

Pioneer church planting in Isaan

OMF Isaan 2011-2016

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Marten Visser

Executive summary

Isaan is the Northeast of Thailand. It has a population of over 21 million people, of which 99% are Buddhists. 5,5 million people live in districts without a church, and 17 million live in subdistricts without a church. OMF-International started ministry in Isaan in 2007. We, the OMF Isaan team, are planting churches in the unreached (sub)districts of Isaan since 2007.

We look for bridges into unreached communities. We start house groups, teaching the Bible chronologically. We are willing to travel to start new groups. We build up national leadership and leave new churches in their care as soon as possible. We minister in a for the Isaan believers reproducible way so that a church planting movement may occur.

We are looking for team leaders who can open up new provinces of Isaan for ministry. We are looking for church planters to reach the unreached districts of Isaan. We are looking for student workers. We are looking for missionaries in supporting roles for project management, church leadership development, children's ministry, and other specialized ministries.

People to help reach Isaan with the Gospel are our main need. We also have various evangelistic projects that need funding.

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1. Context

1.1. Isaan

Isaan is the Northeast of Thailand, with about 22 million people. The every day language for most people is Isaan, except for over 1 million Khmer. Isaan is closely related to Thai. The educational, official, and media language is Thai. The younger generation is fluent in Thai.

Isaan is poorer than Central Thailand, because it consists of a plateau that holds less water than the fertile plains of especially Central Thailand, and because it used to have limited connections to the rest of the world. The inhabitants of Isaan are closely related to the Lao people in Laos, and speak basically the same language. The Isaan have a strong regional identity within Thailand, that they hold on to even after moving to other parts of the country.

Many of the Isaan are migrant workers. Some are seasonal workers and come back for planting and harvesting the rice. Others are permanent migrants working in Bangkok and other industrial areas. Many Isaan work for stints as labourers overseas in e.g. Taiwan, Singapore, and Israel. Tens of thousands of Isaan women have married foreigners and are living abroad.

Within Thailand, the Isaan are noted for eating everything. Herbs and leaves from around the house provide the needed vegetables, and e.g. beetles, lizards, and red ant's eggs are common parts of Isaan dishes.

About 90% of all people in Isaan are living in villages. Around each village paddy fields can be found. Planting rice is an important part of Isaan culture, and it is a matter of pride for the Isaan to eat rice from their own land. Other important cash crops are casave, sugar cane, and eucalyptus trees.

There are four cities with over 100,000 people in Isaan: Nakhorn Ratchasima, the largest city and closest to Bangkok; Khon Kaen, most central and having the most educational opportunities in Isaan; Udon Thani in the North and Ubon Ratchathani in the southeast of Isaan.

The Isaan are staunchly Buddhist. Life in the village centers around the Buddhist temple. Many women wait in front of their house every morning to offer food to the monks. Village festivals always take place in the temple grounds. Any ceremony is incomplete without the presence of some monks. At the same time, animist practices are widespread and are not seen as conflicting with the Buddhist religion.

1.2. Isaan churches

Isaan has 35,000 Protestant Christians in 765 churches. This means that the average church has 45 members, including children. This means that many churches, especially the rural ones, face leadership challenges. Over half of them do not have a resident pastor, but are dependent on lay leaders.

0.16% of the population is Protestant. The number of Roman Catholics is slightly higher, but mainly made up by ethnic minorities (Chinese, Laotian and Vietnamese).

The largest denomination in Isaan is the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), with 4500 members in 96 churches. Another 2500 in 36 churches belong to the 13th district of the Church of Christ in Thailand, which is a split-off from the CMA. The CMA was the first mission to start work in

Isaan in 1926. Until today many of the Isaan church leaders of all denominations have their roots in CMA churches.

Other larger denominations in Isaan are the Evangelical Covenant Church, which has 2500 members in 53 churches and the most contextualized ministry of all denominations; three charismatic denominations with 5,000 members and 79 churches between them; the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Thailand with 1,000 members in 9 churches; and Hope of God, a neo-pentecostal indigenous Thai denomination that is aggressively evangelizing all over Thailand. This denomination claims over 5,000 members in 168 churches, but their real numbers are somewhat lower. Hope of God broke up into various factions in the last two years, but the situation is not clear enough yet to report on their respective size.

Even though they are small, the churches in Isaan display a healthy growth rate of about 4% per year (both in number of members and number of churches). In an average church about two thirds of the members are first generation Christians. Almost half of all churches have been planted in the last ten years. Though the church forms a tiny minority in an overwhelmingly Buddhist environment, this means that in most churches it happens regularly that Buddhists come to the Lord.

1.3. Other missions in Isaan

Of the over 1000 registered missionaries serving in Thailand, about 80 are ministering among the 33% of the population living in Isaan. Close to half of these work among students in the universities of Khon Kaen. Another 20 serve among tiny ethnic minorities. This leaves a total of about 30 missionaries for the other 20 million people in Isaan. Most of them belong to OMF, IMB, CMA, and a Mennonite mission.

1.4. Unchurched areas in Isaan

The most recent available statistics on the church in Isaan are from 2009. 5,5 million people live in 133 districts (of a total of 322 districts in Isaan) without a single Protestant church. This does not include the numbers of the Hope Churches, a neo-pentecostal denomination that is known to report as churches fleeing groups without baptized members. If their churches are included, the numbers become 90 districts with 3,5 million people. 7 million people live in districts with a church, but with less than 0.1% of the population being Christian. These two groups together comprise well over half of the population of Isaan.

This speaks to the enormous spiritual need in Isaan. At the same time, it is a sign of the progress of the Gospel proclamation in Isaan that over two thirds of all district towns do have at least a small church.

To realize the size of the task remaining, it might be even better to look at the subdistrict level. Within districts, people still need to travel up to 30 kilometers to be able to attend a church in the district town. This is not a realistic expectation for people in the rural areas. However, almost everybody lives within 5 kilometers of the main village of a subdistrict.

In total, Isaan has 2678 subdistricts. 2312 of them are still without a church. 78% of the population of Isaan lives in these subdistricts without a church.

2. Vision

2.1. Vision

We see God glorified in Isaan by biblical churches in all of Isaan. We see strong churches in every district town of Isaan, through itinerant ministry serving satellite churches in every subdistrict, that in their turn have house groups in every village.

We see churches that worship God using Isaan cultural forms. They are built up in the faith through careful study of the Word of God. Many of them will be led by unpaid elders. Many of the satellite churches will be house churches. We see churches that have an impact on their community through social service.

We see churches that multiply.

2.2. Mission

It is our mission, in partnership with others, to take the Gospel to all of Isaan and build believers up in biblical churches that multiply.

2.3. Values

Grace. We are saved through God's grace only. Only through God's grace we can stand. Therefore we boast in God alone.

Passion to reach the unreached. Only in Christ eternal life is found. Therefore we strive to share the Gospel with all Isaan people. We are focused on unreached areas. We are willing to make sacrifices to reach them. We persevere when it is difficult. We are innovative and willing to take risks to reach the unreached.

Reproducibility. We model ministry that makes it possible for churches to multiply. We hand over responsibility to Isaan Christians as soon as possible.

Close to the people. We are part of the communities we live in and show that in our lifestyle. We know and appreciate the language, culture, and world view of those around us as much as our commitment to Christ allows.

Freedom. We share a common vision. We are committed to a common strategy. Within these boundaries, local teams are free to make their own ministry decisions.

Help. We minister in small and independent teams. Yet we support each other in daily life and in ministry with the gifts, experiences, and resources God has blessed us with.

Partnership. We realize we are only a small part of what God is doing in Isaan. Where helpful to the advance of the Gospel, we partner with other churches and missions. God's Kingdom is more important than our denomination.

2.4. Strategy

We look for bridges

Going into a community as outsiders without any point of contact will often lead to a very slow process of church planting. Therefore we are looking for bridges into communities to people who already have shown some interest in the Gospel. We recognize that in most cases, these bridges will be family lines.

Some of the bridges we are looking for are:

- Isaan believers from districts without churches who are living in Bangkok or abroad and have become Christians there.
- Isaan believers living in districts without churches who came to the Lord in Bangkok or abroad.
- Isaan believers in neighbouring districts.
- People who responded to Christian radio or other large-scale evangelism.

Bridges are especially promising when people already have come to the Lord. For there is no guarantee that an interested person or family will come to a saving faith and become an active member of the church. Where possible some preparatory ministry will be done in a new district, and new missionaries will only be placed there when some people have made a commitment to Christ.

Isaan has a unique future within Thailand. Migrant work is so much a part of Isaan culture that in our experience so far we have encountered people in every district who had had significant Gospel exposure before in other locations. So it seems that ready-made bridges are already in place in many places.

We travel

Because bridges are so important, we are willing to travel. It is more effective to spend much time in travelling to go to a community that welcomes us than to go to a nearby community where we have no entrance.

Also after choosing a place for ministry, we stay committed to travelling. We are living in districts with around 100 villages each. We need to go to the villages to proclaim the Gospel.

Through our ministry we may get in touch with people who have contacts in other areas. Especially when this is in unreached districts or subdistricts, we investigate whether there is interest in the Gospel and potential for planting a church.

We start house groups

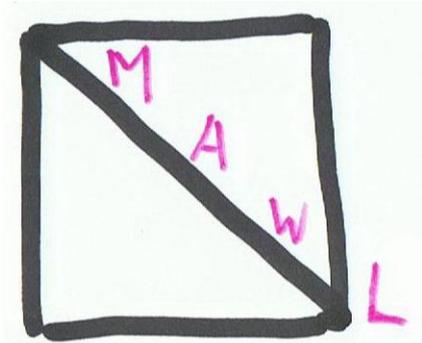
The core of our strategy is starting house groups in as many places as possible. We do not mainly invite people to central events, but try to get invitations to come to their homes. In this way, the Gospel message reaches whole households rather than individuals.

In the house groups, we teach the Bible chronologically to ensure that people get a firm foundation and understand the nature of God, the seriousness of sin, and the provision for sin that God gave in his Son Jesus Christ.

House groups are also a good setting where people can explore what it means to be a Christian in the Isaan context. We try to use Isaan language and culture as much as possible to avoid unnecessary barriers to the Gospel.

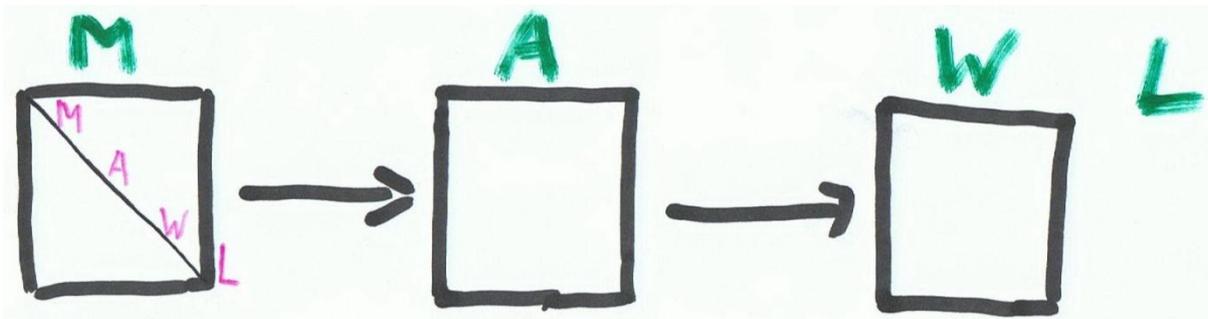
We leave

As missionaries, we are passers-by. From the beginning, the members in the churches we plant need to know we are not there to stay. We work according to the Model, Assist, Watch, Leave (MAWL) principle.



First, we model ministry. Second, we assist the new believers in ministry. Third, we watch the believers do ministry. We are only present in a consulting role. Fourth, we leave the area. That does not mean we abandon the church. We keep in touch. During this MSAWL process, the responsibilities of the missionary in and for the church gradually diminish.

It is important for us that the Model, Assist, Watch, Leave process is not limited to one church. It also takes place in the church multiplication process.



Ideally, when we move from the modelling to the assisting stage in the church we plant, a daughter church is planted from that church. In that daughter church the Model, Assist, Watch, Leave sequence is started afresh, with the Isaan Christians being the ones who model (while we assist them). We watch the third generation church being planted, while the church we planted assists the daughter church to plant a granddaughter church.

In the diagram above, the two MAWL's are happening at the same time. Ministry in the first church is modelled (the 2 M's). When the missionary starts assisting in ministry in the mother church (the first A), he is at the same time assisting that church to plant a daughter church (the second A). As he is watching ministry in the first church, he is at the same time watching how the mother church assists the daughter church to plant a granddaughter church.

This is an aspirational goal. So far, we have seen church planting and churches being able to function on their own taking place. But we have not yet seen churches multiply. In the years to come, we will continue to work towards that goal. We will continually evaluate whether our approach facilitates or hinders multiplication. We will study cases of church multiplication in Thailand and other countries to learn from.

When we say 'we leave' we do not use a fixed time frame. Some of the considerations for the timing of leaving include:

- When missionaries have committed Christians with leadership potential from the beginning (those are the situations we are looking for), it is often possible for a church to stand on its own within about four years. When leadership has to be built up from scratch, at least six years will be needed.
- If the church can stand on its own but no multiplication has taken place, and there is no very real possibility of it taking place in the immediate future, the missionary leaves.
- If the church can stand on its own and multiplication has taken place so robustly that it will continue without missionary input, the missionary leaves.
- If the church can stand on its own, and church multiplication is taking place but so tentatively that withdrawal of the missionary will most likely end or severely disrupt the movement, the missionary stays.
- When at any point of time, after faithful and consistent Gospel sowing, it becomes clear that there is no opening for the Gospel, or no realistic hope that a church comes into being that can stand on its own, the missionary leaves for a more promising place of ministry. This is not failure, it is shaking the dust off our feet. Disruption of life and costs of relocation are not enough reason to continue where there is no fruit.

After a few years of ministry in Isaan, it has become clear that it is very hard to plant churches in villages that function independently. Groups tend to be small, and the potential for leadership is low. A pure MAWL approach expects too much of these nascent churches. Therefore we modify the MAWL approach by expecting an ongoing role for the central church in the district in the nurturing of the village groups and churches.

2.5. Theological distinctions

Associated Churches of Thailand

The churches we plant normally belong to the Associated Churches of Thailand (ACT). This is a denomination grown out of OMF mission work without clear theological distinctives besides being broadly evangelical and baptist. The ACT is strongly congregational, which means local churches have a lot of freedom in deciding how they are organized.

Because of the OMF's history with ACT, planting ACT churches is the default option. In those cases where it would help the chance of a church planting movement occurring, permission can be given by OMF leadership to plant churches that belong to other denominations.

The Isaan team is loyal to this stated policy. We will also explore possible close partnerships with paedo-baptist missions that accept candidates who do not want to conform to the OMF- Thailand baptism policy.

Grace-oriented

Grace is at the heart of the Christian faith. The churches that we plant display this. There is no place for legalism. Most of our members understand grace in the reformed sense as the electing grace of God that transforms sinners who do not seek God into his beloved children.

Because of our understanding of grace, many of us do have problems with the 'sinners' prayer', especially the unjudicial way it is widely used in Thailand, as it shows a decisional view of regeneration that shortchanges the grace of God. While these are not crucial issues for us, it flavours our churches and our team.

Elders

The churches we plant are led by elders. Some elders will be called to be teaching elders. We do not recognize extra-biblical requirements to become a teaching elder, like a seminary education, while recognizing such an education may be helpful for some.

The elders in the churches we plant are male, as we believe this is what the Bible teaches. People with other convictions in this area are welcome to be part of the Isaan team as long as they are willing to ensure the unity of the churches by not ministering according to these convictions.

Sacraments

Within ACT each local church is free to decide who has the right to administer the sacraments. This same freedom applies in the Isaan team. When church services start in a new place, male missionaries are ordained as teaching elders of the new church with full rights to administer the sacraments. However, the missionaries are encouraged to let Thai Christians administer the sacraments as soon as possible.

Spirit-filled

We have high expectations of the transforming and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in all believers. There is no gift of the Spirit mentioned in the Bible that we as a team reject as a possibility for today. But we are sceptical about the functioning of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in charismatic churches and guard against fleshly emotionalism and false teaching. We seek to be continually filled with the Spirit and minister in the power of the Spirit.

3. Ministry and ministry goals

Mission is a spiritual enterprise. The Lord builds his church. The Holy Spirit needs to work in the hearts of people. Therefore it is impossible to work with goals in the same way as in business or even in development aid. Many of the plans are dependent on the Lord's provision of new labourers for Isaan. The following paragraph therefore gives a broad stroke picture of how we, by the grace of God, hope to develop ministry in Isaan in the next few years. Numerical goals will be scarce, as they suggest a level of control that is not realistic in missionary work.

3.1. Team

Normally, each missionary couple works in a different district. The reasons for this are:

- With over 100 districts without a church, the need is great.
- Most unreached district towns are small, with a population between 2,000 and 10,000. Several foreign families in such a small community will give the church a very foreign flavour.
- By building teams, you build walls. The more skills you have in the team, the less you need the Isaan Christians to help you. That makes it harder to phase out. Having several foreign families close together also means more time is spent with the missionary community and less with the local population.
- Many missionaries have clear ideas on how they want to work. Having each family in a separate location, frees everybody up to set his own direction and to minister in the way he feels called.
- Several missionary families together in the same place creates an unhealthy environment. You are each other's colleagues, friends, you go to the same church, your children play together, and all of these things are true for both husband and wife in each family. A problem in one area will affect all others. The potential for conflict is enormous.

Yet exceptions to this rule are possible, e.g. when beginning missionaries want to start ministry with an experienced couple for one or two years, or when missionaries with a specialized ministry outside church planting need a base to work from. In every situation where more missionary families are serving together, there is a local team leader who sets the direction of the team and who has the authority to accept people into and dismiss them from the team.

Regionally, OMF Isaan forms a team through regular team meetings for prayer and training, through informally helping out each other, through willingness to take on tasks that contribute to the overarching OMF Isaan vision, and through developing personal specialisms that may support the other local teams.

OMF Isaan does not have authority over the churches planted by its members. OMF Isaan members who are involved in church planting, in many cases will have formal authority as elders or informal authority as advisors in the churches they help to plant. As soon as a plurality of elders exists, missionaries move into an advisory role.

Neither do churches that we work with have authority over OMF Isaan members, except in those cases where that has been agreed.

3.2. Existing church planting projects

Beginning of 2011, all of the missionaries in the OMF Isaan team are located in Khon Kaen province. They are ministering in six different districts within a distance of 150 km. of each other.

Waeng Yai

Marten and Esther Visser started ministry in Waeng Yai, a district with 30,000 in January 2007. They had contacts in the district before that time. Several people had come to the Lord (through others, with minimal input by the Vissers), but there was no church yet.

As of January 2011 the church has 31 members, among which 21 baptized adults. It has an elder and a deacon. When the Vissers were on home assignment in 2010 for 6 months, the church showed it could stand on its own feet. The Vissers are still present in an advisory role. Because of their responsibilities for the whole Isaan team, they have not moved on to another place of ministry.

Though the Waeng Yai church is already quite strong for its size, it has one major drawback that makes it hard to function as a model for the other churches. The OMF Isaan office is located in Waeng Yai. Two of the important members in the church are employed by the Isaan team. So it not a natural example of a lay-led church.

Nongsonghong

Jan and Jose van Eeken started ministry in Nongsonghong, a district with 80,000 inhabitants in 2009. Marten Visser had taught a group in one of the outlying villages. The Van Eekens took over responsibility for this group and also started ministering in the district town. The first church in Nongsonghong came into being.

As of January 2011 the church has 5 members. The Van Eekens have been teaching various house groups, and hopefully some of these people will come to faith and join the church as well. The one man shows potential to become an elder of the church.

Manchakhiri

Sijmen and Annelies den Hartog started ministry in Manchakhiri, a district with 70,000 inhabitants in 2010. Manchakhiri does not have a biblical Protestant church (though it does have two somewhat sectarian churches), but it does have a private school owned by a Christian.

Through the school, the Den Hartogs have access to students and their parents. They also started meeting with two Christian ladies, and have actively evangelized in several outlying villages. Hopes are a church may soon start.

Baan Faang

Reinout and Arenda van Heiningen started ministry in Baan Faang, a district with 50,000 inhabitants in 2010. The church in Waeng Yai had contact with two women who had made a profession of faith. Marten Visser knew a group meeting in the district town, but was struggling.

After starting ministry, the Van Heiningens found out the group in the district town had so many problems and had already had so much input from outside, that it was impossible to help them. They did however build a group around the two women in the south of the district, with one more woman professing faith. Hopefully this group will be ready for baptism soon so a church can start in this area.

Nonsila

Khrieko and Nitho Peseyies started ministry in Nonsila, a district with 30,000 inhabitants, in 2010. Nonsila is a neighbouring district of Waeng Yai and does not have a single church. There were no clear openings for the Gospel, but Waeng Yai church was willing to be involved in planting a daughter church there.

The Peseyies have been sharing the Gospel in their neighbourhood and in various villages. In two different places they have been able to start house groups with the help of Waeng Yai church members. However, so far nobody has come to the Lord.

Nongrua

David and Grea van der Lee started ministry in Nongrua, a district with 90,000 inhabitants, in 2010. Though we thought it was a district without a church, later we found out that in one of the subdistricts recently a church had been planted. However, the district town and all other subdistricts were still devoid of the Gospel witness.

Only one Christian woman was known in Nongrua town. The Van der Lees were able to start a house group around her. They also started one other house group, where two people made a confession of faith. While the very promising start is no guarantee, it raises the hope that a church may be planted here before long.

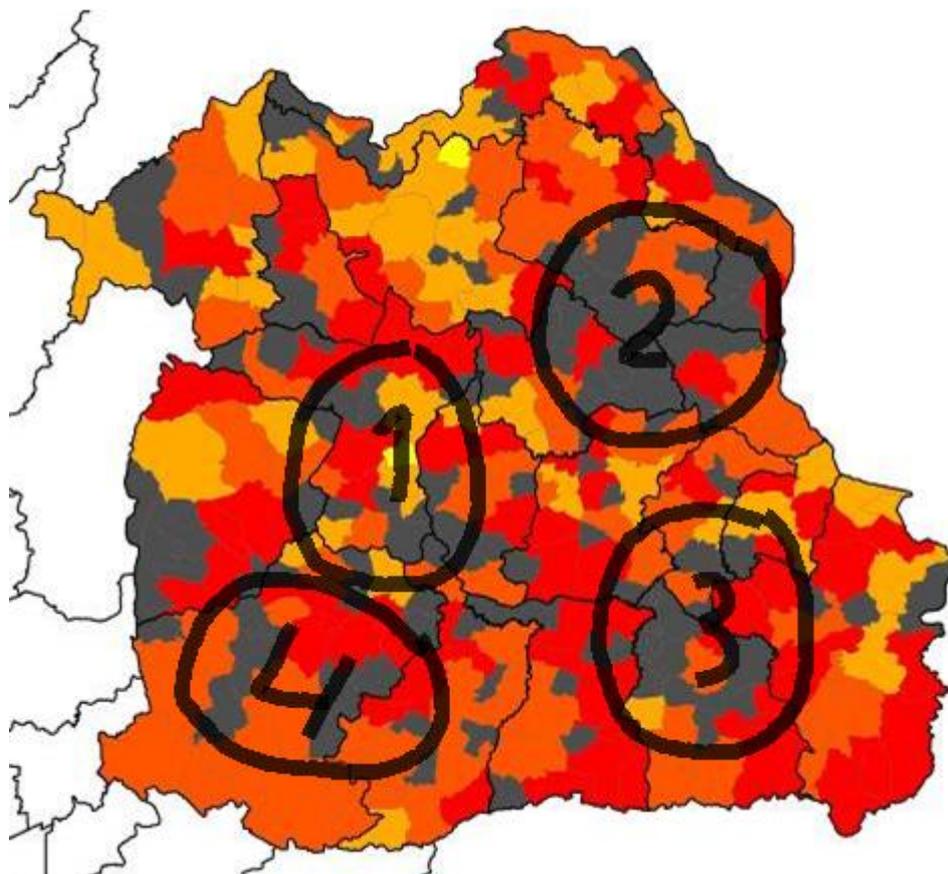
Burmese church

A fellow OMF missionary was instrumental in bringing together a group of Burmese labourers into a church in one of the factories in Khon Kaen at the end of 2009. First Marten Visser and after that Reinout van Heiningen have mentored this church. What they could do was limited because of the language barrier. Yet the church grew in a very encouraging way. Within one year, twenty people were baptized.

Because of a labour dispute most labourers left or were laid off. At the beginning of 2011 only six members were left in the factory. It remains to be seen how the situation will develop. The Burmese ministry does not belong to the core business of OMF Isaan. Yet as we have the opportunity to help out and mentor the believers to reach the Burmese in the factory we will not let this opportunity slip by.

It is our goal that in the plan period daughter churches will be planted from all of these churches. In most cases these will be satellite churches in the same district.

3.3. New church planting projects



The grey areas are the areas that did not have churches in 2006.

The Khon Kaen cluster (1)

At the moment we have a cluster of missionaries in Khon Kaen province. There is still room for growth of this cluster. At least one more amphur in Khon Kaen province and several in east Chaiyaphum, north Nakhon Ratchasima, north Buriram and west Mahasarakham could have missionaries belonging to this cluster.

The Kalasin – Sakhon Nakhon cluster (2)

The largest unreached area of Thailand is the border area of Kalasin and Sakhon Nakhon, overflowing to Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, and Roi-Et provinces. 26 neighbouring districts, with over 1 million people living in them, do not have a single church between them .

As we look to the future of the Isaan team, the highest priority is to build up another cluster of church planting missionaries in this area. Even taking into account that other churches undoubtedly will start ministering here as well, 20 missionary units (including supporting personnel) could easily be placed here.

The goal is to station a team leader in this area by 2013 to start building this cluster. The team leader should be someone with some years experience in Thailand, who can pioneer, network, and lead a team. A major asset is one Isaan lady from this area. She was an OMF missionary serving among the Shan, but felt a strong call to take the Gospel to her own relatives. At the moment she is

a teacher in Manchakhiri, but she is ready to move into this area as soon as the Isaan team has people to go with her.

The Sisaket cluster (3)

The second area in Isaan with many remaining unreached districts is the north of Srisaket province, with the border areas of surrounding provinces. This is the third area where we want to build a cluster of missionaries as soon as a suitable pioneer team leader can be found.

The goal is to start ministry in this area not later than 2015.

The central Khorat cluster (4)

A final area of interest is central Khorat, which likewise has a concentration of districts without a church. As the Khorat culture seems to be halfway between Thai and Isaan culture, ministry here might be slightly different than in Isaan. A fourth cluster of missionaries could be built up here. It might be too soon to target this area before 2016. However, if a suitable team leader presents himself we plan to start ministry here as well.

3.4. Other church planting ministries

Student ministry

By discipling students, the leaders of a new generation are disciplined. Because of the brain drain that is happening in Isaan, this is of vital importance. Many of the students will leave Isaan, but with the further development of the region more are likely to stay in the future.

Another reason why student ministry is strategic, is that at the universities students from all over Isaan are coming together. When they become Christians, they may be trained to go back to their home village to plant a church there.

The main universities in Isaan are in Khon Kaen and Mahasarakham. Khon Kaen already has a strong Christian presence on campus. Mahasarakham less so, though several Christian campus ministries have a small presence. Mahasarakham University has 42,000 students living on campus. This is a wonderful environment to evangelize, disciple, and train. It also is the geographical heart of Isaan, so a large part of Isaan is accessible within a reasonable travelling time.

An added advantage of starting student ministry is that it opens up a venue for people who do not feel drawn to rural work to serve in Isaan.

The goal is to start student ministry in Isaan by 2012. In all probability in Mahasarakham, but that is subject to change if further research shows there are better opportunities. The student ministry team needs to be bigger than the other teams for the following reasons: it functions in a more urban environment; student ministry is very intensive; and a range of ministries needs to be done to make sure the students are reached, are trained, and bridges back to the students' home villages are being used.

Factory ministry

Most factories in Thailand are concentrated in the Greater Bangkok Area and on the Eastern Seaboard. But Isaan has a few factories as well, mainly around Khorat and Khon Kaen. Thai labourers

travel considerable distances to work in the factories; in other factories labourers are living on-site, and they have an even larger area to draw labourers from.

If entrance to these factories can be secured and Bible study groups being started or even churches being planted in them, that might be another way of spreading the Gospel to many areas of Isaan. The Van Heiningens live near several factories, and they will try out whether factory ministry is feasible. If so, more missionaries could be assigned to this ministry.

3.5. Supporting ministries

3.5.1. Organizational support

- The OMF Isaan leader helps develop and evaluate ministry plans for each local team.
- The OMF Isaan leader visits each local team monthly to see the ministry, talk about issues that have come up, and pray for the ministry.
- The Well in Chiang Mai provides member care through quarterly pastoral talks, yearly cross cultural adjustment assessments, and relevant input during the yearly team retreat. The Well staff members are also available for counselling when needed, and team building training in cases where several missionary units will work together.
- Isaan language modules are being developed. At least five modules will be developed. They may be studied after completing the 2nd year Thai language exam. Team members may choose to continue Thai language study up to the 3rd year level before switching to Isaan if they think that is more helpful to their ministry.
- Isaan does not have international schools. Local schools are at best an additional option. To be able to attract families and to let them remain long-term on the field, developing good schooling options are important. In most settings, home schooling will be part of the equation. In each cluster possibilities for joint schooling of the missionary children will be researched for the relevant languages.

In Khon Kaen the Dutch families will jointly school their children two days a week, for which a facility in a central place needs to be found. This same set-up may be used for English language education. As the children grow older, it might become feasible at some point in the future to have monthly school weeks for all mission kids in Isaan. Teachers for the joint schooling days, who also may support home schooling, will be sought.

- Resources for all main areas of ministry will be made available, either by choosing existing resources or developing them for our specific needs. Every team member is free to choose whether he want to use these resources or other ones. The basic resources that are available or will be made available include:
 - Chronological Bible Teaching 1. 12 Lessons. For evangelistic housegroups, from creation to Christ. Available, but needs checking.
 - Chronological Bible Teaching 2. 18 lessons. More Bible stories for new believers, also direct teaching about the Christian life. First draft available, but needs extensive work.
 - Kaansaangawok. 52 simple discipleship lessons. Printed book.
 - 3 year children's church lessons. 1 year is available. 2 years are in process.

- 1 year evangelistic children's club lessons. Available in English. Needs Thai translation. Crafts are available in Thai.
- Standard format for house group meeting.
- Devotional for daily Bible reading. 'Daily Bread' is available in Thai and sent out free to churches who request it.
- Three day program for evangelist outreach with the Bible van.
- Leaders' training. To be decided. "Train and Multiply" will be taken into consideration.
- Preaching. Thai version of Robinson's "Biblical Preaching". Out of print book, may be photocopied.
- Training for leading worship. This needs to be developed, probably in seminar format.
- Standard song book. A choice needs to be made between Color Songbook and Phleeng Chiwit Christian.
- Isaan song book with CD. Several songs and MP3's are already available. An Isaan songbook for use in the villages needs to be made from this.

End 2012 all these resources should be ready for use.

3.5.2. Support on the field

- New missionaries who do not have mature Isaan Christians around them to work with, will be supported on a weekly or two-weekly basis by an Isaan Christian employed by the Isaan team. We do not normally support the use of outside funds to pay church workers. Yet we believe it is so important that new missionaries get the opportunity to see how Isaan Christian leaders minister, that we provide this service. An added benefit is that the Isaan Christian will be better able to assess the level of interest in the Gospel of the contacts that the missionary has.
- Kimon, a Dutch organization, will partner with OMF Isaan to develop children's ministry in Isaan. A couple will arrive end of 2011 to start this ministry. The children's workers will need to get experience in one of the local settings of the Isaan team. After that, they will serve the whole team by:
 - Developing children's materials
 - Helping run evangelistic children's activities
 - Training children's workers from the various churches.
- Central training of church leaders needs be developed. In what format and who is responsible will be determined later. Specific training may be geared to different groups, e.g. training for elders, preachers, children's workers, and worship leaders.
- Each team member will develop a personal specialism after finishing language study. This specialism could be in line with his educational or vocational background. Possibilities include: youth work programs; music; teaching about social issues like debt, raising children, marriage etc.; agricultural projects; sports ministry. This specialism will be used in the local ministry of the missionary. He will also make it available to the other team members in appropriate ways, e.g. by training the other team members; by developing resources; by running workshops in the ministry locations of the other team members.
- A Bible van with evangelistic resources is available. This van may be used in special evangelistic outreaches in schools, village squares, markets, etc. Each local team is

encouraged to use the Bible van at least once a year for a more day event and once a year for a one day event. While larger events do not often directly lead to conversions in Isaan, they do help raise the profile of the church.

3.5.3. Support from the office

- Evangelistic resources (Bibles, children's bibles, tracts, DVDs, etc.) and resources for social work (glasses, wheeled rollers, wheelchairs) are available at the office in Waeng Yai. If finances allow these are free of charge for team members.
- Secretarial help is available for team members, e.g. to write or check Thai texts and to prepare teaching resources.
- We partner with the Thai Church Resource Center (which OMF Isaan helped found) to biannually update the Isaan church statistics. These statistics can be used to produce church lists and maps on Isaan-wide or provincial level with data down to the district and subdistrict level. This both helps to make the remaining task visible and to find ministry partners in various locations.
- We also partner with the Thai Church Resource Center to make available as much useful resources for the team and for the wider Isaan and Thai church as possible on www.thaicrc.com.

3.5.4. Other ministry

- Training of Isaan church planters. A two week church planting training for OMF-Thailand members was developed in 2008. In 2011 a pilot for a Thai version was developed. In the next few years a format needs to be found that can be used extensively in Isaan.
- Training of Isaan Christians in Bangkok. A representative sample among Bangkok churches showed that almost 20% of their members were born in Isaan. This means that there are about 8,000 Isaan Christians in Bangkok.

Many of them must be from unreached districts. Those that have the heart, the capability, and the time to be involved in reaching their home villages, could be trained. This calls for an Isaan team member being stationed in Bangkok (or have a Bangkok team member closely working with the Isaan team). The probably around 200 Isaan believers in the Bangkok ACT churches would be the easiest group to work with, but ideally the training would pull in believers from a much wider denominational background.

Another key aspect of this ministry is that it would help to find Isaan people for new missionaries to work with. When a new church planting project is started in an unreached district together with someone from that district, or with an Isaan willing to locate there, chances of quick church development are much better than when missionaries go in on their own. Because Isaan people move to Bangkok and surrounding provinces even more than they move within Isaan, Greater Bangkok is a prime area to find Isaan Christians to work together with in unreached districts.

This project is dependent on finding the right people to start it.

- Radio ministry. OMF Isaan has a contract with a local radio station that has a potential reach of up to 1 million people mainly in Khon Kaen province for two hours of Christian programming a day. This will be filled in with existing programs from larger Christian stations, interspersed with information about churches and church activities in the region.

- Isaan church news letter. Isaan churches are spread out and have limited opportunities to know what is happening in the wider church scene. We plan to produce a monthly (or maybe quarterly) Isaan church news letter of 4 pages that will be sent free of charge to all Isaan churches. Its contents should inspire, help people to think biblically, challenge them for church planting in Isaan, and point out training opportunities.
- Every Home for Christ has a goal of handing out a small literature package to every household in Thailand in the next 10 years. We will look into possibilities of working together on this in Isaan, especially in areas we focus on.
- Broken families, promiscuity, and prostitution are huge issues in Isaan. We want to address these issues. Lessons about God's plan for relationships and for the family will be collected or developed for use in the various places of ministry.
- With estimates of the number of yearly abortions for Thailand ranging from 300,000 to 1,000,000, a pro-life message is urgently needed as well. The publication of a pro-life book has been arranged with the largest Christian publisher in Thailand.

A one hour lesson will be developed for use in highschoools and vocational colleges about sexuality and pregnancy, with follow-up possibilities through the internet or local churches or church planting ministries. This project is dependent on finding the right people whose full- or parttime time ministry it is to visit the schools.

- Most Isaan people are in debt. Many are in debt to loan sharks. Many do not budget, and are always in financial trouble. We will collect or develop lessons, possibly in a seminar format, to help people in this area. The lessons will give a Christian outlook on possessions and our use of them. In this way they may form a bridge that opens up possibilities to share the Gospel.

Team members who have a supporting or specialized ministry as their main job, will be placed with a church planting team. They help as much as their main ministry allows.

4. Timeline

Year	Existing church planting	New church planting	Other ministry	Products
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Church meetings start in Baan Faang, Manchakhiri, and Nongrua 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factory ministry started 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radio ministry started Central church leaders training started Literature ministry in connection with EHC started 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two modules of Isaan language study prepared 8 of 13 standard resources available Isaan church list and maps Relationship seminar Debt seminar
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Church meetings start in Nonesila Daughter churches planted from Waeng Yai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New church plants in Khon Kaen cluster Student ministry started 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Church planter's training in Isaan started 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five modules of Isaan language study prepared All 13 standard resources available Thai resources completed in digital library
2013		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start of Kalasin/SakhonNakhon cluster Working model of reaching labourer's home villages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's ministry started Bangkok-Isaan ministry bridge established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isaan church list and maps 2nd Bible van bought Isaan language digital library Monthly Isaan churches newsletter
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daughter churches planted from Nong Song Hong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working model of reaching students' home villages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pro-life ministry in schools started 	
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daughter churches planted from Baan Faang, Manchakhiri, and Nongrua 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start of Sisaket cluster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's ministry training and support started 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isaan church list and maps

2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughter churches planted from Nonesila • Missionary withdrawal from established churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Start of Khorat cluster?) 		
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5. Continuing Education

The continuing education of our team members is a priority. The first three years in Thailand the main education is Thai language study. Other important aspects of continuing education are:

- For each new project a ministry plan is developed. This is done in consultation with the regional leader (in later years the cluster leader) and will be evaluated on a two-yearly basis with him.
- Project Paul training, a two week course in church planting in Thailand.
- Quarterly team meetings and a yearly team retreat will have educational components.
- Personal development plan. This is part of the OMF-Thailand member care programme. All team members, after finishing the 2nd year Thai language exam, share the intellectual development and present and future ministry components with their team or regional leader.
- Both team members and outsiders (e.g. graduate students anthropology) are encouraged to write papers on aspects of Isaan and culture that will be made available to the whole team.

6. Mobilization of new missionaries

The need in Isaan is great. To make all the plans described in this ministry plan happen, about 45 missionary units are needed in Isaan by 2016. These may be subdivided as follows:

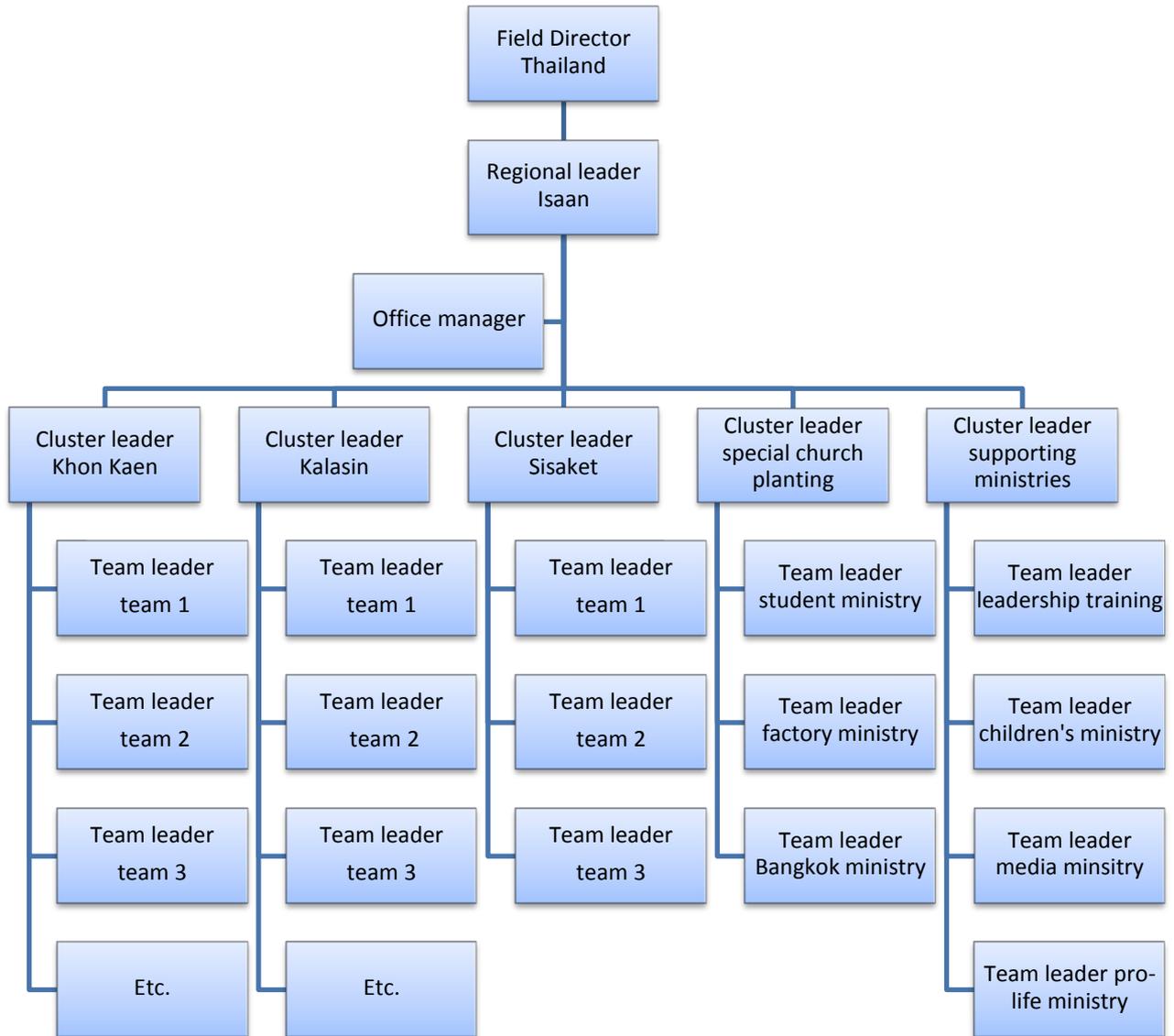
Ministry	Present	2016 goal
Church planting	5	23
Khon Kaen	5	9
Kalasin / Sakhon Nakhon		10
Sisaket		4
Church planting special		9
Student ministry		4
Factory ministry		3
Bangkok network		2
Supporting ministry	1	22
Projects		10
Office / leadership	1	3
MK teachers		9
Total	6	54

This is ambitious growth goal. To reach it, a growth of over 50% per year is needed. We work towards this goal in the following ways:

- **Prayer.** It is the Lord who sends labourers into the harvest.
- **Personal effort.** The best mobilizers are the missionaries who are already on the field. All team members are encouraged to be mobilizers in their own network, through web presence, and through working with short-term missionaries.
- **Purposeful internationalization.** So far, the Isaan team has a very Dutch flavour. During the plan period this should change so that at least half of the team consists of people from other countries. Ways to mobilise outside the Netherlands include: English web presence; communication with OMF Homesides about the needs of Isaan; mobilization trips to various countries; partnership development with missions that will second people to OMF or work closely together on the field.
- **Continuing mobilization in the Netherlands.** Besides the ongoing efforts of OMF The Netherlands, the Isaan team has three key Dutch partners: the Reformed Mission League, the Christian Reformed Churches, and Kimon. We hope that each of these partnerships will result in several more missionary units being sent to Isaan during the plan period.

7. Organization

The internal organization of the Isaan team is shown in the organization chart on the next page.



- The office manager leads the administration team. The responsibilities of the administration team include: Finances; Bible van; mission kid teachers; internet presence; coordination of short term missionaries.
- Not all positions are full-time positions. E.g. cluster leaders in many cases will at the same time be leaders of one of the teams.
- Team 1, team 2 etc. normally will be just one family. In some cases it might include another family or one or two single missionaries.
- Candidates will be sought who will devote themselves fully to the supporting ministries. We leave open the possibility that church planters in a geographical team spend part of their time in a supporting ministry as well.

Another way to look at the organization is not according to lines of accountability, but according to function. That leads to the following matrix:

	Leadership training	Church planting training	Children's ministry	Literature	Media	Church Newsletter	Pro-life ministry
Khon Kaen							
Kalasin							
Sisaket							
University							
Factory							
Other denominations							

The rows consist of the geographical locations where church planting is taking place. The columns consist of the various ministries that support church planting. The shaded cells show that the supporting ministries are contributing to most geographically based church planting ministries of the Isaan team, and also to churches in other denominations.

8. Finances

Each OMF missionary has a budget for basic ministry expenses of 12,000B (about \$400) per month. This is sufficient for e.g. 2,000 car kilometers. Ministry expenses over that amount need to be budgeted separately.

The Isaan team tries to fund the ministry expenses outside the mentioned basic amount from a central fund. In this way team members with different levels of support still have the same ministry opportunities. Also important is that it allows for better management. If there is a central fund, people can be asked for a task or a ministry without having to worry whether their supporters base will take the financial responsibility for it.

However, history shows that personal support is much easier to raise than project support. If project support falls short, either projects need to be discontinued or be funded through the personal support of missionaries.

The following budget is for 2011. In later years, the budget is likely to grow, especially with the start of new ministries and higher costs for evangelistic resources because of a higher number of church planting missionaries. Because these costs are dependent on future developments and choices made in the future by new missionaries, it is not helpful to guess at a multi-year budget now.

Budget 2011 Isaan project	Euro	Baht
1. Personnel	6,600	264,000
2. Travel Bible van	4,500	180,000
3. Travel to support missionaries	3,000	120,000
4. Evangelistic resources	5,000	200,000
5. Radio ministry (10 year investment)		150,000
6. Development resources and web-based resource center	1,250	50,000
7. Administration and office	4,500	180,000
8. Social work	2,500	100,000
9. Travel regional leader	2,500	100,000
10. Ministry costs team members	3,000	120,000
11. Member care	1,250	50,000
12. Option conference center	2,100	84,000
13. Regional leader's fund	2,500	100,000
14. Staff development	600	24,000
Total costs:	39,300	1,572,000

Attachment 1: Protestant Christianity in Isaan

Province	Inhabitants	Protestant churches	Protestant Christians	Percentage protestant Christians	Registered missionaries (needs updating)
Kalasin	978,583	33	944	0.10	4
Khonkaen	1,756,101	82	4119	0.23	40
Chaiyaphum	1,122,647	55	1845	0.16	0
Nakhon Phanom	699,364	23	927	0.13	0
Nakhon Ratchasima	2,565,117	69	2916	0.11	5
Buriram	1,541,650	56	2833	0.18	2
Mahasarakham	936,854	27	1061	0.11	0
Mukdahan	337,497	16	688	0.20	0
Yasothon	539,284	19	663	0.12	0
Roi Et	1,307,212	54	2722	0.21	0
Loei	618,423	23	1547	0.25	0
Sisaket	1,441,412	38	1443	0.10	2
Sakhon Nakhon	1,116,034	30	1234	0.11	2
Surin	1,375,560	28	1162	0.08	7
Nongkhay	906,877	38	1530	0.17	2
Nongbualamphu	499,520	15	489	0.10	0
Amnat Charoen	369,476	14	495	0.13	0
Udon Thani	1,535,629	86	5184	0.34	5
Ubon Ratchathani	1,795,453	49	2503	0.14	10
Total	21,442,693	755	34305	0.16	79