



## REACH 2007 Short-term Mission Trip - Thailand -

### How did the Thailand Mission trip come about?

In 2005, I was part of NVBC's Short-term mission (STM) team to Thailand and Vietnam. Our time with Max and Barb Smart was an important leg of that journey. At one point, the men and women separated and Max and the guys went to the Immanuel Children's Home at Chiang Doa to do some trenching and concreting. At the end of our last working day, Max reflected on what we'd achieved and he expressed his gratitude in a way that I will long remember. I think I replied with something like, "imagine what we could have achieved if we'd had more hands and more time?" Max answered that question expressively, saying that teams of guys, particularly skilled workers are an enormous blessing to his ministry. The seed of our 2007 Mission Trip was sewn there, and later watered at an NVBC breakfast when I heard some men express their hearts for ministry - but lamented that they didn't know what they could do! God has since raised up 16 hungry men who have stepped forward in faith - to serve Him, to be stretched and to grow.

### What was the purpose of the trip?

Our goal was to serve God through Max, Barb and MMM in whatever form that should take. We knew that we would perform practical tasks like plumbing, tiling, gyprocking, painting and landscaping - but importantly, we were called to be Jesus' witnesses and to express the love and character of Christ to the people we would meet (Acts 1:8). Communicating with the Thai was always going to be a challenge, but our teams found inspiration in St Francis of Assisi who said, "*Preach the gospel often..., use words when necessary*". As a leader, it was a privilege to see my burly mates embrace these words with warmth and tenderness. Our tongues may have been tied, but the hearts of these



guys required no translation.



When we weren't 'on the tools', our teams taught several classes in a 2,200 student school (through interpreters); we prayed with many young adults and children; led Sunday services, preached and facilitated kid's time activities; conducted prayer walks through soi's, baans and city streets and worshipped in song before hundreds of young people. We played with the kids, we learned and we were stretched considerably. Our days were jam packed but we always had time for fun and fellowship. We went to give, and God helped us to achieve some wonderful things including the refurbishment of the Sunshine Home at Chiang Rai and a medical clinic at the Mae Suai orphanage.., but the truth is *we received so much ourselves*. I pray

that our families, friends, work colleagues, neighbours and the Church will know and enjoy the downstream benefits of these rich personal blessings.

### Why was the trip an all-male team?

The idea of an all male team was never about 'gender'. It was about meeting the technical needs of a particular ministry. Our two teams possessed skills in structural engineering, carpentry and building, architectural drafting, electrical trades, steelwork and welding, machinery maintenance, concreting and tiling, gyprocking, painting, joinery and other trade skills that were called upon during the trip. Now that the trip is over, the obvious question is "Was the decision the right one?" From a practical / trades point of view; a men's ministry point of view and from a coordination point of view (i.e.,



accommodation, facilities etc), Yes. But there were many occasions when I *longed* to share my experiences, my thoughts and questions, my happy times and my tears with Leanda. We *all* missed our loved ones, and they us. Every ministry carries costs and this was one of them. On my down days, I reminded myself that ministry is about God and His glory – the reason that we went. I can't speak for my team mates, but I believe that the blessings of this STM trip, both here and in Thailand have **greatly** overshadowed any cost that we were asked to bear.

### What has changed you?

In my early Christian years I was uninterested in Mission, to the point of almost being oppositional. I don't know why... but God has a great sense of humour! More recently, I've felt a strong call to mission and the chance to lead our team to Thailand was a great honour. God has used STM to remove countless Christians from their comfort zones, to open their eyes and unblock their ears. Mine included! Mention mission to a Christian who has been to Africa or Chile and you are likely to see a twinkle in their eyes and hear a quickening of their voice. More than likely, God used that experience to tip their worldview upside down. I used to wonder why Missionaries that spoke at our church didn't seem to have the same effect? I'm sure that they do from time to time, but I've come to believe that there is no substitute for hands-on experience.

Western culture has anaesthetised itself to the realities of life in developing countries. We hear Missionary accounts or watch edited news reports and say, 'what a pity... those poor people', but our emotions are largely left in tact. Our lives aren't invaded... in fact, most of us will change the TV channel and think about other things in quick time. STM is an awakening experience. Mostly joyful; rarely comfortable and sometimes jarring. No amount of imagination will prepare you for the hug from a 5 year old with AIDS; the blank face of an emaciated mother struggling to breastfeed her infant; the decision to stop or walk past a begging leper, or the smile of a 3<sup>rd</sup> world Christian who has been given her first Bible. *This is the domain of the heart.*

Has STM changed me...? Definitely. The Holy Spirit has used these experiences to rattle my values and to transform my mind. I can only pray that my journey will continue.

### Describe your most treasured part of the trip?



There are so many! But if I had to choose one then it would be "the children". Each day they turned 16 Aussie blokes into blobs of jelly. On our first day at Mae Suai our team was told that some of the kids had scabies and that we would catch nits. This stopped us for a minute - but we got over it quickly. There were 450 Akha children at Mae Suai, and they climbed over us at every opportunity. You couldn't help but have fun! By the way, we didn't catch nits (although I'm not sure about Owen and Paul!)

One amazing day, God led us to a Chiang Rai Church where my eyes were drawn to a rack of books and a sign that said, "Free Bibles. Take as many as you can give away". They were new Gideons Bibles written in Thai and English. We were hoping to take 3 or 4 to Mae Suai, but the Pastor encouraged us to take 3 boxes – about 60 in total! We later learned that the Akha Training Centre had very few Thai Bibles and they were in poor condition. This was an amazing gift! When we handed them out to the senior children, their eyes lit up like beacons. I mean literally. You could see that these young Christians treasured the books like gold. Oh, how their reactions must have warmed Jesus' heart! Thank You God for allowing us to share in this joy.

As a team, we encouraged each other to think about the waves of experiences that flooded our minds – and to not just let them wash over us. Specifically, we wanted to see the Thai and Akha and Karen and Lahu and Burmese men, women and children that we drove past or met in the markets. We wanted to engage them with a smile and when we could, to fire off some arrow prayers. We challenged ourselves to *really* look and to *really* see these beautiful people as God saw them.... In doing so, it broke my heart afresh. It made me realise that my appreciation of God and His creation, my understanding of the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice, my personal reality, my troubles and my world are so small. This may sound like an awkward moment, but it was a wonderful time of learning. I treasured many such moments.



## How does a trip like this link to REACH?

Throughout the Bible, God has repeatedly called his people to *reach* the nations for Christ. This mandate is the heart of our Mountain. Short term mission provides us with an *important* opportunity to action the Great Commission, help our less fortunate neighbours and to disciple Christians within our own community.

Each letter of REACH is significant, because it represents a principle that NVBC is advocating through our own efforts and/or through the agencies and missionaries that we support.

- The R in REACH stands for Restoration: restoring the nations to Christ is our first and most important objective.
- The E stands for Education: effective schooling empowers exploited people groups, fosters independence, generates local employment and helps to raise up future leaders
- The A stands for Accommodation: advocating for the de-institutionalisation of orphan care and providing basic housing for the poor and displaced
- The C stands for Compassion: showing Jesus' love, care and kindness to the lost and broken hearted
- The H stands for Health: targeting water quality, nutrition, community development and primary health care education.



Our teams were *honoured* when God provided us with opportunities to action many of our REACH principles. What we couldn't carry out - we promoted.

## How can people find out more about this trip, or REACH?

Any one of our team members would be happy to talk with you if you want to know more about the STM trips. Team 1 members were Rob Day, Tristan Day, Chris Bratby, Dane Armstrong, Dave Burns, Matt Rosee, Craig Andrews and Steve Cawley. Team 2 members were Phil McCamley, Brad Jones, Paul Fisher, Owen McKay, Wayne Mitchell, Glenn Douglas, Russell Andersen and Gary Morley.

Phil McCamley, Phil Newman or Susie Newman can help you with further information about REACH, or you can check out the NVBC 'Vision' website. If God is stirring your heart for mission then please keep listening! Read books, do Kairos or Perspectives, talk to someone who has been - but don't tune out.

God doesn't call everyone to serve Him at the front, but the Great Commission does speak to each one of us personally. We should *all* be praying for the lost - but additionally, we can go, we can mobilise, we can send, we can equip and we can support missionaries in countless ways - but know that God wants us to be involved in one way or another. Satan will tell you that you can't do it. You're not good enough. You have nothing to offer. It's the wrong time. Not now. You're the wrong age or too busy. If our missionary forefathers had believed these lies then the church would be significantly smaller than it is today.

Please pray that God will reveal His **truth** and His **plans** for your life - then the choice is yours!

Jeremiah 1: 6-8 and 29: 11-13; Romans 10: 14,15; 2 Cor 5: 9.

Yours in Him

**Phil McCamley**  
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