

KAREN CHRISTIAN LEADERS' NEWSLETTER

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Notes from Duane Binkley: We just received some good news from Judson University which is located in the state of Illinois, not far from Chicago. This is a Baptist university named after Adoniram Judson, the first American missionary. To acknowledge the historical connection between Judson and the people of Burma, they are offering a special scholarship for any Karen, Chin or other person from Burma now living in the state of Illinois. With this plan, Judson University will give a 32% discount on the tuition and they estimate that various government programs can cover another 50% of the cost. That should leave just a little more than \$3,000 per year, plus room and board to come from other sources. For detailed information, applications, and more information on financial aid, contact Billy Dean, Director of Enrollment Services, at bdean@judson.edu.

Also regarding college, we saw that the University of Toledo in the state of Ohio is offering free tuition to any student in one of the cities of Ohio that can graduate with a 3.0 average or above. The article we read pointed out that this program is modeled after programs in other states. So no matter where you live, if you are in high school and want to go to college, try to get good grades. There are many scholarships available but it may take some effort to find them.

If you are a little older and not in high school now, it would be of great help to you if you can complete a GED program. This is the same as graduating from high school and it will help you get better jobs. With the GED, you might also be able to get training in new kinds of work. Sometimes this training might only take a year or so, but can provide you a career that lasts the rest of your life. For example, even though the economy is bad, high quality welders and people that can operate computerized metal cutting machines are in high demand all across the US. With high school or GED, you can get training in these and other kinds of jobs.

I recently heard of about 50 Karen moving to Storm Lake in the state of Iowa to work in a meat processing plant. Many of them have started to attend the First Baptist Church of Storm Lake. Another new Karen congregation is being formed at the First Baptist Church of Pomona in the state of California as well. In Lansing, Michigan, a group of Karen have been living and holding services in an apartment. But they were introduced to the Olivet Baptist Church and are starting to meet and hold worship services there.

On March first, a special program was organized in the city of Sioux Falls, South Dakota to welcome the Karen people that are now living in the area. The closest Karen communities would be in Huron, South Dakota and Worthington, Minnesota. The Karen went there to work in meat processing plants. The welcome program was held at the University of Sioux Falls which is an American Baptist college.

Another special program is being organized for April 19th at the North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois. This program is called a Karen – American Open House. Plans are still in the works but they hope to show Karen crafts and culture and feature some Karen food. There will

also be a chance for Karen to look into employment opportunities and meet with social service agencies and learn more about adult education, health care and other things.

Message from Thra Mue Htoo May. Greetings to all Karen in the name of Christ. We, the nation of the Karen people, have been blessed by God in ways we don't understand. We come and are sheltered in America where we don't have to be afraid, we can sleep comfortably at night, and we can eat well. These are all blessings that come from God. America is a land of plenty, a big country, where we can get a complete education in a well organized system, and where the cities are full of tall and beautiful buildings with manicured gardens. We see these things and it makes us feel good.

Some Karen have been settled in America for a long time but others of us are new. Either way, we desired to come and arrived here legitimately. So when we have found our place, whether in our work or in our daily activities, may we do our best.

Grandfather Sah Bah, the father of Thra Charlie Dtah Dah who was the former principal of the Mae La School, wrote the Karen National anthem. Now all three verses of the anthem have been fulfilled. Let me remind you of the verses:

1. My people, the best people, I love you so much. You love honesty, you love to welcome guests, I love your good deeds so much.
2. The nation of God, we are the people that are expecting you. You (the Karen) are blessed. You face poverty and are even enslaved but our younger white brother is our savior sent back to us by God.
3. The God of our fathers, our ancient hope, we worship you. So we will become your disciples and spread the Good News all around the world. Bless us again.

Through Ann and Adoniram Judson, our grandfather Ko Tha Byu became a Christian. He believed and was baptized in water, then spread the Gospel among the Karen and many came to know Christ. Many American missionaries, both husbands and wives, came and spread the Gospel among the Karen until the government of Burma forced the missionaries to leave the country. Thra Duane Binkley and his wife Marcia Binkley are missionaries to the Karen in Thailand. But because so many Karen have come to America, they have accepted the duty of finding where the Karen are living and worshipping in the US. Duane and Marcia are 100% Americans, but they love the Karen people and are staying in the US to search for the Karen and help for which we are grateful. They always travel and can't stay home but they don't complain. They enjoy doing God's work and we ask god to bless them always.

Similarly, Thra Mue Catherine B. Allen also is a precious mother that loves the Karen so much. When I first came to the US she came to see me and help me with what I needed providing clothes, umbrellas, shoes, snow boots, hats, socks and other kinds of shoes. She helped my friends who had just arrived as well. In our country, there is no snow, we had never seen snow and we had only one pair of shoes. We come to America and now we have many pairs of shoes. This is a blessing from God.

We thank each of the leaders of the country, the religious leaders and leaders of our church organization leaders that love our Karen refugees and welcome us into the country. We are a people with our own language, literature, culture, clothing, flag, schools, places of worship, church and organization. We are a people that has everything except our own country. Actually, we have a land. It exists. But because we are oppressed by the Burmese government (SPDC) we always have to flee, the children can't study and their parents can't make a living. So we must become refugees until today.

Those of us who have come to the US, please do your best where ever you live. Don't forget god. Like our ancient poem says, "You leave God and God can still live. But if God leaves you, all you can do is grimace." So honor God and do the best you can where ever you are. For the young people, try your best in your studies. When you receive a lesson from your teacher, treat it like something of great value. So study hard.

Proverbs 3: 5-6: Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

(A Karen poem) A Karen mother's children are powerful. Powerful in almighty God.

Don't use Daw Tway and Daw Kyin medicines. Two products, Daw Tway and Daw Kyin, commonly used as digestive aids in children of Burmese refugees in Fort Wayne, Indiana, have tested high for lead and arsenic. The public is advised to avoid using these folk medicines. Daw Tway has been found to contain lead as high as 970 ppm, 200 times above acceptable limits. Daw Tway has also been found to contain arsenic as high as 7,100 ppm. Daw Kyin, generically referred to as "wonotsay," has been found to contain arsenic as high as 23,000 ppm. Additional information about the two products is available at the following website:
http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/Arsenic_and_Lead_Poisoning.pdf.

Job opening with American Baptist Churches. National Ministries of the American Baptist Churches is looking for someone to work as a Liaison for Refugees from Burma. The person will work to serve as a bridge between the denomination and the many new Karen and Chin communities and congregations around the US. To get an application and the full job description go to: <http://www.nationalministries.org/employment.cfm>. Applications are being accepted until April 21st.

Are You a Pastor? Some Karen communities have many pastors and other communities have none. If you are a pastor and would consider going to another location, please let us know. We would like to start a list of potential pastors but we need your help. Please send us: Your name, Address, Telephone number, where you had Bible training, your experience as a pastor, whether you are willing to move, how many children you have, what languages you speak and any other information you think would be useful. Please send this information to Duane Binkley at dmbink@pobox.com.

Support for Duane Binkley by Neil Sowards. International Ministries (IM) has told Duane he must raise support from individuals in order to stay on as a missionary with IM. IM is in a financial crisis and has been forced to lay off a number of persons. They are asking all missionaries to raise their own support. E-mail Neil Sowards for details.

Karens in Ithaca, New York. "Margaret Myers" <mmyers@twcnj.rr.com> We probably have about 60-75 Karen in Ithaca. Some attend the Bethel Grove Church. Some of the Karen here visit friends and relatives in Buffalo and Utica, where there are many more Karen. In Utica, we have heard there are up to 1,000 persons. There is mostly an informal network of volunteers in Ithaca working with the various refugee families, along with several school personnel who work as family liaisons or are ESL teachers. We also work with the Southeast Asia outreach program at Cornell University that has organized several workshops on Burma for teachers and also an exhibit at the public library.

Now is the time to buy a house! The federal government is granting 10% of the cost of the purchase of a house by a first time house buyer up to \$8,000. So if you buy a house for \$50,000 the federal government will give you \$5,000. The house must be purchased in 2009. If purchased in 2008 the first time buyer can get up to \$7,500 from the federal government.

Federal Income Taxes. Everyone must file. But there are many places where you can get free help from competent persons to fill out your tax form. Check with your local library, newspaper, organizations working with refugees. In Fort Wayne there are a number of people preying on refugees filling out their forms for them and charging them \$50 for something they could have had done free. In one case a woman paid \$180 plus \$10 to have her forms filed on line. She was really ripped off.

Good ESL English lessons. Has anyone found some good CDs on English which Karens could listen to as they drive to work? Or any good CDs for use at home for adults?

Karen Christian Leaders' Manual. A number of persons have been working on a manual for Karen Christian Leaders. It is an attempt to put a lot of useful information in one location. We are offering what has been written to Karen Leaders by e-mail to those who would like to see it. Please understand it is a work in progress. However Karen Leaders will find some of what is finished useful and can suggest to the committee other topics they think might be useful. E-mail neildianasowards@juno.com for an e-mail copy. Sorry no hard copies are available. It is thirty pages long with 80 pages of addendum.

Citizenship Manual. The manual issued by the U. S. government to help persons to become U. S. citizens has now been translated into Karen. A printed version in both English and Karen is available with a DVD for \$20 plus \$5 shipping. The DVD has spoken English and Karen. Contact: TansyJKadoe@cox.net Mailing address: Tansy Kadoe, 18050 N. 89th Lane, Peoria, AZ 85382 This a fund raiser for her youth group. The first six who purchased and used this manual and translation passed their citizenship test!

Feedback. If this newsletter is interesting and helpful to you, please let us know. Also send us any information to share with other Karen groups. Tell us what you would like to see in the next issues. Give us e-mails of leaders who might like to receive it--our list is very incomplete.

Past Issues of this newsletter are available on karenkonnection.org