

Happy New Year!

You may think I am late with this greeting, but depending on which year you are thinking about, you might just as well think I am too early or right on time. I used to think that the new year started January 1st. no matter what. But since going to Thailand and now working with Karen and Chin coming to the US, I find myself saying Happy New Year a lot more than I used to.

The Thais enjoy a holiday whenever one is available so even Buddhists in Thailand enjoy celebrating Christmas as it extends the New Year celebration. And, with Christmas and New Year late in the month and the Kings Birthday (which is also Father's Day) and Constitution Day earlier in December, virtually all of December has a festive mood fueled by lots of days off work.

But the Thais also have their own New Year which is the big water throwing holiday of Song Kran which occurs in April. It marks the beginning of the traditional rice planting cycle, which is a pretty logical place to start a new year in a culture dependant on rice for survival. So as people throw water on each other, one often hears, "Sawatdee Pi My", or Happy New Year for the several days of festivities in April.



Another big New Year in Thailand is the Chinese New Year in February. With people of Chinese lineage controlling so many businesses in the country, even hyperactive Bangkok virtually closes up shop for several days during the height of Chinese New Year. By Karen reckoning, January 8, 2008 would be day one of the waxing moon of Thalay month, the first day of the year 2747. So... Happy New Year to all our Karen brothers and sisters. With Karen now being resettled in 8 or 9 countries, Karen New Year is increasingly becoming an international event. A number of you that receive this mailing are Karen or are involved with the Karen in your community and you have, no doubt, attended, or soon will attend a Karen New Year celebration.



We had the privilege of participating in the New Year celebration organized by the Karen Community of Akron which was held on January 6th. Even the mayor of Akron took the time to offer a greeting to kick off the celebration a start. Blowing a Karen horn, singing, dancing, some speaking and of course eating, rounded off the event which was held in the auditorium of the public library in downtown, Akron, Ohio.

I have sprinkled a few photos of the Akron New Year celebration in this letter. But if you want to see more photos of the event, follow this link to the Karen Konnection website:

http://www.karenkonnection.org/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=1638. Also on the Karen Konnection website are some photos from the New Year celebration in the Philadelphia area.

If you would like to see photos of more Karen celebrations there are several listed at www.karen.org and many more (if you read Karen or have someone help you who can) at www.kwekalu.net.

In Revelation 21:5 it says “He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new.” With the adjustments the Karen and Chin must make as they come to live in America, they may feel this verse is being fulfilled in their lives. At the same time, the people and churches receiving and helping the new arrivals are engaged in new ministries, working in new ways, hearing new languages, learning of new cultures and maybe seeing themselves and their own culture in new ways. May the Lord lead us as we work in these new ways.



Left behind in the refugee camps are those that are not accepted or that decline resettlement. There are still hundreds of thousands living in hiding inside Burma trying to stay ahead of the army. There are those that have fled Burma but that couldn't get into a camp. So they live secret lives without documentation in Thailand, China, Malaysia, India and other places. As we work in new ways here, may we also remember to pray for and seek ways to help those that remain in Burma, in the refugee camps, and in other countries of sanctuary. The problems that caused the people to flee and become refugees in the first place still remain and need solutions.