

Strategic Approaches for the Buddhist World

Draft Position Paper: Buddhist Task Co-ordination

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Incorporating suggestions from
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I. Global Situation of Buddhism and the Church

We ask: What is being done? What remains to be done? How can we work together?

1. Among about 1,000 UPGS, hundreds of small Buddhist people groups are unengaged and unentered. Work among the larger groups has been in place, some for decades and even centuries, but with only comparatively meager results. While classic “core” Buddhists number about half a billion, the wider syncretistic folk Buddhist global population rises to *one and a half billion*, including many in China. Twenty-first Century Buddhism is currently growing and reviving in China and worldwide, including gaining significant influence in the West.

2. Using mostly traditional, western methods and structures, the church’s growth among Buddhists is slow, except possibly in China, under the house church movements. In some lands open evangelism and traditional church planting is proscribed.

3. Existing churches of each Buddhist people group in most lands, including majority Buddhist ones, is *less than 2%* of the particular Buddhist people group. Korea is an exception, where still less than 28% are nominal Christians and currently considerable numbers of Christians are reentering Buddhism there.

4. Generally Southeast, East and North Asia depend on western workers, except in China. While national church workers in most Buddhist lands are growing, they are also largely tied to outsider western patterns, rather than insider, indigenous and contextual ones, and so are seen by the majority of Buddhists as foreign. Overall local church workers are not making significant inroads into their Buddhist Societies. The best outreach is occurring through local native adult lay witnesses.

5. Todd Johnson’s research finds that *86% of Buddhists do not personally know a Christian*. So a stronger movement of the laity in witness is urgently needed. Current approaches are not multiplying effective, relational outreach fast enough to keep pace with population growth.

6. Among Tibetan Buddhists, as one leader reports, “a diverse work force with nearly all foreigners, is reaching out almost solely by targeting individuals (not so much families and communities).” This could also be said of mission work among the majority of other

Buddhists in Asia. A greater focus on affecting whole families and social networks is a priority for future strategy.

II. Networking Needs: SEANET Perspective

For thirteen years SEANET has been a networking platform for the majority of Buddhist peoples. For even longer, CAF (Central Asia Fellowship) has successfully networked exclusively for the Tibetan Buddhists.

The SEANET network certainly is a good place to start—in terms of seeking to find relevant strategies for reaching the broader Buddhist world, and by this, we mean:

1. A Broad Forum: Our annual meeting in Chiang Mai, which brings together some of the best, brightest minds and extensive experience in working with a wide range of Buddhists, as well as representatives of the churches in about a dozen or more Asian nations. More representation from the Mahayana world would increase the coverage.

2. Research and Resources: Our growing library of current resources is primarily on better ways of reaching, touching, praying for and communicating effectively with Buddhists about the Gospel. Every year we publish a solid text on emerging missiology on reaching the Buddhist world—which is an edited result of a collection of about ten scholarly papers presented at each annual ‘academic forum,’ held on the first two days of our network meeting. Each year we now have a dominant theme which makes this library a growing set of thematic texts on current issues in reaching Buddhists.

3. Synergistic Cooperation: A degree of synergy with various key movements out there, like the global ‘house-church movement’ or ‘church-planting movements’ of which some in our leadership have certainly been a part in recent years. The annual meetings have had some of the best teacher/trainers with us in this regard as well. We also have interest in ‘insider movements’ and other means of ‘allowing Christ to be born’ in these cultures, many of which have virtually no ‘church’ to speak of, and if they do, it is often only an extractionist model, which leaves the bulk of the cultures untouched by Christ. We’ve also had good connections with global and regional-level researchers—to better understand the global demographics and other ‘people movements’ in today’s rapidly changing world.

4. Local Ownership: We are seeking increased ownership of ‘reaching Buddhists’ in the main countries which have them, like Thailand and Japan (and many others). As a result there are on-the-ground practitioners of evangelism, church planting, prayer and other forms of ‘nation-discipling’ throughout the region. These workers come to our annual meetings and are increasingly accountable to the network for any goals and progress they are able to make in their contexts. These are the local Country Core Teams.

5. Balanced Strategy Teams: A practical priority is to develop balanced strategy teams in each Buddhist nation. Team members use gifts and expertise to identify and enter each people group, and to initiate strategies for multiplying movements in cooperation with

local churches and mission groups. The goal is to have functioning Core Teams of these facilitators and implementers in each country where significant Buddhist populations are located. There is still a long way to go in mobilizing local prayer, training, strategy implementation and evaluative analysis. But this has started already in some nations.

III. Suggested Strategy

On the broader horizon and a wider scale, strategic approaches for accomplishing the task need to be researched, refined, defined and applied with definite real experiments.

1. Our Primary Plan: Seanet attendees have already started to form strategic plans to reach each of their respective Buddhist-majority nations. A group was initiated to reach Western Buddhists. If we can expand our network, we may be able to coordinate the groups so that each tries to reach the top 25 Buddhist-majority peoples in the world (as counted in Todd Johnson's updated list). Note particularly that our strategic plans are done mainly by INSIDERS /nationals. Why? Because we believe that the most strategic way to reach Buddhists is "*insider movements*."

2. Existing National Plans: In some Buddhist-majority lands, national plans for reaching their peoples are already in place. In such cases SEANET can help to develop local expressions that serve those goals by encouraging the existing church to

- a). Become more context-sensitive in the way they share the message and construct church life
- b). Legitimize and encourage more highly contextualized outreach attempts or experiments in insider movements alongside their traditional work
- c). Influence the training curriculums to include things relating to insider movements, contextualization, and more rapidly expanding church movements.

3. Assisting Existing Church Movements: Insider Movements have great potential to multiply rapidly by developing modes of the Christian faith that are not bound by traditional western forms already present. This needs to be taught to the current churches. SEANET might also encourage existing church movements to face the issues of their own contexts, and to train leaders for more highly contextualized styles of multiplication, as well as for the traditional modes. This requires existing churches to make significant changes

- a). Freeing and training lay persons for magnified service
- b). Reducing the power and control of the professional clergy
- c). Recognizing and rejecting western influence to accommodate local outsiders. .

4. Our Mission Strategy: Set up Christ-centered *transformational development centers* (TDCs where God's shalom/kingdom prevails) through "*insider movements*" (IM) in the world. IM consists of three methods: church multiplication movements (CMM), contextualized self-theologizing, and community development/transformation. We simply need to follow Jesus' missionary-sending method in Luke 10:1-20, and multiply His disciples through empowering a local "person of peace" in each community to do it! This is God's simple master-plan for all peoples to receive His good news most

effectively - and the soonest!

5. Bridging Different Forms: In developing local expressions of SEANET we also want to embrace what God is doing through the whole church in each country. Throughout history people movements into the church have occurred. Modern Church Planting Movements are relatively young phenomena that are endeavoring to describe not prescribe what God is doing. Further research is needed in areas of social structure, sociability in the local settings and so on, in order to discern if the results seen in one social setting are reproducible in dissimilar settings. One unknown element is how such movements will eventually relate to the existing church. For this reason local SEANET expressions could act as bridges between these two modes of faith, helping bring strengths to both sides. This can be done by fostering conversations between key players, sponsoring training and so on.

IV. Implementing Practice and Experiments

See Alex Smith's Paper attached "Fruitful Principles and Practices for Working with Asian Buddhists"

See Paul De Neui Paper attached "From Once Upon a Time to Daily Bread"

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