



# 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 | info@garuna.org | Volume 23, Issue 2 | Fall 2023

## JOURNEYS WITH JESUS: LEARNING AND GROWING

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began teaching them many things. *Mark 6:34*

Summer travels are nearing an end, and now it's "back to school" time in the USA! Join us as we share about the **exciting year-round learning journey in Southeast Asia** as children and adults are learning about Jesus every day and in many ways! These large crowds are excitedly receiving and growing in the grace and knowledge of their Savior Jesus!



GCS #8 (Siem Reap, Cambodia)

**ALL ABOARD...**for the **opening of the two newest Garuna Christian Schools (GCS) in Cambodia**. August marks the first days of registration and classes for GCS 8 and GCS 9, with expectations of 200 new students at each school. This Garuna school ministry will now touch the lives of 1700 Garuna Kids and their families.



GCS #9 (Prey Veng, Cambodia)

**DEPARTURE DATE: JANUARY 2024.** The 2 new schools **will be officially dedicated in January** when leaders from the supporting churches in Omaha, NE and Fremont, CA travel together for a trip to meet their Garuna Kids, see their schools, and celebrate with their communities!



*The families come to register their children at the new Garuna Schools. Students pay no tuition. They are funded by Garuna Kid sponsorships!!*



*Welcome home! 97% of the families in rural Cambodia are Buddhist, but they are quick to register for Garuna's schools. They appreciate the Bible teaching, and they love and trust the teaching staff as they join the school family.*



**ARE WE THERE YET?** The COVID pandemic slowed down these two projects, but everyone has been patient as the construction crews in Cambodia have been working hard to complete these projects so that students in grades K-6 can begin to learn about Jesus every day of the year! **Did you know that the Garuna Schools do not take a long summer break or vacation?** This extra time in class is beneficial for many reasons! The kids continue to learn and grow, and the parents can continue to work and provide for their families, knowing their kids are loved and safe.





## BUCKLE UP...IT'S A NEW DESTINATION!

**Garuna has decided to move its Thailand gospel outreach from Bangkok to Chiang Mai.** Plans are being made to purchase a site and to move/add staff to work in a collaborative manner from this northern Thailand hub. Besides work in the Chiang Mai area, Garuna will continue to reach into nearby closed countries and the hilltribe groups near the border. Currently, Garuna has work in this region, but with increasing invitations and opportunities, a more centralized team and approach will be a new focus. It's an exciting new opportunity. Watch for updates in the next issue!



Sharing Jesus with hilltribe groups along the Thai border.



Pastor Niran is Garuna's Bible training coordinator in Thailand. His wife, Esther, is a translator with LHF, a great Garuna partner.

**GOING THE EXTRA MILE:** Watch for a **new end-of-year giving opportunity** this fall! Garuna will be purchasing a site for a new **Luther Institute-Thailand (LI-T) Ministry Center in Chiang Mai!** We feel this is an amazing opportunity to make an even greater impact in northern Thailand. Details coming soon!



**“OUT OF THIS WORLD” TOOLS!** The Garuna team prepared materials for VBS/SS and for 2023-24 school chapels that are helpful for your church and school. The VBS team from Trinity Lutheran Church in Temecula, CA shared them with 350 kids. They wrote, “Day 1 of VBS is today, and we’re watching the Garuna video and hearing the presentation. It is excellent!

**Congrats on developing such wonderful resources for us to use at VBS!** If you want to partner with Garuna, write to [liane@garuna.org](mailto:liane@garuna.org).

*“Thanks for allowing us the opportunity to partner with you in raising awareness about the importance of spreading the Gospel, not only in our vicinity, but also in SE Asia and beyond.”*  
(Friends from Temecula, CA)



Garuna Kids ride the Garuna bus to school each day to learn about Jesus.

**CRUISIN’ TO SCHOOL.** Students in the Minnesota South District of the LCMS will be focusing on the Garuna Kids this year for their annual Hearts for Jesus Fundraiser. **They have chosen to help provide classroom desks/furnishings and transportation for the kids in Cambodia!** We love working with all the kids in the USA to make missions relevant and “real” – even though half world away!



**WINDOW SEAT.** Garuna’s new **Teacher Aide program** is off and running as Garuna Kid graduates have a “window seat” to leadership development. Each Garuna school has received applications from graduating 6th graders who want to continue to be involved at their alma mater as a teacher aide. Garuna’s Education Director, Pastor Peter said, “These students have many memories of their years at their Garuna school as they have learned both general knowledge and the Bible. Many of them heard the Gospel and believed that Jesus is their God.” **Approximately 50 young people are now part of this pilot program, as they help the younger students, join in weekly Bible study, help with Sunday School, learn about teaching, and are encouraged to further their education.** Pray that these continuing connections will result in growing faith and future Garuna Christian School teacher recruitment!



Principal Tharon is training her new group of teacher aides for her school in Tbong Khmum (GCS #1).

*This teacher aide at Garuna Christian School #4 is reading a Bible story to the younger students.*





**BOARDING PASS.** Garuna is gearing up for its 2nd **M.A. in Christian Ministry cohort** which will start in January. Nearly 20 students from all over the globe will study with Lutheran professors in a unique partnership with Grand Canyon University. It's a joy to train Lutheran leaders from around the world. Applicants for this year are from countries such as Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Burundi, Vietnam, and Papua, New Guinea.



Cambodian student Un Song Im receives his degree from GCU from Garuna chairman Jeff Ehlers. Songlm works for Lutheran Hour Ministries.

**GLOBAL CITIZENS.** Dr. Beck and his **Concordia-Nebraska business students visited Garuna's ministry** on a recent trip to Cambodia with the Garuna team. They were able to meet Garuna Kids, learn about the culture, and see the new rice bank that they funded as part of a business/social ministry project at the Kampot church and school.



It's quite a Garuna Kid welcome for the visiting Concordia University-NE visitors as they disembark the bus!



**JUST PLANE AWESOME.**

Meet Elen Tong (Vice Principal at Garuna School #6)

A flight is only as good as its crew...and the Garuna Schools are only as good as their teachers. **Elen Tong is an excellent teacher at the GCS 6 school in Siem Reap, Cambodia, serving 320 students.** She serves as the vice principal and English teacher. On Sundays, she helps with the Sunday School program with approximately 150 of the Garuna Kids attending. In June, Elen shared her thanks for the opportunity she has as a Garuna teacher, serving in a ministry role she loves.

Elen grew up as the 7th child in a family of 9 children. **As a child, she dreamed of being a teacher because she loved children.** However, her family faced much hardship, including a shortage of food, no money, no clothes, and no transportation to attend school. She didn't complete 9th grade. Instead, she dropped out and went to live with her older sister. She worked as a cleaner at a Christian school, and the more she watched the teachers, the more she longed to do the same. She became a Christian and was able to go to a Bible school for a short time before she was married. She then served in several schools. Even though she and her husband were working, it was still difficult to make ends meet.

Elen began to work for Garuna in 2018 when she and her husband were hired to teach at Garuna Christian School #6. She joyfully (and tearfully) said, "It made me feel that God gave me a chance to serve him again. Now that I work with Garuna, my family is better both physically and spiritually. **Garuna has also helped the community by providing education to children, especially the children who study in our school and hear the Gospel every day.**" Elen shared that she's seen that the student families are positive about sending their children to school and Sunday School, listening to their kids singing and hearing the Bible stories, too

In summary, Elen feels that school is a great place for sharing the Gospel in Cambodia. The parents are able to go to work and know that their children are learning and growing in the nurture and safety of the Garuna schools and staff. She now serves at the Garuna school with her husband as principal. He is also in charge of the second school in the region, opening this fall. Two of her brothers and a nephew are also teaching at the school. **Her family certainly has a heart and a gift for sharing the Gospel with children and families who have never heard the Good News.** Elen loves Matthew 6:33-34, "but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."



Elen's family at a Cambodian wedding. There are 5 Garuna teachers in this photo!



Elen loves children and they love her!





## FROM THE CHAIRMAN: Raise Your Hand!

*“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved, ... For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”*  
Romans 10:9,10,13

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

Do you remember your teachers asking you to raise your hand before you speak? If you knew the answer to their question you might wiggle your arm or stand up at your desk to get the teacher’s attention. Or, if you didn’t know the answer you might try to hide behind a classmate so the teacher couldn’t see that you didn’t know the answer.

In this newsletter **our theme is “Journeys with Jesus...Learning and Growing”**. The purpose of Garuna’s ministry in Southeast Asia is reflected in the passage from Romans chapter 10. It is to bring the Good News of Jesus to the region where less than 1% of the population believe in Jesus.

Our initial student enrollment at our 9 Garuna schools reflects that percentage. But thanks be to God, our leaders report to us that after their daily Bible study of God’s Word, the vast majority “raise their

hands” when asked if they believe in Jesus! **In the photo, I was leading a devotion with the children at the Garuna Christian School in Phnom Penh, and I asked them to raise their hand if they believed in Jesus. WOW! I was so blessed and full of joy to see almost every hand shoot up with delight and enthusiasm.**



Paul teaches us that the gift of salvation is by God’s grace, and we testify to that faith He gives us by “confessing” with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and “believing” in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead. It is His promise that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”! Let’s join the children by raising our hands to that wonderful promise.

Thank you for your prayers and very generous support of Garuna and its ministry of bringing this Gospel to Southeast Asia. **May we lift up our hands in faith and in praise to our Lord who allows us the opportunity to bring Good News to children and their families in such a place.**

Sincerely in Christ,  
**Rev. Dr. Jeff Ehlers, Chairman  
Garuna Ministries**



# GENEROSITY OPTIONS You Mean the World to Us!

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

**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 support Garuna Ministries?

- **IRA Charitable Rollovers or IRA RMD’s** can provide an opportunity for stewards over the age of 70-1/2 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 do your online shopping...Christmas is coming! ([smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com))

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](http://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.



**Be Our Guest!** The friendly students at GCS #7 in Phnom Penh love to welcome visitors to their campus!

