

Plano church seeks to minister behind bars in Bangkok

Contributed by Serge Taran
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By George Henson, Baptist Standard Staff Writer

Plano church is preparing to launch an effort to support an outreach to prisoners in Thailand after an exploratory visit discovered a vibrant ministry there.

Pastor Bobby Bressman plans to take a team of five to 10 people from Prairie Creek Baptist Church in Plano to Bangkok and the surrounding area to minister in prisons and at House of Blessing, a ministry to recently released inmates and former inmates.

Pastor Bobby Bressman of Prairie Creek Baptist Church in Plano joins volunteer missionary Mark Blanford in baptizing new Christians under the watchful eye of Soonthorn Soontorntarawong, director of House of Blessing in Bangkok. • Watch a video on the House of Blessing ministry here.

“I was so impressed with the ministry there. Especially the evangelism—about 3,000 have been baptized each year for many years—the discipleship to mature those new believers, the passion of those involved, and the care and community the people there had for one another,” Bressman said.

Steve Cable, a member of Prairie Creek Baptist Church, had been to House of Blessing before and was the catalyst for the investigatory trip.

Cable, also a staff member of Probe Ministries in Richardson, had seen the staff of the House of Blessing in action. The ministry initially was an International Mission Board effort, but now it is run by the Christian Prison Ministry Foundation of Thailand.

Soonthorn Soontorntarawong is the director and is assisted by volunteer missionaries Mark and Charlotte Blanford.

The Blanford family, both former missionary kids, felt a call to return to missions, but health considerations prevented them being approved for appointment. Now, Blanford works as a consultant for a Thai company in the evening for financial support, and acts as an administrator of House of Blessing during the day.

Blessing of the government

While the country is predominantly Buddhist, the government holds the ministry in high regard because of the low recidivism rates among former prisoners who become involved in it.

“It’s pretty amazing that a Buddhist government approves a Christian ministry to prisoners because of the difference they see it making in lives,” Cable said.

The ministry now serves in about 60 prisons, and “they are limited only by the number of volunteers they have,” he explained. There are 117 Thai prisons.

Cable and Bressman were able to preach in prisons during their stay in Bangkok, as well as lead Bible studies at House of Blessing.

One of those days of preaching in the prison stands out especially for Bressman. He was working with Jean, a former drug addict who now is a pastor, and his wife, Tijuana, who acted as interpreter for Bressman.

Worms for lunch?

When they stopped for lunch, Jean told Bressman, “Today you eat a worm.”

Worms and larvae are a staple of the diet there, Bressman said, but he told Jean, "No, thank you."

Jean took him to a popular worm house anyway, but Bressman noticed a McDonald's restaurant and walked there for a burger instead.

After Bressman returned so they could eat together, "Jean looked at me with a worm half hanging out of his mouth, pointed at my burger and said with a grin, "You eat that stuff?"

Both Jean and his wife are products of the ministry of House of Blessing.

"We help both those getting out of prison and former prisoners," Soonthorn explains in a House of Blessing informational video. "Give them confidence in returning to society. It is the confidence that comes from trusting in God."

Bpaan, a former female inmate whose life has been redeemed through the ministry, is very grateful for her new life.

"Thank God, he released me and gave me the chance to walk with him outside. And he helps me to know whatever lies ahead, if I put God first, let him lead me, I am sure I won't fall," she said.