

**\* Draft translation \***

# **CENTRAL BUREAU OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

## **TRAINING DOCUMENT**

### **CONCERNING THE TASK OF THE PROTESTANT RELIGION IN THE NORTHERN MOUNTAINOUS REGION**

**FOR INTERNAL CIRCULATION**

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#### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

		Page
Lesson 1	The Policy of our Party and State toward religion	1
Lesson 2	The Protestant Religion and the work of dealing with the Protestant Religion	21
Lesson 3	The Protestant Religion and the management task of Government regarding the Protestant Religion in the Mountainous Region of the North	37
Attached	Sample forms for registering religious activities by meeting places of the Protestants	

## Lesson 1

### THE POLICY OF OUR PARTY AND STATE TOWARD RELIGION

#### I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN VIETNAM

1. Due to the various and unique geographical, population, historic, and cultural characteristics, Vietnam is a nation with many different religions. There are some religions with a stable organization, a set pattern of religious practice and progressive direction for development. There are some others without stable operation and still in the process of making improvements. According to the first census of the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs in 2004, there are about twenty millions members from six different religions in the whole nation, accounting for 25% of the whole population. The detailed numbers are followed:

- Buddhism:	9.038.064 members
- Catholicism:	5.624.492 members
- Cao Daism:	2.376.987 members
- Hoa Hao Buddhism:	1.332.572 members
- Christianity (Protestantism):	601.248 members
- Islam:	70.000 members

This reality challenges our Party and our Government to have appropriate policies toward religion in general and toward each religion in particular.

2. In Vietnam, there are some of the ethnic minorities in Northwest, the Western Highlands, and Southwestern regions who practice religion. Especially recently, Protestant Christianity and Catholicism have penetrated and focused their energy on evangelizing the ethnic minorities in the Western Highlands and the Northwestern region. According the statistics gathered in September 2005 by the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs, there were 361,449 ethnic minorities in the Western Highlands who were Protestant Christians and 165, 264 ethnic minorities in the same area who were Catholics. Similarly, in Northwest region, there were 100,000 ethnic Hmong Protestant Christians (under the name of Vang Chu) and about another 10,000 ethnic Dao Protestant Christians (under the name of Thin Hung)

The fact that a portion of the ethnic minority people are practicing religion creates a very complex and sensitive issues for us that need to be addressed, namely ethnicity and religion.

3. Religious believers in Vietnam are mostly farmers and workers, especially farmers, and they are patriotic citizens. At the same time, they are highly devoted to religious belief and have a need for communal religious activities. Therefore, religious believers in Vietnam are bonded with the nation, follow the leadership of the Party, contribute significantly to the revolutionary work of the nation; while at the same time maintaining their religious activities and a bond with their religious community, following the guideline of being “good citizen and a devoted believer.” However, the standard of living and intellectual level in areas where people follow religious are still a little lower compared to the rest of the nation. Particularly in some areas that had some unpleasant historical experiences with the Revolution, the people are still very hostile and prejudiced toward the Revolution.

The concern of the religion task is to improve the positive aspects in these religious communities, respect the freedom of belief and religion of these believers. At the same time we have to strive to erase the gap of self-pity and prejudice they have toward the Communist Party resulting from historical experiences.

4. In Vietnam there are a great numbers of professional monks and church workers who specialize in religious work. According to statistics gathered by the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs in 2003, the whole nation has about 56,000 people in this category.

The details are as follows: - - - -

Buddhists with 33,066; Catholics with 14,889; Cao Dai with 7,104; Islam with 699; Protestant Christians with 394. . . Beside these figures, there are approximately 100, 000 more positions in which people are working non-professionally as volunteers in various religious institutes such as the Executive Boards of Catholic Dioceses, the Buddhist Sanga, the Board of the Cao Dai, and the Executive Committee of Protestant Churches, etc.

These professional workers of various religions are an important vehicles for the government to manage religious activities and through which the government can guide religious beliefs and practices of the believers to be done legally.

5. In Vietnam, the various religions have extensive international relationships. Vietnamese Catholics, in term of organization, are part of the Catholic Church under the leadership of the Vatican. The Catholic Church has about 1.1 billion members in virtually every part of the world. Various denominations of Protestant Christians in Vietnam have multi-dimensional relationships with different Christian international organizations, based especially in Northern Europe, North America, and Korea. They have relationship both in terms of specific organizations and also a common spirit of the universal Christian church. Protestant Christianity worldwide has about 550 million members with 280 different denominations with a high concentration in developed countries such as those in Western Europe, Northern Europe, and North America. Besides being affected by the relationships mentioned above, religious bodies in Vietnam are also affected by many Vietnamese organizations and individuals living abroad. (Presently, there are about two millions Vietnamese abroad who are mostly religious believers and professional religious workers.)

The international relationships of the various religions, as mentioned above, need to be taken into consideration as part of the opening and internationalization policy of the Communist Party and government, as well as in light of globalization and internationalization in the social and economic spheres.

6. In the past, through colonization and invasion, imperial powers took advantage of religion to benefit their reactionary political moves. The act of exploiting religion this way has left a lot of unpleasant consequences that we have to clean up. These days, United State and its alliances with enemy forces both inside and outside of the country are using “peaceful evolution” as a means to attack our Revolution. under the guise of ethnic issues, religion and human rights. The United States is working with some international organization to distort the religious situation of our nation, falsely accusing us of limiting, and persecuting religious activities, while at the same time creating some legal means by which to interfere in the religious issues of our nation. In a very short time, the United State has crafted some legal policies under the guise of human rights and religious freedom relating to Vietnam. The United States is also trying to gather, and support the extremist religious fanatics in the nation to provoke instability in the religious situation in the country.

These situations described above creates for us the dual task of guaranteeing the religious needs of the religious believers, and at the same time guarding and fighting against the destructive plans of United States and its allies in trying to exploit the religion issue to attack our country.

## **II. OUR VIEWPOINTS, GUIDELINES AND POLICES CONCERNING RELIGION**

*\*Some documents*

- + Instruction #37 CT/TW on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1998 of the Politburo concerning the religion task in the new situation.
- + Resolution #25 NQ/TW on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003 of the 9<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party concerning the religion task.
- + Decision #125/2003/QD-TTg of the National Government concerning the implementation of the resolution of 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the Central Committee of the 9<sup>th</sup> Plenum.
- + The Ordinance on Religion and Belief
- + Decree #22/2005/ND-CP of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005 of the National Government regarding guidance to carry out some provisions of the Ordinance concerning religion and belief..
- + Instruction #01/2005/CT-TTg of February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005 of the Prime Ministers concerning some tasks involving Protestant Christianity

The documents listed above express the new perspective of the Communist Party and the National Government concerning the religion task.

*\*The detailed contents as follows:*

**1. Regarding the direction:**

The religious activities and the religion task in the new situation must aim at strengthening the support of all religious people for the great national unity bloc, developing the collective strength of the whole nation, succeeding in carrying out the industrialization and modernization of the nation, and building and defending the Fatherland to have prosperous citizens, and be a strong nation with a just, democratic and civilized society..

**2. Regarding the viewpoint and policy:**

*First*, belief and religion is a spiritual need for a portion of our people who were and will be with us in the process of building socialism for our country. Religious people are a part of the great national unity bloc.

Consistently carry out the policy of respecting and protecting freedom of religion, whether to believe or not to believe in a particular religion; respecting the right to practice religion according to the law. Religion must operate within the framework of the law, and (religious believers) are equal before the law.

*Secondly*, the government must consistently implement the great national unity bloc policy, without showing any discrimination toward religious belief or religion.

All the religions are must act within the framework of the law. Unite the people of different religions and unite people who have religion with those who do not. Keep and develop the positive values of traditional ancestor worship, and of venerating those who made great contributions to the Fatherland and the people. It is strictly forbidden to discriminate on the basis of religion and belief. At the same time, strictly prohibit the exploitation of religion to invoke superstitious activities, or do any illegal actions against the policies of the Government, and create divisions among the people and the ethnic groups, or in any way infringe on national security.

*Thirdly*, the core content of the religious task is to mobilize the masses.

The purpose is prosperous citizens, a strong nation, a just, civilized and democratic society to connect people from different religions to our revolutionary task. Every citizen, regardless of their religion or beliefs, has the same right and responsibility in building and defending the nation.

The work of mobilizing religious believers must include motivating them to patriotism, and concern for the independence and unity of the Fatherland through carrying out the economic and social polices, social stability and national defense to guarantee the material and spiritual well-being of the people, who include religious believers.

*Fourthly*, religion task is the responsibility of the whole political system under the leadership of the Communist Party.

Our country today has tens of millions of religious believers and professional religious workers, in virtually every region and area of the country. Therefore, the religion task is related to many different areas of social life and on many different levels.

To do well in the religion tasks is the responsibility of the whole political system under the leadership of the Communist Party, in which individuals specializing in religious affairs have the chief role. The infrastructure of carrying out the religion task needs to be strengthened and perfected, especially in the areas with a high density of religious believers. The religion task is by nature the task of mobilizing the masses. The government's task of managing religion and fighting against the taking advantage of religion for rebellious reasons will only be successful if the task of mobilizing the masses is done effectively.

*Fifthly*, the issue of believing in a religion and of propagation.

Every religious member has a right to practice religion at home and in legal religious buildings according to the provisions of the law.

Every religious organization that has been granted legal recognition by the Government, has the freedom to function according to the law, is protected by the law. It has the right to carry out religious activities, open schools to train workers, publish religious materials and maintain, renovate, or build their religious institutions according to the regulations of the law.

Believing in and propagating a religion and all other religious activities must be according to the law; under no circumstances may anyone exploit religion to propagandize false religion, or any type of superstitious activities, and under no circumstances may people be forced to follow a religion. Strictly forbidden are illegal organizations spreading religion, illegal evangelists and any illegal methods of evangelizing which violate the Constitution and the law.

### **III. SPECIFIC POLICIES AND LAWS AFFECTING RELIGION**

On June 18, 2004, the Standing Committee of the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the National Assembly passed the Ordinance on Religion and Belief. After that, on June 29, 2004, President Tran Duc Luong signed the Ordinance on Religion and Belief. The Ordinance on Religion and Belief includes four chapters and 41 Articles, as follows:

*Chapter I* – The general regulations, including eight articles (from 1 to 8) in which the principles of the Ordinance express the spirit of renovation of the Communist Party and the Constitution concerning religion, with the basis being respect and guarantee for freedom of religion for every citizen.

*Chapter II* - The activities of belief of those who have belief, and the religious activities of the religious believers and professional religious workers include seven articles (from 9 to 15) which details the belief activities for those who have belief and religious activities of the religious believers and professional religious workers.

*Chapter III* – Religious organization and the activities of the religious organization include ten articles (from 16 to 25). This is the main chapter of the Ordinance on issues such as the registration and granting of legal recognition for religious organization and the establishment, merging, separating, uniting, dismissing of religious organizations; the registration of monasteries, religious communities; the installation, promotion, firing, transferring of religious professionals; the opening of

schools, training classes for the professional workers; organizing general assemblies and councils for any religious organizations.

*Chapter IV* – The property possessed by religious institutions, and the social arms of the religious organization, religious believers and professional religious workers are covered under eight articles (from 26 to 33). These refer to issues such as the properties of religious organizations, fundraising, receiving gifts-in-kind, building and moving religious buildings, publishing, printing, and distributing religious materials; and the involvement of individuals or religious organizations in charitable activities.

*Chapter V* – The international relationships of religious organizations and religious believers and professional workers include four articles (from 34 to 37). These concern the relationships between individual believers and religious organizations in Vietnam, with any religious believers and organization in other countries and vice visa; and religious activities of foreigners in Vietnam.

*Chapter VI* – the implementation rules are included in four articles (from 38 to 41). These regard the resolution of legal conflicts between the Ordinance and international agreements and covenants which Vietnam has either signed or joined; and the matter of providing guidance for implementing the Ordinance during the time that it is in force.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, the Government issued Decree #22/ND-CP providing guidance to carry out some issues of the Ordinance on Religion and Belief. Compared to Decree 26/1999/ND/CP of April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1994 of the Government and the previous regulations concerning religion, the new Ordinance on Religion and Belief and Decree #22/ND-CP have many new points. The details are as follows.

#### *1. Regarding the scope of the adjustments*

This Ordinance does not only make adjustments on religion activities but also in religious beliefs activities. Different from religion activities, belief activities are ones without any fixed organization and yet appeal to a majority of people. The government respects these healthy activities which lift up humanitarian values and national cultural traditions, meeting the spiritual needs of a majority of people and at the same time strictly forbidding every action that may take advantage of religion to promote superstitious beliefs, or any attempts to commercialize religious belief activities.

Articles 3 to 5 of Decree #22/ND-CP explicitly explain the concept of belief ceremonies and when ceremonies require permission of the provincial People’s Committees before being carried out and which ones need only to be reported; and about the order, the documentation, the time of the ceremonies. Ceremonies which are organized for the first time, or restored after several years of interruption, or happened periodically but have changes in content or time or place different than the tradition, must get the permission of the respective provincial People’s Committees. Other cases need only to be reported to the commune level People’s Committee.

#### *2. Regarding the legal recognition of religious organizations*

The matter of legally recognizing a religious organization is not a new issue because in Section 1, Article 8 of Decree #26/CP concerning religious activities explicitly states: “Those religious organizations which have an appropriate purpose, mission statement, and leadership direction, and an organizational structure in conformity with the law and are permitted by the Prime Minister to function, have the protection of the law”. However, under the new regulations of the Ordinance, we will open up and continue handling the cases of some religions, among which are those with a large numbers of members, and some which have just recently appeared. This new feature conveys our policy of respecting the freedom of religion of the people, and at the same time it suits the development of society. Specifics as follows: - - - -

- *About the registration of religious activities and legal recognition of religious organizations.* Guidance for carrying out Article 16 of the Ordinance and Articles 6 to 8 of Decree #22/ND-CP, stipulates that before a religious organization can be legally recognized it must register its religious activities and must demonstrate stable religious activities for a specified period of time.
  - *About registration of religious activities.* Article 6 six explicitly stipulates that the organization must send its application document to the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs or the government's religion management department at the provincial level. The document should include the registration application which clearly states the name of the organization, its origin, its past activities in Vietnam, its mission statement, its purpose, the scope of its activities, the number of members at the time of registration, the planned location for its physical buildings, the office of the organization, its doctrines, rules and a summary of its dogmas and regulations; a list of the planned board of leaders who must be Vietnamese citizens with adequate ability and a good reputation in the religious community. Sections 3 and 4 of Articles 6 spell out the authority to register and the time limit by which the registration must be issued.
  - *About the religious activities of the organization after the registration for religious activity.* Article 7 states that after being registered the organization can organize religious ceremonies, carry out religious rituals, evangelize, preach at its registered religious places, elect leaders, release religious leaders of the organization, open doctrine classes; can renovate, rebuild, upgrade its religious buildings and can be engaged in charitable works. When doing these religious activities mentioned above, the organization has to abide by the regulations of the Decree and all related laws.
  - *About legal recognition of religious organization.* Articles 8 states that the registering organization must send its file to the Prime Minister or to a provincial People's Committees. The Application file must include the registration request, the doctrines, regulations, and constitution of the organization, organizational by-laws, and documents affirming stable religious activities issued by the provincial religion management office of the government from the area in which the headquarters of the religious organization is located, and the certificate of registration for religious activities issued by a government body with authority to grant it.
3. *Regarding the establishing, separating, dividing, merging, and uniting of specific religious organizations.*

This is a new regulation. According to Article 17 of the Ordinance, the religious organization has the right to establish, divide, separate, merge, and unite any religious organization which is directly related to it. This regulation will help the organization plan, and arrange all their related organizations which meet the need of the religious activities.

Guidelines on implementing Articles 17 of the Ordinance in Articles 9 and 10 of Decree #22/ND-CP, stipulate the requirements for permission to establish, divide, separate, merge, unite specific religious organizations, and the time limits to establish, divide, separate, merge, and unite specific religious organizations.

4. *Regarding the ordination, promotion, installation, voting, and releasing from duty within religious organization.*

Article 22 of the Ordinance contains some significant changes. The Ordinance considers these to be internal issues of the religious organizations so the organizations have the right implement accordingly to their constitution, bylaws and religious regulations. Since the constitutions and bylaws of the religious organization have been ratified by the Government, the Government doesn't need to interfere in these matters. The Government needs only to stipulate the

requirements and characteristics of citizens being considered for ordination, promotion, installation, voting or releasing, so the religious organization makes the choice and decides. After ordaining, promoting, installing, voting or releasing, the religious organization has the responsibility to register the results with the concerned governmental offices, so that the government is informed and can guarantee their right to operate according to the law. Guidance for carrying Article 22 of the Ordinance in Articles 16 and 17 of Decree #22/ ND-CP, says the religious organization have the responsibility to register those who are ordained, promoted, installed, voted or released from duty, promoted and to inform the government office about firing the higher ranking workers along with their mistakes or misconduct, to the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs, and to the provincial People's Committee for the other religious workers.

The above mentioned registration document must includes a registration application, the background information with confirmation from the commune where the subject lives, and a short resume of the religious activities of the subject.

In cases where ordaining, promoting, installation, voting or releasing religious workers have any foreign connections, prior approval must be obtained from the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs.

Religious organization removing credentials or removing from office religious workers under their jurisdiction, must provide a written report to the concerned government office where they had earlier been registered, and this documentation must state clearly the reason for removing of credentials along with all related documents.

5. *Regarding the transferring of professional religious workers from one place of activity to another.*

The new regulations of the Ordinance radically change the issue of transferring professional religious workers from one location to another. In normal situations, religious organizations have only the responsibilities to advise the People's Committee of the district level to which they move and where they have registered their religious activities. In cases which the religious dignitaries were transferred due to violations of religion regulations and were charged with administrative infractions or criminal activity by the Chairman of the People's Committee, the regulations of the government require that in addition to informing the People's Committee of the district to which they are being moved, they must get the permission of the concerned provincial People's Committee.

The directions for carrying out Article 23 of the Ordinance in Articles 18 and 19 of Decree #22/ND-CP state that when religious organizations transfer their professional religious workers from one place to another, they must inform the district level People's Committee about their name, their position and role, the reason for the transfer, the place of transfer, and the official decision of the transfer from the religious organization. The religious organization must register beforehand with that district People's Committee to which the religious worker is being transferred.

The registration documentation must include the registration application, the official decision to transfer of the religious organization, and background information on the person confirmed by the commune People's Committee where this person lived.

In cases where professional religious workers violated religion regulations and were charged with administrative infractions or criminal activities, by the Chairman of the a provincial People's Committee, the transfer documentation must be sent to provincial People's Committee to where the subject is being transferred.

6. *Regarding religious communities/orders*

According to the new regulations of the Ordinance, religious communities are defined as a community of members established by a religious organization for the purpose of religious activities. Article 19 of the Ordinance states that a religious order is allowed to function only after registering with the competent government office. Depending on the sphere of action of a religious order, the sponsoring religious organization must register it with a district or a provincial People's Committee, or with the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs.

Directions to implement Articles 19 and 20 of the Ordinance in Articles 11 and 12 of Decree #22/ND-CP, stipulate that the registration documentation for a religious order must include a registration application, the roster of the orders leaders, regulations, and policies or bylaws concerning the functioning of the group. Those orders that are established by a religious organization with the sole purpose of performing religious ceremonies are not required to register with the authoritative government offices.

Concerning a monastery, nunnery or other type of communal order with religious purposes, the registration documentation must include the registration application, the roster of the religious workers, regulations or bylaws for the activities of the order.

7. *Regarding the activities of monasteries, nunneries and other monastic communities*

According to the new regulation of the Ordinance, these organizations need only register with the concerned competent government offices (district or provincial People's Committees or the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs) to have the right to function legally. Those monasteries and nunneries which had registered before the Ordinance was promulgated don't have to register again

- *Concerning the registration for new people joining monastic communities.* Directions for implementation in Section 2 of Article 21 of the Ordinance in Article 22 of Decree #22/ND-CP, state that when admitting new people, the supervisor of the religious order must register new members with the district People's Committee, and include their background information. In the cases of underage members, consent must be obtained from their parents or legal guardian.

8. *Regarding the property of the religious beliefs and religion organizations.*

The Ordinance affirms that legally owned properties of religious institutions are protected by the law and no one is allowed to infringe on this. Specifically, the land which belong to the religious institutions is protected by the law for stable and long term use. The religious institutions have the right to raise funds, receive goods-in-kind, giving and receiving for the purpose of religious activities. However, these acts of giving and donating must be done by individuals on a voluntarily basis. This must be done publicly with a clear indication of purposes for using the donations, and the local People's Committee where the action is to take place must be informed in advance.

9. *Regarding social, charitable and humanitarian work of professional religious workers and religion organizations*

The government encourages and creates opportunities for religion organizations to participate in taking care of children with special needs; helping and caring for the poor, the handicapped, patients with HIV-AIDS, leprosy, or mental disease, and in supporting kindergarten system and being a part of other humanitarian programs which are stated goals of the organization's constitution and bylaws and in conformity with the law. Professional religious workers, in their role as citizens, should organize charitable educational and medicals events, and other charitable events that are promoted by the government according to the regulations of the law.

Directions for implementing Section 2 Article 28 of the Ordinance in Article 30 of Decree #22/ND-CP, state that religious sites and organizations, when they organize fundraising drives, should report in writing, depending on the scope of event, to the People's Committee of the commune, district or province - the purpose, the scope, the length of time for fundraising, the management system, and ways of spending the money being raised. By no means may a religious organization abuse fundraising for people's individual gain or any illegal purposes.

The People's Committee which receives the information about the fundraising activity, has responsibility to supervise the fundraising event to make sure it happens as claimed.

#### *10. Regarding international relations of religion organizations*

Starting from the idea of creating a more open, more multi-dimensional, and more diversified international relation policy for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Ordinance indicates that only the international relations which directly relate to religious organization need to have the approval of the government. The Ordinance also clearly states that these international relationships must be based on mutual respect for each country's sovereignty, without interfering into each other's internal problems, equality with mutual benefits, according to the regulations on both sides, and according to the law and international regulations, in order to have open international religious relationships on both sides.

The directions for Articles 35 and 36 of the Ordinance in Articles 31 to 35 of Decree #22/ND-CP regulate the procedures for inviting foreign religious organizations or foreigners to Vietnam for the purpose of international exchange and cooperation in religion work; for taking part in international religious events overseas; and for attending training courses abroad – all of which require documentation be sent to the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs.

For professional religious workers who go abroad for other reasons other than these mentioned, they must follow the legal regulations concerning immigration (Article 34).

Article 35 indicates that the religious organizations that invite foreign religious dignitaries to preach in Vietnamese religious institutions, must submit documents requesting the visit to the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs. The documentation must include the names, position, nationalities, name of the foreign religious organization, the program, the time and location, and the people who organize the program and who will participate.

#### *11. Regarding the religious activities*

Religious activities include preaching, applying doctrine, regulations, ceremonies, and managing the religion organization. The Ordinance clearly states what these religious activities are, and stipulates which government management organizations are responsible for each. Compared to previous Decree #26/ND-CP, the management tasks of the Government are defined much more clearly.

##### *- Concerning the registration for annual religious activities of the religious organization or institution.*

Directions for carrying out Section 1 Article 12 of the Ordinance stipulate in Articles 20 and 21 of Decree #22/ND-CP, that annually, before October 15, those in charge of the religion organization have the responsibility to submit the registration documents concerning the activities that will take place the following year, to the People's Committee of the commune. They must clearly indicate the name of the organizer, the people in charge of the activities, the estimated number of participants, the content of the activities and, the time and location of the activities.

Regarding those religious activities that are outside the pre-registered programs - depending on the scale of the activities and the extent of participation by members, the activities must be approved by the district or provincial People's Committee. The religious organization must send the request, including the name of the organizers, the people in charge, the estimated number participants, the content of the activities, the time and location of the activities that will take place, and guarantee the information.

- *About conferences and general assemblies of religious organization.*  
Guidance to carry out Article 18 of the Ordinance is in Articles 23 to 25 of Decree #22/ND-CP, which say that annual conferences and general assemblies of religious organization, depending on the level of organization, has to get the permission of the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs, and the provincial or district People's Committee.  
Before organizing conferences or general assemblies, there must be a formal request giving the reason, estimated number of participants, the contents of the program, the time and location of the event and other related documents (the Annual Report, the constitution and bylaws, and proposed changes in same). In the case of national conferences and general assemblies, input is required from the People's Committee of the province where the event is proposed to take place.
- *About the religious ceremonies that take place outside of the religious institutions.* Guidance to carry out Article 25 of the Ordinance in Article 26 of Decree 22/ND-CP indicates that in the case of a ceremony taking place outside the confines of religious institutions, the religious organization must submit a written request to the People's Committee of the district or the province where the ceremony is to take place. The request must include the name of the ceremony, the organizers, the content, the program, time, location, the scale of the event and those who will participate.
- *About preaching, and evangelizing of professional religious workers outside of religious institutions.* Directions to implement Section 2 of Article 11 of the Ordinance in Article 27 of Decree #22/ND-CP require that professional religious workers who preach and evangelize outside the religious institutions must submit a request to People's Committee of the district where they are planning to perform their activities. Included with the request must be comments of the local religious management organization, or the one that normally directly manages the preaching and evangelizing activities of the respective professional religious workers.
- *Concerning renovating, upgrading, and new building project of religious institutions.*  
Guidance to carry out Article 30 of the Ordinance in Articles 28 and Clause 29 of Decree #22/ND-CP states that any renovation and upgrading the buildings of religious institutions that do not alter the architecture, the engineering standards and safety of project during renovation, are not required to have construction permission prior to starting, but the person in charge must inform the local commune People's Committee in writing.  
In the case of renovation and upgrading a religious building that will change the architecture, and engineering standards, and affect safety during construction, the people in charge of that religious organization must submit a request for a building permit to the provincial People's Committee.  
This documentation for a building permit includes an application for construction work; the blueprint of the construction work, legal land ownership documents, and written consent for the construction from the government management office concerning religious affairs at the provincial level.
- *Concerning the establishment and dissolution of training schools, and training courses for upgrading professional religious workers.* Directions for implementing Article 24 of the Ordinance in Articles 13 to 15 of Decree #22 ND-CP state that the religious organization which desires to open a training school for professional religious workers must submit appropriate documentation to the Prime Minister.

The documentation must include the request to open the school; the proposed plan with the name of the religious organization submitting the request, name of the school, planned location for the school, the purpose, its functions, responsibilities, scope and sphere of action, schedule of teaching, planned procedures of functioning, procedure for admitting students, standard of admission, proposed leadership board, management board, teachers and all the related biographical information of the leaders, managers, and teachers; proof of adequate finances,

infrastructure, documents concerning the land property and written comments of the provincial People's Committee where it is proposed to locate the school.

During the operation of the school, if for any reason the school is disbanded, the religious organization must send all necessary documents and reports to the Prime Minister stating the reasons for and method of disbanding, and the disposition of the land and other property of the school.

Regarding the opening training courses for upgrading professional religious workers, the religious organization is responsible for sending a request to the Chairman of the provincial People Committee where the course is to be organized. The document must clearly state the name of the course, the location, the need for organizing the course, the time frame of the course, the contents, program, participants and a list of teachers.

#### *12. Regarding the suspension of the religious belief activities and religious organization activities*

According to Article 15 of the Ordinance, religious activities can be suspended for violating one of these conditions: violating national security, seriously affecting public order or the environment; violating a person's life, health, reputation, property or other serious illegal acts. This decision is a crucial legislative foundation allowing concerned government offices that have authority to suspend religious belief or religious organizations' activities when they violate or bring bad influence to other social relationship that are under the protection of the government.

Regarding the punishment of violations - beside the punishments for actions of violating religion for defiant political motives, or taking advantages of religion for superstitious purposes as in the past, the Ordinance also mentions punishments for those who shows hostility to others due to their different religions or beliefs as this violates the right of freedom of religion for every citizen.

#### *13. Regarding the type of management and the authority of the Ordinance*

In managing religious belief and religious activities, there are three main forms: reporting, registration, and asking for permission (must have the permission of the government). If "asking permission" was the main form in the past, then with the new Ordinance, reporting and registration are the main forms. All normal religious activities of the people, all the normal religious activities of the professional religious workers are respected and protected without having to ask for permission. The matter of asking for permission is used mainly for the administration of the organization - such as granting the legal right for the religious organization, arranging a conference or general assembly, opening a training school for the workers, constructing places for worship or other religious institutions. These things are applied in the same way as they would for other mass social organizations.

The Ordinance on Religion and Belief is a legislative document, in contrast to Decree #26 which was an executive document. Thus the Ordinance is highly consistent and authoritative. The Ordinance will be consistently implemented and is legally effective over the whole country and for all kinds/classes of citizens.

#### **IV. SPECIFIC JURISDICTION OF GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS WHICH MANAGE RELIGION**

According to the Ordinance on Religion and Belief, and Decree #22/2005/ND-CP, the management task of the government toward religions and beliefs employs 44 different tasks concerning areas such as: receiving reports about activities, receiving requests for registering activities, issuing approval for such registration license, and giving permission for activities.

These are implemented by four different management levels: the national government and the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs, the province level which includes provincial People's Committees and Religious Affairs Committees, the district level which includes the district People Committee, and commune level People's Committee.

The actual tasks of each management level are as follows:

1. ***The Prime Minister:*** Has 4 main tasks (01 legal recognition, 02 granting approvals, 01 receiving reports):
  - Recognizing the religious organization which operate in many provinces and cities (Article 8, Section 3 a)
  - Approving the establishment, dividing, merging, and uniting of religious organization (Article 10 Section 3a)
  - Receiving reports of disbanding of training schools for the professional religious workers (Article 14)
  
2. ***The Central Bureau of Religious Affairs:*** Has 11 different tasks (02 issuing registration; 06 approvals, 02 receiving registration applications, 01 receiving reports):
  - Issuing registration for religious activities for the organization with a sphere of action in many provinces and cities (Articles 6 Section 4 a)
  - Receiving registration requests of religious communities with a sphere of action in many provinces and cities (Article 11 Section 4)
  - Issuing registration for monasteries nunneries, and other types of religious communities with a sphere of action in many provinces and cities (Article 12 Section 3)
  - Granting ordination, promotion with the foreign connection involved (Article 16 Section 4)
  - Receiving registration of candidates for ordination and promotion (Article 16 Section 5 a)
  - Receiving reports of dismissal from office of religious workers (Article 17).
  - Granting permission for general assemblies at the central level (Article 24 Section 3)
  - Granting permission for extending invitations to foreign organizations and individuals to Vietnam (Article 31 Section 3)
  - Granting permission for participating in religious activities abroad (Article 32 Section 3)
  - Granting permission for attending training courses abroad for religious purposes (Article 33 Section 3)
  - Granting permission for preaching of foreign religious workers in Vietnam (Article 35 Section 2)
  
3. ***Provincial People's Committee and Provincial Religious Affairs Committee:*** Have 15 assigned tasks (01 legal recognition, 08 granting approvals, 01 granting registration, 02 receiving registration requests; 02 receiving reports)
  - Approving the organization of religious ceremonies as described in Article 4, section 1 (Article 5 Section 3).
  - Issuing registration for religious activities for organization with sphere of action in some provinces and cities directly related to the central government (Article 6 Section 4 b)
  - Recognizing religious organization with a sphere of action in one province or city (Article 8 Section 3 b)
  - Receiving registration for religious communities with the sphere of action in many districts, provinces, and cities in many regions (Article 11, Section 4)
  - Issuing registration for monasteries, nunneries and other forms of communal living with religious purposes with a sphere of action in one province (Article 12, Section 3)
  - Granting permission for the opening of training courses for professional religious workers (Article 15, Section 2)
  - Receiving registration requests for candidate for ordination and promotion (Article 16, Section 5b)
  - Receiving reports of dismissal from office of religious workers (Article 17)
  - Granting permission to transfer locations for religious workers who have violated religious regulations and have been treated accordingly (Article 19, Section 4)

- Granting permission for religious activities outside those registered by the religious organizations (Article 21, Section 1a).
  - Granting permission for conferences and general assemblies of religious organization which are not provided for in Articles 23, 23 in the draft of the Decree (Article 25, Section 3)
  - Approving ceremonies taking place outside the religious institutions or facilities (Article 26, Section 4)
  - Approving the renovation, and upgrading of religious buildings/facilities (Article 29, Section 3)
  - Receiving reports on fundraising activities of the religious institutions and religious organizations (Articles 30, Section 3 c)
4. ***District People Committees:*** 9 tasks (01 granting registration; 04 granting approvals; 02 receiving registration requests; 02 receiving reports)
- Receiving registration of religious communities with the sphere of action in district or a town (Article 11, Section 4)
  - Issuing registration for monasteries, nunneries or other forms of communal living with religious purposes, with the sphere of action in one district or city of a province (Article 12, Section 3)
  - Receiving reports of the transfer of location for religious activities of professional religious workers (Article 18, Section 1)
  - Receiving registrations of the transfer of location for religious activities of professional religious workers (Article 19, Section 3)
  - Granting permission for religious activities outside the registered programs of the religious organizations (Article 21, Section 1 b).
  - Approving conference and general assemblies of religious organization at the local level (Articles 23, Section 3)
  - Granting permission for ceremonies taking place outside of religious institutions (Article 26, Section 3)
  - Granting permission for preaching and evangelizing outside the religious institutions (Article 27, Section 3)
  - Receiving reports of fundraising events of religious institutions and religious organizations (Article 30, Section 3 b)
5. ***Commune People's Committees:*** 5 tasks (02 receiving registration requests, 03 receiving reports)
- Receiving reports of the organizing of religious ceremonies not listed in Article 4, Section 2
  - Receiving registration requests for annual religious activities of religious institutions (Articles 20, Section 3)
  - Receiving registrations of people joining religious communities (Article 22)
  - Receiving reports for minor repairs and renovations of religious institutions/facilities (Article 28)
  - Receiving reports of fundraising events of religious institutions and religious organizations (Article 30, Section 3 a)

The Ordinance on Religion and Belief is a progressive move in the process of perfecting legal regulations regarding religions and beliefs in our country. It will create an innovative legislative environment to ensure the freedom of religion and belief for the people, while at the same time creating opportunities for us to manage and direct these religious activities accordingly to the legal policies and laws.

## Lesson 2

# THE PROTESTANT RELIGION AND THE WORK OF DEALING WITH THE PROTESTANT RELIGION

## I. OVERVIEW OF THE PROTESTANT FAITH

### 1. About the name Protestant Religion (Dao Tin Lanh)

The name “Dao Tin Lanh”(The Protestant faith or religion) has a special meaning indicating the relationship between the Protestant faith with other branches (religions) within Christianity.

Christianity (the religion that worships God) came from the Middle East during the first years of the Christian era. It was founded by Jesus Christ (the second person in the Trinity). After three hundred years of persecution by the Roman Empire because of the differences between polytheistic and monotheistic religions, from 313 (under the reign of the Emperor Constantine) the Roman Empire accepted it as the religion of the empire (a state religion). During the process of development around the 11<sup>th</sup> century, due to cultural differences and interests between the East and the West, Christianity was divided into the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was great schism in the Catholic Church and a new religion was born: the Protestant faith (religion). The Catholic Church and the feudal system in Europe called it Protestantism. When it arrived in China, it was called “Dao The Phan” as the Chinese language rendered it (religion of the betrayers). The second schism is in fact a religious reform, so on many occasions people refer to it as the Reformation. The Protestant faith came to Vietnam in last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the North it was called according to the Chinese, the Dao The Phan; in Central Vietnam, it was called Dao Gia To (the religion of Jesus), and in the South Vietnam it was called Dao Hue Ky (The American religion). In the 20's and 30's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, missionary Cadman of the C&MA mission along with writer Phan Khoi translated the Bible into Vietnamese. They did not translate the word Phuc Am as Tin Mung (good news) as did the Catholic Church, but rendered it as Tin Lanh. The way the Protestants translated Phuc Am (Gospel) as Tin Lanh gradually became well known and distinguished them from the Catholics, so people call the Reformation religion “Tin Lanh” to the present time.

### 2. The environment and conditions into which the Protestant faith was born.

1. The Protestant faith was born in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It has deep social and political origins. First is the appearance of the bourgeois class with new demands in politics, society, ideology and religion. With the conditions in the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church and the feudal systems had a close relationship. The Catholic Church was the ideological backbone of the feudal system. The Catholic Church was politicized and became a feudal power. The bourgeois class created reform to limit the power and influence of the feudal class before they initiated a social revolution - a bourgeois revolution to overthrow the feudal system.

2. The birth of the Protestant faith demonstrated the serious crisis in the influence of the Catholic Church in their ambition of secular power and the decline of morality of the clergy. With crisis of prestige and influence of the Church came is the dead end of the scholasticism, the basic foundation of the Catholic Church.

3. From the cultural and ideological standpoint, the Protestant faith was born due to the emergence of the renaissance, of humanism, and nationalism in the Europe of the 15 and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. With emphasis on the value of man, of human rights, humanism, individuality, and democracy and the enjoyment of life versus the emphasis on theology and the theocracy of the Catholic Church and the feudal system.

4. The birth of the Protestant faith is the succession and continuation of the movements against the power of the Pope and the Roman Curia in earlier centuries.

5. The motivation for reform was in the luxurious life of the clergy in the Roman Curia. Those who led the reform movement were no other than Catholic priests themselves: Father Martin Luther, Father Thomas Munzer, Father John Calvin, and Father Ulrich Zwingli...

The Reform movement exploded first in Germany in November 1517 with the posting of 95 theses by Martin Luther attacking the Pope, the papacy and the sale of indulgences. From Germany the movement spread to France, Switzerland, England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and by the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century after the 30 Year War (1618-1648) it became a new religion, the Protestant religion, separated from the Catholic Church.

### **3. The process of spreading of the Protestant faith**

1. In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the bourgeois class in Europe stepped onto the political stage, and affirmed itself with a number of bourgeois revolutions (The English bourgeois revolution in 1640, the French bourgeois revolution in 1789...) The bourgeois class then started wars of conquest in the outside world in order to expand trade and to exploit natural resources. The Protestant faith exploited the political and social reasons mentioned above to expand its influence. If by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Protestant Religion had only 30 million followers, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Protestant faith had 100 million members. The 20<sup>th</sup> century with its two World Wars (1914-1919; 1939-1945), and with industrialization and modernization progressing at great speed, a favorable environment was created for the rapid development and expansion (of Protestantism) to many countries in the world. The Protestant faith was born in Europe but later moved to North America. In America with a free environment, the Protestant faith flourished with the emergence of many denominations and organizations. From America, and by many ways, including the position and power of the US, the Protestant faith returned to Europe and then spread throughout the world. That is the development path of the Protestant faith, and it is also the reason thereof. The cradle of the Protestant faith is in Europe, but the center of operation for world Protestantism is North America.
2. Noteworthy during previous development as well as the current development, is that apart from the favorable conditions as mentioned above, capitalists friendly to the Protestant faith were very dynamic, changing and accommodating all the time, especially the policy of contextualization "in the world" (incarnation), using social activities as means and condition to attract converts. Also due to its late appearance, and areas of missionary activity previously assigned, limiting Protestants, their missionary activity became focused on the areas of ethnic minorities.
3. At present, only after 500 years since the birth of the Protestant faith, it has developed with great speed. It has become a major religion, standing third only after the Catholicism and Islam, with about 550 million members, 285 denominations and present in 135 countries on all continents. The majority of these countries are advanced industrial countries in Northern Europe, Western Europe and North America. In East Asia the Protestant faith is present in China, Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia.

### **4. Doctrines, laws, liturgies, and organization.**

The Protestant faith has many denominations, and although there are differences in theology, in the practice of the faith, and organization among denominations, by and large they are united in contents and key principles. In general, the following are differences in doctrines, laws, rituals and organization between Catholicism and the Protestant faith

- a. - First, the Bible. Both the Catholic and Protestant faith take the Bible (both the Old Testament and the New Testament) as the basis for doctrine. The Protestants recognize 39 of the 46 books in the OT. The Protestant Bible has 66 books whereas the Catholic Bible has 73 books. The Protestant faith highly values the place of the Bible, regarding the Bible foundational and the only basis for faith and practice. The Catholics believe that, apart from the Bible, there are also decisions of the church councils, papal decrees, and pastoral letters from the Pope. In principle, they also have value for doctrines. The Protestants believe in the Bible absolutely. Pastors and church members all use the Bible, speak and live according to the Bible; for the Protestant faith the Bible is of absolute importance. In all circumstances, the Bible serves as a respected teacher for both pastors and missionaries. Protestants directly read, meditate and ponder over the Bible. Both Catholics and Protestants highly honor the Bible in all their activities.

- Catholic and Protestant doctrines are basically similar. Both religions worship God, and believe in the Trinity. They believe that God created and governs the universe and everything in it. They believe that God created man with both body and soul. They believe man is a sinner.

However, there are some details in the Catholic doctrines that the Protestant faith has corrected or dropped altogether, demonstrating a distinct difference between the Catholics and the Protestants.

- The Protestant faith respects but does not worship Mary as the Catholics do. Mary had the honor to raise Jesus, and she is not the mother of God.

- Protestants honor the angels, the saints, the apostles, the martyrs and other saints but do not worship them as the Catholics do. Protestants do not worship icons, statues or relics.

In some cases, Protestants use images and statues in their religious activities, but as tools for teaching or explaining.

- Protestants believe in heaven and in hell but not to the point of using them as a reward or a threat for punishment.

#### **b. Church laws (canon laws) and rituals**

In its religious life, the Protestant faith is a religion that respects reason. Protestants believe that salvation is by faith not by the outward matters/ appearances (that is by keeping church laws and rituals). Therefore, the way they practice their faith is simple, not complex like the Catholic Church.

- Among the Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church (baptism, confirmation, absolution, communion, supreme unction, ordination, and matrimony), the Protestant faith recognizes and use only two: baptism and Holy Communion.

- Those who are going to receive baptism need to know the doctrines, and especially to lead a pure life, without any sin. The Protestant baptism is an immersion into the water, not a symbolic sprinkling of water on the head as the Catholics do.

- Protestants recognize 15 feasts/ceremonies, but they consider the time to commemorate the death of Jesus to save mankind as primary and through it remember to live a life worthy of God. Holy Communion or mass in the Catholic church is celebrated with much more ritual. The faithful can only eat bread, but the wine is saved for the clergy.

The Protestants celebrate the Communion much more simply, all members joining in eating the bread and drinking the wine, Holy Communion is usually held on the first Sunday of the month.

- The Protestants only believe in the Bible, using the Bible in all religious activities. In the confession of sin, as in prayers the Protestants can stand in front of the congregation to confess or offer their own prayers in public.

- Protestant Churches are built with modern and simple architecture. Inside the church there are no images, only a cross symbolizing the sufferings of Christ. In some cases, the Protestants use only a meeting room, or a hall, or even a house of a member for a service, to share the word from the Bible.

### **c. Clergy and the organization of the Church.**

-Clergy of the Protestant faith include the following positions: Pastor (the title used in the Bible), under the pastor is preacher (also call teacher (giang su). Presently, the ECVN(South), and the ECVN (North) call their preachers Pastors-in-training (Muc Su Nhiem Chuc). Clergy in the Protestant faith are most often males, but some denominations also choose women. In general Protestant do not favor celibacy. Religious officials of the Protestant Church do not claim power from God, and this means they do not represent God to offer blessings or absolution to the members. They are not the sole bridge between the religious believers and the Divine. Relationships between clergy and member are as equals and open. Some churches elect pastor for a limited time. Church officials work under the supervision of the church members, and each year the members vote to show their confidence in the pastor of the local church.

- The Protestant faith has the policy of establishing independent churches with different structures, depending on the denominational structure and surrounding conditions. Some Protestant churches have two levels – a central headquarters and local (congregations). Some denominations maintain a middle level called districts (Giao Khu or Dia Hat). Leaders at all levels of the church are elected by democratic means. The leadership of the church does not include only pastors or preachers but also laymen. All Protestant denominations claim the right of self-management for the local church on the basis of self-establishment, self-nurture and self- propagation.

- From the organizational point of view, Protestants usually have a Renewal Conference (Boi Linh) and the Annual General Meeting. Renewal Conferences are also called Spiritual Renewal (Linh Tu) and are commonly organized on an annual basis at different levels in order to upgrade the spiritual, doctrinal, and theological understanding of pastors, preachers and members. The Annual General Meeting is held for delegates from local churches every year to review the work of the previous year and to plan for the work of the following year, to elect the deacons, to cast a vote of confidence for pastors, and preachers and to elect delegates for the conference at the next level. The conference of delegates from local congregations is called the General Conference (Dai Hoi). Those who participate in this Conference include pastors, preachers and lay delegates from local churches. The General Conference is held according to deal with internal business, to amend the constitution or by-laws and to elect leaders.

## **5 Some observations about the Protestant faith**

1. The Protestant faith separated from the Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the time when the bourgeoisie and the capitalism emerged. The essence of the reform was deeply influenced by the idea of democratic bourgeois freedom for the individual.

In its religious activities, the Protestant faith highly respects the role of individuals. In community life and in organization, Protestants highly value democracy. Laws, rituals, religious practices and organizational structures of the Protestant faith are simple and light, not complex and binding as those of the Catholics.

2. These reformed contents have provided the Protestant faith with new characteristics, suitable for the bourgeoisie, functionaries and intellectuals...and urbanites in general in the industrial society. Especially with an uncomplicated religion, and a high respect for faith and the role of individuals, Protestants are able to preserve their faith in all political and social circumstances, including when oppressed and persecuted.
3. The Protestant faith is a religion that has dynamic direction and plans for actions, always renewing its essence as well as its forms and expressions to suit the social situation. In particular Protestants actively participate in all social activities, especially humanitarian work, using them as a way to expand influence. This generates a good reputation and opportunity for connections and co-existence with various political systems.
4. Apart from the urbanites, the second important objective for evangelization for Protestants, are the ethnic minorities. This is new territory where there is no official belief or religion. Old religions are declining and losing their reputation where the level of education of the people is low. Spreading the Gospel to such areas, the Protestants can exploit their advantages such as simple rules, rituals, and practices of the faith. But they also learn history, culture, psychology, lifestyles, customs, and habits of each ethnic group and contextualize their teaching in order to penetrate into the people.
5. Appearing on the scene at the same time as the bourgeoisie class, the Protestant faith has many relationships with the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie used the Protestant faith as a weapon in all the revolutions to defeat the feudal system and to limit the influence of the Catholic Church in the beginning and in their search for the markets in the colonies. Conversely the Protestant faith also relied on the bourgeoisie to consolidate their power, including exploiting the wars of conquest that the bourgeoisie initiated.
6. However, in each historical period, these relationships changed according to each denomination, and depending on the attitude of the leaders, and the exploitation of reactionary forces in the country and in the region, In recent times, the Protestant faith has been influenced by progressive tendencies in the world and many denominations have separated themselves from the bad forces.

## **II. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE PROTESTANT FAITH IN VIETNAM**

### **1. The Protestant faith developed mainly in South Vietnam before 1975.**

The Protestant faith was introduced to Vietnam at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. (The C&MA is a Protestant organization established in 1897 in America). From a base in Da Nang (1911) they began their missionary work in Vietnam. At the beginnings the missionary work faced many difficulties: politics, culture, ideology, in which we should mention the opposition from the French, resistance by the Catholic Church, Buddhism and traditional beliefs, and so the missionary work did not bring the hoped for results. After more than 40 years of missionary work from 1911 to 1954, the Protestant Church in Vietnam had 60,000 members, over 100 pastors and preachers in one organization, The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (established in 1927).

After the division of the country in 1954, there were differences between Protestants in the North and in the South. From the North a number of church members and clergy moved to the South. Only few hundred members remained with 20 pastors and preachers. In 1955 they established their own church called The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), commonly called, The Evangelical Church of the North.

In the South, during 1954-1975, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, commonly know as the Evangelical Church of the South taking advantage of the war situation with the material and spiritual assistance from the C&MA and other international Protestant groups, developed rapidly in terms of number of members, pastors, as well as organization and scope of activities. In 1975, in the South there were about 200,000 members and 500 pastors and preachers.

## **2. The Protestant faith in Vietnam has many organizations and denominations.**

At present, apart from the Protestant organizations with originate from C&MA and Seventh Day Adventist which existed earlier, there are also about 20 denominations, mainly denominations from North America that came to Vietnam and made Protestantism in the South quite diverse.

One can categorize the Protestantism in Vietnam in 1975 as follows:

*Denominations which have established churches include:*

- + The Evangelical Church of the North (Originated from the C&MA)
- + The Evangelical Church of the South (Originated from the C&MA)
- + The Seventh Day Adventist Church (1929)
- + The Christian Mission Church (1956)
- + The Baptist Church (1959)

*Denominations which recently established some places of worship*

- + The Presbyterian Church (1972)
- + The Assemblies of God (1972)
- + The Church of Christ (1963)
- + Jehovah's Witnesses
- + The Mennonites (1954)
- + The Jesus Church (Split from the ECVN-S in 1974)
- + The Gospel Mission (Split from the ECVN-S in 1974)

*International organizations with representative offices.*

- + The Bible Society – UBS
- + The Summer Institute of Linguistics – SIL
- + World Vision (WV)
- + The Christian Council of Asia – CCA
- + The World Council of Churches – WCC
- + The Young Men Christian Association – YMCA

## **3. The Protestants are mainly urbanites and ethnic minorities.**

Those who live in cities, towns or in industrial areas (usually called urbanites) and ethnic minorities, when seen from the standpoint of history, culture, society, customs and habits, seem to be different and unequal and even contradictory, but they make up the majority of Protestants in Vietnam. Actually this is not that much different from Protestantism around the world.

According to statistics of the Evangelical Church of the South in 1974 there were about 190,000 church members of which 100,000 were urbanites (55%), and about 55,000 members from ethnic minorities in Western Highlands (35%), whereas the members who are farmers from the delta made up only 10%.

All other denominations in the South have similar characteristics:

Seventh Day Adventists, urbanites 55%, ethnics 35%.

Christian Mission Church, urbanites 40%, ethnics 45 %

The percentages in the Church in the North vary a little in comparison with the South, with urbanites at 40% and ethnics at 30%, not counting the Hmong who recently converted to Christianity. In recent years, the Protestant faith is regarded as being the most rapidly growing among all religions in Vietnam, mainly growing in the two categories of urbanites and ethnic minorities.

#### **4. The Protestant faith considers mission as the task and goal for all its activities.**

Mission and growth in membership is a most basic activity of the religion. It is the divine call for the clergy. And also in Vietnam mission is of special importance for Protestants. The constitution of the C&MA as well as by-laws of the ECVN (N) as well that of the ECVN (S) affirm: Preaching the Gospel is the essence and the goal of all activities.

The focus on mission is shown through the institutions of the church.

Religious, economic, cultural, social infrastructure that the ECVN (S) built before 1975 included: one Theological Institute, 2 Bible schools, 3 magazines, 2 newspapers, 1 printing press, 15 programs for radio broadcast, 4 hospitals, 1 leprosy, 142 elementary and high schools, 320 Sunday schools...) through the support of international Protestant organizations such as the Bible Society, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and the Salvation Army. The Summer Institute of Linguistics translated the complete Bible or parts of the Bible into 22 ethnic languages. The Bible society printed millions copies of Bible and evangelistic materials, and in addition to these, there were the missionary forces and all the methods they used.

One point must be borne in mind - as an organization with special emphasis on mission in the past, the present and likely in the future, the number of followers of Protestantism will increase, and never quit growing as some other religions.

#### **5. The Protestant faith in Vietnam, though small in number, has broad international relationships**

The international relations of Protestantism are multifaceted; One can put them into two main categories as follows:

- Relationships established since the Protestant faith was first introduced into Vietnam according to the denominational organization in which the said Protestant church in Vietnam is regarded as an integral part of the international organization. Typical of this relationship is the connection between the ECVN (S) to the C&MA abroad, the Vietnam Seventh Day Adventist Church to the International Adventist Church, and Grace Baptist Church to the Southern Baptist Convention.

- Relations among people of the same faith with people who have an ecumenical spirit. These relations are very rich and dynamic, and are employed for mutual support in religious activities, especially in missionary activities. This group has two sub-categories: + Professional missionary organizations: Bible Society, SIL, and the Salvation Army.

- + Social. humanitarian organizations set up by international Protestant denominations such as like WV, ADRA and Oxfam.
- + These relations are established alongside other relationships like those of the NGOs.

## **6 Imperialism and bad forces continually seek ways to exploit Protestantism in Vietnam.**

When they invaded our country, imperialist forces found way to exploit religion with the purpose of using religion as an opposing force against our people, and against the revolution. The Catholic Church, Cao Dai, Hao Hao, and Protestants... at different levels, have some people who were thus lured and bought. However, because it developed in complex political environments, the Protestant faith has tried to avoid organizational connection with politics. Political relations of the Protestant faith are mainly through specific individuals.

During the years of 1954-1975 there were pastors and preachers who were chaplains in the lackey armed forces, or participated in humanitarian and relief organizations that were set up by the US Government, which also provided them with money. Particularly in the Western Highlands, a number of pastors and preachers joined with the reactionary organization called FULRO to oppose the revolution.

However, during the resistance against the Americans, a number of church members, pastors and preachers, including those in the Western Highlands, supported or joined with the revolution, or kept a neutral attitude, doing no damage to the revolution. And during the 50 years of developing and maturing, the ECVN (N) always strove to find progressive ways to honor God and love the country, building an independent church, contributing to the heritage of resistance of the people, developing and protecting the country. Since 2001 when it was recognized with legal status, the ECVN (S) has established a new direction of service - living the Gospel, worshipping God, and serving the nation and the people, and to moving the church bond closer with the people.

## **III. THE SITUATION OF THE PROTESTANT RELIGION IN VIETNAM AT PRESENT TIME**

At present, the Protestant faith in our country exists in various regions with different situations and different solutions.

### **1. The Protestant organizations with legal status.**

#### **a. The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North).**

The ECVN (N) is an organization that we helped to set up with legal status since 1958. It is member of the Fatherland Front of Vietnam, working progressively with the motto "Honor God and love the country". In 2003, the ECVN (N) had over 6,000 members, 4 pastors (1 retired), 9 preachers, 14 congregations in 10 cities and provinces (Lang Son, 1, Hanoi 2, Hai Phong 3, Nam Dinh 2, Hai Duong 1, Ha Tay 1, Vinh Phuc 1, Ha Nam 1, Thai Binh 1, and Thanh Hoa 1. There are also groups of Christians in Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Thai Nguyen...

Since it was established until 1984 the ECVN (North) held 31 General Conferences. After a hiatus of 20 years for various reasons, the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Conference was held in Hanoi from November 30, 2004 to December 2, 2004. The success of the General Conference has opened a new era for the ECVN (N) with the passing of the amended by-laws, and the election of the new board with 13 members with Rev. Phung Quang Huyen serving as President. The office of the church is at 2 Ngo Tram Street in Hanoi.

## **b. The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South).**

The ECVN (S) formerly the Evangelical Church of Vietnam was established in 1927. After the ECVN (N) was established in 1958, and separated from the ECVN, then the name the ECVN (S) was used to indicate the Evangelical Church in the South. In 1975, the ECVN (S) had a total of 150,000 members (58,000 were ethnic minorities from the Western Highlands), with 530 congregations, 190 pastors, 167 preachers, 155 seminary interns (42 pastors, 91 preachers, and 50 seminary interns were ethnic minorities). At present, the ECVN (S) has over 600,000 members, 300 pastors and preachers working in 34 provinces and cities under the Central Government from Quang Tri to the far south.

After 1975 for various reason, we maintained the status of non-legality for the ECVN (S). However, the ECVN (S) remained active with all activities without our directions and management. With that situation, the Central government had a new policy: *Approve the ECVN (S) to carry on its activities.*

In 2000, a committee to organize the first General Conference was formed and after a year of activity, in February 2001, the General Conference of the ECVN (S) was solemnly convened with 482 official delegates (100 pastors, 147 preachers and 235 delegates) and 287 unofficial delegates (retired pastors and preachers and wives of pastors and preachers). They came from 32 provinces and cities in the south. The church received legal status for an organizational structure of two levels: the central (Tong Lien Hoi), and local (congregational), and a motto for activities: *Living the Gospel, worshiping God and serving the country and the people*".

After receiving legal status, the activities of the ECVN (S) were extended. At present, 32 of 34 provinces and cities have Protestant provincial representatives, 100 temporary pastors were allowed by the government to be ordained as official pastors, and dozens of preachers were recognized as temporary pastors. In 2003 the Bible and Theological Institute was established with the first group of 50 students currently in their second year, and with a second class with 100 students.

The ECVN (S) successfully organized their General Conference and the government recognized the legal status of the organization of the Church. This has made church members enthusiastic believers in the Party and the government, and created very favorable opinion inside the country as well as overseas. In particular conditions have been created for the government to manage the Church and change the attitude of the Church into a progressive direction.

In March 2005, the ECVN (S) held its second General Conference according to the four-year term. This conference had 821 official delegates (345 were pastors, temporary pastors, or preachers and 476 were lay delegates) with 500 unofficial delegates from 34 provinces and cities in the South. Unique to this conference were guests from C&MA overseas, allowed by the Government. This contributed to clarifying the open direction and policy of our country.

The Conference also elected a Board of Directors for the term of 2005-2009 comprised of 23 members. They continued the direction for *Living the Gospel, worshiping God and serving the country and the people.* as affirmed by their Constitution of 2001.

## **2. Protestant denominations that existed before 1975 and are active but have no legal status yet**

In the years between 1954-1975 in the South, apart from the ECVN (S), there were other Protestant denominations, mainly from North America, which entered for missionary work

and set up infrastructure. Among these are some which have had a great influence in the South. Specifically as follows:

- The Seventh Day Adventist Church, established in December 1929 in Saigon, by 1975 had 30,000 members in 42 congregations. Presently they have 10,739 members concentrating mainly in the provinces of Binh Phuoc, Lam Dong, HCM City, Can Tho and Quang Tri...
- The Christian Mission Church, established in 1956 in Danang, by 1973 had 16,350 members, 16 pastors, 18 preachers and seminary interns, 11 foreign missionaries, and 35 congregations. The area of activity now includes Quang Ngai, Dong Nai, Kon Tum, Gia Lai with about 40,000 members.
- The Baptist Church, established in 1962 in Saigon, by 1975 had 10,000 members, 9 pastors and preachers and 16 congregations. Presently they have nearly 3000 members scattered in Lam Dong, Ninh Thuan, Soc Trang and HCM City.

### **3. Protestant denominations and groups restored or founded after 1975.**

After the liberation, Protestant denominations which had recently arrived were small, and when missionaries left, they became inactive and disintegrated.

When the country began the Renovation program, international relations expanded, and these Protestant denominations resumed their activities. At the same time, through tourism, international cooperation, visits from Vietnamese overseas, the return of boat people and workers from overseas together resulted in the appearance of some new Protestant groups, such as:

- The Assemblies of God came to Vietnam in 1969. A church was established in 1970 in Saigon and by 1975 they had about 500 members, 4 Vietnamese pastors, and 9 foreign pastors. After 1975 they ceased their activities. Since the beginning of 1990, they resumed their activities in the form of house churches and under various names such as Full Gospel Church, Faith Church, Interevangelistic Church, Grace and Hope Church, Agape Church... with about 300 meetings points and about 14,000 members in the North, Central and South.
- The Mennonites started working in the South in 1954 under the form of a social relief organization called the Mennonite Central Committee, MCC. In 1975, the Mennonites had about 500 members, with three locations in Saigon and one in Can Tho. In 1975 they donated all their social and religious infrastructure to the government. Only the location in Binh Thanh still maintained some activities until June 1978. In 1991, the Vietnamese government allowed them to reopen a representative office for MCC in Hanoi.
- The Jehovah's Witnesses started working in the mid-1960's with the distribution of the Watchtower magazine. By 1975, they had about 100 followers, and now they have about 650, concentrated mainly in HCM city and Dong Nai Province.
- Recently many Protestant denominations from overseas came to Vietnam to build their work - such as the Full Gospel Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the New Apostolic Church, the Four Square Church... A number of groups separated from the ECVN such as the Christian Fellowship Church which is involved in vigorous missionary activities. Recently, in the South, these groups came together to form a fellowship that attracted the attention of our government. If in the period of 1954-1975, Protestant organizations and denominations focused their missionary activities on cities and in areas of refuge temporarily occupied because of the war, since 1980 they have focused their missionary work on the remote areas, and ethnic minority areas that served as bases for the revolution around the country.

#### **4. The Protestant faith in the Western Highlands and provinces in the mountainous region of the North. (hereafter NMR for Northern Mountainous Region)**

Apart from the Protestant denominations mentioned above, our country also has a number of ethnic minorities in the Western Highlands and the Northwest who follow the Protestant faith.

- In the Western Highlands in 1975 there were nearly 60,000 ethnic minority followers of the Protestant faith, but that number has now increased to 300,000 in 1,730 villages, mainly belonging to the ECVN (S).

By the end of December 2005, in provinces of Western Highlands and Binh Phuoc, some 50 congregations had been recognized (Gia Lai, 29; Lam Dong, 12, Dac Lac 5; Dac Nong, 1; Binh Phuoc, 3). and dozens of small groups, in particular over 600 meeting points have been guided to register their religious activities with local authorities.

- In the mountainous provinces of the North, apart from the Dao in Bac Son (Lang Son) who have followed the Protestant faith since 1954 and are now a part of the ECVN (North), since the mid-1980's, the Protestant faith was spread to the Hmong under the name of Vang Chu, and to the Dao who call it Thin Hung. By 2004 in the NMR there were about 100,000 Hmong and 10,000 Dao who follow the Protestant faith.

The Protestant faith in the Western Highlands and in the NMR is becoming a religious reality. Ethnic minorities in the Western Highland as well as in the NMR, though recently converted, have formed strong religious sentiments and a need to be able to carry on their religious activities in a normal manner.

#### **IV. POLICIES OF WORK WITH THE PROTESTANT FAITH**

##### **1. Basis for the policies of work with the Protestant faith**

+Decree 25 (2003) of the Committee of Central Committee of the Party in the Ninth Plenum.

+ The Ordinance on Religion and Belief (2004) of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly.

+ Decree 22 (2005) of the government to guide the implementation of the Ordinance on Religion and Belief.

+ Directive 01 (2005) of the Prime Minister of the Government *Concerning some tasks with the Protestant faith.*

##### **2. Concrete policies**

Based on the respect for religious freedom of the followers of the Protestant faith, and on the fact that we do not treat the Protestants differently than followers of other religions, on this basis we recognize the existence and the activities (of Protestantism) within the framework of the law.

However, because of the characteristics of differences among Protestants in Vietnam, and differences among regions, therefore the implementation of the policies toward the followers of the Protestant faith in the future should proceed as follow:

1. For the Protestant organizations already recognized with legal status, such as the ECVN (N) and the ECVN (S) – because they fully comply with all requirements of policy and law, they are allowed to have organizational activities (a General Conference, other conferences, revival

meetings) and ordination and installation of clergy, repair and building their worship places, international relations...

2. For the organization not yet recognized (including those which came in before 1975, and those which came more recently, they should proceed to begin registration of religious activities with the government. For denominational organizations which arrived before 1975, when the South was liberated, allow them to maintain regular religious activities until registration, then after one year, if they fulfill all the requirements of the laws (Article 16 of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion), they should then proceed to follow the procedures in order to be legally recognized (a General Conference to pass a constitution and to elect leaders for the organization). As for the remaining organizations, they need to fulfill the requirement of 20 years of religious activities after registration, as well as all requirements required by the law and then they will be legally registered. Only those who arrived before 1975, and are now restarted, may add the years before 1975 fulfill the 20-year requirement.
3. Concerning the Protestant religion in the Western Highlands, mainly of the ECVN (S), rapid normalization will be done on two ways: by registering meeting points in villages to guarantee the religious activities of the followers of the faith. Then, if they meet all the conditions of the law and the constitution of the Church, the next step will be taken in regard to being recognized as branch congregations, that is the basic organizational unit of the ECVN (S).
4. For the followers of the Protestant faith in the mountainous provinces of the North, they are allowed to carry out religious activities in the confines of their home. For places where there are long time believers in the faith, and which have a genuine need for religious activities, let them register their activities according to the meeting points in the hamlets. When all conditions are met, we will help them to have regular activities as in other locations. In the mountainous provinces of the North where there are recent converts to the Protestant faith, if they have a need to return to their traditional beliefs, make it convenient for them, but definitely do not force them to give up their faith.

The content of the policies for the 4 different Protestant regions according to the Directive of the Prime Minister of the Government as outlined above, is to implement well the religious policy of the Party and the Government toward the Protestant faith. That content is totally in conformity with the Ordinance on Belief and Religion and the governmental Decree for implementation.

### **Lesson 3**

## **THE PROTESTANT RELIGION AND THE MANAGEMENT TASK OF THE GOVERNMENT CONCERNING THE PROTESTANT RELIGION IN THE MOUNTAINOUS REGION OF THE NORTH (NMR)**

### **I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS AND CONDITONS OF THE NMR**

1. The NMR consists of the provinces of Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Son La, Hoa Binh, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen, Cao Bang, Back Can, Lang Son and the western mountainous region of the two provinces of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An. This area covers 90,000 square km. with 2/3 of it being perilous high mountains. This mountainous region is of strategic importance for national security, and affects the stability and development of the whole country. This area has 2500 km. of border with China and Laos.

The NMR has potentials for metallurgy and hydro electricity. However, up to this point, it is still very poor with the most difficult challenges of any place on our country. In recent years, with special attention from the government for investment through programs 135, 134, 120 186, the NMR has many encouraging accomplishments. The growth of this region has reached 11%, production for agricultural products has increased to the level of industrial production at 16%, and trading and services have also changed for the good. Health services, education, physical well-being and morale of the ethnic minorities have also improved. National security of this area has been maintained and step-by-step, and the political infrastructure has also been improved.

2. The NMR has a population of about 8 million, with more than 70% belonging to 30 ethnic minorities. Breakdown as follows: Tay (1,477,514 people), Thai (1,388,725), Hmong (875,604), Nung (856,442), and Dao (620,538). The ethnic minorities in this area have an ancient culture with various customs and traditions. They have a tradition of unity and love. They are attached to one another, yet each group has its own characteristics and separate traditions.
3. The ethnic minorities in the NMR have a multifaceted religious life. Most of them are polytheistic, with special emphasis on the cult of the ancestors and spirit worship. However, in some ethnic minorities, traditional beliefs involve superstitions and are very costly. Recently the Catholic, Protestant and Buddhist religions have penetrated the region of the NMR. Currently, there are 30,000 Buddhists, 340,000 Catholics, and 100,000 people who have been influenced by the Protestant faith.

In particular, the 800,000 Hmong who live in this region, comprise 97% of the Hmong in the whole country. The majority of the Hmong live in the high mountain area. The conditions for land cultivation are not favorable and their life has many difficulties. Their religious traditions and customs are rather unique in comparison with other people's. The Hmong are polytheistic, their weddings and funerals are rich but also complex and expensive/wasteful.

In the last 20 years, a number of ethnic minorities in the NMR have been influenced by the Protestant faith (under the names of Vang Chu for the Hmong and Thin Hung for the Dao). This has created a management problem for the government that needs to be resolved.

## **II. THE PROCESS OF PENETRATION OF THE PROTESTANT FAITH INTO THE MOUNTAINOUS REGION OF THE NORTH (NMR)**

In reality, the Catholic and Protestant faiths have been preached in this area for a fairly long time. The Catholic faith has been preached to the Hmong since 1921, and at present the Catholic faith is reasonably stable, meeting only in a few places such as Sa Pa, Bac Ha and Bao Thang. The Protestant faith was brought in Vietnam by the CM&A in 1911. In 1930 the C&MA and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam and other organizations found ways to preach the Protestant faith among the ethnic minorities of the NMR but with very limited results. They could only establish small groups among the Thai in Son La, the Hmong in Lao Cai and the Muong in Hoa Binh, but during the years of 1954-1975 these groups disintegrated and left no trace. Only the French Reformed Church established a group of several hundred Dao who followed the Protestant faith in Bac Son District of Lang Son province. In 1962 this group officially became a part of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North). Thus, the evangelization of the ethnic minorities in the provinces of the NMR has been going on for a long time but without much success.

In the last 20 years, the Protestant faith, at first under the names of Vang Chu and Thin Hung, has flourished among the Hmong and the Dao. The stages of this development may be divided into three periods, as follows

### **1. The period from 1986-1990:**

A group of Hmong listened to the Hmong language broadcast by FEBC in 1986, and the Vang Chu religion first appeared in Ha Giang province. After that, in 1987, the Vang Chu religion spread to several locations in Song Ma district of Son La province, and then it spread to a number of villages in the high region of the districts of Dien Bien, Tuan Giao, Sin Ho, Muong Te, Phong Tho in the province of Lai Chau (old name). In 1990, the Vang Chu religion penetrated into 164 villages of the 8 provinces of the NMR where the Hmong live, that is Tuyen Quang, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Bac Thai (now Bac Can and Thai Nguyen), Son la, Lai Chau (now Lai Chau and Dien Bien), Lao Cai and Yen Bai.

At a time when the Hmong were suddenly looking for a new religion, the Protestant faith has cleverly used the similarities between the stories and personalities in the Hmong traditions with those in the Bible to convey the concept of establishing a king and welcoming a king. Thus they contextualized the faith for the ethnic group and local situation in order to introduce it to the Hmong.

The preaching of the faith at this time was clandestine and secret, mainly through the broadcast of the FEBC and through the whispered sharing of some of the Hmong in the area. During this time, the characteristics of Protestantism were not yet clearly revealed, and it was usually called the Vang Chu religion

### **2. The period from 1991-1992**

In 1991 leaders of these groups contacted some of the Catholic churches in Yen Bai, Son Tay and Ha Noi. They were instructed by the priests in doctrines and liturgy and also provided with some Bibles. And so, those who followed Vang Chu religion now changed to the Catholic faith. However, after some time of being Catholics, they found that the Catholic doctrines were different from what they heard on the FEBC, Veritas broadcasts. Furthermore, the liturgies of the Catholic Church were complex and not suitable to the new converts of the Hmong.

At the same time, the FEBC broadcasts also guided them to the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) at 2 Ngo Tram Street in Ha Noi. They sent delegates to the headquarters of the ECVN (N) asking for help. Here they received guidance by pastors and preachers on teaching, preaching and living the faith. They realized that the Protestant faith, apart from its spirituality, really meet their needs, their lifestyle in simple economical ways suitable to the Hmong and similar to what they heard on the radio. Therefore, those Hmong who used to follow the Vang Chu religion now changed from the Catholic faith to the Protestant faith.

### **3. The period from 1993 to present**

Since 1993 the number of the followers of the Protestant faith in the NMR increased dramatically. The majority of the leaders of these groups or meeting points related closely with the ECVN (N). They were provided with materials, Bibles, literature and finances, and they were instructed on how to teach the doctrines and liturgies of the Protestant faith in a systematic manner. When these people (trainees) returned home, they distributed materials, lead local people in with activities, establish membership rolls, and also make application to join the Tin Lanh Church. Besides this they were also guided on how to

listen to the preaching on radio and cassettes. By 1994 there were about 40,000 followers of the Protestant faith in the provinces of the NMR.

From 1995 till the present, the Protestant faith does not stop with the Hmong and the Dao, but it continues to spread to other ethnic minorities such as the Thai, Tay, Nung, San Chi, Pa Then, Ha Nhi, Co Lao and La Hu. In the face of the reality that a number of the ethnic minorities, mainly the Hmong, were influenced by the Protestant faith, and have taken steps to follow this new religion, a number of localities, due to the need for stability and the lack of complete policy, have used special measures to deal with the situation.

Furthermore, due to limited education and simple understanding of the faith, local group leaders did not understand the law, and did not realize that the activities of these groups need to follow the requirements of the law and the government. Also, with the appearance of the new phenomenon, a new form of religion, there were conflicts between individuals, families, clans, and communities. . . . And hostile forces have also incited the Hmong to migrate illegally creating many problems for society.

With the increase of the number of followers of the faith, and an increase in area of their activities, Protestantism, step by step, has evolved into an organization. In the beginning, the faith appeared suddenly, and gradually it developed a relationship with the ECVN (N) and groups have organized Boards of Deacons, and Prayer Committees. In 2002-2003 the ECVN (N) unilaterally recognized 500 churches in the NMR. Apart from the ECVN (N) there are other denominations with offices in HCM City, which are expanding into this area. These include Christian Fellowship Church, the Full Gospel Church, the Interevangelistic Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Besides this, the beliefs of these believers became clearer, and their knowledge of the Bible increased significantly. So the need for religious activities of some of these religious believers has become undeniable. In many localities, these activities have become more public and regular.

At present, the number of those who follow the Protestant faith in the NMR is about 100,000 (about 15% of the Hmong). There are also those Hmong who migrated to the Central Highland and some to Laos and China. (The Central Highland has about 25,000 Hmong of which 20,000 are followers of the Protestant faith.)

There are several points about the conversion of the ethnic minorities in the NMR that require special attention.

- The followers of the Protestant faith live mainly in the remote high mountain areas (in distant villages). Among these are those who participated the revolution, such as cadres, Party members and even Party leaders, government officials, and leaders of mass organizations.

- The speedy growth of the Protestant faith has become a phenomenon among ethnic minorities. At present it has slowed down, but not stopped. In the provinces of the NMR it has spread to the San Chi, Pa Then and Co Lao minorities.

- The preaching of the Protestant faith among the ethnic minorities in the provinces of the NMR, which is entirely illegal, is done in different forms. First, by missionary activities from the outside (the Philippines, Hong Kong, Laos and China) which entered our country in various ways such as via broadcasts, recorded tapes, Bibles, hymnals, and Christian literature. Together it is called underground evangelism and is done through NGOs, and

individuals, more recently with the support of the ECVN (N) and other Protestant organizations.

- The preaching and following of the Protestant faith among ethnic minorities in the NMR has had a negative impact, especially among the Hmong in matters of the economy, culture and ideology. For example, it slows down production, promotes unregulated migration, creates disunity within families, villages and ethnic groups and results in the loss of social stability and security. However, with a fuller understanding and accepting of the faith, religious activities become more stable, and the previous negatives aspects begin to decrease, and positives aspects in customs and in daily lifestyle began to appear.

### **III. UNDERLYING CAUSES THAT LED TO A NUMBER OF THE ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE MOUNTAINOUS REGION OF THE NORTH (NMR) FOLLOWERS OF THE PROTESTANT FAITH.**

1. The Hmong live in the remote high mountains where the conditions for land cultivation are difficult. In the mid-1980's, our country changed from a communal state led economy to a market economy, so some policies of the earlier system favorable to the ethnic minorities were no longer applicable. So a difficult life is a favorable environment for a religion to develop.
2. The ethnic minorities in the NMR general and the Hmong in particular have simple religious traditions. Nevertheless, their customs and habits are complex, backward, and in some areas they are superstitious and costly. These are barriers to development. Poverty, lack of education, primitive polytheistic religion, costly and backward customs and habits, as well as the psychology and sentiment of the Hmong for the past, today created the conditions for the religion to penetrate. And in this context, the missionary methods of the Protestant faith are dynamic, their rituals are simple and not costly or wasteful, making it easy for the religion to penetrate. At the same time, the Protestant faith has some positives such as limiting alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, adultery, thus making it easy to attract people to follow it.

Besides this, the Protestant faith exploits the cultural similarities of the Hmong and the Bible. They "Hmongize" the personalities and stories in the Bible. So for the Hmong accepting the Protestant faith is receiving something new but which is similar to their familiar tradition - making it easy to accept. . These reasons explain why the Protestant faith can more easily penetrate the Hmong and the Dao than other ethnic groups in the area.

3. The political infrastructure of the NMR is still very thin, weak and inefficient. The level of the cadres cannot cope with the local demands. The Party leadership and Party members have not been able to command control of the masses. Activities of the Fatherland Front and other organizations, in many places, have not been able to cope with the need of renewing the task of mobilizing the masses, and they are not close to the people and are ineffective. Reality has shown that the Protestant faith has developed rapidly where our political system is weak, and that in areas where our political system is strong, the Protestant faith can hardly penetrate.

Besides, the penetration and development of the Protestant faith is a new issue, so local authorities have been passive and clumsy in dealing with it. The measures of dealing with it are not consistent, and have been too heavy on administrative penalties such as prohibiting or forcing people to give up their religion. These measures create negative feelings on the part of the people, leading to a strong reaction from the religious followers.

At the same time this approach creates opportunities for hostile forces overseas to accuse our government of violating religious freedom.

4. The Protestant faith is a religion that has simple and concise activities, suitable to people in a difficult economic situation. The Protestant faith has spread to the NMR primarily through radio broadcasts of FEBC, Veritas and Source of Life. It uses modern means of communications to preach to the remote and distant areas that ordinary means cannot reach. At the same time, the Protestant faith pays special attention to translating literature as well as having the radio broadcasts in local ethnic languages. This is the main reason why the Protestant faith can reach ethnic minorities who still on the whole have a poor spiritual and cultural life.

Broadcast programs are also dynamic, frequently changing their content to suit the level of understanding of listeners. Besides, the ECVN (N) and other Protestant organizations are very creative in providing materials and finances, and in training the leaders of the ethnic groups in their religious activities, and in building organizational structures. NGOs and tourists are also very active using every opportunity for doing missionary activities.

5. The spreading of the Protestant faith among ethnic minorities of the NMR is also a matter that hostile forces scheme to exploit for their political purposes. They have established a number of organizations to help spread the faith among ethnic minorities in our country, and through airways, under the guise of preaching religion, they badmouthed our government and incited the Hmong to migrate illegally and to oppose our government.

Throughout history, these underlying reasons explained above always exist, but to differing degrees. Only the combination of all these above factors can explain the sudden explosive growth in the number of the believers in the Protestant faith in the NMR. A subjective and objective understanding of the above reasons shows that solution for the problem of the growth in the number of followers in the Protestant faith needs a comprehensive plan in all areas: economy, culture, security, national defense, religion, and ethnicity. This is not the responsibility of one particular level or branch, but the responsibility of the entire political system.

#### **IV. RESULTS OF THE WORK DEALING WITH THE PROTESTANT FAITH IN RECENT PAST IN NMR**

1. Considering the present reality, we can look back and see the phenomenon of the growth in number of the ethnic minorities in the NMR following the Protestant faith. Since this is a new problem, in the beginning the Party and government at the provincial level were inexperienced and perplexed in dealing with it. They did not pay enough attention to it.

In the following period (1992-1993), the preaching and following of the Protestant faith gained more attention. Gradually provinces have issued decrees and directives on the work of religion. However, the general consensus of the Party and government is that *the problem of preaching and studying the faith illegally on the part of the ethnic minorities is caused by the fact that the enemy exploits the situation and this is part of the plot for peaceful evolution of the US.* Therefore, all measures used were aimed at limited the growth of the Protestant faith among the ethnic minorities of the NMR.

2. From 1994 until the present, local authorities have paid attention to the economic and cultural development of the ethnic minorities through programs and plans and infrastructure aimed at upgrading the material and spiritual life of the people. At the same time, the Party and government at various levels have organized study to help the cadres understand the policy and directions of the Party and government on religion in general and on the Protestant faith in

particular. For 5 years we implemented the plan of sending work team to go into villages to mobilize people to return to their traditional religion, to deal with illegal preachers, and to dissolve all grassroots religious organizations. The first phase of this work produced some results, partly limiting the spread of the Protestant faith by a getting a certain number of people to voluntarily recant their faith. However, in some areas, the work actually forced people to give up their faith through using administrative measures such as fining them money, and making them sign pledges to give up their faith. These measures generated a strong reaction on the part of the followers of the faith against the government, creating a gulf between religious believers and government officials. In reality the preaching of the faith is still going on, and the measures to stop it have not been effective, and the number of people who follow the faith has a tendency to increase, and those who recanted their faith quietly return to the faith and some migrate to other areas.

The current problem in the religion task is the perception on the part of the cadres that the preaching of the Protestant faith is a plot of the hostile forces. They are unable to distinguish between the activities of preaching and of following the faith, and between the legitimate need for religious activities of some people, and the abuse of religion by hostile forces. They do not see the objective and subjective reasons that some people follow the Protestant faith. That understanding leads to mobilizing people to give up their faith, and to using administrative measures to force people to give up their faith. And so the results have been very minimal, and at the same time these measures have stirred up unfavorable opinion inside the country and overseas, creating opportunities for hostile forces to oppose our government.

## **V. THE COMPONENTS OF THE TASK OF MANAGING THE PROTESTANT RELIGION IN THE NORTHERN MOUNTAINOUS REGION IN THE FUTURE**

To implement Resolution 25/NQ-TW of 12 March 2003 of the Central Committee concerning the religion task, and Instruction 01/2005/CT-TTg of 4 February 2005 of the Prime Minister concerning the task of the Protestant religion. Article 5 of that Instruction clearly states:

*Concerning the citizens who live in the northern mountainous region who have only recently followed the Protestant religion and have a genuine need for religion, in the first instance guide them to do their religious activities in their home, and where there is a need, guide the citizens in registering their religious activities in a suitable location in the village or hamlet. When they have met all the requirements, allow those citizens who practice religion in a normal manner and do so according to the law.*

*Concerning the segment of society that followed the religion, and now have a need to return to the traditional beliefs of their ethnic group, create the conditions and help them to realize that desire.*

The Government Committee of Religious Affairs is creating a State plan to manage the Protestant religion in the northern mountainous region as follows:

### **1. Objectives:**

- Unify the perception concerning (the Protestant religion), evaluate the real situation, and find methods to solve the Protestant problem in the ethnic minority areas of the northern mountainous region in an objective and comprehensive manner.
- Step by step place the activity of the Protestant religion the area of the ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region under the administration of the law, with the goal of solving the need for religious belief and religion of the masses, and to guarantee the right to believe or not to believe in religion for the ethnic minorities, and to resolutely subdue the abnormally rapid and spontaneous development of the Protestant religion in the region.
- To stop and defeat the scheme exploiting the Protestant religion by all the internal and foreign enemy forces to defeat the revolutionary mandate and heritage of our Party and our State, and to

contribute to stability, and to conditions for development of the of the northern mountainous region.

## **2. The components:**

**a. Firstly**, organize a thorough understanding of the concepts and the policies of the Party and the State concerning religion, and extend/teach the State's Plan for managing the Protestant religion in the northern mountainous region to Party officials, government officials, the Fatherland Front, all departments and branches, and all mass organization in all provinces of the northern mountainous region. Contents of the training as follows:

- The concepts and policies of the Party and the State concerning religion in general and the Protestant religion among the ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region in particular (including the resolutions of the Party and the laws of the State) in order to create a unified political position/system.
- On the basis of a thorough understanding of the concepts of the Center and based on the actual situations in each locality, each locality is to develop the religion Plan that includes the State's management of the Protestant religion. Expand the implementation of the Plan of managing the Protestant religion in the northern mountainous region, keeping in mind that the most important issue is to investigate and make careful distinctions (concerning the three categories) and guide in an orderly fashion the registration religious activities with local authorities.
- In working the Plan we recommend that in each area you pay special attention to helping and guiding those citizens who have a desire to return to their traditional beliefs.

**b. Secondly**, the work of propagandizing and mobilizing.

Upgrade the work of propagandizing and mobilizing the citizens to conserve and develop their own culture and the good traditional religious beliefs of the ethnic minorities, and to give up their backward customs, and simultaneously vigorously pursue economic and social development, raising the living standard and intellectual standard, with goal of addressing the root causes of the unusual growth of the Protestant faith.

**c. Thirdly**, carefully examine the real situation.

Carefully research the real situation of the Protestant religion in all localities that have followers of the religion. Focus on the following:

- Determine the number of hamlets, villages and people who have sustained influence of Protestantism, the extent of the influence, the stability of the places where they meet, those who provide leadership for the meetings, and those who propagate the religion. . .

Based on this research, classify them into the following three categories:

- + Category 1: Those locations which have had followers of the Protestant faith for a relatively long time, and where the citizens have a genuine need to practice their religion, clearly understand their doctrines and ceremonies and regularly practice the religion.
- + Category 2: Those locations which follow the Protestant religion but their faith is not yet firmly established, and their grasp of the doctrines is not clear, and their practice of the religion is irregular.

+ Category 3: Those locations where people have only recently begun to follow the Protestant religion

**d. Fourthly**, guide and direct those citizens who follow the Protestant religion in hamlets and villages according to Category 1, to register their religious activities and place of meeting with local authorities.

- Requirements for registering religious activities in a location

+ The citizens who follow the Protestant religion in the hamlets and villages belong to Category 1.

+ The leaders of the Protestant meetings (in hamlets and villages) are local people and good citizens.

- The scale of the meeting place: The meeting place must be organized at the hamlet or village level.

- The contents of the registration should include: The name of the congregation, the place of meeting, the scope of religious activities, details of religious activities, a schedule of religious activities by week, month and year, the person(s) in charge of the congregation, the person(s) who lead the religious activities, the number of people participating in the religious activities at the time of registration, details about the Protestant organization they are affiliated with and wish to join, and a pledge to engage in religious activities according to the law and by the terms of the registration.

- Registration and administrative procedures:

+ Registration procedures/forms include: A list of the names of the Protestant believers in the hamlet or village confirmed by the hamlet or village head, and an application form for seeking approval for religious activities in a particular location as described above (a model form is attached), and a pledge form signed by the head of the family offering their home as a meeting place.

+ Administrative procedures: Based on the actual situation, the business of registering the congregations must take place at two levels – the commune and the district. The People's Committee of the commune has the authority to issue the registration for religious activities for the congregations. The People's Committees of the communes that have congregations, are directly responsible for managing the religious activities of these congregations.

After receiving the certificate of registration, the Protestant congregations are guaranteed the right of religious activities according to the laws of Vietnam and the terms of the registration. The person(s) in charge of each congregation have the responsibility of annually registering their religious activities with the Peoples' Committees of their respective communes.

Note carefully: Do not raise the matter of constructing places of worship with the congregations. This matter will be addressed later, after the congregations have become part of Protestant organization which is nationally recognized by the government, and which meets all the legal requirements.

\*\*\* Concerning the remaining categories:

- Concerning Category 2, urgently and continuously mobilize these citizens to return to their traditional beliefs. In the event that this has been tried many times in the past and they have not returned to their traditional beliefs, guide and direct these people to practice their religion in the context of their private homes.
- Concerning Category 3, hold your ground and mobilize and persuade the people to return to their traditional beliefs.

e. **Fifthly**, concerning those who are in charge of the Protestant congregations:

- Investigate and collect the names of all those who lead the Protestant congregations and classify them as follows:
  - + Those who have an attitude of following government authorities and the law, and have the characteristics of a good citizen - in the first instance help them to be leaders. In the longer term, help create the conditions in which they can become ordained religious leaders within a legally recognized Protestant church.
  - + Those who are hostile and extremely resistant, treat them severely and publicly denounce them to the citizens explaining their activities of destroying the country, dividing the ethnic groups, and their other illegal actions.

## **VI. ORGANIZATION FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION:**

### **1. The Government Committee for Religious Affairs and all local areas to implement:**

In order to implement the policies of the Central Government, the Central Committee of Religious Affairs is coordinating with the authorities of the Central government and of local areas to establish a system of branch offices to provide direction.

First of all, each province must select at least two congregations in hamlets or villages that have Protestant religious believers, ones that have all the requirements necessary to register religious activities with the government. This is to implement a pilot project so that an assessment can be made, experienced gained and the big picture informed.

### **2. Implementation steps:**

Prioritize this to complete the following in 2006:

**Step 1:** Complete the preparation stage (the Plan, the forms, the order in which congregations will be registered for religious activity, and the propaganda materials. . .) and thoroughly organize the extension of the Plan at the Central level and the level of the most important provincial leaders of the concerned localities.

+ For all areas implementing the Plan.

+ Organize training with the goal of thoroughly teaching the concepts and the policies and the Plan of the Protestant religion task to the key cadre in each locality.

+ In all localities, identify villages and hamlets that have Protestant believers, and those who lead the congregations where people follow the Protestant religion in each hamlet. Report according to the details outlined above and on the attached forms. On this basis verify which hamlets or villages belonging to Category 1 in order to prepare to guide them in registering religious activity by congregation.

**Step 2:** A number of localities (should be) chosen to guide to register Protestant religious activities, that is congregations in some hamlets or villages to be registered with the local government. Investigate and then issue a religious activity permission certificate on an annual basis to each of these congregations.

**Step 3:** Organize evaluation and ways to learn from the experience of implementing the pilot projects in each location.

+ Continue to guide the congregations in the hamlets or village to meet the necessary requirement to register their Protestant religious activities with local government officials.

**Step 4:** Organize ways to collect information and to learn from the experiences in each locality, and at the same time, prepare to extend the next phase of the Plan

## **VII. SOME MATTERS REQUIRING SPECIAL ATTENTION IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN.**

1. The idea of acknowledging that there is a need for religious belief and religion of a portion of the ethnic minorities, principally the Protestant Hmong, and then, based on this to have a method and steps which agree that is suitable to place (this phenomenon) under the administration of the law, is very new policy and very big deal for our Party and our Government.

Therefore a thorough understanding of the policy is the primary task, and it is very important. Then have uniformity among the Party, the government, the Fatherland Front, committees, departments, branches and mass organizations at every level (from the central government to the local authorities).

2. Pay special attention to our ideological work among that portion of the ethnic minorities which are not yet influenced by the Protestant religion, especially Party cadre, government officials, members of various departments, village elders, and clan and family heads of those minorities which have Protestant believers. Avoid creating a feeling of discouragement and giving the wrong impression that with the State now accepting Protestant religious practice among a portion of the minorities, it is thereby rejecting the traditional culture of that ethnic minority. Don't permit a religious conflict among the ethnic minorities, that is a conflict between those who follow religion and those who don't.
3. Religion in the areas inhabited by the ethnic minorities is a very deep and delicate problem. The process of solving the problem of the Protestant religion in the areas of the ethnic minorities in the northwest mountainous region, must pay special attention to distinguish between propagating the religion (evangelism) and just following the religion, between the legitimate need of orthodox religion and the scheme of taking advantage of religion of the enemy forces.
4. The process of accepting and placing religious activity of the ethnic minorities of the northwest mountainous region under the administration of the law must be cautious and clever, with appropriate steps, implemented in pilot project locations, and after that examine the results and learn from experience in all matters and only then expand the implementation of the plan. Resolutely fight and take legal proceedings against those individuals who take advantage of the Protestant religion problem. Mobilize and support the role of traditional village elders, village heads and clan leaders, and key cadre in preserving the value of the traditional culture and in keeping the law – as well as protecting the right for religious activity of a portion of the people.
5. We will strengthen our foreign propaganda concerning religion so that the world will understand the general situation of religion in Vietnam and the situation of the Protestant religion in the

northwest mountainous region in particular, and to fight against distortions of the enemy forces in talking advantage of religion and human rights to destroy our mandate of building and defending our country.

6. In those area that have not yet reached the pilot project stage, those citizens who follow the Protestant religion are allowed to practice it within their family household. If these people have the desire and the need to register their religious activity, try to lead and mobilize the congregation to preserve the status quo and to prepare to meet all the requirements and find a way to solve the matter at an appropriate time.
7. Recommend to all departments, mass organizations and the Fatherland Front – at all levels to strengthen the work of mobilizing the masses, and build up the political forces and the core cadre among those citizens which follow religion in places where they are registered and in those places where the Plan will be extended in the near future.
8. In the process of implementing the Plan, work hard at good coordination among the various concerned departments, branches and officials, and between the various levels of government. If complicated problems, or issues arise suddenly, all the provinces must report in a timely manner the Northwest Task Force and to the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs of the Government.
9. The results of implementing the Plan must be reported every three months, with all localities reporting to the Northwest Task Force and to the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs of the Government. Maintain the system of professional reporting on a quarterly basis, and on a rotating basis by localities. **end**