

## Lutheran Mission in Thailand: Gospel in a land of Law

By Harold Ristau

Over thanksgiving I was privileged to spend ten days teaching an Old Testament course to our seminarians in Thailand who will be ready for ordination in the next couple of years.



*Miniature temples containing food decorate the entrance to most homes*

Although God is faithfully shepherding the Church in Thailand, she struggles in a culture which is antagonistic toward Christianity, and in which the Christians compose less than 1% of the population.

Buddhism mixed with Chinese spirituality is the dominant religion of Thailand. Many of the people have hardened their hearts to the Gospel. The Christian converts are often rejected by their families for dishonouring their family religion and heritage.

I mentioned to Suchat Srikakaran, one of the seminarians that the Buddhist monks look so sad and tired. Suchat responded – “it is

because they practise the Law every moment of every day.” If only they understood that the Law makes us tired, in order to lead us to Jesus through the Gospel, and he gives us rest, peace and joy.

Miniature temples containing food decorate the entrance to most homes in order to prevent harm from demons who, after eating the food, may choose to spare the home from their curses. The sound of firecrackers are a constant reminder of how these people try to ward off the devil by man-made devices. They live in constant fear of the future and the unseen world. For the poor in spirit the Gospel can indeed be a sweet word: that by Jesus’ death and resurrection the demons have fled for good and there is no more need to fear these forces. Slowly people are opening up to the priceless treasure of the Gospel, finding comfort in this

### ***Christian converts are often rejected by their families.***

One Almighty, and yet personal, God who brings peace and protection from all evil.

Many opportunities exist for evangelism in Thailand (both amongst the unbelievers and amongst the mislead

Christians of other church groups whose hearts are being moved by Lutheran theology and have joyfully received our catechisms). Yet the resources are often lacking. Not only are

### ***...they practise the Law every moment of every day***

funds and pastors/church workers scarce, but also the greatest need is for Lutheran translators (i.e. Thai pastor/teachers who are also fluent in English). Very little Christian material for Sunday school, tracts, commentaries, etc.

has been translated into Thai—Lutheran material is even harder to find. Pray that God would provide these resources, especially leaders, teachers and translators who can continually feed our brethren and bring the Good News to a place where bad news dictates: Gospel in a land of law.

*Harold is a Graduate Assistant at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines. He has been to both Nicaragua and Thailand teaching. He offers this personal insight to the mission work in Thailand.*



*Buddhist monks in front of a temple. They look tired and sad because, as seminarian Suchart says, “They practice the Law every moment of every day.” The Gospel of Christ frees us from the heavy Law.*

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visit our web site at <http://personal.nbnet.nb.ca/gsheplc/clms>



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## Three New Directors Named

Three new directors were elected to serve on the board of Concordia Lutheran Mission Society (CLMS) as a result of a mail ballot which wrapped up in mid-January. The three are Lillian Rusch of Osoyoos, B.C., Dr. Norman Threinen of Edmonton, Alta. and Frances Freund of Winkler, Man. They join six incumbent directors who were re-elected: Rev. James Fritsche, Terry Goerz, Doreen Haberstock, Rev. Edwin Lehman, Rev. David Somers, and Anne Taylor. Two other former directors, Rev. Don Schiemann and Rodney

Haberstock declined to stand for re-election.

Mr. Milton Glaicar, C.A., who serves as the Society's auditor, supervised the counting of the ballots. He reported that a total of 78 ballots were returned from approximately 130 that were mailed out. Seventeen names from all across the synod were on the ballot.

The new directors, along with those re-elected will meet in Winnipeg at a board of directors meeting just prior to the Society's annual meeting March 31, to determine officers and assign responsibilities.

## LCC at work in Thailand

*Dr. Leonard Harms*

Our involvement with Thailand began shortly after we became a Canadian church. Dr. Edwin Lehman, the first president, went to Southeast Asia to visit the church in Hong Kong. While he was there, he took a trip to meet Pastor Ted Na Thanlang and the LCMS mission in Bangkok. He also went to visit Pastor Na Thalung's parents, who lived in Takuapa, and become acquainted with the mission there.

The mission started when Dr. Herb Gernand and his wife Dr. Staporn Gernand returned to Takuapa to

### *They soon tired of worshipping alone.*

operate a private school in the town. They soon tired of worshipping alone and invited teachers at the school to join them. As they were able, they taught the Christian faith to the teachers and many became believers. In order to share the faith with more of the people in the Phang Nga district of Thailand, they taught some of the teachers to become evangelists who then were hired and sent to various villages and towns of the district to begin missions.

Dr. Staporn Gernand translated many teacher training courses from English into Thai. These translations were used to train the evangelists and also to teach new believers. Over the years, the purposes of our involvement have been to support important social

ministry projects of the church there, to facilitate translation and to train candidates for ministry.

God has blessed the Phang Nga district with a new Lutheran Church, Sahatay Lutheran Church. The name means "hearts together." That is why the symbol of the church incorporates hearts joined together under the cross of Jesus. There are seven mission stations and congregations in the church right now. The progress of the church has been slow but steady. Thailand has about 98.5 per cent of the population Buddhist or animist. Even a small Lutheran church is a remarkable blessing of God.

At the end of this year, two men will complete their internship and be ready for ordination into the church's ministry as pastors. This will be the end of three years of preparation and the beginning of many years of service to the Gospel in Thailand. The church is already searching for new men to train for the ministry. We will continue to assist the church to train church workers and develop as a confessional church in the midst of millions of non-believers.

There have been many pastors and teachers from Lutheran Church-Canada who have served in Thailand in support of the church there either instructing candidates or supporting Dr. Gernand as she translated for the church. Senga Bosche, Erin Fritsche, Kendra Brown, Michelle Gehring, Rebekah Bradshaw, Rolf and Wendy Antonovitch, Rev. Wm. Ney, Rev. Mark Beiderwieden, Rev. Colin Liske, Dr. Leonard Harms, Mr. Harold Ristau)

I am one of those typical Christian volunteers who have more hats than time slots to wear them. I seem to be rushing about from one project to another putting out the fire in one area so I can put on another hat and put out a fire over there. It seems to be the norm as I interact with others at church, with our mission society, and with various other Christians. This article is due tomorrow morning. I started tonight. In all the rushing about one wonders how God can bless such disorganization. But he does.

**REGULAR PROJECTS**

All of the projects we have scheduled for 2000 have been funded except the Brazil deaf ministry project. Enough funds should be in for this project soon. When Rev. Russell Anderson was called back from Kiev, Ukraine we removed the unfunded project for a computer and a printer from our list. The telephone and fax project for Kiev had previously been funded and monies sent. That equipment was relocated to Dnepropetrovsk since the same equipment had failed there.

New projects will be chosen March 30 and 31.

***Our income keeps growing!***

Until now we have waited for the Synod to set their mission budget so we could try to fill in where needed. At our annual meeting we will be trying to find a way to align our project selection

process with our budget year so we have the full year to do fundraising for specific projects.

**SPECIAL PROJECTS**

Kamenka Seminary — The first class of students will be graduating this summer. They will be ordained in the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Brethren in Ukraine (AELBCU). Lutheran Church-Canada has signed a letter of intent with AELBCU to assist them with preparing a second class of pastors beginning in 2002. That letter of intent includes a commitment from Concordia Lutheran Missionary Society to provide funding for room and board, scholarships, translators, books, supplies, and student transportation.

**DONOR INITIATED PROJECTS**

Six thousand, five hundred dollars were received this year for donor-initiated projects. Most of it was for building materials for a congregation in Kagarlik, Ukraine, and for medical supplies for a hospital in Dnepropetrovsk.

**INCOME KEEPS GROWING**

- 1997 — \$11,508
- 1998 — \$25,517
- 1999 — \$16,171
- 2000 — \$34,100

Thank you to all of our donors and the directors of our society who have made this last year a success.

*Terry Goerz*

**CLMS in Thailand**

Your mission society has been involved in Thailand since its formation. Our first year we assisted the church in Takuapa with funding for a pastor from northern Thailand to travel to the south so that church could have communion twice a month. The next year we sent funds for the purchase of the property the Takuapa Sahatay church was built on.

We have assisted Synod in their support of a prison ministry and rental of a chapel for Khok Kloï mission station. This last year we assisted the Synod by paying the transportation costs for one of the four teachers who volunteered for seminary training. CLMS work in Thailand totals about \$10, 660 plus about \$1,360 forwarded for donor-initiated projects.



*Takuapa Sahatay church building*



*LCC President Ralph Mayan with theological candidates*



*Khok Kloï mission station*

**Concordia Lutheran Mission Society (CLMS)**

A Listed Service Organization of Lutheran Church-Canada

**PARTNERS**

I was recently in Edmonton to hear the presentation by Sandor Arguello on the work in Nicaragua. What delightful news. The response to the Gospel in that country has been phenomenal. There are now about 7,000 people associated with the mission churches in that country. The large number of people who committed to training as pastors, evangelists, or church leaders are following through and being trained. The blessings of God are obvious in our synod's mission work, and not just in Nicaragua, but in Thailand and Ukraine as well.

How involved do you feel when you hear wonderful news like this coming from our mission fields? Are you just a spectator in the stands, or do feel like you are out there on the playing field with our missionaries???

As Paul began his letter to the church at Philippi he thanks God for them, and tells them that in all his prayers for them he always prays with joy "... Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now..."



Nicaraguan children and their parents hear the Gospel proclaimed.

Philippians 1:5. We learn just what that **partnership from the first day** was in chapter 4 as Paul concludes this epistle by thanking the Philippians for the gift they had sent through Epaphroditus and then commending them in 4:15, 16 "Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid

again and again when I was in need." In all my years as a Christian volunteer leader I have seen no higher motivator, no stronger feedback for Christians than for them to see God involving them personally as he accomplishes his plans. Paul wants the Philippian Christians to make this connection, to see God involving them through their gifts.

As you hear of the many blessings of God in our Synod's mission work I hope you see yourself as a part of that work, that you can see God involving

you personally. You are **partners with our missionaries** through you and your congregation's prayers for this work, through your congregations mission funds forwarded to district, and through your donations to mission groups like CLMS. As Paul thanked God for the Philippians, I also thank God for you who have responded to the work of CLMS. And, I once again have the delightful opportunity of inviting all who read this to partner personally with our missionaries in the same way the Philippians did. If you have never been more than a spectator, come on down from the stands. The victories are so much sweeter when you are a part of the team!!

And because of the richness of this Philippian epistle I know that "*The Coach*" is out on the field waving at you to come on down — " for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Philippians 2:13

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**Response Form**

Please make cheques payable to "Concordia Lutheran Mission Society" and mail to: Doreen Haberstock, Treasurer – 33 Victor Place, Yorkton, SK. S3N 2H3

The only unfunded project from last year is the Brazil deaf ministry project. We will be meeting about the time you are reading this to choose projects for this year. However, we know that the Synod has an ongoing commitment to train church workers in Ukraine, Thailand, and Nicaragua so these will also be projects we will be supporting this year.

Please indicate your preference:

\_\_\_\_\_ Brazil, Deaf Ministry \_\_\_\_\_ Wherever needed

\_\_\_\_\_ Training Church Workers (Ukraine, Thailand, Nicaragua)

Mr. Mrs. Ms. Rev. Dr. Other (e.g. Rev. & Mrs.) \_\_\_\_\_ First name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Last name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov. \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Home Congregation \_\_\_\_\_ Circuit \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Fax \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

(the last four spaces are optional)