

Bahnar Work - Pleiku

When the first missionaries were assigned to work with the Bahnar tribe, Grup was already a Christian, having been won through contact with the Jerai work in Pleiku. Flemings were assigned to begin work with the Bahnar in 1959 and Grup went along as the contact man. We worked in the An Khe valley until our first furlough in 1962. A few people in two different places had prayed for salvation but no church had been established. The V.C. cadres were working in the same area and by the time of our furlough all Bahnar in the An Khe valley had broken contact with the government and were inaccessible to us.

In 1961 Dave Frazier was reassigned from Sedang language study to begin studying the Bahnar language, living in Pleiku. Early in 1962 Dave began holding leprosy treatment clinics in Bahnar villages, under the supervision of the personnel from the Banmethuot leprosarium. Poh, a young man from the village of Kon Chrah, was one of the patients who was sent to the leprosarium for treatment of a foot ulcer, and while there he was soundly converted. In later years he graduated from the Bible School in Banmethuot and is an outstanding pastor.

In January 1963, the small village of Dolol, mostly leprosy patients, decided as a group to become Christians. They formed the first Bahnar church. Poh became their pastor and also started a church in his own village which was about 6 miles down the road. The village of Dolol grew in numbers as refugees from communist dominated areas joined them and many of these newcomers were also converted. Later the majority of the people who were not leprosy patients formed a new village nearby, called Amrẽ Chrõng. At the same time the influence of these Christians had been felt in Dak Jã, a village 10 miles down the road towards Pleiku where some were converted. Today Poh is in charge of these four churches, with lay leaders also in each of the villages. In recent years about 1,000 Bahnar have returned to the An Khe area and we have made monthly trips down there with an evangelistic team from Kon Chrah. About 15 have come to the Lord there and two young men from that group attended our last lay leaders session in January.

When Grup finished his time as contact man with us in An Khe in 1961, he determined to return to his own village near Pleiku and witness to his own people. Things moved slowly there and though twice small groups responded, each time they fell away when adversity came their way.

In 1967 Grup returned to Bible School in Banmethuot. He was caught there by the Tet offensive in 1968. After he was released from captivity by the V.C., he found his family and returned with them to his own village. There he found the people ready to listen and by the time we returned from our second furlough that July, eleven families had decided to become Christians. This has been a growing church with an evangelistic impact on the Golar area ever since. Another beginning among the Golar people was made in 1965 with meetings held in Fragier's house for Bahnar high school students. About 12 young men were converted there and they formed the nucleus of a church in Plei Brel Dor. Dave's language teacher, Young, became a leading Christian. His young brother-in-law, Uý, attended the Theological Institute at Nha Trang for one year and has been pastoring the church at Plei Brel Dor and a branch church at neighboring Plei Tuoh for the past 3 years.

Following is a list of church groups that meet regularly with approximate number of Christians:

An Khe - 15	Amrë Chrông - 150	Kon Chrah - 160	Dólól - 80
Dak Jă - 15	Kông Brech - 400	Brel Dôr - 150	Tuoh - 90
Bôí - 20	Hólôm - 50	Piôm - 80	Dak Alu - 40

In these villages there are church buildings in Kon Chrah, Amrë Chrông, Dólól, Dak Jă, Kông Brech, Brel Dôr, Tuoh. Plei Hólôm and Piôm were in the process of building churches. A group of Christians living in Pleiku city usually travel to villages or meet at the Jerai church on Sunday mornings and meet together Sunday nights. Attendance is usually around 30. This group has had a wide influence with key people from several areas being converted through contact with these folk.

Our ministries have included village evangelism and church planting, Short Term Bible Schools for new converts, preparation of some literature materials and more recently, the lay pastors' training program. We were able to hold two sessions of this program and were greatly encouraged by the enthusiasm and maturity shown by these men.

Literature prepared included a hymn book with 65 hymns and choruses, a life of Christ picture story book, a catechism, worship helps and a tract entitled "Eight Important Things About Freedom" which was used as an evangelistic tool. Scriptures printed include a Bible

Overview with selections from the Old and New Testaments, 12 New Testament books, and two selections in tract form--the Easter story (John 18-20) and Lost Things from Luke 15. John and Betty Banker, workers with Wycliffe Bible Translators, had prepared and printed the 12 New Testament books and had also finished the first draft of the entire New Testament. They had also prepared a lot of literacy material and were responsible for literacy classes being started in many of the churches. Their help in the lay leadership training program and in every area of the work was of great value and we praise the Lord for these co-workers.

Leaving our Bahnar brethren was the hardest thing we have ever encountered but the Lord gave us some sweet memories to cushion the blow. As Irene was getting ready to leave for Saigon Friday morning, March 14th., two pastors, Grup and Uý dropped in for a visit. On hearing that Gail was not planning to leave, they both expressed concern for his safety and urged him not to stay too long. Grup said, "If you stay too long and the communists kill you, that's all right for you, you will go to heaven but what about us? If you go away for a while, perhaps some day you will be able to come back to us again." When he was given short notice next morning to evacuate that afternoon, Gail was still able to have a short visit with the Bahnar Christians in town and came away, knowing they are secure in the One who never leaves nor forsakes His own.