



# GARUNA MINISTRIES

A ministry of sharing the "grace, mercy and compassion" (Garuna) of Jesus in Thailand, Cambodia and surrounding countries.

GARUNA MINISTRIES | 11034 North 36th Street, Phoenix, AZ 85028 | [www.garuna.org](http://www.garuna.org) | [info@garuna.org](mailto:info@garuna.org) | Volume 24, Issue 2 | Fall 2024

## ➡ FROM HERE TO ETERNITY! ➡

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him **who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**" 1 Peter 2:9



Traveling on long road trips is not easy for preschoolers. "**Are we HERE yet?**" is a common question raised by youngsters in the back seat. It might seem a funny question at the start of a journey of many miles, but the question has relevance. We are all in our unique spots in the world – **HERE**. But the real question is where are we headed? What is our plan? Where is God leading us? In this edition of the Garuna newsletter, learn more about the mission journey whose ultimate goal is to share Jesus and his promise of **ETERNITY** for all who believe.

### FROM BUS DRIVER...TO BIBLE STUDENT...TO GARUNA TEACHER

Mr. Tim Tola finds it difficult to simply answer the question, "What do you do?" He is an energetic and busy man who wears many hats. And he enjoys serving God in every role he assumes. Garuna was first introduced to Mr. Tola 4 years ago. At that time, there were 30 children who wanted to study at Garuna Christian School #4 in Kampong Chhnang, Cambodia, but could not safely travel to school. There were issues of distance and hazards on the journey. The leadership team developed a transportation plan, and Mr. Tola signed on as **Garuna's first "bus" driver**. He was known by the team due to his involvement as a worship leader at a nearby Lutheran church.



Mr. Tola (right) visits the GCS #10 school site before construction was started. This is where he will serve as a Bible teacher with Principal Channet (left). The parents joining him are excited to send their children to the school when it opens this fall.

A few years later, he asked about studying the Bible. Soon, he became a **Bible student** in Garuna's newest Lutheran Institute SE Asia (LISA) cohort. This non-residential 4-year program allows him to remain in his community. And now, he has applied to be a **Bible teacher** in the morning session of the Garuna Christian School #10 which will open in a few months in the same province where he lives.

Mr. Tola is generously sponsored by the Lutheran Church of the Risen Savior in Green Valley, AZ through Garuna's Bible student sponsorship program. In his introduction and thank you note to that congregation, he shared, "Hello! I am married, and I have two daughters. Currently, I work as a driver for Garuna to transport the students from the village to GCS in Kampong Chhnang and take them back home after the class.

**I want to study with LISA because I want to serve in the new Lutheran School as a Bible teacher and then teach the Sunday School there and at the Lutheran Church. Lastly, I would like to say thank you to Garuna/LISA for accepting me as student to learn about God & His Word. God Bless you."**

Mr. Tola is a blessing to Garuna, the Garuna Kid riders and their parents who trust him to transfer their children, his congregation, his LISA classmates, the Garuna school community, and to his wife and children. Please keep him in your prayers.



Mr. Tola joins 44 other LISA students as they study LISA 102: Luther's Small Catechism in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.







**FROM HERE TO ETERNITY**

## FROM BRICKS TO BUILDINGS

The 10th Garuna Christian School is under construction and should open in a few months. Desert Foothills Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, AZ is funding this project and will join in its official dedication event in January. In addition, GCS #11 is fully funded by Prince of Peace Lutheran Church (Fremont, CA) with construction to begin soon. Each new school site adds an additional 200+ students and families to those who are learning about Jesus for the first time!

**FROM HERE...**

**...TO ETERNITY!**



**FROM HERE TO ETERNITY**

## FROM SENDING TO JOINING!

Parents in Siem Reap joined their Garuna students for Sunday School time led by Prince of Peace (Fremont, CA) volunteers during a June mission trip. Parents learned the Bible story and had a great family time. Many parents said it was the first time they'd ever used crayons...or joined in a Bible lesson. Chairs were set up outside to accommodate the overflow crowd.



**FROM HERE TO ETERNITY**

## FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Pastor Niran in Chiang Mai, Thailand has been praying for his extended family to become Christians for many, many years. What a joy it was for him to recently baptize 5 adults from his family! Pastor Niran is Garuna's Luther Institute SE Asia (LISA) coordinator in Thailand. He has taught and baptized many, but this day was an extra special and joy-filled one for him and his family!



**FROM HERE TO ETERNITY**

## FROM USA KIDS TO GARUNA KIDS!

Students in Omaha's King of Kings VBS program are joining kids all over the USA to help raise money to support the Garuna Kids in Cambodia! Other VBS leaders in Lakefield, MN shared, "We used your celebration Garuna VBS materials for our VBS this year. It was wonderful. You have developed such amazing materials!" If you would like to receive free resources to share for your chapels, VBS, or SS programs, contact [liane@garuna.org](mailto:liane@garuna.org)





**FROM HERE TO ETERNITY**

### FROM GARUNA STUDENT TO GARUNA TEACHER

Miss Makara attended Garuna Christian School #2 in Prey Veng 10 years ago. Today, this former Garuna student is now serving as the substitute teacher during the kindergarten teacher's 3-month maternity leave. This 20-year-old is taking courses from a local university, and she has also expressed an interest in studying the Bible in Garuna's Luther Institute SE Asia program. We thank God for her growing faith and love for teaching with Garuna.



**FROM HERE TO ETERNITY**

### FROM CALIFORNIA TO CAMBODIA

An amazing team from Orange Lutheran High School (Orange, CA) journeyed to Cambodia in June to visit 7 of the 10 Garuna Schools, engaging in fun games, crafts, Bible sharing, and music with hundreds of Garuna Kids and the Garuna staff. Who had the most fun? We think they all did...and each visitor became a Garuna Kid sponsor, meeting their student on the trip!



**FROM HERE TO ETERNITY**

### FROM LEARNING TO TEACHING

The students in the Luther Institute SE Asia (LISA) courses are completing their classes and immediately applying their learning as they serve and minister to others. One student shared that he finished the LISA 101: See Through the Scripture overview class and began to teach it the next week to his local congregation. We are thankful for this type of hunger for God's Word and a desire to share with others.



**FROM HERE TO ETERNITY**

### FROM GARUNA STUDENT TO TEACHER AIDE

The Garuna teacher aide program has expanded from 49 to 107 aides. The aides are graduates of the Garuna Schools, now in grades 7-12. They continue to study the Bible and help with Sunday School and daily school activities at their alma maters even as they continue their high school studies. Often, they learn praise songs and actions to teach the Garuna Kids at school or Sunday School.



## From the Chairman: **FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT!**

*"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9*

### Dear Friends in Christ,

When you see the word "darkness" or think about being in "darkness," what feelings or emotions does this generate for you? My guess is that most of us do not have positive memories of times when we were in darkness. Perhaps we were lost and couldn't find our way. Maybe the power went out and we were not prepared, and we didn't know what to do. Maybe we were camping and heard "strange" noises. The definition of darkness is 'the partial or total absence of light'. Darkness can make us feel lost, fearful, disoriented, and confused.

God's Word is clear that without Jesus, this is our natural condition. We were in our sin, separated from God, lost, without hope, and not

sure about why we are here. This is how we experience the 'darkness' of life without Jesus. **BUT the Good News of the Gospel is that by God's grace (garuna), He moves us from life in darkness into His LIGHT.** This amazing gift is freely given and freely received through faith in Jesus the LIGHT of the world (John 8:12).

**This wonderful message of the LIGHT of the world is Garuna's motivation for sharing this Good News in Southeast Asia.** Thank you so much for your partnership. Without your prayers and support, this ministry would not be possible. I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter with wonderful stories of God's grace and blessings. It is certainly only by His love and care that He takes us from darkness into His marvelous LIGHT.

Sincerely in Christ,

**Rev. Dr. Jeff Ehlers**  
Chairman  
Garuna Ministries



## FROM ONLOOKERS TO BOARD MEMBERS



In the past year, Garuna has been blessed to add two new members to the Board of Directors. **Rev. Jim Henkell** (Scottsdale, AZ) currently serves as a ministry executive in the Pacific Southwest District of the LCMS. He previously served congregations in San Diego, Agoura Hills, CA, & Ellisville, MO, in addition to serving on other boards, writing and speaking. He is married to Liane, and they have 3 children and one grandchild.



**Justin Smith** (Paradise Valley, AZ) co-founded Skinbetter Science and served as President through its acquisition by L'Oreal. His previous executive positions were in sales and marketing in the fields of Dermatology and Pharmaceuticals. He graduated in marketing from James Madison University. He is married to Tara, and they have 3 children.



## **FROM YOU TO GARUNA: GENEROSITY OPTIONS**

Thanks for sending your gifts to fund Garuna ministry projects in SE Asia



Have you considered these giving options?

- **IRA Charitable Rollovers or IRA RMD's** can provide an opportunity for stewards over the age of 70½ to make gifts to Garuna from their IRAs directly with no income taxes due on the rolled over or donated funds.
- **Employee Match:** Ask your employer if this option exists for you!
- **Gifts of Stock:** Garuna can receive gifts of appreciated stock.
- **Donor Advised Funds:** Garuna welcomes gifts from your donor advised funds.
- **Estate Planning:** Have you considered Garuna in your estate planning?

- **Endowment Fund Gift:** Help us plan for the future!
- **Thrivent Choice:** Garuna is eligible to receive Thrivent Choice Dollars.

If you are led to donate, your check may be made **payable to Garuna**. Gifts may be mailed to **Garuna at 11034 North 36th Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85028**. You may also donate online by visiting our secure online giving page at **www.garuna.org**. Your gift is tax-deductible as allowable by law. The Garuna Foundation is a 501-c-3 nonprofit (EIN number: 86-1037570). Garuna will mail a gift receipt to the address you provide.

For more information on making gifts, please call (602) 765-7613 or email us at [jeff@garuna.org](mailto:jeff@garuna.org).

