

# Spirit of voluntarism stands out

## Thailand social workers see Church headquarters

By Julie Dockstader Heaps

Church News staff writer

Published: Saturday, May 22, 2004

The spirit of voluntarism stood out among principles of Church welfare and humanitarian efforts, said a group of social workers from Thailand visiting Salt Lake City.



Anne C. Pingree and Kathleen H. Hughes of the Relief Society general presidency speak with Thailand social workers, escorted by Cynthia Hart in Relief Society Building.

Photoa by Jeffrey D. Allred

"The reason we came here is because we think that our work as social workers is similar to your work here," Sauwalak Teparagul, a social work specialist, said during a visit to the Relief Society Building on May 13. Expressing her interest in what the Church has done with its welfare program, Mrs. Teparagul said she recognized great lessons in what she saw as the Church's "new techniques for voluntarism."

Mrs. Teparagul was among eight representatives from the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration who visited Utah from May 7-May 15 on a grant from an anonymous source. They visited and toured state

agencies and shelters and Church sites, including Welfare Square and Church Humanitarian Services, as well as BYU. During their visit to the Relief Society Building, they were greeted by Sisters Anne C. Pingree and Kathleen H. Hughes, counselors in the Relief Society general presidency. Relief Society General President Bonnie D. Parkin was out of town.

The Thai social workers, who seemed impressed with the role of women in Church leadership positions, also included Sukritta Suecharoen, assistant director of the Klongsan District Office; Runganda Phongtarakulpanit, a social worker; Patchara Kerdphol, director of the Social Work Division; Anusara Chuensuang, a social worker with the Din Daeng Senior Social Welfare Service Center; Pannee Theeraraktrakul, chief of the Welfare and Social Work Sub-division; and Arnond Thavisin, personal secretary to and son of Khun Ying Nathanon Thavisin, Permanent Secretary of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

Khun Ying Thavisin (Khun Ying being an aristocratic title) was present during the early part of the Utah visit, but had to return to Thailand on an emergency. Her representatives continued on the tours under her direction.

The social workers have supervision of some 50 districts of 10 million people in Bangkok alone and are seeking to implement shelters for the homeless and abused women and children similar to what they saw in Utah, as well as welfare programs similar to the Church's program.

"This is a very great work you have done (for) your people," Mrs. Teparagul told the *Church News*. This work and the spirit of voluntarism, she added, would be a great help in her own country, where they face problems typical of any metropolitan area of the world.

"We really appreciate your organization," Mrs. Phongtarakulpanit said, saying that volunteers at Church welfare sites "work by heart."

She added that Salt Lake City "is like a city of God."

These Thai women are "like women everywhere," Sister Pingree said. "They want to better the community and the lives of the people in their country. We've shared our hearts and our feelings about reaching out to bless the lives of those who need us."

"These women have worked very hard," Sister Hughes said of the group's weeklong visit. "They've asked good questions and listened intently. They're making a difference in their country."