

CELEBRATING ETHNIC THAI LEADERS

Following years of ministry among the Ethnic Thai we celebrate the news that three emerging faith communities are now being led by local believers! Cross-cultural worker Petina explains how this has come about and introduces us to some of the leaders.

The Global Interaction team is a mixed lot here in rural Northern Thailand. We have Luke and Belle and their son Salem (2), 'Mum and Dad' of the team Maxine and Richard and myself. We are looking forward to Glenn and Liz and their boys Sebastian (6), Levi (4) and Oliver (1) joining us next year. We come from a range of backgrounds and have different skills and giftings, but what we have in common is our love for Jesus and a desire to see God's Kingdom expand in Northern Thailand. We love seeing God move in the lives of the people here.

We work in a province called Nan, which, in Thai, means 'very far'. For a while it seemed like the Kingdom of God was very far from this part of the world. It has been 13 years since the first Global Interaction workers Jan and Larry, Muana and Villi and John and Vicki came to the area. It was 10 years before Larry and Jan, Anna and Dema and Carolyn gathered with the first faith community in Ban Luang.

It has been a slow, and at times, difficult process. We all have needed to learn the culture and language, build relationships, share our faith, journey with those who don't yet know Jesus, encourage new believers to share their faith with their family and friends and empower them to develop their own distinctive ways of following Jesus.

Over the years local leaders have emerged within the three communities and we have been supporting and training them.

Mae Raan is a passionate and committed leader who has a good knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures.

Mae Phun is faithful to God and the group, her teaching style is simple and honest.

Prakij is the oldest and is therefore well respected.

Nan Tong used to be a monk and has a deep thirst for the Bible. He is the main leader to perform rituals and ceremonies.

Oh is a young guy who originally came along to the gathering to replace his mum, who couldn't attend for one week. He continued coming and is now a leader!

Tong is a gifted organiser.

Mae Kwee and her husband **Pour Neuk** host one of the groups in their home each week.

Long enjoys teaching the Bible.

Mae An is an enthusiastic host and is very willing to share her story.

The leaders now manage the weekly faith community gatherings and teach the Bible. It is a big commitment for people to prioritise meeting regularly, as this can sometimes interrupt the time-consuming work of subsistence farming.

It will be a while before the Global Interaction team moves out of the area completely, as the believers face ridicule for their faith and need encouragement to stand boldly amidst this.

Our team mates Dema and Carolyn and their children Grace (12) and Daniel (9) moved from our rural area to the city of Chiang Rai in order to be closer to a school. They have taken with them experience, knowledge and a deep desire to share Jesus with people to a new community. They will start the journey afresh of building relationships, joining in community life and earning trust and respect. We pray that as they share Jesus in this new location, a new community of faith will be established. We are looking for new members to join them in this exciting ministry.

Life and ministry has not always been easy here and despite mission activity in the country for over one hundred years, very few Ethnic Thai people have had an opportunity to hear the message of Jesus in a way that they can understand. The Global Interaction team is rejoicing that after 13 years in this place, we are seeing fruit from all the seeds that have been planted. The harvest is well and truly ripe and it is so wonderful to see how God is extending His Kingdom in this place. We are privileged to be able to be a small part of His work here.



Leadership Training for Ethnic Thai faith community leaders. Photo taken by Petina. (Above)

Carolyn spending time with Ethnic Thai friends. Photo taken by Dema. (Top right)



Introducing Leader Mae Phan

When our team met Mae Phan, she was the breadwinner of her family and primary carer for her chronically ill husband and aged father. She has two sons, one married and the other in high school - both incapable of supporting their parents financially. In the time we have known Mae Phan, her husband and father have both passed away. She now lives on her own, a rare practice in community-oriented Thai culture.

Her husband was one of the first followers of Jesus in their village. Initially Mae Phan did not want to get involved, but was soon moved by the kindness and love of Global Interaction workers as they cared for her husband while she worked in the city during the week. As her husband could not read, she helped him learn the Bible stories and she began to attend the faith community meetings and finally opened her heart to receive the greatest gift of all.

Today Mae Phan is one of the key leaders in her faith community. She often talks about responding to fear, stress and sadness by praying and reading her Thai Bible. She teaches the Word every second week and ministers to her neighbours who are sick. Mae Phan experiences ridicule for her new faith, including at her husband's funeral as she chose to have a memorial service in the name of Jesus. However, transformation is evident as she chooses to love those who curse her. As a widow, she could be quite lonely but being part of a faith community means she belongs to a bigger family journeying towards oneness in Christ.

IN THEIR EYES

Larry and Jan Martin

Cross-cultural workers 1986 – 2014

“When we moved into the area we didn't know anyone. We looked for ways to be involved in the community and it wasn't long before we were teaching English in a school and from our home and farming in the fields. We invested in making good friends and we were gentle and tactful with our faith, studying the Bible with individuals. The catalyst occurred when we were joined by three other Global Interaction families. With everyone's contacts we could start meeting as a group. Team ministry is so important. We were thrilled and thankful to God that we were able to see the start of local leadership before we returned to Australia.”

Keith Jobberns

General Director 2004 – 2012

“Some may say 13 years is a long time but I'm not surprised it has taken us that long. Look at the Mission's history with other least-reached peoples groups – it is a reality that it takes time to build genuine engagement for incarnational ministry. We had to plough new ground in these villages because there was literally no Christian presence. For those who might have heard of Christianity, their perception was that it was a Western faith. I am so proud of the workers that over many years were authentic friends and faithful witnesses. It has been worth all the investment – let's keep doing it!”