

Bangkok: Week for Christian Unity

BANGKOK (AsiaNews) - "Five years ago we had almost 200 participants, and today there are more than a thousand." Joseph Chusak Sirisut, bishop of Nakhon Ratchasima and president of the Catholic commission for Christian unity, paints this picture of the success in Thailand of the week dedicated to ecumenical dialogue.

By Weena Kowitwanij

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Dialogue among the different Christian confessions is growing, and is being developed through common efforts on behalf of young people, the poor, and the sick.

In the Asian country, with an overwhelming Buddhist majority, Christians represent only 1.1% of the 63 million inhabitants. They are Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist. At the opening ceremony for the Week for Christian unity, held on January 18 in the Catholic Church of St. Louis, representatives and faithful of all five confessions recognized by the department for religious affairs participated. In his remarks, Bishop Sirisut asked them: "Why should we who are named Christian be unable to cooperate with the blessing of God? Prayer to the same God is the major objective of this activity. Other benefits arise from the closer friendship gained from mutual cooperation through different related organizations."

Reverend Virat Koydul, a representative of the Church of Christ, recalled that the week for Christian unity has been held in Thailand for more than 44 years, when Catholics and Protestants began to celebrate it in the country. "Today the fruit of the prayer has been expanded, testified by the three more denominations to join in the major cities such as Cheingmai and Bangkok."

According to the representative of the Protestants, the development of the initiative also indicates the path open to Christians for contributing to the good of society: "If we could build up authentic harmony among us, in the future we may be able to have unity with people of different religious faith, which will lead to true peace in society."

The theme chosen for the 101st edition of the Week throughout the world is "That they may become one in your hand," taken from the book of the prophet Ezekiel. This theme was referred to by the representatives of the Catholic and Protestant communities, in pointing out the joint initiatives already underway, and those hoped for the future.

Bishop Sirisut recalled in this regard the effort of the archbishop of Bangkok, Cardinal Michael Michai Kitbunchu, for the modification of the statute on religious confessions in the country. The bishop then cited the activity of the Christian Youth Camps, which for six years have been organized by Catholics and Protestants working together, as an example of the dialogue among the different confessions.

Reverend Koydul focused on common efforts to help the poor and sick, and recalled that the organizers have decided to use the occasion of the week of prayer in order to collect funds on behalf of HIV patients.

http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=31729&wf=rsscol