

Memo from Paul and Sarah in Thailand, April 22, 2008

Dear Friends,

There have been several of you who have specifically requested more frequented updates or shown more interest in our ministries here in Thailand. We thank you for your strong interest, and will try harder to keep you updated more often. I will also let everyone know in our regular bimonthly newsletter, in case they want to receive more frequent email updates.

First, the big news is that we have finally purchased a car. We did not spend all the money we received for our vehicle purchase fund, and may use the remaining money to buy another car or a motorcycle in the future. Inflation is a factor, but not as much as the falling dollar. It seems that despite our consistent income from USA, our purchase power has dropped by about 30% over the past two and a half years. Thanks, NCPC, for the increased financial support for this year, and for NSC and Pilgrim EM, for initiating a relationship of financial partnership.

More about the car: We bought a used car from a Thai friend, Lon, for about \$4,500. It's an old 3 series bmw, and a much better car than what we could get for the same price among Toyotas that we were originally looking for. Maintenance is supposed to be expensive, but Lon will help me not to get ripped off as a foreigner by introducing me to his reliable mechanic. It was a tough decision, and something I put off for a long time, because the image of a missionary driving a bmw doesn't look good; but, we decided that buying a good car for the money was better than getting a less reliable car for the same amount, just because of what other people might think.

What other people think actually makes a big difference for missionaries who rely on other their support; you might say it's even an obligation. And we feel pressured to present our ministries in a way that appeals to our supporters back home. That is, we must show the people what we've accomplished, and how we are pioneering or being in charge of exciting ministry institutions. But we try to maintain our position as foreigners who are here to help the Thai church, not to take over. It's a fine line, and something that goes against our human instinct as well as the advice of many senior missionaries in our agency.

For instance, I'm playing a supportive role at Chonburi Center, teaching in the seminary and helping to network with supporters; I also play a supporting role in Newsong Bangkok, teaching once in a while and supporting the leaders personally. I help Santosh lead Bible studies on Thursdays to a group that's not a church or even a foundation; we call ourselves, formerly OLC, the language school under SDRF which used to support the group. Sarah also plans to join the Bible study teaching team soon. We'll need a place to continue meeting, and it'll be a chance for us to test our strategy-- to help and even contribute funds without taking over. We do not wish to 'own' any ministry, because at the end of our careers, it'll be humanly impossible to find a successor; whereas, if the Thais own it from the beginning, there would be no problem of sustainability.

Pray for us, as we continue to feel bombarded by the many ministry needs around us, while our own needs as a family with little children to not diminish. We thank you for your support, and for your strong interest in what God's doing in our lives.

Warmly,
Paul and Sarah