

Native Thais begin missionary service in Thailand after receiving MTC training — a first in their country

By Sister Annette Hardy

Thailand public affairs missionary

Published: Thursday, Oct. 15, 2009

BANGKOK, THAILAND



Eight Thai Missionaries are the first from Thailand to attend an MTC (in Manila, Philippines). They are, back row from left, Charit Kitsawat, mission president's wife Sister Janis J. Smith, Thailand Bangkok Mission President Michael S. Smith, Theerapong Pukpumin, Chaiyawat Yothinboonak; front row from left, Phoom Pholdee, Urisa Polngam, Natcha Nakowong, Wanlapa Kaewka, Phanuphong Kadiya.

Many native Thais have served as missionaries in Thailand and in other countries over the years, but a new group of elders and sisters is the largest to actually be called to serve at the same time in their own country.

That is not the only first. These eight Mormon missionaries are the first to have the opportunity to attend a missionary training center. They flew to the Philippines on Friday, Sept. 4, to attend the Manila Missionary Training Center. In the past, native Thai missionaries were assimilated into the mission without special training in an MTC if their call was to the Thailand Bangkok Mission.

The latest group, however, received "Teach My Gospel" training under the direction of Sister Wisuchalak Khanakham for 19 days in the Manila MTC. The MTC experience was recognized as a momentous and significant milestone for Thailand. After arriving in Bangkok from Manila, under the leadership of Thailand Bangkok Mission President Michael S. Smith, they attended a "moves" meeting on Thursday, Oct. 1, and learned with anticipation their exact assignments and met their new companions for the first time. Each of the new missionaries shared a few words about themselves and their commitment to the Church.

President Smith emphasized three important points: 1. Stay faithful to your calling. 2. Love your companion and work with the spirit of unity. 3. Recognize and follow the Spirit, praying always and searching the scriptures.

Five of the eight Thai missionaries are elders and three are sisters. They are Elder Phoom Pholdee from Lamping, Elder Chaiyawat Yothinboonak from Bang Bua Thong, Elder Theerapong Pukpumin from Nongkhai, Elder Phnuphong Nadiya from Chiang Mai, Elder Charit Kitsawat from Bangae, Sister Natcha Nakhong from Rungsit, Sister Wanlapa Kaewka from Sakonnakhon and Sister Phanuphong Kadiya from Ubon.

Elder Kitsawat stated, "I was born as the prophet Nephi with parents who also love me so much. I will do the best I can because I know that I am like one of the sons of Helaman's Army."

Sister Kaewka emphasized, "The Book of Mormon changed my life. I know that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind. I know the Holy Ghost is always beside me and leads me. I am grateful to be a missionary. It gives me a chance to serve the Lord. I intend to work and dedicate myself to the Lord's work and will do this with all my might."

Elder Yothinboonak remembers how persistent the missionaries who taught him were, trying to contact him again and again. Nevertheless, he confirms that it was not persistence on their part that led him to become a member, but it was through the converting power of the Spirit that he recognized the importance of the message. "It made me see the purpose of life," he said.

When the eight Thai missionaries arrived in their mission, they were joined by other new missionaries from the Provo, Utah, MTC. Also, last goodbyes and recognition were given to departing missionaries who were finishing their missions with honor.