

Foursquare Church Reports Progress for Christ in Southeast Asia

When George Butron was 19, he had no idea that God was calling him to be a missionary to the nations. He just wanted to be a farmer.

But after completing his agriculture degree, George enrolled at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Okla., where he met his wife, Joyce, who was working on a degree in education to become a teacher in the mission field. God used Joyce and others to impress on Butron an urgency to take God's Word to the nations.

"As it turns out, I am a farmer after all," he declares. "God has enabled me to plant and minister the seed of His Word all over the world."

George and Joyce, married for 30 years, have four sons, two of whom live with them in Singapore. The couple has served in various roles with Foursquare around the world. Since 2003, George Butron has served as area missionary to Southeast Asia. In July 2009, he took on the additional role of senior pastor of Community of Praise Baptist Church. This Spirit-filled congregation is impacting Singapore and touching nations in Asia with local and international ministries.

The Butrons know that God has called them to take His Word to nations and peoples who have not had the same access to the gospel that is common in Western nations. They say they are called to places where cultural, linguistic, political or spiritual barriers prevent people from hearing the Good News and seeing the power of God demonstrated.

"Not only do we feel like God has called us to the nations,

particularly nations in Asia,” George Butron tells , “but we also love the diversity of Asian cultures, peoples, foods and lifestyles.”

Foursquare in Southeast Asia

Butron describes Southeast Asia as a dynamic and rapidly changing region of the world. Ten countries make up Foursquare’s Southeast Asia region: Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar (aka Burma), Cambodia, Philippines, Guam (a U.S. territory), Laos and Brunei. These 10 countries represent a total population of 350 million people and are served by just over 5,600 Foursquare churches. Most of the churches are in Cambodia (3,365) and the Philippines (1,800).

The spiritual statistics among the nations of Southeast Asia reflect significant growth and potential. Throughout the region in 2010 there were a total of 207,000 decisions made for Christ; 41,600 water baptisms; and 26,400 Holy Spirit baptisms.

The Philippines is the only stage-four nation in the denomination’s Four-Stage Development Model. Stage four is the “send/extending” stage, meaning they have developed responsible, reproducing, missionary-sending churches that send missionaries to other countries.

Cambodia is a stage-three nation. Stage three is the “expand/multiplying” stage, during which congregations are reproducing other congregations.

Myanmar and Malaysia are between stages two and three. Stage two is the “nurture/strengthening” stage, the goal of which is to make responsible, reproducing leaders. Thailand, Singapore and Guam are stage-two nations.

Vietnam is between stages one and two. Stage one is the “initiate/evangelizing” stage. Laos and Brunei are stage-one nations.

Ministry Challenges

The challenges to spreading the gospel in Southeast Asia are numerous. Butron explains that many of the nations are politically unstable with corrupt government systems that foster persecution, widespread poverty, terrorism, and drug and human trafficking. Also, Christians face challenges presented by the predominant influence of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

One of the biggest challenges to churches is the fact that the highest percentage of the Asian population is under 30 years old.

“The clash of youth culture, media and technology with traditional values is impacting both urban and rural areas,” Butron explains. “Raising and training up a new generation of Christian leaders becomes challenging when so many talented young leaders emigrate to other countries and do not always return. Countries in the regions struggle with the lack of strong successors to carry on the work of their churches and ministries.”

But he notes that these instabilities are creating more needs and, therefore, more opportunities for the gospel. In spite of religious extremism and persecution, and in the face of so many obstacles, the church is growing. Christianity is becoming a credible and powerful alternative for many, especially younger-generation Asians who are looking for answers beyond materialism, worldly wisdom and philosophy, and traditions.

“Churches and Christians that care for orphans and widows, help the poor and provide disaster relief are gaining credibility by meeting human need,” Butron affirms. “This brings people to Christ and opens the way for new churches to start.”

Open Doors

Doors of opportunity are being opened, even in smaller countries such as Laos and Brunei, and new partnerships between nations are being developed.

“We are finding ways of helping the fruitfulness of countries like Cambodia and the Philippines spill over into the other countries, as well, and there are plenty of places for believers from the West to join in partnership,” Butron notes.

He describes how the Philippines is sending missionaries to other nations and helping to train leaders from other Asian nations through their Bible schools. New approaches to ministry, such as urban church-planting projects, are also becoming new models for innovative ways to impact urban areas.

One of the most fruitful church-planting movements in the world, Butron notes, is happening in Cambodia. The innovative approaches and ministry principles they follow are an example for other Asian leaders and churches.

“The harvest is ripe, and workers are needed now,” he asserts. “God is pouring out the Holy Spirit and bringing genuine transformation to nations in Asia.”

The area missionary sees a strong movement of God happening as church-planting movements are doing more than establishing a few remnant Christians in countries that traditionally follow other religions. The pastors and leaders in Southeast Asia believe that a significant move of God is stirring, and that the region is experiencing a great kingdom “invasion and innovation.”

Points of Celebration and Prayer

There are several points of celebration to be thankful for throughout the Southeast Asia region. For example, Cambodia continues to see one of the most significant church-planting movements in the world, with transformational impact taking place in spite of significant challenges.

Vietnam has greater religious freedom, and the Foursquare work is moving toward registration and recognition by the Vietnamese government. The Foursquare Church in Malaysia has a vision and strategy to plant 300 house churches by 2020.

The Foursquare work in the Philippines continues to grow and mature, with diverse urban ministries in Manila and other key cities, effective leadership training programs, Bible colleges, and a strong missions vision and sending focus.

How can those of us in the U.S. pray for Southeast Asia? Butron mentions praying for the development of effective leadership training programs to be developed in Singapore, Guam, Thailand and Malaysia, and for national boards to be strengthened in every country with skilled leaders and visionaries.

He also asks for prayer for Christians who experience persecution, which is still very much a threat in Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos. Laos is politically resistant to Christianity.

Prayer is also requested for a change in the political climate of the countries where Islamic militancy, Buddhism and poverty challenge the growth of the Christian church. Pray for protection, provision and the health of workers in the harvest.

Finally, Butron asks that we pray for the nation of Myanmar, which experienced an earthquake a few days after the Japan quake. Some towns and villages in the eastern part of the country (Shan State) were leveled. Several Foursquare churches were damaged beyond repair and will have to be rebuilt. Believers in this nation have faced exceptional challenges and hardship, but Butron reports that God is doing a great work there.

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