

HeRD #234 - The Past Embodied

In his mission annual report of 1886 [see HeRD #233], Wilson explains why the Laos Mission seldom founded new churches even though its membership was founded clustered in numerous villages. The mission believed it wasn't wise to establish numerous small congregations. Wilson explained, "Of our organized churches Maa Dawk Daang has done well from the beginning. It has good officers and no little power of self expansion and furnishes a good illustration of the adaptability of our [Presbyterian] form of government to mission fields. But on the whole we have thought it better to keep our scattered members in connection with the mother church [i.e. Chiang Mai Church] than to form weak small ones, as we have a better hold on them and can better train them for independent separate organization." Throughout its history, the Laos Mission adhered to this policy of forming relatively few churches, each church it did establish being composed of members from several scattered villages. I've called this type of church the "regional church." Even today, one sees strong evidence of this pattern in the current structure of the CCT's northern Thai churches.

HeRD #236 - Who Should Lead?

One of the most important shifts in Protestant missionary thinking in Thailand had to do with the missionaries divesting themselves of effective power over the churches that emerged from their work. The process was gradual with a great deal of steps taken toward that goal and away from it. Baptist missionaries in the 1840s allowed their converts a significant voice in the life of the church. In the 1970s, Presbyterian missionaries still held significant authority in the CCT. The shift wasn't an easy one as is shown by the experience of the Karen Baptist churches in northern Thailand.

The handful of Karen churches founded in northern Thailand before World War II had long looked to the Burmese Karen for leadership and support, but the War broke that relationship. Events after the war proved it couldn't be renewed. Thus, according to Karen sources themselves, the Thai Karen churches were overjoyed when the Baptists began missionary work in the North in the 1950s. Their joy soon turned to disappointment, however, when they found that the Baptist missionaries were all younger and believed that they shouldn't take a leading role in church life. The churches had hoped for an "old-fashioned" relationship with the missionaries in which the missionaries would take charge. When that didn't happen there followed an awkward period during which neither side took real leadership. According to his own report, this situation was resolved only after Thra [teacher] Tun Shein, a Burmese Karen, visited. He initiated discussions that led to better missionary-church relations. In later years the Baptist missionaries still refrained from taking direct leadership in the churches. They focused much of their attention on institutional, evangelistic, and development work.

HeRD #247 - A Lesson from Mae Salap

One of my colleagues is writing up her study of the history of the Samakhitam Church, a suburban-rural congregation located in the village of Mae Salap near Chiang Mai. Her summary of the church's experience with pastoral care offers a possible lesson of wider application. Ach Janram writes, "The Samakhitam Church...from its inception down to the present has had pastors for much of its history, even though some pastors have looked after the church only for brief periods. Their pastoral styles have varied somewhat but not much. In those periods when there is no pastor, the church tends to drift and there are no new activities. Some previous activities disappear. When, however, the church has a pastor its work is carried out better and more consistently. There are new activities. The congregation's members are cooperative in carrying out those activities."

In other ecclesiastical settings, this insight into the value of pastoral care might be taken as mundane and hardly worthy of note. The CCT, however, is still struggling to put a denomination-wide system of trained, full-time pastoral care in place, and sometimes it is the local churches themselves that

are most resistant to having a professional pastor. They feel that pastors aren't a good investment, that is they aren't worth the money the church has to pay them. Hence the importance of the Samakhitam Church's experience for other congregations is that it provides a possible lesson for other congregations, a lesson we can't take for granted in the CCT.