

After rescue, soccer boys pray for protection at Thai temple

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA AND KAWEEWIT KAEWJINDA
Associated Press

CHIANG RAI, Thailand (AP) — The youth soccer teammates rescued from a flooded cave began their first day back home with their families Thursday by going to a Buddhist temple to pray for protection from misfortunes.

Eleven of the boys and the Wild Boars coach knelt and pressed their hands in prayer to the tune of chanting monks at the ceremony meant to extend one's life and protect it from dangers. They were joined by relatives and friends at the Wat Pra That Doi Wao temple, overlooking Myanmar on Thailand's northern border.

Only one member was absent, Adul Sargon, who is not Buddhist.

The team has already said they would ordain as Buddhist novices to honor a former Thai navy SEAL diver who died in the cave while making preparations for their rescue.

On Wednesday evening, the boys and coach were released from hospital and spoke to the media for the first time since their ordeal, describing their surprise at seeing two British divers rising from muddy waters in the recesses of the cave. It would be another week before they were pulled out

of the Tham Luang cave.

"We weren't sure if it was for real," 14-year-old Adul said. "So we stopped and listened. And it turned out to be true. I was shocked."

In one poignant and emotional moment at the news conference, a portrait was displayed of Saman Gunan, the Thai diver who died. One of the boys, 11-year-old Chanin "Titan" Vibulrungruang, the youngest of the group, covered his eyes as if wiping away a tear.

"I feel sad. And another thing is I'm really impressed with Sgt. Sam for sacrificing his life to let all 13 Wild Boars to be able to live our lives outside happily and normally," said Coach Ekapol "Ake" Chanthawong. "When we found out, everyone was sad. Extremely sad, like we were the cause of this, for making the sergeant's family sad and having to face problems."

The Wild Boars had entered the cave on June 23 for what was to be a relaxing excursion after soccer practice. But rain began, and water soon filled the cavern, cutting off their escape, and they huddled on a patch of dry ground deep inside the cave.

Ekapol said the trip was meant to last one hour, simply because "each of us wanted to see what was inside."

When the hour was up, they were pretty deep inside and already had swum



AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit

Coach Ekapol Janthawong, center, and members of the rescued soccer team attend a Buddhist ceremony that is believed to extend the lives of its attendees as well as ridding them of dangers and misfortunes in Mae Sai district, Chiang Rai province, northern Thailand, Thursday.

through some flooded areas in the spirit of adventure. But in turning back, he discovered the way was not at all clear, and he swam ahead to scout the route, attaching a rope to himself so the boys could pull him back if necessary.

He said he had to be pulled out.

Ekapol said he told the boys: "We cannot go out this way. We have to find another way."

The boys told reporters of their reactions at that point.

"I felt scared. I was afraid I wouldn't get to go home and my mom would

scold me," said Mongkol Boonpiam, 13, prompting laughter.

Ekarat Wongsukchan, 14, said they decided "to calm ourselves first, to try to fix the problem and find a way out. Be calm and not shocked."

The group had taken no food with them and survived by drinking water that dripped from the cave walls, Ekapol said, adding that all the boys knew how to swim, which had been a concern for rescuers.

Titan said he tried hard not to think about food. "When I'm starving, I don't

think of food otherwise it'd make me more hungry."

Adul said they were digging around the spot when they heard the voices and Ekapol called for silence.

He recounted how Ekapol told them to "quickly get down there, that's the sound of a person, or else they're going to pass on by, something like that."

But he said his teammate holding the flashlight was scared, so Adul told him "If you're not going to go, then I'll go."

"So I quickly took the flashlight, and quickly went down, and I greeted them,

"hello," Adul added.

Psychologists had vetted the journalists' questions in advance to avoid bringing up any aspects of the rescue that might disturb them. The dangers of the complicated operation, in which the boys were extracted in three separate missions with diving equipment and pulleys through the tight passageways, were not discussed.

Doctors said the 13 were physically and mentally healthy. Although they lost an average of 9 pounds during the more than two weeks they were trapped in the cave, they have since gained about 6 1/2 pounds on average since their rescue. They were treated for minor infections.

Asked what he had learned from their experience, 13-year-old Mongkol Boonpiam said he felt stronger. "I have more patience, endurance, tolerance," he said.

Adul said it had taught him "not to live life carelessly."

While many of the boys wanted to be pro soccer players when they grow up, at least four of them said they hope to become navy SEALs, so they could help others.

All expressed their apologies to their families.

"I wanted to apologize to my parents. I know that I will get yelled at by mom when I get home," said Pornchai Kamluang, 16.

Mighty Fortress builds kids' fun

IRRIGON — A victory celebration is featured during the Mighty Fortress vacation Bible school in Irrigon.

Open to ages 5-13, children will learn that in Jesus, the victory is won. Participants will learn what God's word has to say as well as singing songs, creating crafts, playing games and enjoying snacks.

The event kicks off Monday July 23 from 1-4 p.m. at the Irrigon Seventh-day Adventist Church, 205 Tumbleweed Blvd. It runs daily through Friday, July 27. There is no registration fee.

For more information or to register your child, contact 541-922-3895, irri-gon7thdayadventist@yahoo.com or visit www.myvbs.org/irrigonSDA.

Paving the way for Jesus

HERMISTON — Facing much-needed capital improvements at Hermiston Church of the Nazarene, a member is taking to the streets to raise money.

As part of a GoFundMe campaign to raise \$3,000 needed to complete payment for the church's parking lot resurfacing project, Patrick Temple will depart by unicycle from the Eastern Regional Airport in Pendleton on Thursday, July 26. He will ride the roughly 30 miles to the church, located at 1520 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston.

The first leg of the journey will take Temple via the Barnhart-Airport extension road before taking Interstate 84 with a flashing chase vehicle close behind for rider safety. The idea grew



Contributed photo

Patrick Temple, a member of the Hermiston Church of the Nazarene, is promoting a GoFundMe campaign to raise money to complete payment for a parking lot resurfacing project at the church.

after months of generous donations by members and friends of the church. With a balance remaining, Temple

decided to use a bit of imagination to help raise the rest needed for the project.

Temple will be doing Facebook Live broadcasts en route every half hour — look for them via #NazUni. To donate through the fundraiser, visit www.gofundme.com/unicycling-for-hermiston-naz-parking-lot.

For more about the church, contact 541-567-3677, hermistonnaz@gmail.com, search Facebook or visit www.hermistonnazarene.org.

Heppner church discovers Jesus

HEPPNER — The Heppner Christian Church is gearing up for "Discovering Jesus from Eternity Past to Eternity Future."

The vacation Bible school kicks off Monday, July 23 from 6-8 p.m. and runs daily

through Friday, July 27. The church is located at 293 N. Gale St., Heppner. The program is geared for kids that are 3 years old through sixth grade.

The fun crescendos with a barbecue dinner on the last day. For more information, call 541-980-9391 or 541-561-8881.

It's Game On! at the Free Methodist Church

PENDLETON — With a focus on gearing up for life's big game, all kids entering first through fifth grades are invited to vacation Bible school at the Pendleton Free Methodist Church.

Game On! is Monday, July 30 through Thursday, Aug. 2 from 3:30-6:30 p.m. at the church, 1711 S.W. 44th St., Pendleton. There is

no participation fee.

Those planning to attend are asked to register by Friday, July 27. To register, visit www.pendfmc.org/vbs-registration. For questions, call 541-276-6015 or 541-969-3635.

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