working with the poor, I did pursue that when I got back. In fact my wife and I looked all over the city for different areas where Isaan people were congregated, and presented that to our leadership team. But they weren't willing to support or give us anyone to work with. So putting all that together, we went with where God seemed to be leading. And we have worked with that one church for 15 years or so, until I became the field director. That is how things developed.

What now, Anthony? This is really timely for me, because I am convinced that we need to do something like this.

You know, we have been at it now for 15 years ... that was '84 ... so 16 ... 17 years. We have planted now, maybe 8-9 churches, and they are here and there, scattered all over the city. A very traditional approach, with buildings and land, pastors with M.Div.'s, and we now have a total of maybe 600 people. That is including almost 300 of that at the one church, so the other churches are, obviously, 30, 40 ... 50 ... a couple of them are up to about 70 or so. But as I look at the city and the need, there is no way if we are going to continue with this model, that we are going to see the kind of breakthrough ... it is too slow. So I am working through these very same ideas now. In fact we have a meeting of our leadership team next week, in which I am going to challenge them to re-look at the whole idea of house church, saturation church planting, moving away from buildings, moving away from using M.Div. graduates and that leadership style of the church ... that is kind of an overview of where we are at right now.

__From what Dr Tira was saying it would appear that the Mahaporn Sukhumvit church was not particularly cell or house-oriented from the time it was founded, and has only more recently begun transitioning into a cell-church. Was there a reason you opted to not use houses? Did it not work, or did you just not try it at that stage?__

We started in '84. Cells did not come in 'til '92.

We had a lot of students from universities. Most of them do not have homes, but are living in dormitories. And things were progressing so well, there did not seem to be a need for it at that stage. What we began to realise later, as the church grew, was that we had literally 100s of kids and some adults coming in the front door and going out the back door. A retention problem began to dawn on us. We hovered around 100 or so. We realised we did not have in place a structure for discipleship and nurture. We had a lot of evangelism and baptism, but there was no structure to hold them. Then we heard about Ralph Neighbour and the training in Singapore. I went down first, and later took some of the other pastoral team down. To answer your question, we did not see we had a need until '92. The facility we had was nice ... it was air-conditioned ... and we were pretty-much content.

Review Results:

1. _What are some of the greatest obstacles you can see for the proposed models, culturally, practically or attitudinally?_

   Assessment of size of obstacle:
   (1=minimal / 10=major)

   i) Key leader needs clear vision and strong leadership training ability.

   1 2 3 4 5 (6) 7 8 9 10

   ii) Desire of most pastors for a strong, large mother church.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

   iii) The concept that a church must have a sacred building—the concept of what a church is and of the building being the glue.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8—9) 10

   iv) The desire to be part of something big— convincing people this model is big not small.

   1 2 3 4 (5) 6 7 8 9 10

   v) Will professional lay leaders be accepted as church leaders? i.e. gaining credibility for leaders without formal theological training.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8) 9 10

   vi) Financial support for those training for full-time leadership positions, particularly if heads of families.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8) 9 10

   vii) Time pressure, making it harder for **marrieds** and families to attend cells than singles.

   1 2 3 4 © 6 7 8 9 10

   vii) Middle and upper class people in Bangkok relate more around job than local neighbourhood.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8) 9 10

2. · _What are some of the greatest advantages you can see for the proposed models?_

   Assessment of size of advantage:

   i) Reduces obstacle of cost of facilities.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (1 0)

   ii) Penetrates the community.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8) 9 10

   iii) Aids evangelism. Thais will enter a home more easily than a building.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (9) 10

   iv) Forces us to train leaders.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (10)

   v) Fosters family decisions and people movements.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (1 0)

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Notes that for this kind of grass roots movement to happen, i people must be ready. A lot of Thai conversion is superficial, based on group dynamics and sense of joy and friendship. Follow-up is vitally important.

3. *Do you feel the proposed models could work? Why or why not?*

Yes, as above.

4. *Do you think many pastors would use these models in planting new daughter churches?*

It depends on the person, and to what extent they are willing to take a risk. A successful model will speak louder than anything else. The Thai are not big on theory and abstracts—there would have to be a good working model and training program to convince many pastors to adopt the model. **j**

5. *What do you think would be their strongest reasons to accept / reject the models?*

Accept:

j

Strength of Reason:

(1=minimal / 10=major)

i) A practical working **model**.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8) 9 10

i) See the financial advantages.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 ⑧ 9 10

Reject:

Strength of Reason:

i) Pastors wanting the respect of having a big church with a big, nice **building**—i.e. identifying bigness with success.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (8) 9 10

6. *Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the proposed models to make them more effective? More acceptable / desirable to senior pastors?*

No. I want to try a model like this myself over the next year. Will give any suggestions in a year, after we try it.

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