

HELP KARENNI WORSHIP IN THEIR OWN MOTHER TONGUE

Some Background:

Karenni Catholics and Baptists are used to attending church in the refugee camps. Wherever the refugee camps are, they build themselves churches. Traditionally animists, **the first Karenni convert to Christianity was in 1870. *Though it's been 139 years since the first Karenni person became a Christian, they have never had the Scriptures in their mother tongue until recently.*** Without the Scriptures, the Baptist Karenni have used the Scriptures and hymbook of another language, Sgaw Karen. This means that they have had to learn another language to access God's Word. The Sgaw Karen are the Karenni people's brothers and are much more numerous. They share a rich history stemming from the American Baptists who began work with them back in the 1800s. The Sgaw Karen have had a huge impact on the Karenni church but ***with the Scriptures now completed in the Kayah language, the Karenni have the opportunity to really worship and understand God's Word in their own mother tongue.***

Often, Karenni who have gone to a Baptist church all their lives, still do not understand the basics of the Gospel message. They know all about Jesus, but they still think that in order to go to heaven they have to do certain things. So, no matter what they call themselves, the Karenni need to hear about the ***grace*** of God for them, the ***free gift*** of salvation because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One of the most exciting opportunities for church planting today are among the Karenni refugees who are being resettled in America. The Karenni are located in areas where foreigners are not allowed to go but God has opened the door for these people from the 1040 window to come right to the doorsteps of American, New Zealand, Finnish, etc. churches. At Calvary Baptist Church in Winston Salem, NC, a weekly gathering of over 100 Karenni people (animist, Catholic, Baptist) meet together and learn about God. Whereas in the refugee camp, a Catholic or animist might not come to a Baptist church, the situation in America is a new opportunity. If American churches will seize the opportunity, it's a tremendous chance to love and share Christ with them. Based on the experience in Winston Salem, **here are a few suggestions for how you can help the Karenni refugees in your area to begin a mother-tongue gathering/Sunday School:**

1. Get together with Karenni Christians among the refugees and offer to help them begin a gathering where they can worship in their own language, learn American culture, hear spoken English and celebrate their identities. Foreigners are respected and looked up to—having your help will enable them to get everyone involved and they won't look like self-appointed leaders.
2. Encourage them to invite EVERYONE. Explain that it's a great opportunity for all to hear the newly completed Scriptures, to hear English and learn about American culture and to help their children NOT forget their language and culture.
3. Provide a consistent room that they can use during the Sunday School hour.
4. Provide them with markers, big paper, scissors, white board, etc. for preparing their own songs
5. Get a couple of donated guitars for them and ask them to prepare at least one or two songs each week. The Karenni are very capable singers of 4 part harmonies. They may have brought their own songs with them. If not, help them print out copies of the songbook on this website (coming soon hopefully).
6. Prepare yourself a song in English or one simple Scripture verse in English to teach everyone.
7. Print off a copy or two of an older draft (Jan09) of the New Testament and put it in a 3 inch binder. We hope to see an on-line up-to-date version of the New Testament available in the near future. You'll need a bit of cash for printing because the NT is 747 pages! Those who can read

- can take turns practicing and then reading the selection for that week (see next item).
8. Buy a flip book of Christian stories from David C Cook for \$29.95 plus shipping. It's called Scripture Pictures; Experiencing the Life of Christ and can be found at; <http://www.davidccook.com/catalog/Detail.cfm?sn=103247&source=714> Have one person practice and read the Scripture selection for that story and then have one of the Karenni re-tell the story using the picture book.
 9. If they do not have a pastor among them and there is truly no one to share, then prepare short lessons and ask someone to translate until someone becomes available in the future. **BUT, please protect the use of their own mother tongue scriptures AND SONGS in their mother tongue and give them the leadership week to week.** If there are other Burmese language groups in the church, there will be a great temptation for the their Scriptures and teaching to be used which will completely exclude Karenni (especially the Catholics and animists who do not know some of these languages. Even the Baptists who do know the Sgaw Karen language have limited understanding.
 10. Take responsibility to teach short vignettes of American culture and compare them with Karenni culture. For example, How do we celebrate birthdays? How do you celebrate birthdays? Or Explain your country flag to me. Let me explain the meaning of our flag to you. The possibilities are endless, you can make them funny with skits and people will love it.

GO FOR IT!!