

Rice Bowl

MISSION



Global Mission's Myanmar Newsletter

June 2020



These women have successfully completed their tailoring training, a vocational training programme, hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) and funded by Global Mission. These well-established training courses give young women basic tailoring skills which often allow them to gain employment in an existing business or develop a cottage industry at home, enabling them to supplement the family income.

PCM Women's Secretary, Hming Sangi, reported that ten trainees from six different synods attended the most recent course. This was affected by Covid-19, which impacted Myanmar during this time. Despite a delay, the course was able to be completed – although the trainees who had to travel to the Chin Hills faced a 21-day quarantine upon their return home.

Read about the developments in our Ricebowl Mission partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, including the latest news about the PCANZ's Wayne and Helen Harray, who serve as partners in mission at Tahan Theological College.

Reports on Project Funding in the Chin State

The Chin State is a remote and undeveloped area of Myanmar where the ethnic Chin people have traditionally lived. Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) members are predominantly of Chin ethnicity and so call the Chin State their home. There are many ethnic groups among the Chin people, and the PCM reflects this diversity in the ten ethnic synods that makes up the Church. Global Mission has a policy of supporting projects in the Chin State to help improve the livelihoods and living standards of the Chin people in this region. Earlier this year the PCM General Secretary sent an update on some of the projects we have funded recently.

Falam Boarding House (right)

This was completed in August 2019 and is now rented out to 11 families. The Falam Synod receives income from the rental to support ministry in their region. This is an example of an income generating project that aims to help the various PCM synods increase their ability to be self-sustaining. They expressed their thanks for the financial support from PCANZ which contributed to this project.



Calvin Church, Matupi (left)

Matupi is in the southern Chin State where having a church building is an important requirement in the mission context of Myanmar. Our funds have contributed to the construction of this church, which is still ongoing. The first female pastor in the PCM, Rev Cherry who visited New Zealand in 2018, is based in Matupi and can be seen in this photo.

Victoria Boarding School Dining Hall (below)

Victoria Boarding School in Mindat, Chin State is where PCANZ's Petra Malcolm taught in 2018. The dining hall at this church-run school was destroyed by strong winds and Global Mission has contributed towards a rebuild. Thanks to the Island Bay congregation in Wellington who raised funds for this project.

Facts About Victoria Boarding School

Rev Bawi Zaw who manages the school on behalf of the PCM said that many students have been granted exemption from fees for various reasons including being orphaned, or being from families who are victims of a war in nearby Paletwa township (see information about Paletwa on the next page).

The school caters for year 9 and 10 students. The current roll of 118 reflects the multi-ethnic and multi-faith nature of their region – with Christian, Buddhist and traditional animist students.

The objective of Victoria Boarding School is "To Serve God and Human Beings through Learning and Teaching."



Violence in Paletwa township, south western Chin State

Last year we sent funds to help with an income generating project for PCM members in Paletwa, planting seeds to grow a cash crop to help with their development.

This area has now become victim to hostilities between the Myanmar Army and Arakan Army, a separatist militant group in the nearby Rakhine State. Life has subsequently become very difficult for civilians in this region.

This is a conflict that attracts minimal media interest and is largely unknown outside Myanmar. However, the impact is devastating: homes have been burnt, villages destroyed, thousands of citizens have been displaced and some killed.

We have recently sent emergency relief funds to support villages affected by this increasingly distressing conflict. As many within Myanmar have commented, it is not Covid-19, but this conflict which is taking the lives of Myanmar citizens.

Please remember the people of Paletwa as they pray for an end to the violence. More information can be found the Myanmar news site, irrawaddy.com. *Top: Rice is delivered to Paletwa by the UN Food Programme: Bottom: A young boy in Mandalay hospital after shelling in his village.*



Latest Ricebowl Mission Grant Allocations

Thanks to ongoing donations and Global Mission funds, we are able to continue financial support for the PCM and have recently made another round of grants. The Myanmar Support Group considered a number of projects and agreed to support the following:

Income Generating and Educational Projects and Crisis Funds:

Hakha Synod Stallroom, Tahan Theological College (TTC) Women's Student Hostel extension, Paletwa Emergency funds (for relief of the internal conflict mentioned above).

Scholarships were approved for:

Nurse Aid programme, BA English Scholarships at TTC, and the final allocation of fees for a Doctor of Ministry degree for Rev Bawi Zaw (mentioned on the previous page about Victoria Boarding School).

Nurse Aid Training

We will once again be sponsoring the nurse aid training programme, but currently there is only one student able to take part, due to the restrictions on travel and education caused by Covid-19. Man Deih Nuam, 17-years-old, (pictured) is from the Zo Synod, the lowest socio-economic synod within the 10 ethnic synods that make up the diverse Presbyterian Church of Myanmar.



Gender Justice for Women in Myanmar

PCM Women's Secretary Sangi (pictured here with sponsored nurse aid student graduates) is a staunch advocate for gender justice and works hard to create opportunities that will advance the status of women in Myanmar. Read her article on this topic published in the December 2019 issue of the Council for World Mission's Insight magazine, https://issuu.com/cwmission/docs/insight_issue_8/2 (See p. 34, 'Advocacy for Gender Justice')



Serving Together as Partners in Mission in Myanmar

Wayne and Helen Harray are members of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand who have been serving with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar since 2018. They have recently returned to New Zealand on furlough. They have written this brief summary of their work so far.

It's been 21 months now since we left New Zealand to work at the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar's Tahan Theological College (TTC). Working in Myanmar has its own unique challenges. The politics of the country are a lot more complex than we, or most people in New Zealand, realise. We work primarily with the Chin people, who are a completely different people group to the other seven ethnic groups in the country. The Chin themselves are broken down into at least 35 language and tribal groups (some put it as high as 54) with their own inter-tribal differences and tensions.

When we arrived our roles were loosely defined as follows:

- Helen was to teach pastoral theology on a half time basis (6 hours a week).
- Wayne was to develop the 6 hectares of dormant farmland the College owns to create a supplementary income for the college, and create an environmentally friendly farming model that could be used as a demonstration farm for students and the community.

What has actually transpired is slightly different. Helen has been appointed Head of Department of the Liberal Arts department which focuses on teaching conversational English, and this has become more than a full-time job. Wayne has added the major goal of restoring the depleted and impoverished soils to full health. Space doesn't allow for a full summary of what we have achieved so far, but impressions after 21 months can be given.

(This article was previously published in the Global Mission Update in March; but is reproduced here because it is specifically related to Myanmar).

Helen is teaching with extremely limited resources when we compare what we would take for granted here in New Zealand. However, it is not just TTC that has limited resources; this is true for almost every educational institute across the country that has been affected by 60 years of military rule that did not promote education in any way, shape or form. This does lead to real frustrations.

In spite of this, progress is being made, albeit slowly. Helen has made significant changes to the model of teaching and it is her intention to continue to do so - introducing teaching practices and methods that are more aligned with current world standards.

Wayne has made inroads into restoring the land that he has been entrusted to manage. As he drives around it, two major emotions that envelop him; satisfaction at what has been achieved so far, offset by the challenge of knowing that it will take at least another five years for it to really start to show signs of maturity and bear results.

Wayne says: "I am learning as I go and the overall management system of the property is evolving constantly. Let's hope that COVID-19 becomes a thing of the past very quickly and that we can get back to roles that we very definitely feel called to over the next few years."



Wayne and Helen with fellow TTC staff member Zohmai Rokhum at the Graduation Dinner in March 2020

Wayne and Helen were planning to be in New Zealand until mid-May. However, their return date will now be closer to September. Their original itinerary included visiting congregations and supporters to update on their progress, but these plans were obviously derailed as New Zealand went into lockdown. They hope to catch up on some of these visits in the next couple of months. If you would like to hear from them while they are back in New Zealand, contact them directly or send them an enquiry through Global Mission Coordinator Phil King, phil@presbyterian.org.nz.

Wayne and Helen have both written informative articles about their work in Myanmar which have been published in the TTC magazine and also CWM's Insight magazine. You can read these articles here, <https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/global-mission/myanmar>

For more news you can go to their blog site at www.helenharray.com

Some Facts About Myanmar

Myanmar is a country that is not well-known to most of us. So here is some information to help explain important facts about the country and its people.

Why Was the Name Changed to Myanmar?

In 1989, the military junta officially changed the name from Burma to Myanmar to distance the country from its British colonial past. Many people still call it Burma, either because they didn't recognise the legitimacy of the military government, or they are so used to calling it Burma, it is hard to change. However, Myanmar is now generally more commonly accepted and used.

Population: It is estimated that the population is about 55 million.

Demographics

Myanmar is ethnically diverse. The government recognises 135 distinct ethnic groups. The majority Bamar form an estimated 68% of the population. Myanmar's ethnic minority groups prefer the term "ethnic nationality" over "ethnic minority" as the term "minority" furthers their sense of insecurity in the face of what is often described as "Burmanisation"—the proliferation and domination of the dominant Bamar culture over minority cultures.

Religion

Estimates suggest that about 88% of the population are Buddhist. Other religions include Christianity 6%, Islam 4%, tribal religions 1% and Hinduism 0.5%.

Christianity

The Christian population is largely found among the Kachin, Karen (or Kayin) and Chin ethnic groups, who mainly live in separate regions (see the map below). The majority Bamar people tend to be Buddhist. This map (right) shows the many states and regions within Myanmar, revealing the country's ethnic diversity.



Myanmar Nationals in New Zealand

Many thousands of Myanmar citizens have been accepted as refugees around the world, including our own country. In New Zealand most predominantly live in Auckland, Wellington and Nelson, and are of the Chin, Kachin and Karen ethnicity, with many forming their own ethnic language churches. While fewer in number, there are also some Bamar Buddhists in New Zealand as well.



Myanmar is in South-East Asia, bordered by Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, Thailand and Malaysia



A Vision for Better Education Leading to Equal Opportunity and Improved Quality of Life for All

Helen Harray's work in Myanmar has involved developing the BA English department at Tahan Theological College. Martin Zomuanpuia, one of the department staff members has written an article describing the current challenges within the education system in Myanmar, and outlining his dream for positive change. Here are some quotes from his article:

"Today, teaching methods in school, college and university are focused more on test results than learning, more on rote memorization than student-centred teaching. This lack of thinking at the government schools causes many youths to be less creative than those few lucky ones able to study at private schools."

"Every child, not only from the Christian community but from Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and other communities deserves an education which is far better than the present one in this country."

"I have a dream that one day our children will go to a school which is run by the church and is accessible for the poor, where different religious beliefs, cultures and traditions are honoured and respected."

"I have a dream that one day our children will go to a school where they can freely express their feelings, raise questions and not be afraid to make mistakes."

"I have a dream that one day our children will go to a school where they will be prepared for life, not exams, and where they will have the opportunity to learn skills which they can apply to everyday life, and skills they need for a future career."

Martin's article is well worth reading in full, and can be found on the PCANZ website here, <https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/global-mission/myanmar>

Members of PCANZ have visited TTC, worked with Helen in the BA programme, and in a small way have begun to share Martin's vision to develop education in Myanmar. If you are an educator and might be open to using your skills and experience to help in a context like this in the future, contact Global Mission Coordinator Phil King.

A team of seven members from Leith Valley Church in Dunedin visited Myanmar in January to observe and support Wayne and Helen's work at TTC.

Visiting NZ teacher Kathy Boyland from Rangiora with Helen and the TTC BA staff in 2019. Martin Zomuanpuia is second from the right.



Thank you to everyone who financially supports our partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar. Donations are always welcome and allow us to achieve more. Donations to the farm development project that Wayne Harray is managing, or personal support for both Wayne and Helen, are also invited. Online donations can be made to 02 0500 0086963 10, or send cheques to Global Mission, P.O. Box 9049, Wellington 6141. (If donating online please send an email with contact details for receipts.)

*If you would like more information please contact Global Mission Coordinator Rev Phil King,
email: phil@presbyterian.org.nz*