

BRIEF HISTORY OF BANGKOK BRANCH
CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
[THROUGH THE ARRIVAL OF
FULL-TIME MISSIONARIES]
1961 - 1968

Before 1961, informal church services had been held, intermittently whenever active LDS families had lived in Bangkok. The present group has been functioning continuously since 1961.

In March 1961 Col. Hoseph R. Meacham with his wife Shirley and two children arrived in Bangkok to take up a tour of duty with JUSMAG. In June they were joined by Max Berryessa, his wife Jeanette and their four sons. Max was working with USOM as an advisor to the Thai Government in education. Brother Berryessa had been authorized to hold church services before leaving Utah. They moved into the same compound as the Meachams on Soi Raja Dru. Soon a home Sunday school was organized and met in the Meacham home. In September the group was joined by Capt. Robert Liday, his wife Virginia and their son Danny. About that time the group was also increased by the wife and three children of Dr. Hansen who was doing medical research with a SEATO group. In November 1961 Kenneth L. Dyer and Joseph M. Barrett joined the group. Mr. Tom Clarkson of Wellington, New Zealand, a friend of Bro. Dyer, started attending our services and met with us faithfully until he left Bangkok over two years later.

Early in 1962 the group was visited by President and Sister Daynes of the Southern Far East Mission. A conference was held in the chapel of the Mission Hospital (7th Day Adventist). The conference was also attended by a group of servicemen from up - country, among them a sizeable group of Maoris who were serving with a New Zealand construction battalion. About this time the church group was increased by a Maori girl who was working at SEATO headquarters and Sister Angie Judd, a sister of Virginia Liday. (Details of the visit of President Daynes should be available in the Mission Historical Records, also, an account with pictures appeared in the Church News, Desert News). At the conference Joseph Barrett was sustained as an assistant to Bro. Berryessa and Col. Meacham was sustained as group secretary.

The group continued to hold Sunday school with about the same number until the Meachams left in 1963. The services were then transferred to the Berryessa home. Again the group was increased by the arrival of Brother and Sister Bob Campbell. When time came for the Berryessa family to return to the States the future of the group began to look bad. Fortunately a few days before their departure we were joined by Earl and Ethel Jones and their two daughters, Carol and Jillynne. After meeting for a few weeks in the Campbell home we moved into the living room of the Earl Jones residence, this was during the latter part of 1963, the Jones arriving in July of that year.

The group continued to grow, in November Neff and Elizabeth Tippets with their two sons, Lewis and Mark, arrived. We expanded our activities, first to include a monthly Testimony Meeting, then a

weekly Sacrament Meeting which followed our Sunday school. Brother Tippets was the first LDS member of the USBR to arrive. Many LDS people were scheduled to arrive later to work on the Pamong project, a unit of the Lower Mekong River Basin project. Brother Joseph Barrett was set apart as group leader with Earl Jones as assistant.

Glen Wilcox arrived the following spring, May 27, 1964, his wife, June, and children, Nadine, Gary, Lynn and Laurie, arriving the following July. The presidency was strengthened by the calling of Brother Glen Wilcox. A Sunday school was organized with Oral Preece as Superintendent, Dick Nanto, a serviceman, and Gary Wilcox were chosen as assistants. Ethel Jones served as the secretary, Charles Petersen, another serviceman, took over teaching the adult class and Elizabeth Tippets taught the younger group. Brother Nanto and Peterson were both returned missionaries and added much to the group, both being very capable and faithful in their callings.

The following August Sterling Merrill, his wife Laurel and their three daughters, Lee, and Rebecca, arrived. Brother Merrill was a Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army.

With the increased number of LDS people coming in we found a great need to organize an MIA. This was done in September 1964 under the leadership of brother Neff H. Tippets. Ethel as activity counselor. Nadine Wilcox was the chorister. To begin with our MIA meetings were held bi-monthly in the homes of the members. Initially, the group was divided into three major instruction groups, one for the adult class, one for the senior youth and also a junior youth group.

The MIA organization provided the social activities for the group. Nadine Wilcox worked faithfully to teach us Christmas carols, and we successfully caroled at the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital, Erawan Hotel, home of Mr. Tracy Parks, Director of USOM, received us very warmly and later told us how much he enjoyed and appreciated our singing. Monthly dance instruction was undertaken and we would meet in the yards of the members homes where we all to learn the Thai national dance, the Ram-wong. Some of our Thai friends came faithfully to help us learn the dance. When our group was small we took many trips on weekends, Pattaya Beach, Monghol Orchard, Khao Yai National forest. Sometimes we stayed over on Sunday but always held our services, taking our sacrament cups along. On one trip to Pattaya we had six high priests in attendance who gave the talks for our service so we were blessed with lots of Priesthood members. We had many pot-luck dinners, especially on the American holidays and picnics and swimming parties were enjoyed by the entire group.

Earl and Joyce Johnson with their two children joined us later in the year. Brother Johnson was in charge of the Navy PX in Bangkok. Early in May 1965 the group outgrew the Jones home and meetings were transferred to a private dining room at the Ban Keo Puen Kwan restaurant on the corner of Soi 12 and Sukhumvit.

After the first of the year in 1965 Sister Nadine Wilcox received a mission call to the Chilean Mission in South America. She became our first missionary from the group to be called.

Brother Quealy, President of the Southern Far East Mission, visited us several times, coming on his crutches, because of the accident he had in Hong Kong riding on a motorcycle. Sister Quealy accompanied him on two occasions. Brother Quealy was replaced by Brother Keith Garner. In August 1965 Brother Barrett was released as group leader prior to his departure for an extended home leave. He was replaced by Glen L. Wilcox, with Earl Jones, and Earl Johnson as counselors and Sterling Merrill as clerk.

Charlotte Wierdht with her six daughters arrived on January 23, 1966 which swelled our congregation. We felt the need to organize MIA classes and conform to the regular stateside MIA program. June Wilcox and Charlotte Wierdht were sustained as class instructors. Others who came into our group during this period were Lee and Grace Ann Scanlon with their son. Brother and Sister Clarence Burnham, Brother and Sister Rulon Lewis, and Walt and Deon Curtis and daughter.

On January 21, 1966, Jim McElvee, a serviceman investigator, became the first convert to be baptized in Thailand so far as is known. He was baptized by Elder Dick Nanto. He was ordained a Priest on January 30, 1966 by Glen L. Wilcox.

The first Relief Society was organized in February 1966 with Sister Virginia Lewis as President, Charlotte Wierdht and June Wilcox as counselors and Joyce Johnson as secretary and treasurer.

The Thailand District was organized on March 27, 1966 with Sterling Merrill as president, Earl Johnson 1st counselor, John Dieterli 2nd Counselor and Fred Banks as clerk. Darrel Gallup replaced Earl Johnson as 2nd counselor in the group presidency in April 1966. Brother Sterling Merrill was also set apart the same day as Servicemen's Coordinator for Thailand.

On July 17, 1966, Gordon H. Flamer was sustained as Branch President with Darrel Gallup and James Fletcher as counselors. Darwin H. Jepsen and Lola Erma Jepsen and their son Michel arrived Sept. 3, 1966 and Brother Jepsen was sustained as Branch Clerk and Sister Jepsen as YWMIA President.

Sister Nangnoi Thitapoora was baptized on September 11, 1966, the first Thai convert to the church. The meeting place was again changed, this time to the Grand Hotel.

On Nov 2, 1966, Thailand was formally dedicated for the preaching of the Gospel, by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, and Elder Marion D. Hanks of the First Council of Seventies. Sister Hinckley, Sister Hanks and Brother and Sister Garner were in attendance at the ceremony in Lumpini Park, Bangkok. A building fund was started immediately and land was sought for a chapel.

In December 1966, Articles of Corporation were signed by Earl Johnson, Gordon H. Flammer, Darrel Gallup, Darwin H. Jepsen, James Fletcher and Glen Wilcox, commencing the long drawn out process of becoming a recognized church foundation in Thailand. Brother Flamer was appointed president of the foundation.

On March 3, 1967, first Gold and Green Ball in Thailand was held at the Grand Hotel. Over ninety enjoyed the dinner and dancing.

Brother Darrel Jones was released from the District Presidency to serve in the Branch Presidency.

The golfer, Billy Casper and his wife Shirley visited MIA on March 7, 1967 and spoke during the service.

An Aaronic Priesthood banquet was held on Saturday, May 20, 1967, at the Park Hotel.

The Bangkok Branch Presidency was reorganized July 16, 1967 with Hollis Hunt, President, Darrel Jones, 1st counselor, James Fletcher, 2nd counselor and Darwin H. Jepsen as special assistant. Kim Smith and Gerald Springer were made clerks. On July 22, 1967 a Pioneer Day celebration was held at Lumpini Park in Bangkok with over 150 in attendance.

The Church Corporation was recognized officially by the Thai government on <date missing>. Mr. John Suanat Rochonarat, a friend of President Earl Johnson, and a devout Catholic, was of tremendous service in getting the church recognized. Through his influence he was able to change a decision by the Police Department to disapprove the application for incorporation, in addition to constant help throughout the process.

On Feb. 1, 1969, President Hollis Hunt, Darwin H. Jepsen and Harold Ward of the Branch Presidency were released. Sidney W. Ross was released from the District Presidency and sustained as Branch President with Ronald Cundick and Harold Ward as counselors.

THAI BRANCH

The Thai group was formally organized on June 9, 1968 with Elder Alan Hess as group leader and Elder Carl Hansen as 1st counselor and Elder Peter Basker as clerk. Elder Winegar was Sunday school superintendant. On June 16, 1968 two recent Thai converts, Brother Boonpluk Glaupin and Brother Prasong were ordained priests and sustained as 1st and 2nd counselors respectively. In the Sunday school superintendancy Sister Rabiab Glaupin, Brother Boonpluk's wife, was Sunday school secretary.