

365 Thursdays—7 Lean Years or 7 Fat Years? A Manipur Test Case

Colleagues,

365 Thursday Theology postings make exactly 7 years since it all began in 1998. One of you, noting that this anniversary was coming, and remembering Joseph's era in Egypt, asked: "Ed, were they 7 fat years or 7 lean years?" I didn't know how to answer. And then came this Aha! One way to find out is to follow Gideon. Set out a fleece. Ask the ThTh readership to celebrate the seven years by posing the "Manipur Option." And what, pray tell, is that? Thought you'd never ask.

It's all sevens: 7 years of ThTh. Add two more zeroes and you get 700, the number of you folks who receive this post. Add two more zeroes and you get the \$70,000 still needed for the five-year project in Manipur. And what, pray tell, is the Manipur Project? It's building from scratch a Christian school—nursery through grade ten—in the far northeast corner of India.

After you've gulped and caught your breath, read this:

PAST HISTORY

The Manipur Mission is a multi-faceted Christian venture that Marie and I—plus a couple dozen other partners—have been involved in since 2002 with Christian folk in India.

Manipur state is in NE India way up against the Burma (now Myanmar) border not far from China. Some 40 kilometers from Manipur's capital city Imphal is the tribal community of Khukthar. The present "Manipur Mission" now functioning there

includes school, orphanage, evangelist training program, VBS programs in several venues, et al. There are 10 people on the staff. Since 2002 the couple dozen of us stateside partners have been gathering and sending \$15K per year to Manipur.

How on earth did we get connected there?

Husband and wife leaders in Khukthar, Roel and Shangthar Moyol, were my students in 2002 when I taught for a semester in New Haven CT at the Overseas Ministries Study Center. OMSC is an international ecumenical mission think-tank across the street from Yale Divinity School. Toward the end of our time at OMSC the Moyols laid out for us their work in Manipur and asked us to help them. We agreed to do what we could. The \$15K per annum since then is the result.

Roel and Shangthar are tribal folks (beautiful people with Tibeto-Burman features) from the "hill country" of this nobody-knows-about corner of India. Check your world atlas. It's east of Bangladesh. They are working to better the lives of their fellow tribals by taking in orphans and running an English school for other children. All of this as Christian care and education. They also run an evangelism and church leadership school. Plus other Christian sorts of stuff—both out in the hill country and in the Manipur state capital of Imphal (pop. 250,000).

Marie and I visited them last year during our five months in Southeast Asia. We were based as ELCA Global Mission Volunteers with the Lutheran Church in Singapore. [Imphal wasn't exactly close: It's 2300 miles away from Singapore. But we got there.] I was the commencement speaker for their evangelism /leadership graduation ceremony. Topic:"Christ's Upside-Down Pyramid for Church-leadership." Roel also had us do Crossings with two groups in Imphal. We've got digital pics if you are interested.

We were impressed with how much they could accomplish with such modest funds.

When we asked Roel and Shangthar what they were going to do for support after the two of us “went to heaven,” their jaws dropped. They’d never thought about that. They said they would think and pray about it. March 1 their prayers (and deliberations with architects and engineers) were far enough along that they sent us what’s pasted here below. A faith-based venture for becoming self-supporting.

THE DREAM PROPOSAL

It’s a whole school, campus and staff—nursery through grade 10 (that’s the normal end of high school)—for 500 students when completed. End of March they sent us a cost estimate from professionals who have gone to work on their dream-school. We’ve translated their Indian ruppee figures into US dollars. Specs are \$115K (115,000 USD) needed over 5 years until it’s fully operational. \$45K to get the first year up and running.

Roel and Shangthar admit that such sums of money are unimaginable for them. He gets \$2 per day (\$60 per month) as the director (and highest paid person) of the now-running mission operation. They’ve done their homework, and project that the school—and the whole mission operation—can be self-supporting after 5 years

Marie and I have been talking to lots of folks since March 1. We haven’t told Roel and Shangthar that we’ll even try to do it, but that we are casting about to see what seems possible. But it’s becoming increasingly clear that we can’t say No. Our past tincup ventures have never been that big. Though \$115K for a complete campus and staff for 500 students, et al, is hardly big bucks by American standards. But how to raise \$115K?

We started with our current donors. They overwhelmed us! First off, they pledged to continue to cover the \$15K per annum needed for the next 5 years for current “normal” operations. Then they also pledged \$45K over five years for the school. Just a couple dozen folks! So \$70K is still needed to make the school a reality—over the next 5 years. If you’ve read this far, you know what’s coming.

THE SEVEN YEAR PITCH

Back to the SEVENS—7 years of Thursday Theologies, the 700 of you and these \$70,000.

Can you at this time celebrate ThTh’s 7 years and join the group of Manipur Partners?

Might Manipur be a candidate for your own mission work—or for your community, or for your mission-minded Aunt Sophie? Either as a one-time donation, or a pledge for the years ahead till its completion.

Please let us know at this e-address: <mehs55@cs.com>

For the past years our Manipur funds have been channelled through International Partners in Mission (Cleveland, Ohio). Contributions to IPM are tax-deductible in the USA. We’re still negotiating with them the details for handling this big project. As soon as we’ve got things firmed up, we’ll pass on to you what the next step would be. If you “can’t wait,” make your check out to International Partners in Mission, notation “Manipur school,” and send it first to us so we can “read” the fleece. We’ll pass it on to IPM. Our address: M&E Schroeder, 3438 Russell Blvd. #403, St. Louis MO 63104-1563, USA.

If/when \$70K does show up on the Manipur fleece, we’ll tell you right away, and close the campaign. [Or possibly tell you about

a couple more Macedonian calls that have come our way.]

The basic info-letters from Roel & Shangthar are appended below.
If you need to know more, ask us.

Peace & Joy!

Marie & Ed Schroeder

<mehs55@cs.com>

THE PROJECT PROPOSAL FROM MANIPUR

Tuesday, March 1, 2005

Dearest Ed & Marie,

Greetings from Khukthar, Manipur in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

We have been praying for a long-term ministry. It is our believed that this ministry will help us to glorify His name and in the extension of His Kingdom. The proposed project will not deferred our existing ministry but rather it will enhance our ministry.

The Project:

The project is proposed to establish a High School from Nursery to class ten. Apart from High School, a few other projects interconnected with the welfare of orphans and destitute children and Leadership training also have been discussed herein.

Project Goal:

To glorify God through reaching children for Christ, training them to grow mentally, spiritually, and physically

strong to serve Christ and our nation in future.

Project Objectives:

- i. To train children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).*
- ii. To provide a quality education to face a competitive world.*
- iii. To collect tuition fees for self-support.*
- iv. To foster the welfare of the orphans and destitute children.*
- v. To conduct Vacation Bible School for children, Lay Leadership Training, and assist evangelism work.*

Scope of the project:

The Government Schools in Manipur cannot provide a quality education. The teachers are irregular in attendance and when they attend school, they do not care about the academic of the students. The students have become inarticulate to face the competitive world. Many parents are not happy with the government teachers, and are not interested in sending their children to the government schools. They are willing to send their children to the school; where quality education is imparted, and at the same time they want their children to bring them up in a spiritual surroundings. Hence, we see the need and planned to start High School where we will emphasis on quality education and spiritual growth atmosphere. The school will be a co-education and for residence and non-residence students. We will also include an extra curriculum, which will help them in their future endeavor. Through the tuition fees and residence fees collected from the students, we will be able to run the ministry of conducting VBS, Lay Leadership Training, looking after orphans and destitute children and in Evangelism works every year and in the long run.

Project cost:

At the initial stage we need money for school building construction, boarding building for both girls and boys, furniture, infrastructure, office, study cum library room, chapel hall, bathroom & toilets, and salary for the teaching and non teaching staffs (for seven teachers and for four years). At the initial stage we will start from Nursery to class six. There will be ten teachers. Every year we will upgrade one more class and by 2010 we will upgrade up to class ten. In 2006 we expect 100 students. By 2010 we will have more than five hundred students. By that time we will be able to run the school with self-support. We are asking an engineer to draw and estimate the cost of the project. It is not finish yet. When it is finish I shall send you soon.

Project Funding:

Our prayer to God is to entrust Rev. Ed & Marie Schroeder to raise funds for this project. We have not coin the name of the school. ONE Request, We like to name the school if there is any person willing to donate in the memory of their loved ones/trust/organization. If they don't want their name to be written we are willing to name according to our like.

Opening Date of the school:

February 05, 2006

Through this project we will have a long run ministry. We will be able to continue our minsitry by His grace. This is our proposed project. And our prayer is that God will honour our humble project through your kind raising of funds.

Yours always in HIM.

*Roel & Shangthar Moyol
Khukthar, P.O. Pallel
Manipur, 795 135
India*

[End of March came this e-mail.]

March 30, 2005

*Dear in Christ,
Greetings from Manipur In the name of Jesus Christ.*

I have read a book by Poovey on the "Day Before Easter." I learn especially about the Ash Wednesday, and the Lent. I have never observed nor do I know about the significance of Ash Wednesday and about Lent till I read the book which you had sent to me. It is very good and I explain about the significances of the Lent in the church.

Shangthar and I sat together and pray about the School Project. We had asked a local engineer regarding the cost of construction. He estimated the amount which is very very big to us and we prayed to God how it is going to be possible. The Lord seems like responding to us that if the amount is so big you can begin step by step.

Let me unfold the estimated budget. The construction for both School Building From Nursery to Class ten will cost Rs.34,11,096.00 (Rupees thirty four lakhs eleven thousand and ninety six). For Boarding/Residence for Children building will cost Rs.16,22,604.00. Total Rs.50,33,700.00 [=US\$115,000] [Ed: "lakh" is the favored way to express 100,000 in India. Another Indian "big number" is "crore." A crore = 100 lakhs = 10

million.]

This estimated budget is for a period of five years.

The first year amount will be Rs.20,00,000.00 (Rupees twenty lakhs) [= US\$45, 727] and this will help us to construct a School building up to class six with children Residence building. The school session starts from February, so we need to start the construction from the months of October/November so that we could finish the construction before the school reopens.

We are praying that the Lord will raise people for the well being of the tribal people in Manipur so as to uplift their living conditions and at the same time help the poor and destitute children in Christ.

With prayer and wishes

Roel & Shangthar

Indigenous Tribal Development Association [= the legal “secular” name of the mission]

Khukthar, P.O. Pallel

Manipur, India – 795 135