

GLOBAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR PRISON MINISTRY 25 August, 2018



For the last ten years the IPCA Steering Committee has invited all those involved in prison ministry around the world to come together in a special day of prayer on 25 August, the birthday of IPCA. We would like to thank members of IPCA Asia for arranging this year's program.



REFLECTIONS AND TESTAMONIES ON PRISON MINISTRY

Chiangrai Prison has more than 3,000 prisoners and Thoeng District Prison has almost 1,000 prisoners. Both are in Chiangrai, Thailand.

Every month, a team from Chiangrai Second Church District, the Church of Christ in Thailand visits prisoners at Chiangrai and Thoeng District Prisons.

Pastors and women groups from different churches join hands to do prison ministry through Holy Communion, songs of worship, baptisms, lessons from the Bible and prayer. The ministry emphasises the joy and love of being in a relationship with Christ. We teach moral value, ethics and encourage the prisoners to gain higher education. We help to prepare scholarships for the prisoners to continue to study non-formal education. This program belongs to the government.

Many prisoners are active young adults who hunger for knowledge and self improvement through reading books, practicing handicrafts and other trade skills, and learning musical instruments. They continue to grow stronger in their faith everyday.

The prison ministry is instrumental in raising Christian leaders who have hopes of pursuing

careers in Biblical studies. Since its inception, the Christian ministry at Chiangrai prison and Thoeng District Prison have seen many hundreds of new Christian prisoners released from prison because of their good behaviour, community service and high ethical standards.

Many of those released now witness in their own communities about the transforming love of Jesus Christ.

Churches also support the children who have both parents in prison. We have to find a good dormitory to care for them. The prisoners need churches to look after their children. Please keep the children whose parents are in prison in your prayer. They need big support from churches. Raising children is a lifelong process that requires investment of time and physical resources. Feeding, housing, dormitory and educating these many children mean we are always fundraising yet also trusting God to provide.

Supporting these children is often times a challenge with today's economy, but we recognise that it is a wonderful opportunity to witness for our Lord not just to them but also to the community. *Rev Dr Sirirat Pusurinkham*

TESTIMONY FROM RUNG AKARINPUREE

Hello, my name is Rung Akarinpuree. I would like to share a testimony. I was born in Bangkok, there are 4 siblings in the family, I am the only son. My mother is from Phuket and my father is Indian, who came to do business in Thailand. From what I can remember, my eldest sister was raised by relatives from my mother's side and my youngest sister was adopted by another family. My second sister and I stayed with my parents; the main reason we were not able to stay together as a family was "we did not have sufficient funds to care for everybody." When I was 6 years old, my mother passed away, only my father, my sister and I were together. When we reached school age, my sister and I attended a school in the temple which is a turning point in my life. I was disobedient and often had fist fights with friends because I was always teased. I like to be a leader to my friends from elementary to high school.

My life turned for the worse when I became addicted to drugs in high school which made my family miserable. I became very addicted to drugs, delinquent and I would steal and burglarize which made me admitted to the remand home which is actually a prison for children. I was remanded 5 to 6 times which made me learn to be a full-scale lousy person. I led a criminal life, used drugs, initiated gangs which made my father and sister very distressed. My father felt like being in hell, he was not able to eat or sleep, always watchful of how this son will be each day; will he be harmed by someone; how is he, he never comes home; the only times he comes home is when he is famished. One day my father asked me to enlist in the military, maybe things will be better. I just did as he asked because looking into his and my sister's eyes, I felt sorry. Being a soldier did not make me free from this cycle, I was still addicted to drugs and even more addicted than before which made me court-martialed for a year and a half. While in prison, I learned all the immoral ways and all the criminal tricks because all the people in there were all criminals. When all these people gather together, they would talk about or instill unethical ideas. Until one day, my father passed away from much grief that this son could not become a good person.

Then my life turned even worse, I was arrested for burglary, to get money to buy drugs. I was sentenced to 10 years in prison which made me become more delinquent and I did everything possible to survive so I learned every

criminal trick so that I can have the best life possible in prison. I was transferred 4 times from one prison to another because of my bad behaviour and because I never repented. I met people from all walks of life which molded me to become one of the evil ones of prison, such that the wardens see no future in me, the only destiny is to wait for death. I made trouble for myself and the prison—I was often placed in solitary cells, solitary confinement and put in shackles. I was a bully and gathered gangsters—this is what I did on a daily basis. I started to realize my future that I surely will get stabbed in prison like my other inmate friends. But what can I do? I chose this way of life, to go back and reform myself is too late. But deep in my heart I want to stop doing these criminal acts and be like other normal people, but this may be impossible. I always look into the sky when I was in prison and always think in my heart that I want to be a good person.

One day I had the opportunity to meet my sister and

set my mind to prostrate at her feet telling her that I decided to be a delinquent, not to leave prison and that I want to spend my days until I die in prison. But my sister spoke about Jesus Christ!! She told me to pray and ask God for what I desire, so I did not get the chance to prostrate at her feet and the visiting time was up. From the visiting room back to the prison area where I stayed was about 300 feet, Jesus' story was circling in my head. This made me pray to God that night, I sincerely told God that I want to be a good person, please release me from prison so I can return home, please let me receive amnesty from the King. If I can be released to the outside world, I can start to become a good person. If I stay in here I cannot become a good person. And I never prayed again. One year passed by, a miracle happened, I received amnesty from the King, which made me instantly think about Jesus Christ. I started to attentively, sincerely and seriously pray to Him. I know in my heart that Jesus Christ helped me. From that day until now I have spent my life in the outside world for 6 years. I have dedicated myself to serve God by helping the brothers in prison and boys in the remand home because these people also need God and only God can give them new life. I thank Jesus Christ because his grace is plentiful for me.

*"Nothing is impossible
God" Luke 1:37*

THOUGHTS FROM PHLU

The International Church of Bangkok has a long history of visiting the Immigration Detention Center (IDC) in Suan Phlu. Through several pastors and many lay members, we have visited consistently since at least the 1990's. In the recent past we have had up to twelve families connected to the church in IDC. These families fled Pakistan due to persecution for their Christian faith and witness. Unfortunately due to Thailand's immigration policy and not ratifying the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, all asylum seekers and refugees are deemed illegal residents once their tourist visas expire. These families were eventually resettled elsewhere in the world or repatriated to Pakistan. Currently we have no one associated with the church in IDC. For the last few years, our volunteers have visited IDC weekly and I as the pastor visit at least monthly. These visits are ones offering food support, encouragement and prayer. Hopefully our ministry to those in IDC will continue in the years ahead as we serve the Lord Jesus "Wherever He may be found" (Matthew 25:40).

CHURCH – PRISON MINISTRY

Located in the city of Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, Chiang Mai Community Church (CMCC) is an international, interdenominational English speaking congregation, under the Church of Christ in Thailand.

As time passes and trust is built up, spiritual conversations often begin. Over the years we have been delighted and encouraged to see the Holy Spirit at work in many hearts and lives.

The inmates, particularly foreign inmates, are supported by weekly visits by a team of 5 – 6 people, who are often in contact with families abroad, handling mail, contacting embassies and providing information about court procedures. A small food gift is given each week.

The aim of CMCC prison ministry is two-fold: to give spiritual help and spiritual hope, offered to all inmates whatever their nationality and religious background.

FROM A PRISON CHAPLAIN

I became involved in this ministry as a fill-in one day when someone else was not able to join the team. My prison visit that day was a disaster as I am not good at "small talk" with strangers, so I was reluctant to get more involved. But God's call to me was to "try again" after my less than positive first experience. So I did try again and have now been heading up the CMCC Prison Ministry team for the past 30 years. I thank the Lord daily for this opportunity to reach out in His name to such a diverse and special group of men and women. Every day I have been able to use my humble efforts to share His love in these dark places.

One of the extra joys of this ministry for me is the opportunity I have to get to know not only the foreign inmates that our team visits, but also to become acquainted with their families who are scattered across the world, to share in their lives and pass messages and greetings from their loved ones in the prison.

Another aspect of the ministry is the chance to know the prison officers and their families, the court officials, and police and immigration staff.

So the ripples of God's love from our weekly visits go far and wide and only the Holy Spirit knows their full impact for the Kingdom. We are called to be faithful in serving our Lord.