

OMF Thailand Yesterday & Today

Project Paul 2010

Question: Is the IBCM vision something new or has OMF Thailand always been focused on IBCM?

The answer is yes and no!

OMF History

The Fifties: because of the CIM experience in leaving China there was a great sense of urgency and a high sense of insecurity that did not allow the missionaries to think long term. There was a feeling that we must work fast because we will not be here long before we are kicked out of Thailand just like in China. There was also a great deal of struggle between the old China hands and the increasing numbers of new missionaries coming into Thailand as both groups tried to sort through adjustments that had to be made to realities in Thailand. For example policies that made sense in China but made no sense in Thailand (Baptism, housing). Gradually they started to realize that they might be in Thailand a longer time than they thought at first. Key priorities were evangelism and gospel distribution. Publishing was started right away. A strong focus on children and youth work got some converts but failed to produce churches. While there was not a lot of fruit there was some. For example, two men were baptised in Sakaw fountain Lopburi in 1956. Both of these men were well. And both walked out their faith.

The Sixties: this decade saw the mission transition to long term realities. Clinics became hospitals, Nongbua, Manorom, Saiburi. The language program was developed because they saw they needed a higher standard and higher achievement for the long term goals. There was significant fruit from leprosy clinics and churches were formed, mostly around leprosy families. OMF nurses intensively followed up family networks to identify and treat the disease. At this point the goal was to start churches in every village. Provincial capitals were seen as bases but the goal was churches in every village.

OMF started work in the Deep South in the fifties with a focus on Muslims. But they also shared the Lord with Buddhists and saw response that led to formation of churches of Buddhist background believers.

The Seventies: this decade saw significant break through in Uthai. The church in Central Thailand doubled in three years! God can do this again! Alex Smith's strategy was evangelize extensively, follow up families intensively and start groups where ever there is response. Don't stop evangelism to consolidation, do both simultaneously! As the groups grow bring the key lay leaders together for further training by doing further extensive evangelism and intensive follow-up. But this had a high cost for Alex personally and there was a reaction to this wide spread, small church approach. So at the end of the seventies the mission was pulling back from Alex's methods and focusing on consolidation. There was also significant growth among the tribal groups that OMF was working among in North Thailand.

At the end of the decade OMF started work in Bangkok first as a hostel that became a church and then a movement of churches called New Life Churches. But the relationship with these churches was damaged by existing missionary paternalism when OMF started doing intentional church planting in Bangkok.

The Eighties: the decade started with a fresh push to do what Alex had done, in Nakon Sawan and it did meet with some success. But when Kose was killed the factors pushing toward consolidation regained strength. The CT goals were now stated in terms of a church in every district but as the decade came to an end the actual goals were to develop bigger churches in the provincial capitals. OMF started to supply funds for Thai pastors. This was practiced in all our regions.

In the South the OMF work was beginning to form into two groups of missionaries, one that was Muslim focused and the other that was Buddhist focused. But they were still under one leadership team.

The Nineties: began in Bangkok with the idea of a “flag ship church” having a great deal of emphasis. It was similar to the big church emphasis in CT. CMA actually tried to put this concept in to practice. OMF did not but it was still influencing things. CT had great attrition and at one point in early 1990 had only 15 missionaries where they had had 50 church planters in 1986. This meant that CT had to refocus. Bangkok was also trying to refocus but was behind CT a few years as was ST. Some of the key issues was phase out and paternalism. Others included learning how to plant churches again, planting second churches in the provincial capitals. The refocus was then supplemented by trends in past 9 years. This refocusing also led to the formation of Mekong and Seaway, to work with ethnic minorities and Muslims.

2000 to now: CPM and the national vision have greatly helped OMF get back in touch with its roots after a period of consolidation that was church perfecting focused rather than church initiating focused. In the Deep South we were phasing out of work with those churches and looking to redeploy our missionaries further up the peninsula for new church planting. We started new church planting work in Northeast Thailand (Isaan) and Mekong spun off workers in North Thailand that were doing Thai work to become our North Thailand Region. We started planting new churches in the Thai focusing on Thai speaking Buddhists. As we have moved through this decade we want to finish with a sharp focus and improved ministry implementation that leads to multiply church planting efforts, vigorous evangelism and reproductive disciple making ministries often with local unpaid elders/pastors.

Indigenous: We have more or less always held to this ideal and worked toward it.

Biblical: Again this has been a strong point for OMF and is seen throughout our history.

Church: Yes.

Movement: Some times but we have done lots to things that are not movement helpful over the past 60 years. Some are: 1) stop doing extensive evangelism in order to follow up or consolidate, 2) pay pastors, 3) stay in a church and stay in control too long, 4) being suspicious of quantity and anything that is fast, 5) loving to work in ways that are convenient for us or make us feel better, 6) emphasis on schools for ministry training, 7) paternalism, 8) losing the reproducing focus in what we do and 9) not trusting God and his gospel and his word

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