



การิสงอการ สันติธรรม  
平安堂  
PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

# SOLA GRATIA

INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL  
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THAILAND 1976-2019

Jaakko Mäkelä 2021



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## Acknowledgments

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Warmest thanks to all who have participated in this project. Bishop Amnuay Yodwong initiated the writing of an introduction to the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT) during his visit to Finland in 2019. We agreed that the Luther Seminary in Thailand would take care of the implementation. Special thanks to the LST personnel, especially to former Director Ms. Prapasson Niram (Ajarn Nong) and Acting Director Rev. Jongkolnee Sampachayanon (Ajarn Sim). After discussions with Mr. Olli Pitkänen, the Regional Representative of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, I decided to include recent photos of the congregations and preaching places of the ELCT. Translation into Thai and editing by rev. Taweep Oiwan. Several persons have contributed by sending photos from their collections. Here are their names and a list of the abbreviations used in the captions. The same persons have given comments and clarifications on details. All mistakes and misinterpretations are mine alone.

AK	Anneli Könni
BB	Ban Bu Lutheran Church, co-ordinated by Jongkolnee Sampachayanon
BJ	District 2, Boonmee Jaruphong
EH	Eivind Hauglid
HP	Hanna Pajula
KK	Kirsti and Vesa Kosonen
KTK	Kaija and Tapio Karjalainen
LA	Liisa Alanne

- LJH Leena and Jukka Helle
- M Maija and Jaakko Mäkelä
- PH District Three, Preeda Hongsakaew
- PPH Pirkko Harju-Hiltunen and Pekka Hiltunen
- PS District Four, Peerachai Saenthaweedet. Co-ordinated by  
Jongkolnee Sampachayanon
- RTK Districts Four and Five, Riikka-Maria and Tomas Kolikka
- SA District One, Suthiphat Akkarananthaphong
- SK Phaporn Si Khiu Lutheran Church, co-ordinated by  
Jongkolnee Sampachayanon
- TS Tarja Säynevirta
- VID Mission and Diakonia Archives, VID, Norway. Selection by  
Eivind Hauglid
- FELM FELM photo archives, Finland. Selection by  
Marika Björkgren-Thylin  
Luther Seminary in Thailand, Facebook  
Mukdahan Lutheran Church, Jongkolnee Sampachayanon

My daughter Mirkka Nieminen proofread the English text.  
Digitation of the photos by Tmi Digisi ([www.digisi.fi](http://www.digisi.fi))

## PREFACE

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In May of 2019, Bishop Amnuay Yodwong participated in a meeting of the leaders of the Churches cooperating with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission. We had the pleasure of having him visit our home in Pori, Finland. In our conversations, he expressed concern that many of the members and co-workers of the Church are not aware of the origins of its ministry. Because the ministry has been expanding from very modest beginnings, there are very few who have been members from the beginning. We discussed the need for a concise presentation of the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand. After all, the agreement on cooperation of the Lutheran Mission in Thailand, first signed in 1980, already expressed the vision of the Lutheran Church. In this introduction, photos are presented in addition to the text.

## INTRODUCTION

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT) was established in 1994. Its foundations are in the ministry of the Lutheran Mission in Thailand (LMT), which was established as a joint organization in 1980. The most important sources for studying the history of the Mission and of the Church are the documents of the General Assemblies of the LMT and the ELCT, as well as those of the Executive Committee of the LMT and the Church Council of the ELCT. I have utilized publications of the LMT/ELCT, including the annual calendars, as well as my own observations, discussions, and correspondence with colleagues.

The most comprehensive study on the Lutheran work in Thailand is the doctoral dissertation of Marika Björkgren-Thylin *From Pioneer Mission to Autonomous Church*. The research covers the years 1976 – 1994, from founding the work until constituting the ELCT. There are two books written in both Thai and English that deal with the history of the LMT and the ELCT. First, a book published in 1991 for the dedication of the new Headquarters of the LMT included a short introduction to the history of the LMT. In 2011, a collection of articles called *Rejoice* was published.

The partner organizations of the LMT have keenly followed developments in Thailand. Especially should be mentioned the magazines *Suomen Lähetysseurakunta* of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM, formerly the Finnish Missionary Society), and *Norsk Misjonstidende* of the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS). Books on Thailand have been published by various publishers.

# 1

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE WORK

The Lutheran ministry in Thailand is part of the history and expansion of the Lutheran Churches in Asia. The history of the Lutheran Churches in Asia goes back to the joint mission work of the German Lutheran Pietists and the Crown of Denmark in South India in 1706. Most of the expansion in different parts of Asia has taken place since the nineteenth century, and to a great extent after the Second World War. In recent years, the Asian and African Churches have also been involved in the global mission. The work in Thailand is an example of this development. In 2012, a collection of articles on Asian Lutheran Churches, *Abundant Harvest*, was published by the Lutheran University Press in Minneapolis, MN.

Roman Catholic ministry in Thailand began in the Ayutthaya period. First contact was made in 1567. It is possible that there may have been a Protestant church already in Ayutthaya. The first Protestant missionaries arrived in Thailand in 1828. One of them was a German Lutheran, but he was not affiliated to any Lutheran Church or organization. Since the 1960s, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Marburger Mission from Germany have had Lutheran missionaries working with the Church of Christ in Thailand. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod from the USA started the Concordia Gospel Ministry in 1988. The Concordia Lutheran Church was established in the 1990s.

The majority of the people living in Thailand are Buddhist, but Christians have traditionally had freedom of religion. Churches working among the ethnic minorities have been growing faster than

the ethnic Thai churches. Especially after the Second World War, urbanization and industrialization has changed Thai society. The urbanization process has mainly changed the Greater Bangkok Area, but in recent years, the provincial centres have also experienced growth.

Both the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) were looking to expand their ministries in Asia during the 1970s. Different possibilities were surveyed by both missions in different countries, including Thailand. The FELM was mostly interested in ministry in urban areas, while the NMS was also interested in work in Northeast Thailand and Laos. It was agreed that the work should be a joint ministry, and plans would be made together.



*Above: Norwegian Mission Society*





*Above: Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission*

The NMS decided to send its first missionaries to Thailand in 1976. They had originally been working in Hong Kong, and it was planned that they would come just to lay the foundations for the work. Because they spoke Chinese, contacts to Chinese-speaking churches and organizations became important. These first missionaries were Emil and Eli Årsheim, and Nils Peder and Bjørg Kjetså. The second group, Åse Øye, Liv Turid Bjerkreim, and Astrid and Helge Breivik arrived the next year. The FELM sent its first missionaries, Salli Lamponen and Raija Kakko in 1978, followed by Anneli Könni and Maija and Jaakko Mäkelä the next year.

An agreement was signed in 1980 to establish a joint organization called the Lutheran Mission in Thailand (LMT). The joint organization was established in order to avoid problems that had occurred in several other countries, where mission organizations had begun working separately, and several small Lutheran Churches had been established. In 1979, the Lutheran World Federation held a

consultation on mission co-operation for the leaders of Asian Lutheran Churches and their mission partners in Manila, Philippines. The discussions in this consultation influenced the Agreement on Mission Co-operation in Thailand, which was the basis of the ministry of the LMT. The Joint Board for Thailand was organized for co-operation between the leaderships of the partner organizations of the LMT.

The first General Assembly of the LMT was held in September of 1980, attended by eleven missionaries. The number of missionaries increased rapidly after that. The government authorities issued a quota for visas and work permits, and the LMT eventually was granted visas and permits for 28 missionaries. In the 1980s, the NMS and the FELM shared most of the permits on an equal basis. Mobility was high: by 1995, 79 individuals had been serving as missionaries in Thailand, many of them serving only one term. There were, however, 13 missionaries who had come to Thailand before 1983 who continued to serve with the ELCT after 1994.

After 1994, the number of missionaries began to gradually decrease. According to the Calendar of the ELCT, in 2019, only 16 missionaries served in the ELCT. The NMS had only one missionary in Thailand. The FELM had eight missionaries, but many of them also had duties in other countries in the region. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong had two missionaries, the Lutheran Church in Singapore three, and the Malagasy Lutheran Church two families.

In the 1970s, new mission organizations had to join organizations registered by government authorities. Two organizations had been accepted as the main Protestant organizations. The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) was established in 1934, and it consisted mainly of congregations founded by the American Presbyterian Mission. From the start, one of its oldest congregations followed the Baptist tradition, and eventually formed its own District. By the end of the 2010s, the number of Districts had grown to 22, and they have diverse ethnic backgrounds and theological traditions. The Evangelical Fellowship in Thailand (EFT) was founded in 1969 as a co-operation organization between Christian organizations and some independent congregations. By the end of the 2010s, most important member organizations were established national Churches or church fellowships.

In the beginning, the missionaries of the NMS made contact to the Church of Christ in Thailand. At that time, the CCT would accept new mission organizations only into full integration into its structures. The only choice left was to join the Evangelical Fellowship in Thailand.

In theory, there was a category of associated membership in the CCT. During the crisis in connection to the registration of the Lutheran Institute for Theological Education in 1986 – 1988, the possibility of joining the CCT was revived by some of the missionaries of the NMS and Thai co-workers. The associated membership was, however, only possible for a group of national Christians, not for a foreign mission organization.

Some principles concerning the Agreement on Mission Co-operation in Thailand should be pointed out. The first principle concerns the purpose of the LMT. The LMT was a joint ministry of Lutheran mission agencies and Churches with an aim to *“bring Christ’s gospel through proclamation and service, to the peoples in Thailand, and to establish local congregations which shall be united in one Evangelical Lutheran Church.”* When the Agreement on Mission Co-operation was signed for the first time, the establishment of the national Lutheran Church was a very distant goal. No conversions were registered, only children of co-workers were baptized. The co-workers during the early years came from different backgrounds.

The second principle relates to the confessional basis which closely follows the confessional basis of the Lutheran World Federation. These two principles have had a profound influence on the ministry of the LMT. These paragraphs have been used both in planning the work and in co-operating with other churches and organizations.

The third principle concerns membership. While we were two founding members of the LMT, some Asian Lutheran Churches had shown interest in joining the mission in Thailand from the very beginning. The Agreement was formulated in a way which made it possible for these churches to become members. This has resulted a unique situation. European mission agencies have been working with Asian and African Lutheran Churches in their countries. On the

other hand, they work in full partnership with them in Thailand.

In 1982, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong (ELCHK) decided to join the Agreement on Mission Co-operation and became the third full member of the LMT. In 1988 the ELCHK sent its first missionary, Anita Chan, to Thailand. In 1988, the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (later the Lutheran Church in Singapore (LCS)) became the fourth partner organization of the LMT. It sent its first missionaries, Rickson Leong and Leong Tan Pei Pei, to Thailand in 1994, followed by Terry Kee and Sally Lim. In addition to work in Thailand, The Lutheran Church in Singapore has a special role in the work among migrant Thai workers living in Singapore.

# 2

## STEPS TOWARDS ESTABLISHING THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THAILAND

Preparations towards establishing a national Lutheran Church proceeded on various levels. The Long-Range Plan of the LMT estimated in 1986 that establishing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand could be possible in ten years. No drastic changes took place in the ministry of the LMT after its establishment. Expanding the work took place in stages, and joint study committees of expatriate missionaries and Thai co-workers worked with numerous guidelines. In my view, however, the years 1985 – 1987 should be mentioned as decisive. During those years, new elements in the ministry of the LMT were introduced or implemented.

The work expanded during the years 1985 -1987. Three new congregations opened in Bangkok, and the work expanded to North-eastern Thailand in 1985. Since 1981, the Theological Training Committee, later called the Theological Education Department, had provided theological education for both local co-workers and church members. In order to create a permanent structure for the ministry, the Lutheran Institute of Theological Education (LITE) was established in 1986. A debate on the plans on how to develop the Institute surfaced especially during the following year. The Lutheran Deaconess Ministry was established 1987. The present name is Diakonia Department.

The effort to formulate the Constitution for the future Church continued for several years. As a first step, the General Assembly



*Thai-Co-workers of LMT*

of the LMT accepted the guidelines for the Congregation Boards and Thai Church Members and Co-workers Fellowship in 1983. Temporary guidelines had been used before that, accepted by the Executive Committee in September 1981.



*First group the ordinations of LMT*

Organizing the Thai Lutheran Fellowship in 1987 was a significant development. The Thai Lutheran Fellowship provided structures which were later used to develop the administration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand (ELCT). It continued the activities of the Thai Church-members and Co-workers' Fellowship that had held regular fellowship meetings, and organized an annual camp since 1981. The local congregations sent delegates to the annual Thai Lutheran Assembly. This elected the Thai Lutheran Committee to implement the decisions made by the Assembly. In the last years before the establishment of the ELCT, the Thai Lutheran Committee and the Executive Committee of the LMT held joint meetings.

The General Assembly of the LMT accepted the guidelines for ordained ministry in 1986. The first four Thai Lutheran ministers were ordained in 1988 in connection with the General Assembly of the LMT. The second ordination took place in 1990. The requirements for ordination were a Bachelor's degree and five years of service as an evangelist in local congregations. The practice followed by the Church of Christ in Thailand clearly influenced the thinking: before ordination, the candidate must have experience in leading the work in congregations.

The first draft for the Order for Worship was prepared in 1983 and the draft for the Orders for Occasional Services in 1989. Both were meant for preliminary use, and were to be reviewed before printing. After test use and review, the Orders for Occasional Services were printed in 1996. The book included the 1983 draft for the Order for Worship, with some minor changes.



By the 1970s, several organizations had published hymnbooks that mostly contained translations of Western, primarily American hymns. In 1985, the CCT published a new version of the hymnbook *Phleng Thai Namaskarn* that contained more Thai and other Asian melodies. The LMT decided to use this hymnbook in its congregations. In addition to the hymnbooks, various organizations had published collections of *phleng san*, short songs used during the informal openings of the worship services and other occasions. The Overseas Missionary Fellowship had published a booklet containing wordings to traditional Thai melodies.

It was hoped that the Lutherans would one day have their own hymnbook. The Church Council of the ELCT appointed a committee to prepare one in 1998. The hymnbook *Phleng haeng Prakhun* was published in 2008. It contains 313 hymns of which about 40 were written and composed by persons who were or had been members of the ELCT. The first self-sufficiency policies were accepted in 1987. These policies have later been adjusted several times.

According to the laws of Thailand, only registered companies or foundations registered by the Ministry of Interior can hold land deeds. Consequently, the LMT was in need of a Foundation. With the help of experienced Thai Christians, an application was submitted to the Ministry of Interior in 1977 for the registration of the Lutheran Christian Foundation of Thailand. The first piece of land purchased in the name of the Foundation was the site on Sukhumvit Road Soi 50 in 1986. This site became the Headquarters of the LMT, later of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand, and the Lutheran

Institute of Theological Education/Luther Seminary in Thailand. The dedication service of the Headquarters was held in 1991.

Those helping to register the Lutheran Christian Foundation knew that the registration process was going to take some time. A business company called the NMS Company was registered in order to solve the urgent need for premises for the emerging congregations. As a business company, it could buy and sell property, and so some premises were bought in its name. Since 1990s, several pieces of land were bought in the names of private persons. For the most part, the funds for buying all the property came from the LMT partners or their connections. All of these properties were meant to be transferred to the Foundation. This process was delayed, and it created some problems in the 2010s. A second Foundation, Light of Hope, was registered in 2018 for registering premises for congregations.



*Luther Students are standing at the land where ELCT building started*

# 3

## FOUNDING OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THAILAND, AND ITS PARTNERS AND RELATIONS

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand was established in April 1994 at its first General Assembly. The Thai Lutheran Assembly and the member organizations of the LMT had ratified the Constitution of the future ELCT before that. The agreement on co-operation between the ELCT and the LMT was signed as part of the proceedings at the General Assembly. The LMT remained as an organization, but in a reduced form. According to the agreement, local representatives participated in the meetings of the Church Council and General Assembly in a transition period of some years with slightly limited voting rights. Later the agreement has been reviewed, and the partners increasingly negotiate independently with the ELCT.

*ELCT hall*



In theory, the process should have strengthened the self-administration of the Church. In practice, in my view, the administrative load has increased. The main reason is that the ELCT is still dependent on financial support from abroad, and has to respond to the requests of its partners. Prior to 1994, the sometimes differing priorities of the member organizations were co-ordinated within the LMT structures. Much of the discussion was held locally in Thailand. In the new millennium, the ELCT has to negotiate with its partners individually. In addition, the partners have shifted towards project-based support, and have begun to increasingly emphasize their own priorities. Banjob Kusawadee was elected the first bishop of the Church. The bishop was elected for a three-year term and could be re-elected for a second term. The term was later extended to four years.



*The first bishop installation in 1994*



with other Christian bodies in Thailand. Co-operation within the membership of the EFT has been straightforward. Contact and co-operation with organizations of the Church of Christ in Thailand has continued since the beginning of the Lutheran ministry. Contacts to the Roman Catholics were made in the 1980s. The contacts have later become more official, especially since the beginning of the new millennium. The ELCT has participated in fellowship meetings of both Protestant and Roman Catholic church leaders, and in seminars organized by various theological institutes.

The ELCT signed an application for membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) during its first General Assembly in 1994. Contacts to the LWF go back to the time before the LMT was organized.

The *Lutheran Hour* – radio program of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod was broadcast in Thai by the Far East Broadcasting Company. When the LMT began its media ministry in 1982, the Lutheran Mass Communication became the producer of the program. Negotiations in the 1980s led to some years of co-operation in publishing Lutheran theological literature. In 1988, the Missouri Synod started its own Concordia Gospel Ministry.

The ELCT has been a member of the Mekong Mission Forum (MMF) since its formation in the early years of the new millennium. The first contacts between the future partners were made in 1994. MMF is a network of member churches of the LWF and their mission partners in the Mekong region, namely in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar.

The ELCT and the LMT have gained new partners after the ELCT was established. The Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church from Japan began to support the Lutheran ministry in 1989, and officially joined the ministry in 1995. Their first missionaries were Naoki and Hiroko Sugioka in 2002. The Lutheran Church in Australia has supported the ministry of the LMT since the early 1990s, and it applied for membership in LMT in 1998. Simon McKenzie was its first missionary in 2004. The latest member is the Malagacy Lutheran Church. Olav and Nina Razatfimanantsoa began to work in 2014 in Chiang Rai, and Ravaka and Rovasoa Ratovohery in 2017 in Nan.

In 2011, the ELCT signed an agreement with the FELM and directly the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland regarding ministry among Finns living or visiting in Thailand. According to the agreement, the pastor responsible for ministry among the expatriate Finns also serves in the ELCT.

Several pastors have been ordained since the ELCT was established. The first candidates came from different backgrounds in the early years of the ministry. Since the 1990s, most of them have been graduates of the Lutheran Institute for Theological Education/ Luther Seminary in Thailand. Over the years, some of them, including the first four ordained pastors, have resigned from the ELCT. In 2019, sixteen ordained ministers worked full-time.

The debate concerning the ordination of female candidates continued for several years, and the first ordination of female ministers took place in 2018. The question was raised already in the early 1990s, but the LMT refrained from making the decision to

ordain female candidates. It was understood that the question must be decided by the national Church once it was established.

Evangelists, both male and female, work full-time in congregations. In practice, the position of an evangelist resembles the position of deacon in Anglican, Orthodox and some Lutheran Churches. An evangelist may serve as the leader of a congregation, and in some instances, they have been given the right to administer the Holy Communion.

Mobility among evangelists has been high for various reasons, especially in the 1980s. However, in some cases persons who have left the ELCT have later returned. Since the 1990s most of them have been graduates of the LITE/LST. The prerequisite formal studies are not defined in detail. According to the Calendars of the ELCT, a person with a Certificate for Church Ministry (equivalent to one year of full-time studies) may serve as an evangelist. Evangelists with Bachelor degrees are candidates for ordination. Since 2019, assistant evangelists, who may be in part-time or voluntary service, have been listed in the Calendars. The work has been concentrating in local congregations. There have, however, been attempts to organize evangelistic teams which operate in larger areas, but these have not continued in the new millennium. Starting in 1986, the Ubon Provincial Team took care of the emerging groups of Christians in villages in Ubon. In the early 1990s, the Evangelistic Team in Bangkok co-operated with the congregations in Bangkok. In the late 1990s, the ELCT Evangelistic Team operated from Si Kheu, mainly supporting emerging congregations in the Northeast.



In the early years of the LMT, the newly opened places were called congregations from the start. In the Constitution of ELCT of 1994, the local communities are divided into congregations and preaching places. The By-Laws define specific requirements for registering as a congregation. The preaching places may be in the care of a congregation or registered directly under the Church Council.

From the start of the work of the LMT, it was clear that the congregations should strive for economic self-sufficiency. Regular offerings in worship services were started and instructions were given for bookkeeping and the use of money. The first detailed plan for self-sufficiency was accepted by the General Assembly of the LMT in 1987. The principal idea was that the congregations should increase



*Lutheran Church moved to countryside*

their local income so that they would become self-reliant within 18 years. The salaries of the workers were paid from the central fund of the LMT. For this purpose, the congregations were to send part of their income to the LMT central fund. In addition, the congregations were meant to cover 10 percent of the costs of their property.

This plan was made when the congregations were experiencing rapid growth. When growth slowed, the congregations faced problems and the plan had to be readjusted. The ELCT later made different arrangements. The congregations were divided into two groups in the 2010s. Most of the congregations sent 50 percent of their offerings to the central fund of the ELCT, which then paid the salaries of the workers. Some congregations handled the expense of the salaries of their workers themselves, and sent 15 percent of the offerings to the central fund.

The number of organized congregations and registered preaching places has been increasing. According to the Calendars of the ELCT, there were 31 congregations and 16 registered preaching places at the end of 2019. The number of full-time co-workers has been increasing simultaneously. This has become a cause for concern. In the future, it might not be possible to send full-time workers to all emerging congregations. While there were about 5000 members in the entire ELCT, the congregations were relatively small. The economic self-reliance of the congregations has not developed as quickly as had been hoped, and the congregations have been struggling with self-sufficiency.

There are signs of a different kind of expansion which may help in solving the problem of expansion based on sending full-time workers. At least the Phibul Mangsahan Lutheran Church in Ubon Ratchathani and the Mukdahan Lutheran Church have preaching places in their care. These preaching places may not have full-time workers, but rather voluntary or part-time workers, supported by the mother congregation, take care of the preaching places until they meet the requirements of a registered congregation. This kind of pattern is well known in other Protestant communities in Thailand, and it is called a mother church – daughter church relationship. In District Five in Nan, pastors and evangelists usually do not reside in the congregations, but rather visit them regularly for worship services and other occasions.

# 4

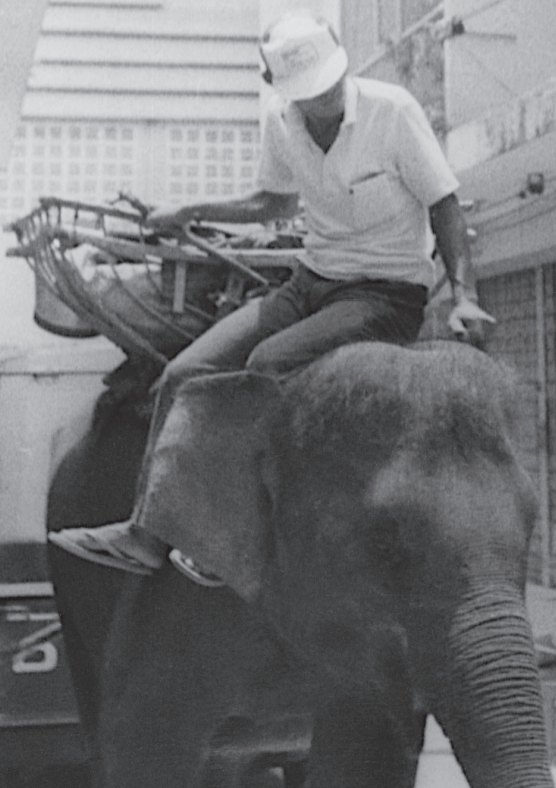
## CONGREGATIONS

According to the Agreement on Mission Co-operation in Thailand, the purpose of the LMT was “*to establish local congregations which shall be united in one Evangelical Lutheran Church.*” The first centres, hopefully future congregations, were opened already in 1977. At first the ministry concentrated in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area. However, the option to begin work in other provinces had been contemplated since the beginning. The experiences of other mission organizations also demonstrated that it would be wise to begin in Bangkok and later expand to other provinces.

In 1994 the Lutheran ministry was concentrated in three areas: the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, North-eastern Ubon Ratchathani, and Nakorn Ratchasima (Si Khiu). The Long-Range Plan of 1996 – 2000 of the ELCT stated that it should become a nationwide Church. The work first expanded to Chiang Rai in the North where several of the co-workers of the ELCT had family. In the 1980s and early 1990s, expansion depended on the available missionary manpower. Whenever possible, new teams consisting of missionaries and Thai co-workers were formed. An exception was the congregation in Si Khiu, Nakorn Ratchasima, which originated from the personal contacts of a new Christian from Bangkok. Later, expansion took different patterns. These patterns are briefly dealt with in the introduction to the Districts.

This strategy has resulted a network of fairly small local congregations. Membership statistics show that the growth of a

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*First Lutheran in Thailand*

congregation usually slowed down when it reached about fifty members.

The first baptisms of those converting from Buddhism were administered in 1981. In 1985, there were eight registered congregations, all in the Bangkok Metropolitan area. In 1994, when the ELCT was established, there were 16 congregations, including the Thai Good News Centre in Singapore. In 2019, there were 31 congregations and 16 preaching places in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, in the Northeast and in the North. The Good News Center in Singapore belongs under the Lutheran Church in Singapore, but it is also listed under the ELCT.

Congregations faced a problem very common to the Christian community in Thailand already in the early years. New members join the churches, but simultaneously old members leave. Some of them join other churches as mobility between churches is high. The congregations also have a crucial and active role in the diakonia work of the LMT/ELCT. Much of the work is carried out in co-operation between the congregations and the Diakonia Department as demonstrated in Chapter 6.

**The membership has developed as follows:**

1985	155
1988	429
1990	573
1994	988
2019	about 5000

The following statistics, published in 1991, are compiled from the Chairman's annual reports to the General Assembly of the LMT. In this chart, the congregations from the Peace Lutheran Church to the Don Muang Church are located in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area.

Membership of the congregations of the LMT 1977-1990

Church		1985	1988	1990
Peace Lutheran Church, Soi Amon	1977	46	63	36
Kluay Nam Thai Church	1977	31	58	56
Lad Phrao Church	1981	42	50	46
Samroong Church	1982	14	37	49
Grace Lutheran Church, Hua Mark	1983	13	17	24
Huay Khwang Church	1985	9	20	26
Laksi Lutheran Church	1985		50	52
Phasee Charoen Good News Church	1986		46	57
Don Muang Church	1988		8	21
Good News Church, Ubon	1985		41	51
Ubon Provincial Team			37	76
Phibul Church, Ubon	1988			34
Korat (Phrapon Si Khiu Church)				22
Thai Good News Centre, Singapore	1988			23
<b>Total</b>		<b>155</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>573</b>

Most of the members of the congregations in Bangkok have moved to the city from the other provinces. Mobility is high, and in recent years people have even been returning from Bangkok to other provinces.

The congregations have been organized into Districts since the early years of the new millennium. The districts are not administrative units. They were established for fellowship and joint activities. Here, the congregations are introduced in the order presented by the Calendars of the ELCT, issued annually since 1988. For the congregations in Bangkok and the Good News Lutheran Church in Ubon Ratchathani, the year presented in the Calendar refers to the start of the work. In other cases, the information often refers to the registration the congregation. In those cases, the congregation had previously existed as a registered preaching place or as a group of Christians.

In addition to the present-day congregations introduced in the photos, there were church-planting attempts which did not lead to permanent congregations. Members of these groups joined other congregations, or contacts to them have been lost. These include the Huay Khwang Church, the Don Muang Church, Church 11 and the Grace Lutheran Church in Bangkok. Work continued for some time at least in Chanthaburi, in Det Udom and Sri Muang Mai and Det Udom in Ubon Ratchathani, in Uttaradit, and in some places in Chiang Rai.



#### 4.1. District One, Bangkok and Nakorn Ratchasima

The Klong Toey Family Centre, (later named Lutheran Church Klong Toey; Kluay Nam Thai Lutheran Church; and then Immanuel Lutheran Church) and the Peace Lutheran Church, (Santitham) in Soi Amon, were both opened in 1977. The first Norwegian missionaries applied their experiences from Hong Kong here. In Hong Kong, day nurseries and youth centres have been successful both in serving the needs of the society and also as tools for church-planting. Congregations have been born around the youth centres and day nurseries. The Peace Lutheran Church was established to function as a youth centre.

A day nursery and a chapel were opened in Klong Toey. The day nursery has been functioning until the present, and a second



*Rev. Taweep Oiwan and Missionaries.*

day nursery has been opened. They are called by the name Home of Praise Day Nursery 1 and 2, and in 2019 they were in the care of the Diakonia Department. In the new millennium, the Immanuel music school was started.

In 1985, the Peace Lutheran Church moved to another site in the same area bought in the name of the NMS Company. In the new millennium, the buildings were sold and the new church building was built in Bangkhunthian on the Thonburi side. After the first centres were opened in Bangkok, some years passed before the LMT was able to open new congregations. New work began in 1981 along Lad Phrao Road in the Bangkapi district. This new congregation was called the Lad Phrao Church. It was an experiment using new methods in beginning a new congregation, utilizing experiences of other mission organizations in Bangkok. The team received addresses of people who had contacted Christian radio and other mass media agencies, and attempted to follow them up. The team delivered tracts, introduction letters, and contact cards in the neighbourhood. Among other activities, the team organized open-air movie nights. The first conversions and baptisms were recorded within a year from beginning of the work.

Initially, there was a vision to use the homes of new Christians as the first meeting place. This proved impossible, and the team temporarily rented the second and third floors of a shop. In May 1982, a house on Lad Phrao Soi 58 and an attached shophouse were bought in name of the NMS Company. The dedication service was held in August that year.

The annual report of the Lad Phrao Church (1984) stated that 670 people had been in contact with the church by 1983. The high number of contacts shows that during the first years of ministry in the area, and probably in other places as well, many people were met. However, this seldom led to church membership.

Similar methods were used in starting new congregations in Bangkok throughout the 1980s. The LMT made every effort to honour the work done by other Christian bodies, and searched for areas where there were no other permanent congregations. The Samroong Lutheran Church was opened in 1982, a year after the Lad Phrao Church. The Laksi Lutheran Church was opened in 1985.

According to the ELCT Calendars, the Phasee Charoen Good News Church was opened in 1986. At first it was called the Bangkhuntian Good News House because it used rented premises



*The beginning of Praporn Sikiu congregation*

in the nearby Bangkhuntian area from March 1986. Surveys of the area and the first home meetings were begun already in the end of 1985. In 1989 the congregation moved to its own premises in Phasee Charoen area.

In 1991, a congregation called Lutheran Church Soi 50 was opened at the LMT Headquarters on Sukhumvit Soi 50. Members of Church 11 on Sukhumvit Road Soi 101, which was closed in the late 1990s, joined this church. The integrated congregation was called the Ruam Phraporn Lutheran Church. In 2008, it moved to its present premises in the Prawet area. A new congregation started to meet at the Headquarters in 2017.

In 1991, a plan was discussed to unite the congregations in Huay Khwang and in Laksi with the Lad Phrao Church. The congregations in Huay Khwang and Laksi were meeting in rented houses, and it seemed impossible to find the funds to buy premises for them. According to the plan, the house and the shophouse in Lad Phrao would be sold and the money from the sale would be used to build a new larger church for the united congregation. In July 1992 the Laksi Church wanted to withdraw from the plan and to continue working in Laksi area. The Huay Khwang Church was closed in 1992.

The Phraporn SiKiu Lutheran Church in the Nakorn Ratchasima Province (Korat) was born as a result of the witnessing of new Christians. Its first members were baptized in 1986 in the Kluay Nam Thai Church (Immanuel Lutheran Church), but it wasn't registered as a congregation until 1991. The new Christians first gathered at a

private home in Ban Nong village. The teams from the LITE and LMT co-workers from Ubon Ratchathani and Bangkok helped minister to the new Christians until the congregation was registered. In 1991, a house was rented for the congregation in Si Khiu town. The rented house soon proved too small for the growing congregation, and in 1997 a piece of land was bought in the outskirts of the Si Khiu town. A temporary bamboo church was built by the church members. The foundation stone of the new church building was laid the following year in 1998.

The Mukdahan Lutheran Church its satellite congregation in Nikhom Kham, and the Ban Bu Lutheran Church in Buriram (registered in 1998) are not part of a specific District. They are located rather far away from other congregations. In Mukdahan and in Ban Bu, the pastors have returned home to lead congregations after they completed their studies. The work in Mukdahan began in 2005. The dedication service of the church building was held in 2009. The buildings in Mukdahan were originally built by the NMS to function as a congregation and training centre. The site was planned to function also as a base for potential future work in Laos on the other side of the Mekong River.

#### **4.2. District Two, Ubon Ratchathani, Sri Saket**

The FELM was interested in urban ministry while the NMS was from the start interested in work in rural areas as well. The NMS was also interested in work in Laos, but it was not possible in the 1970s and 1980s. The LMT agreed that the work outside Bangkok would be a joint effort. Expansion to the Northeast was included in

the first Five Years Plan of the LMT prepared in 1980. The first official study tour, which included members of the Joint Board and the Executive Committee, was organized in March and April 1982. Personal visits to the Northeast had been made before that. Preparations for expansion began, and during 1982 – 1984, several provinces in the Northeast were surveyed. Methods which had been used by other Churches and mission organizations were evaluated. The General Assembly of the LMT decided in 1984 that the Ubon Ratchathani Province should be the area where to begin.

Because of a lack of personnel, actual work did not begin until 1985. In 1986, the decision was made to establish it two teams. The reason for this was in part due to the size of the province, (15,745 square kilometres), in part due to conflicting ideas on how to develop the work. By 1990, the work was organized so that the Ubon Good News Church, opened in 1986, was responsible for work in the provincial town of Ubon Ratchathani. The Phibul Church was in charge of work in Phibul Mangsahan, and the Ubon Provincial Team in the other places in the province. In the 1990s the LITE teams joined in evangelistic meetings in Fa Huan and other places in this District.

The membership of the churches in this District grew more rapidly than in Bangkok in latter half of the 1980s, and the growth has continued since. The Phibul Mangsahan Lutheran Church was opened in 1989, and in 2019 it had three preaching places under its care; the Kids' congregation, the Sirinthon Preaching Place and the Ang Sila Preaching Place. The Ban None Kratae Preaching Place was the fourth registered preaching place in the District.

The Fa Huan Lutheran Church was registered in 1994, but its roots are in a group of new Christians in the late 1980s. The Ubon Provincial Team took care of the groups of new Christians in Fa Huan and in other places until the congregations were organized and registered.

In 2019, the District consisted of seven registered congregations and four registered preaching places. In addition to the three congregations mentioned above, it included the Tungphraphon Koknoi Lutheran Church, registered in 2000, the Romphrakhun Lutheran Nam Thaeng Church, and the Nong Chuak Lutheran Church. The Banpran Lutheran Church in Sri Saket was registered in 1997. Meeting the needs of the people in the rural areas requires a different approach than work in urban areas. Co-operation with the provincial health and education officials began in the 1980s in order to develop health care in the remote villages.

### **4.3. District Three, Udon Thani, Bueng Kaan**

The congregations in District 3 have originated with a group of people who became Christians while working in Singapore in the 1990s. They came to study at the LITE after returning to Thailand. Many of them enrolled in the one-year Certificate for Church Ministry -program, and some of them returned to their home in the provinces. Later they upgraded their general study certificates and continued in the Diploma of Theology and Bachelor of Theology -programs. The Nonghan Lutheran Church was registered in 1989. In 2019, the District included also the Bua Toom Pa Baak Lutheran Church, the Tharn Phraphon Bung Kla Church and the Ban Chaing Preaching Place.

Some congregations in other Districts have similar backgrounds, including the congregations in Ban Bu in Buriram and Ban Pran in Sri Saket.

#### 4.4. District Four, Chiang Rai and Lampang

According to the Five Years Plan 1996-2000 of the ELCT, the ministry of the ELCT was to expand to the northern part of the country. The Chiang Rai Province was surveyed and attempts were made to open congregations in different places. The Palan Lutheran Church in the Doi Luang District in Chiang Rai was registered in 2002, followed by the Ban Rai Pattana Church in the Mae Lao District in 2010. In the 2010s several congregations and groups of Christians (preaching places) of Lahu and Akha Christians joined the ELCT. These include the Ban Mai Huay Luang – Thaho Lutheran Church, the Ban Mai – Mae Yang Min Akha Lutheran Church, the Ban Mai – Charoen Lutheran Church (Akha) and the Ban Mai Siri Pattana Lutheran Church. In 2019, District Four also included six preaching

*Akha group in Chiang Rai*







*Akha group in Chiang Rai*

places: the Saithong Lahu Lutheran Preaching Place; the Ban Mai – Santisuk Lahu Lutheran Preaching Place in Wiang Papao; the Myanmar Center; the Mae Ta Maeo Christian Group in Mae Saruay; the Ban Poh Lutheran Preaching Place (Lahu) and the Ban Thaho Lutheran Gospel Centre (Leso). In Chiang Mai, the FELM has been supporting a separate project to translate the Bible into the Akhe language.

#### 4.5. District Five, Nan

The Ban Napong Lutheran Church and the Ban Den Lutheran Church, the first congregations in the Bo Klua District in Nan, were registered in 2005. The ELCT co-workers had made the first contacts to the area some years earlier. The Huay Mee Lutheran Church and the Ban Huay Tone Lutheran Church were registered in 2010. In

2019, District Five also included four preaching places: the Ban Pa Kow Gospel Centre, the Rubber Plantations Gospel Centre, the Ban Huay Pong Lutheran Preaching Place and the Ban Ko Kuang Lutheran Preaching Place.

There were altogether about 1400 members. In some cases, almost an entire village has become Christian. Most of the members belong to the Lua ethnic group, who do not yet have a literary language. There is an on-going effort to develop a written form of Lua, and first steps have been taken to translate the Bible.

Expansion has been swift, and there has been a need to train local leaders for the growing congregations. Studies for the Certificate for Church Ministry were organized locally by the Luther Seminary in Thailand between 2016-2018 as intensive courses for voluntary or part-time leaders. Some of those who completed these courses are continuing their Diploma of Theology -studies along with students from other Districts. In order to improve self-reliance, a small experimental vegetable and pig farm was opened in the outskirts of the Ban Den Village.



*Lua group in Nan*

#### 4.6. The Thai Good News Centre, Singapore and ministry among Thais living abroad

The discussions on ministry among Thais living in Singapore began in 1986 in connection with the dialogue on co-operation between the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore, and the Lutheran Mission in Thailand. The work in Singapore began in 1989, one year after the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (later the Lutheran Church in Singapore) became a member of the LMT, as a joint ministry between the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore and the LMT. Migrant workers who became Christians in Singapore have joined the congregations of the ELCT after returning in Thailand. Several of them have studied at the LITE/LST and have been working in the ELCT. Several pastors of the ELCT have worked in Singapore for terms of six months.

In addition to the ministry in Singapore, missionaries of the FELM worked among Thai migrant workers in Israel from the late 1990s until the early 2010s. There were plans to send co-workers of the ELCT to Israel. Since 2001, the Taiwan Foreign Inmates Caring Association, supported by the Marburger Mission from Germany, has been working among foreign inmates in Taiwanese prisons and among Thai immigrants in Taiwan. Workers from various churches in Thailand have joined this ministry. Pastors from the ELCT and missionaries of the FELM and have been taking part since 2011. Since 2005, local congregations in Finland, supported by former missionaries to Thailand, have been in contact with Thai seasonal workers collecting forest berries in Finland.



#### 4.7. Mass Communication, Rangsang Bookstore

The LMT Media Office was founded in January 1982. Later its name was changed to Lutheran Mass Communication. The Lutheran Hour -radio program, sponsored by the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, was broadcast in Thai by the Far East Broadcasting Company. The Lutheran Mass Communication became the producer of the program and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod continued to sponsor the program. The Lutheran Mass Communication produced its own radio programs to be broadcast on different radio stations in Bangkok and in some other provinces. The main target audience was people who were not yet Christians. By the end of the 1980s, the Lutheran Mass Communication annually received more than 2000 letters from the listeners, the highest number being 3783 in 1988.

The Lutheran Mass Communication organized evangelistic rallies for the listeners of its programs, and participated in rallies organized together with other media organizations. Co-operation with the Far East Broadcasting Company was of special importance. In the 1990s, radio programs were broadcast in Ubon Ratchathani. They were listened to in the neighbouring Laos as well. In the new millennium, radio broadcasts have not been continued permanently and the Lutheran Mass Communication has concentrated on Bible correspondence courses.

The Lutheran Bookstore was opened in 1980 on the premises of the Klong Toey Church. The location was not well suited for business, and the volume of sales was small. A shophouse was purchased on the main road in connection with the Ladphrao Church, and the bookstore moved there in the beginning of 1983. The name was changed to Rangsan Bookstore. The aim of the bookstore was to evangelize and to distribute Christian literature. Occasionally some congregations sold books in market places, and there were plans to create mobile units for selling Christian literature. In order to draw customers, an agreement was made with a secular publisher to sell all kinds of books. It was hoped that the bookstore would become self-supporting. This ambition was not fully realized as the bookstore was able to cover only 60 to 70 percent of its expenses by sales. The bookstore was closed in 1991, and the shophouse was sold in order to finance the premises for the Laksi Church.

# 5

## THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Preparations for the training of local co-workers in the LMT began in 1981. It was relatively easy to find new co-workers for the expanding LMT. These new co-workers came from different backgrounds. The number of students at theological institutes in Thailand was growing rapidly in the 1980s. After graduation, they needed places to serve, and their home churches were not always able to provide that. An important group was graduates of the Bangkok Bible College who came from the congregations of the CCT in the North.

The Protestant community in Thailand has been influenced by both the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition, and the tradition of the Anabaptists and other Radical Reformers. The Baptists, the Pentecostal and various Evangelical groups share similar emphases with the Radical Reformers.



*First group of Luther Students*

In the early years of the ministry, some of the missionaries and Thai co-workers of the LMT felt that the holy life of the Christians was overemphasized in Thai churches. They felt that in practice, many of the Thai Christians understood justification as co-operation between God and the sinner. Banjob Kusawadee writes in his doctoral dissertation that when dealing with the issue of suffering, Thai Christians try their best to follow God's will to gain the favor of God. They often see the grace of God as something conditional, it must first be earned in some way.

The Thai term for justification is unfamiliar especially to non-Christians. As legal term, it is used for the innocent party. In ordinary practice, the corresponding term for a justified person refers to a deeply religious person. In sermons and in discussions the term usually used is salvation.

The concept of the grace alone, *Sola Gratia*, became important in the process of creating relevant, contextualized Lutheran theology. The term *phrakhun* for grace is well known and is used in other contexts, for example to mean the benevolence of the King. Several of the Bachelor theses written at the LITE/LST deal with the concept of the grace of God. In the theses, written abroad, grace is addressed at length. The Lutheran theologians emphasize that the grace of God is a gift. It cannot be earned, it can only be received.

The goal of establishing a Lutheran Church called for the LMT to offer its own theological education programs. The work was carried out by the Theological Training Committee, appointed in 1981. In 1984, it was renamed the Theological Education Department

(TED). This meant that the department could have its own staff and budget. In the beginning, monthly seminars were held for both missionaries and Thai co-workers in different places. In 1984, courses began for active church members as well. It was hoped that some of them would become future full-time co-workers. In 1985, the TED moved to the rented premises formerly used by the Peace Lutheran Church. These premises were used until the new facilities for the Headquarters of the LMT on Sukhumvit Soi 50 were completed in 1991. In the 1980s, evangelists who had graduated from various institutes were enrolled as part-time students on the Bachelor of Theology program of the BIT. The arrangement was called the Integrated Program, and the LMT was responsible for 16 credits.

The Lutheran Institute of Theological Education (LITE) was established in 1986 in order to provide a permanent structure for theological education. Disagreements on the registration and the legal status of the Institute delayed this process for two years. It was not possible to register the LITE with the government authorities. In fact, only the Payap University in Chiang Mai and the Bangkok Institute of Theology, both of the CCT, were officially registered; the other Bible schools and theological seminaries were not. The problem of registration was finally solved by a guarantee letter from the EFT which gave the institute the much-needed legal status. In this connection, questions were raised about the costs of running full-time study programs. On one hand, it was emphasized that for the sake of the unity of the future Church, it was necessary that the theological education of future co-workers should be in the hands of the Church itself.



The LITE has been a member of the Association of Theological Schools in Thailand since 1988. In 2007 the name was changed to Luther Seminary in Thailand (LST). From the very beginning, the LITE/LST has planned comprehensive programs in close co-operation with the congregations. These would include training of the members as well as education for full-time ministry. In addition, The LITE/LST has been responsible for arranging updating education for the co-workers.

A major reorganization took place in 1988. The General Assembly of the LMT decided that the LITE would provide full-time training to candidates for full-time ministry. Prior to that, full-time students had received a part of their training at other institutes, mainly at the Bangkok Institute of Theology. When the LITE moved to the new facilities on Sukhumvit Soi 50 in 1991, there were three active programs: the Discipleship Training, the Certificate for Church Ministry, and the Diploma of Theology.

The Discipleship Training studies were intended for active church members, in order to equip them to be witnesses and to take on responsibilities in the church. In the 1980s the courses were held in part at the local congregations, in part together with the full-time students. The program has, in theory, been available all the time, courses were held in co-operation with the congregations, but proper implementation has been difficult.

The Certificate for Church Ministry was a study program equivalent to one year of full-time studies. This program could be completed part-time over several years. Between 2016-2018, it was organized as intensive courses in Nan for congregations of District 5.

The Diploma of Theology was a three-year full-time program for candidates for full-time ministry. Since 2018 this program has been organized as intensive courses.

The Bachelor of Theology -studies began in 1991 as intensive courses for those who had received the Diploma of Theology. Later, the Bachelor's program was offered as full-time studies. The Bachelor of Theology -degree is usually the prerequisite for ordination. In the 2010s also a program of Master of Divinity was offered. There were also attempts to develop special programs in music and diakonia.

The LITE received accreditation for the Diploma of Theology in 1994 from the Asia Theological Association, and for the Bachelor of Theology in 1995. The accreditation was renewed once, but a new application was not submitted when it expired again in 2015.



*Graduation Day of LST*

The production of literature is part of the ministry of the LITE/LST. Emphasis has been on theological literature, and on the teaching material needed in the different training programs of the ELCT. The Augsburg Confession, the Small Catechism and the Large Catechism of Martin Luther have been translated and published in Thai. These documents are part of the Book of Concord, the collection of the confessional writings of the Lutheran Churches.

Applied Thai music and dance have been an integral part of the curriculum since the beginning. Thai music consists of different types of music and dance: elements used in royal court and official ceremonies, and folk music from different parts of the country. Students and staff of the Seminar have prepared short plays for evangelistic purposes from early on. Elements of modern church drama and liturgical dance were added in the new millennium.



*Thai Music for worship*

The Thai music and dance group of the LITE/LST has visited Finland on several occasions; in 1998 under the name *Porn Siam*, in 2006 as *Ranat Ek*, and again in 2009.

Major problems surfaced in 2017–2018. The number of full-time students had decreased. In addition, the members of staff of the LST resigned from their positions, and filling the positions took time. It was necessary to arrange for the students to continue their studies in other institutes.

A thorough reorganization was made. Studies in the Certificate for Church Ministry, the Diploma of Theology, and the Luther Studies -programs were now offered as intensive courses. The Luther Studies -program is planned for evangelists who have graduated from other institutes as a part of the studies for ordination. A program called the Empowerment Program was started for membership training in congregations and Districts.

# 6

## DIAKONIA

According to the Agreement on Mission Co-operation in Thailand, Christian service has been an integral part of the ministry of the LMT from the start. The ELCT has continued in the same tradition. In Thailand, Christian social service has often been achieved through foundations and organizations that function separately from the local congregations. Schools, hospitals and social institutes have required a great deal of funding, and they have received financial support from abroad. In addition, they have needed a lot of personnel to run them. However, in many cases schools and hospitals have become self-reliant, or even sources of income. In the beginning, the LMT was reluctant to establish large institutions because it feared these would become a burden to the future Church. A Church consisting of small congregations would not be able to take responsibility for them. The emphasis was on developing



*Home of Grace under the Lutheran Diakonia Department*

forms of Christian love and service which could take place in the context of local congregations.

The social challenges met in Thai society also needed attention. Plans for the social and development work of the LMT were discussed over several years, and the Lutheran Deaconea Ministry was established 1987. According to the preliminary Guidelines, the task of the Lutheran Deaconea Ministry was to support the local congregations in their Christian service. At the same time, the Lutheran Deaconea Ministry should be ready to begin new projects according to the needs of the Thai society. In 2019, the name was changed to Diakonia Department and it now works under the Lutheran Church Foundation.

From the beginning, the Diakonia Department has co-operated with the local congregations, assisting them in serving their communities. Traditional forms of showing neighbourly care have been respected and new forms for serving their communities have been investigated. Courses in diakonia have been part of all levels of the training programs.

Co-operation with the congregations has taken different organizational forms. Since the 1990s, this work has included: scholarships for schools; microloans and support for opening small-scale businesses; support for families affected by AIDS; support for the elderly; providing safe places for activities for children; and resisting human trafficking. In the 2010s, the ongoing program was called the Ministry of Hope for Families. Co-operation between the Lutheran Deaconea Ministry in Ubon and the provincial education and public health officials began in the 1980s. The Immanuel Hostel

in Phibul Mangsahan was established in 1991. The annual report of 1993 listed four diakonia projects in Ubon. First, there were small-scale projects in connection with local schools to provide lunch for the students. This meant digging fish ponds and planting small vegetable gardens. Second, the LMT co-operated with a local clinic in the Ubon city area to provide public health care. Thirdly, LMT personnel helped open small drug stores in remote villages. As a fourth project, the LMT attempted to develop a handicraft project, but this was later abandoned because of a lack of personnel. In addition to these, there were small projects in congregations. An example of these was a buffalo bank for poor families.

In addition to work in the local congregations, the Diakonia Department opened the Home of Grace, a shelter for pregnant women without support, in Bangkok in 1987. More than 900 mothers and their children have lived at the Home of Grace, each for a period from two to six months. The Immanuel Hostel for schoolchildren in Phibul Mangsahan was established in 1991. Two day-nurseries were under the care of the Department in 2019: the Home of Praise 1 and 2 in connection to the Immanuel Church in Bangkok, and the La-On Siam Home in Chiang Rai.

The Diakonia Department has participated in disaster relief projects. In 2005, the Department, together with students of the LITE, took part in the rebuilding efforts in the aftermath of the tsunami in the South. In 2011, the Department participated in the relief work of the damage caused by floods in Bangkok and in the surrounding provinces, and again in 2019 in Ubon Ratchathani.

The stated purpose of the Lutheran Mission in Thailand was to “*establish local congregations which shall be united in one Evangelical Lutheran Church*”. The LMT was, and still is, a truly unique co-operation organization of European mission organizations and Asian and African Churches. When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand was organized in 1994, the LMT continued in co-operation with it in a reduced form.

When the ELCT was organized, there were 988 members in 16 congregations, including the Thai Good News Centre in Singapore. In 2019, there were 31 congregations and 16 preaching places in Bangkok Metropolitan Area, in the Northeast and in the North with a membership of roughly 5000. It is still striving to become its economically self-reliant.

The ELCT has followed the tradition begun by the LMT in its relations in Thailand. It has strived to establish good relations with other Christian bodies in Thailand. It is a member of the Evangelical Fellowship in Thailand.

In the end of the 2010s most of its co-workers were graduates of the Lutheran Institute of Theology/ Luther Seminary in Thailand. The concept of *Sola Gratia*, grace alone, has become important in its contextual theology. The congregations, supported by the Diakonia Department, respect their social responsibilities.



## Lutheran Mission in Thailand

Chairpersons until the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand was established

Rev. Helge Breivik	1980-1982
Rev. Jaakko Mäkelä	1982-1983, 1984-1987
Rev. Christopher Woie	1983-1984, 1987-1989
Mr. Markku Ala-Uotila	1989-1991
Rev. Kjell Sandvik	1991-1993
Rev. Tapio Karjalainen	1993-1994

## The Thai Lutheran Committee

### Chairpersons

Rev. Taweep Oiwan	1987-1990
Rev. Anant Likhitvitayanoont	1990
Rev. Banjob Kusawadee	1991-1992
Rev. Suk Prachayaporn	1993-1994

## Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand

Rev. Banjob Kusawadee	1994-1997, 2011-2018
Rev. Sompong Hanpradit	1997-2000
Rev. Taweep Oiwan	2000-2003
Rev. Visanukorn Upama	2003-2011
Rev. Amnuay Yodwong	2018-

## Theological Education

### Directors

Source: Rejoice 2011, 178-179. Correspondence 2015-2018

Rev. Dr. Jaakko Mäkelä

Theological Training Committee 1982-1983

Lutheran Institute of Theological Education 1989-1990, 1993-1999

Rev. Tapio Karjalainen

Theological Training Committee 1983-1984

Theological Education Department 1984-1986

Lutheran Institute of Theological Education 1986-1989, 1990-1993

Ms. Norlys Nilsen

Theological Education Department, Acting Director 1985

Rev. Kjell Sandvik

Theological Education Department, Acting Director 1985-1986

Lector (Rev.) Tarja Säynevirta

Lutheran Institute of Theological Education, Acting Director 1994-1995

Rev. Suk Prachayaporn

Lutheran Institute of Theological Education 1999-2006

Dr. Lilja Kinnunen-Riipinen

Lutheran Institute of Theological Education, Acting Director 2006

Luther Seminary in Thailand 2011-2015

Rev. Dr. Banjob Kusawadee

Lutheran Institute of Theological Education 2006-2007

Luther Seminary in Thailand 2007-2011

Rev. Visanukorn Upama

Luther Seminary in Thailand, Acting Director 2015-2017

Rev Amnuay Yodwong

Luther Seminary in Thailand 2017

Rev. Smith Wuthisawat

Luther Seminary in Thailand 2018

Ms. Prapasson Niram

Luther Seminary in Thailand 2018-

## Lutheran Diakonia Department

### Directors

Ms. Anneli Könni	1987-1989, 1990-1992, 1993-1995, 1996-1998
Ms. Elise Fintland	1989-1990
Ms. Siriphon Tunapan	1992-1993
Ms. Liisa Alanne	1995, 1998-2000
Ms. Leena Helle	2000-2010
Rev. Onchan Phuyafaa	2010-2012
Ms. Anuttaraphat Chanpan	2012-

**Ordained ministers of the ELCT in 2019, 16 names**

Amnuay Yodwong (Bishop), Onchan Phuyafa, Sutin Somphon, Bunmee Charuphong, Chamraeng Daengruean, Chanda Saiyotha, Wisaran Akhe, Thawee Bunrasee, Suthiphat Akkharanantaphong, Thosaphon Laphimon, Suriya Niram, Virot Kaeusaat, Jongkolonee Sampachanyanon, Sompon Kulachot, Prida Hongsakaeu, Wannee Khemthong.

**Retired or in voluntary service:** Visanukorn Upama, Banjob Kusawadee, Bunma Chaiyotha, Smith Wuthisavat, Kaeu Thowanant

**In memoriam:** Praphan Na Chiangmai