



# GARUNA MINISTRIES

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

GARUNA MINISTRIES | 2924 East Cholla Street, Phoenix, AZ 85028 | www.garuna.org | info@garuna.org | Volume 22, Issue 1 | Easter 2022

## Of First Importance

"For what I received I passed on to you **as of first importance**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..."  
1 Corinthians 15: 3-4

## Of First Importance: Salvation!

Several months ago, Kem Oun, a Garuna teacher, was baptized with three 6th grade Garuna Christian School students on the same day. **It was an amazing salvation celebration and an exciting day for the entire church and school community!** Let us share the story.

Miss Kem Oun had been involved in Prech Lutheran Church, led by Cambodian Pastor Bun Sopheab. The church is located next to the Garuna Christian School in Kampot where Pastor also teaches Bible classes for the Garuna Kids. Pastor had invited Kem Oun to participate in Garuna's Lutheran Institute Southeast Asia (LISA) Bible training program while she continued to live at home with her mother. **Kem Oun considered herself to be a Christian, but she had never been baptized.** Though her mother had given her permission to be a Christian, she had resisted the idea of her daughter being baptized. Kem Oun felt it important to honor her mother, so she patiently waited for that next step.

In the fall of 2020, there was an opening to teach at the Garuna Christian School next to her church, and she wanted to be involved in ministry with the children. By now, she had completed the LISA Bible class 2-year program for teachers, so she was hired. A few months after her new teaching position started, she was engaged to Mr. Suy Neang,



*Like Kem Oun, many of the new Garuna teachers and principals are chosen from the LISA class students because they are excited about how the schools are used for Christian education, outreach, and church planting.*

a Korean language instructor and a very open-minded young man. They were married soon after, and an exciting opportunity soon followed. Her mother agreed to her baptism, as did her husband who has a growing interest in Christianity, as well. She was then baptized with three Garuna students before the school/church Christmas outreach party last December.

**We pray God's grace on Kem Oun and her husband as we celebrate this gift of baptism and salvation!**

*Pastor Sopheab baptizes a 6th grader, assisted by Pastor Bun Phanna, Garuna's Director of Education in Cambodia.*



*Khem Oun and Suy Neang in typical Cambodian dress on their wedding day.*

## Of First Importance: Easter!

Surrounded by so many major issues in our world today, we hope that you will take a few minutes to pause and reflect upon the life-changing and all-important Easter message of 1 Corinthians 15. **Because of Jesus' resurrection that earns for us eternal life, many people in Southeast Asia are trusting God's promises, bringing peace, joy, and hope for their lives, too!!** This Garuna newsletter is designed to share some of these "Of First Importance" stories with you. Thank you for being a partner in this important Gospel work!



# Of First Importance: Reaching Young People!



The boys' and girls' teams celebrate their victories after the soccer tournament. They love this outreach activity which combines ministry and sport.

## All over the world, the best ministry strategy is to listen to the local people and design ministry around their interests and needs.

Our Asia leaders know this, resulting in the formation of soccer teams which include worship and Bible study. Garuna now sponsors 5 teams in Cambodia, each connected to a Garuna school and designed for those who are 14-24 years old. There are four boys' teams and one girls' team. Channdet, Garuna's Education Coordinator and the coach shared, **"This soccer ministry provides a chance for sharing the gospel, helping youth improve their health, and keeping them busy with good things."** Recently the boys' and girls' teams from Kampong Chhnang competed in a national U18 Christian tournament in Phnom Penh, with the girls' team winning 1st place and the boys' team winning 4th place. The girls won prize money and decided to treat the boys to dinner at a favorite "hot pot" restaurant on their way home.

# Of First Importance: Sunday School Outreach!

The Garuna Christian Schools are used for year-round school for students in Grades K-6, **but are also designed to be multi-purpose, serving as a church plant, for Sunday School, youth activities, and for other community gatherings.** At this point, all 7 of the schools now offer a Sunday School program and are seeing significant numbers of young people attending. We are so thankful for this open door for sharing the Gospel.



It wasn't long after Garuna's 7th school opened in Phnom Penh, that nearly 100 students were meeting for Sunday School each week!



# Of First Importance: Growing Church Communities!



Pastor Samol is a LISA student, Garuna Christian School principal, and a church leader. Here he meets with families and youth in his community for worship and Bible study.

# Of First Importance: Christian Schools!



Today, 7 Garuna Christian Schools are operating in Cambodia with 1,246 students enrolled. School #8 is under construction and school #9 will be built soon. **Sites for new schools are selected based on the need and openness of a community as well as the availability of strong school leaders – ideally students who are part of Garuna's LISA Bible training program.** A coalition of Omaha (Nebraska) churches



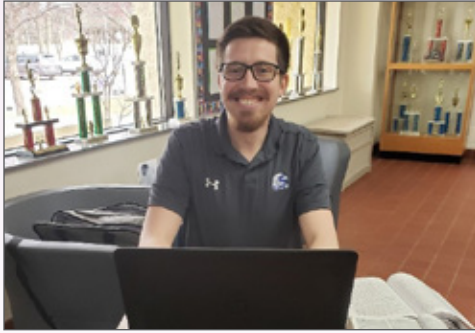
This church community in Prey Veng is very excitedly anticipating the new school which will be built this year, funded by partners from Omaha, Nebraska. The village leaders are endorsing this project, encouraging their villagers to send children to Garuna Christian School.

and schools are funding the building of school #9. As one of the pastors shared, "It is wonderful to see area churches and schools working together on a shared mission project...that is what is so exciting about the building of our Garuna school in Prey Veng." There are 9 churches and 2 Omaha schools working together to fund the construction and to sponsor the Garuna Kids attending the school. The congregation and village leaders in the Prey Veng area are beyond excited to see a school being built for their people and children!



## Of First Importance: Great Partners!

The fields are ripe for harvest, but Garuna couldn't plant and water the seeds of God's Word without great partners in the USA and other parts of the world. **Thanks to churches, schools, and individuals around the country, the ministry is expanding** – even with pandemics, war, inflation, and uncertainty. God is in charge, and we are thankful that He is!



Pastor Adam Wolfe from Divine Redeemer Lutheran Church and School (Hartland, WI) is spending time at his "Garuna desk" in the school hallway. WHY? His students met and exceeded their "Hearts for Jesus" offering goal to help the S. Wisconsin and the Michigan Districts build two new classrooms for an existing Garuna school! Pastor Wolfe shared desk time with Pastor Seth Flick and Principal Janet Bahr as students passed on the way to class!



Concordia Academy (Omaha, NE) is part of the Omaha Coalition partnership which will be building Garuna Christian School #9. Their students challenged the faculty in a fundraising effort to purchase the desks and furnishings for the project. Apparently, the students did well, resulting in the "pie-ing" of Principal Nathan Domsch and 3 of his amazing teachers. A lot of fun was had by all, especially the students!!

## Of First Importance: Sharing Jesus With Those Who've Never Heard!

If you look closely at a section of the data page from one of the Garuna Christian Schools, you will see some of the data collected for each student. Each year, the data for each Garuna student is updated,

## Of First Importance: Celebrations!

The holidays are an ideal time to share the Gospel with friends and families in Southeast Asia. Whether it's part of an English teaching ministry or at a Garuna Christian School, everyone loves to have a gathering, fellowship, and to learn about the holiday's origins. Activities are centered around the reasons for the seasons, such as Christmas and Easter. **For most of Asia, there is little to no knowledge about how these holidays are related to the**



**life of Christ and the difference it makes in our lives.**

Most of the activities emphasize a joint church-school focus, inviting the community onto the church and school sites.

*An egg decorating activity in Bangkok leads to a discussion of the Resurrection and the open tomb. At the Into Light English Language Center, Director Ar helps many students in Bangkok learn about the meaning of Easter for the first time!*



*Students at each Garuna Christian School gathered with the church and school families for a Christmas party. Why mention Christmas in an Easter issue? There's no Easter without Christmas!*

including a new photo and information about the child's family, grade level, etc. Much of this is shared with the sponsors of these students in their annual brochures. Upon enrollment, their religion and baptism status reveal that **nearly all the students come from Buddhist families and are not baptized.**

As an example, Garuna Christian School #7 opened in Phnom Penh last November with 162 students registered. 100% were listed as Buddhist and not baptized. What an opportunity to share Jesus with 162 grade K-6

| Photo | Religion | Baptism | # of Siblings |
|-------|----------|---------|---------------|
|       | Buddhist | No      | 2             |
|       | Buddhist | No      | 1             |

## Of First Importance: Training Leaders!



During this time of COVID and quarantines, it was not possible to attend a large group Bible study. And so, **Pastor Niran, Garuna's LISA coordinator in Thailand, has adjusted by developing a weekly online Bible study.** He has divided the 20 participants into 5 groups which includes whole group online study, followed by a small group study to dig more deeply into the Word with a more experienced teacher.

## Of First Importance: Mentoring Leaders!



Pastor Niran Tamsakun loves to spend time with his leaders who are studying with him through the LISA program. He is an amazing mentor and loves to train students

like Mr. Nathapon and his wife who are members of Promise Lutheran Church in Chiang Mai, Thailand. As Pastor Niran said, **"I am looking for leaders with a good personality who are willing to learn. I love to teach and develop leaders for a year and then they are ready to lead on their own."**

children attending daily, 100 coming to Sunday School, 52 teens coming for English/Gospel lessons, 17 young people on the newly formed soccer team, and plans for a new church plant to open soon on this new campus. **This is the**

**kind of "open door" that exists in Cambodia! We thank God for over 300 baptisms through the Garuna Christian School ministry, but we also ask you to pray for all who now have the opportunity to hear the Easter Gospel message.**



# Of First Importance: Growing The USA Team!



A new team member has accepted the call to work with Garuna USA! **Please welcome Andrew Hulke, an LCMS teacher from Hudson, WI who will serve as Garuna's Assistant Director of Education** after he completes his current school year as a high school theology and history teacher at Concordia Academy in Roseville, MN. Andrew is married to Emily, and they have

2 young children, Addi and Aidan. They will continue to live in Wisconsin while serving with Garuna. Andrew shared in his acceptance letter, **"In my 13 years of teaching, my mission has been to know Jesus and to make Him known."** That is truly of first importance, and we look forward to Andrew's leadership on the Garuna team!



## From the Chairman

*Dear Friends in Christ,*

He is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Amen.

**Of First Importance** "For what I received I passed on to you **as of first importance**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..." *1 Corinthians 15: 3-4*

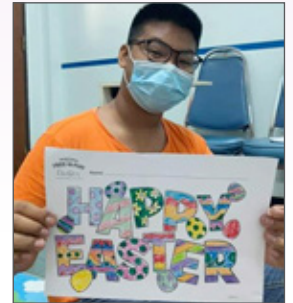
It has certainly been a very trying time for so many all around the world. It has been very difficult navigating the pandemic for the past two years. Many have suffered and have lost loved ones. We are seeing nations in conflict, even as we watch the daily news programs. There are many other conflicts in various troubled locations in the world that we don't even hear about.

**The message of Easter is certainly "Of First Importance."** We need to know that Christ Jesus died for our sins and that He conquered death and the grave by His victorious resurrection from the dead. The gift He gives is forgiveness and everlasting life. It is of first importance. With your prayers and support, this is the message that Garuna shares in Southeast Asia through our wonderful partners.

Thank you for your partnership and help. We are so blessed to work side by side with you – both here in the USA and with our brothers and sisters in Christ in Southeast Asia. **We pray that God's Holy Spirit, working through His precious Word, will help us keep first things first.**

Sincerely in the Savior,

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



## "Of First Importance" Generosity Options

**Where Needed Most** – Any amount is greatly appreciated!

### Garuna Ministry Sponsorship Options

- Garuna Kids (K-grade 6): \$30/month
- Bible/LISA Student: \$50/month
- Garuna Teacher: \$100/month

### Have you considered these ways to give to the Garuna Ministries?

- **IRA Charitable Rollovers or IRA RMD's** can provide an opportunity for stewards over the age of 72 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.
- **Estate Planning** – Have you considered leaving a legacy gift for Garuna as a part of your estate planning?
- **Endowment Fund Gift** – Helps us plan for the future!

- **Thrivent Choice** – Garuna partners with Thrivent Financial and is eligible to receive Thrivent Choice Dollars.
- **Amazon Smile** – Please consider Garuna as your charity of choice as you shop online with Amazon! (smile.amazon.com)

If you are led to donate, your check may be made **payable to Garuna**. Gifts may be mailed to **Garuna at 2924 E. Cholla 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. Thank you in advance for your partnership in prayer and financial support. Contact us at [info@garuna.org](mailto:info@garuna.org) if you have any additional questions.



*Thanks for joining hands in support of sharing the Easter message with so many who have not yet heard.*

