

Orthodoxy in Thailand



Architectural drawing of the new Orthodox Church on Phuket Island, Thailand

There is a new church in Thailand. The Church of the Holy Life-Giving Trinity on Phuket Island is the fourth parish in the country. Construction of the new church on Phuket Island has taken several years.

In a recent interview Archimandrite Oleg (Cherepanin), the senior Russian Orthodox cleric in Thailand, said: ‘Originally, we planned it to be the first Orthodox church in the Kingdom, but history decreed otherwise. In May 2009 Orthodox believers on Phuket started the project to build an Orthodox church. However, it was not so easy. At that time, the Orthodox Church had just received State registration. Then they bought building land, but the economic crisis intervened. As a result, many of those who wanted to donate to help build this church had to give up such plans. So progress in building the church was slow. In the meantime we founded a new parish in Pattava and built two churches in different parts of the country. The new parishes actively helped us to fund the construction of this church and together we have finally completed it’.

Today, the Phuket church is the largest Orthodox building in the Kingdom. Built in the best traditions of Old Russian architecture, it catches the eye from afar with its golden domes and white walls. Not only do locals come to gawk at this architectural miracle, but also tourists from around the world, regardless of their confessional or religious affiliation. The church will not be empty, because Thailand has a sufficiently numerous Orthodox community, numbering several thousand. Archimandrite Oleg told us, ‘It’s customary for Orthodox believers of all backgrounds to come to Orthodox parishes in Thailand, including members of the local population. Our

parishes are multinational, including Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Romanians, along with French, Americans and even Africans. Of course, the number of Orthodox Thais is constantly increasing. Generally, the locals are very sympathetic to Orthodoxy, despite the fact that Thailand's a Buddhist country. I would remind you that most Thais profess Theravada Buddhism, which is the most original and oldest form of Buddhism, which they compare with Orthodoxy. Therefore, when Thais consciously decide to convert to Christianity, a priori, they are drawn to Orthodoxy, as they consider it one of the most ancient and original dogmatic expressions of the Christian Faith'.

The Russian Orthodox Church has only existed in Thailand for a little more than a decade. The first parish opened in the Thai capital in 2000. At the same time, Archimandrite Oleg arrived in Bangkok. He was the first Orthodox cleric in the country and translated many of the books of Holy Scripture into Thai. This helped locals to gain an understanding of Christianity. In early 2011, in Ratchaburi Province, an Orthodox monastery opened, which not only has a spiritual mission, but is also a large-scale cultural and educational centre. In the near future the Church plans to build three more churches. One of them, to the south of Pattaya, is an indigenous Thai parish. Another will open on Koh Samui Island and a second church will rise in the heart of Bangkok. The consecration of the new church on Phuket, dedicated to the Holy and Life-Giving Trinity, will take place in mid-February 2012. During a pastoral visit to Thailand, Archbishop Mark of Yegorevsk, the head of the Russian Orthodox Department for Foreign Institutions, will serve the liturgy to bless the new building.

<http://rus.ruvr.ru/2011/12/20/62535685.html>



The Completed Church Today