

# OUR VOICE WILL NOT FADE AWAY

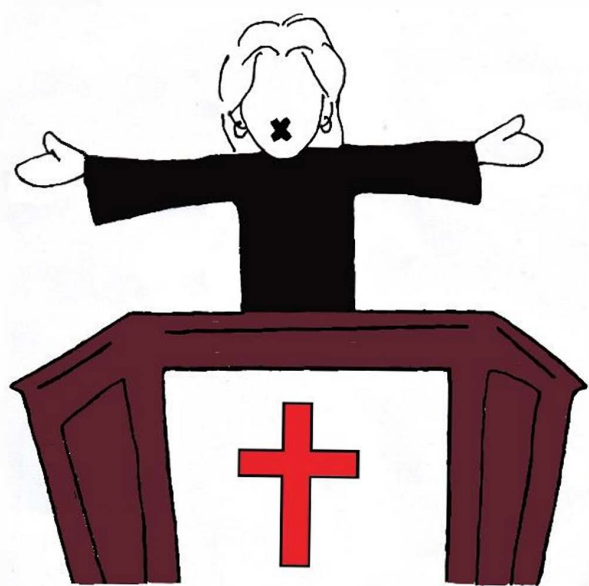
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Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

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Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

Mission Stories

OUR VOICE WILL NOT FADE AWAY

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# Editorial

First, I would like to introduce the reason why we published this book we named "Our Voice Will Not Fade Away." CWM has many mission partner Churches, and the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar is one of CWM's members. CWM itself organises different trainings to partner churches and sometimes it helps partner churches by giving funds to organise trainings in their respective countries.

One of CWM's mission foci is to eliminate discrimination among human beings in relation to men and women within the church. We can see women in every mission context and there are also prominent women mission workers. At this juncture, CWM does not forget the voices of women who are always quietly active in PCM but who are unheard of and unrecognised by the church members. As CWM members are one big family, CWM also understands that if the family members do not know each other well, we will never have good relationships in the family. By realising this, CWM gave the responsibility to the women's secretary to publish about PCM women mission workers so that their stories will be heard. Apart from that, it is high time for member churches to recognise women who are doing mission on different levels. Therefore, we publish this book with the hope that women should be recognised as very instrumental and ought to have equal partnership in mission so that the church can be stronger in its mission.

Secondly, we had 9 months for the publication of this book. Apart from publishing in the Mizo language, we needed an English version too and we have put in every effort to finish this bilingual publication on time. But God is good. Our worries were solved when we could publish the book after getting help from some of our pastors and theological students who were able to translate our stories into English. The women writers were busy with their own work during this time too. Most of us are not well-versed in literature but we all managed to finish our writings on time. Therefore, I would like to thank all of the writers. We should also acknowledge their great and brave expressions about their experience in their mission journeys. We believe that their voices will be heard and will not fade away.

Vanlalmingsangi  
Women Secretary (Chief Editor)  
PWGC

# Preface



This book is one of the three important CWM Mission Support programmes, which is called the Mission Stories programme. One of the main goals of these mission stories is to unearth and to acknowledge each other's stories which are untold and never recognised but which are very challenging and uplifting. Therefore, those untold stories are collected in this book.

It is very interesting and great to hear from the experience of PCM's first woman pastor, especially her joyful expression about the openness of the church for women's ordination.

There are some servants who do not want to do God's ministry because of their stubbornness and docile minds. It seems that there will always be Jonahs among us. But those who work with perseverance, along with the force and pushing of God get achievements in the end. We can see in this book that even when we think that our commitment and intention have faded away, service through obeying God is still vital.

We glorify God knowing that if everyone puts their abilities and efforts into the ministry of God, the Kingdom of God will be extended. The important ministry of the church can be seen in this book through stories and personal experiences. I believe that everyone will benefit from reading this book.

There are many untold stories in the lives of women. I hope that this book will not be the last of its kind, and these types of stories can be prepared and published soon. This book will be even more valuable if the readers acknowledge the revelation of God and God's vocational calling through women.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ramthanga'.

Rev. Ramthanga  
General Secretary  
PCM

# God is Good



Pro Pastor T. Cherry

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**PCM women have been longing for female pastors for many years and Pro. Pastor T. Cherry is the first woman probationary pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, from the Maturam Synod. We will shed some light on the challenges she faces in her ministry.**

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I am very pleased to have this wonderful privilege to write about my life through God's goodness and mercy. Blessed be the name of God who provides me this chance to write about my ministry!

I am the eldest sister among four siblings, having two brothers and one sister. Although my father is still alive, my mother passed away in 2004. Since the death of my mother, whom I loved most, I served my family earnestly as a motherly figure for my siblings at home and in Church, as much as I could. But when my father remarried, they moved to another village in which he works as the Church custodian.

From my childhood, I enjoyed attending Children Sunday School so much that I did not miss a lesson. One night I had a strange dream. In my dream, there was a strong wind blowing and I saw Jesus clothed in fine white linen standing on the clouds. He approached me at the door of my house with open arms, calling me, "Come home!" I answered, "Wait! I have to tell my father and mother", and I went inside the house. I talked to my parents about what I saw, saying "Father! Mother! Jesus has just called me, and I am going now". The wind calmed down when I went back to the door, but Jesus disappeared. I shouted, "Jesus, Jesus!" but there was no answer and no trace of him. The following morning was Sunday. When I awoke from my strange dream, I shared this dream with my mother. She answered, "If it was the call of Jesus, doesn't it mean that you will die soon?" That remark lingered in my head. I was so confused by the thought "what should I do if I die" that I missed the following morning's Sunday school. I asked my mother frequently, "when will I die?" At that time, I was a five-year-old girl but until today I cannot forget the face of Jesus and the strange dream.

The feeling that I felt when I decided to attend Bible College after I had passed my matriculation exam always remains in my heart. When I passed my matriculation exam, I submitted the necessary documents to

enter into Tahan Theological College. I completed the Bachelor in Theology (B.Th) in 2001 by the grace of God. The Synod Meeting elected me as the Women's Secretary in Maturam Synod on April 2001. At that time, I had been working tirelessly with all my strength as Acting Accountant cum Office Assistant, also assisting with every other responsibility assigned by the Synod because Maturam Synod had a shortage of office staff and workers. I was very eager to further my studies, as I knew that my knowledge and experience in theology were limited but the Synod declined my application to pursue theology because, as I have mentioned, Maturam Synod had a shortage of staff and workers. I prayed many times with tears for God to help me with my situation. After serving thirteen years, I was finally allowed to continue studying. What a wonderful opportunity! With God's guidance, I studied the Master of Divinity (M.Div) for three years in Academy Integrated Christian Study (AICS) in Mizoram, India, beginning in 2014. In April 2017, I completed my Master of Divinity and I continued my previous work as the Women's Secretary.

When I heard that the 2016 General Assembly now accepted the ordination of women, I was happy and excited. I prayed to God with tearful joy, "God, you are now

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revealed in the hearts of the members of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar that you have called everyone to be ministers without distinction. It was once thought that only men could become pastors. I give thanks to you for opening the door for women". From that moment, I decided that I must go home when I finished the M.Div. course. I encouraged myself that I should be a minister and I should apply for it. God answered my prayer! The application for Pastor, which I submitted



to my local church, was accepted through the Regional Meeting, Presbytery Meeting and Synod Conference. My application was confirmed in the General Assembly on 23rd February 2018 by the grace of God. I was assigned and trained as a Probationary Pastor under the Senior Pastor for the first year at Cangbong Presbyterian Church in Matupi, Myanmar. I have served well especially with the Presbyterian Women Society (PWS), and with all the church members in general.

In my second year as a Probationary Pastor, I was assigned to a rural village consisting 30 houses of PCM members. The whole village, including people not from our church, were so hospitable to me. By the guidance of God, I have had no significant difficulties in the ministry till today. God provided a chance for me to visit New Zealand, which was beyond my expectations, through the General Assembly in my first year as a Probationary Pastor in 2018. We visited three metro cities, Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin, in which I presented and reported the ministry and activities of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM), Presbyterian Women Society (PWS), and Presbyterian Youth Fellowship (PYF). I was particularly happy that I could visit New Zealand. I have always had an enormous inferiority complex by thinking that I am not worthy to be a Pastor, to which I was in need of being prayed for. When I arrived in New Zealand, I came to know that we are brothers and sisters in Christ with those who are very different in culture, character, attitude, personality, food and body shapes, and that they have been praying for our church and for me. Those prayers made me stronger physically and spiritually. A female ordained minister, Deaconess and a Senior ordained minister prayed for me by laying their hands on me, which I had never experienced in my country; some even prayed with tears. I felt so blessed. I learned many things which I had never seen or heard before. Knowing that there are many

women Pastors and senior Deaconesses encouraged and helped me grow stronger.

It is my prayer that I will serve God with all my strength throughout my life by the grace, mercy and goodness of God, even though I am unworthy and unskillful. Thanks to those who read my testimony and my own short life story.

# A Stubborn Servant



Tuan Bor

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**“Women have been fighting against church rules and constitutions by the decision makers. They have been pushing for women’s rights in the Church.”**

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I am the seventh daughter among nine siblings, five sisters and four brothers, of Mr. Thang Cung and Mrs. Mang Thlia. I was born on 12th March 1968, at Tlanglo village, Thantlang District, Chin Hills. My mother said, “God blessed me as I worked”, and thus I was named Tuan Bor. When I was a child, our family moved to Leilet village, Falam District and I was raised in that village. I am now the Women’s Secretary of Lairam Synod, Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM).

I was educated till 4th Grade at Leilet Primary School, 5th Grade at Tuibual Middle School, 6th and 7th Grade at Leilet Private School, 8th Grade at Zawngte Middle School, 9th and 10th Grade at No. 1 High School, Falam. Since my childhood, I have been a pious person who enjoys attending Church and admires church ministry. At that time, I was a Methodist member as there was no Presbyterian Church in my village. I had been an invocator for the worship service, and whenever my parents preached the Word of God, I would be the one to sing. I regularly attended children’s Sunday school and I was indeed an outstanding student. At that time, the Women’s Worker Ms. Sapthangi used to visit us. Seeing that she preached in a white gown convinced me to become a woman minister. I told my father that I wanted to be a woman minister and he said to me, “Study hard. When you have passed your matriculation exam, enroll at a Bible College. Then, you would be able to serve God as a minister”. However, my father passed away before I finished my Bachelor of Theology (B.Th), which broke my heart and made me so sad.

My longtime desire, which had been to go to Bible College, started to change when I was 8th Grade. I wanted to go to secular college, and my aim to attend Bible College faded away. But when I was in 9th Grade, our cattle, which was the only source of income that could support my college fee, all died. I was so depressed by my situation that was further

compounded by failing my matriculation exam in the first year, causing me to not want to live anymore. Moreover, as I had been acquainted with the church since my childhood, I was elected as Children's Sunday School teacher. I continued to work as secretary of the Presbyterian Women Society (PWS) and the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship (PYF), and was further elected as secretary in the regional level of the Presbyterian Women Joint Fellowship (PWJC). In 1992, I was diagnosed with Malaria and Typhoid for three months causing me to have no further hope to live. I requested prayer from those who visited me and their prayers gave me hope and peace. In the same year, I sat for the matriculation exam again, which I passed by the blessing and mercy of God.

As soon as I passed the matriculation examination, I, along with one other woman and two men, sat for the entrance exam at Falam Synod to study theology at Tahan Theological College. Although we, the women, got

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Although we, the women, got higher marks than both men, we were rejected and the men were chosen.

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higher marks than both men, we were rejected and the men were chosen. Being rejected and excluded from my mother church meant that I was forced to choose another college. I was enrolled at Far Eastern Fundamental School of Theology, Insein, Yangon with the help of some friends. As my family was poor, life was very difficult financially while I was studying. I fasted every Saturday as I worried that I would not be able to complete the academic year. I used to pray, "O God, I have enough money only for this semester. If I cannot finish the semester, you will be put to shame. Additionally, if I did not finish because of my wickedness or bad behavior, it would mean that I put shame on you." There were times when I was so hungry. When I saw my friends eating, I would run into the Chapel immediately. I was afraid that they would

give me something to eat because I was so ashamed of receiving food every morning from the hands of my friends. Even with all these troubles and difficulties, I finished my Bachelor in Theology (B.Th) in 1997 with the help and support from God and my family. My initial thought at that time was that as the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) did not accept women as pastors, and even if I could not be a Pastor, I would regard my four-year study of theology as a full-time ministry. However, God acknowledged my desire allowing me to be the Women's Secretary at Falam Synod on 1st April 1997. My post was confirmed at the General Assembly held in February 1999. As Lairam Synod was established in 2000, I moved to Lairam Synod continuing work as the Women's Secretary. I pursued my further study at Asia Evangelical College and Seminary, Bangalore, India in 2001-2002, after which I completed my Master of Ministry (M.Min) course. In 2004-2005, I finished the Master of Theology (Th.M) at Hanil University and Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Jeonju, South Korea, and I then continued my work as Women's Secretary at Lairam Synod. I have been working in the ministry of God till today as a single woman.

Throughout my life in ministry, I have faced discrimination, difficulties, poverty and sorrow, which I do not want to write down on the pages of my diary, but still remain in my heart and mind. I knew nothing about office work during the start of my ministry as the Women's secretary and had to request that my co-workers teach me every step of the office work. But when I sought some advice from my fellow workers on how to manage the business agenda, the reply that I got was, "How dare you as the Women's Secretary not know how to plan and arrange agendas?" That reply made me so sad and confused. In like manner I was treated so many times in my initial years in front of the delegates, "Being the Women's Secretary, how can you not know how to do these things?" Although these incidents are hard to forget, those bitter words and

stereotyping pushed me to work harder through which I have progressed much and I am now thankful for them.

When I was elected as Women's Secretary, I was urged to pledge that I would visit the churches by foot without having a porter of my own. Although it was sometimes hard to carry my bedding by myself, some villages would meet and send me off, which was a pleasure for me. Although some churches were hospitable to me, there were also others who were not. In one village, they said to me, "since you are not the Lord of this world, eat this stale food!" And in some villages, they even offered me fangra beans and arum roots. I had much difficulty eating what they offered me because I had never eaten them before. On the other hand, some villages were so hospitable to me that they offered me what they were not able to provide even for their own children.

I once visited a particular village and their pastor told me that they could not hold worship service because they had another guest speaker from the Assembly of God (AOG) church. This happening caused me to reflect on how low and disregarded I was. As we did not have pastors in every village, I usually stayed as a guest in the house of church Elders. But there were times when no one invited me into the house in certain villages. A woman who once received me told me that she would not kill any chicken for me, which was funny but also uncomfortable. In another incident, a pastor's wife told me as soon as I arrived in their house that her husband was away and he did not leave her any money to buy food and curry. That was so uncomfortable for me. The churches paid little attention to the activities of women secretaries and that may have been because it was the initiative of women. Whenever we organised training programmes, men usually did not want to participate in it. More disappointingly, the pastors of some churches did not even want to participate in our activities. They would rather watch

some sports channel on TV. The mindset that the words of women should be listened to only by women made me so sad. However, I was not discouraged. I gave as many trainings and lectures to women as I could in every church of our Synod. The fruits of our trainings are ripening now.

During one of the Church's conferences, I gave lectures on women's rights. But the pastor preached from the Pulpit against my lectures by saying, "there is no need for rights for women and children; the Church does not need them. What we need is the Holy Spirit." Those remarks made it difficult for me to shake hands after the worship service, but I still shook his hands! As soon as the training programme in the agenda of the Presbyterian Women Joint Conference (PWJC) had been seen, what I kept hearing was, "we do not need training [for women] in every circumstance". A pastor once said that he worried that his wife would become wise and educated! Doing ministry in such circumstances was so hard, but I realise now that these instances of opposition and resistance are the marks of victory of my ministry as a women's secretary.

When my church wanted to elect church Elders back in 2015, the church committee made a list of those who could be elected as Elders. In that list, there were no women or youth who were full members, but only male adults including some over 70 years of age. The chairman of that election, the Pastor, said without consulting the PCM Constitution, "You must vote for two men among the nominees in this list". But I stood up and boldly questioned his words by citing the By-laws (page 58, No. 17 (4)), "Are all the women and youth who are not included in this list under church discipline? Have they all committed adultery such that they cannot be elected? Or did PCM just change the By-Laws and make up limitations for electing church Elders?" After that, the Pastor



replied angrily, “you can put up your nominees”. Although he tried to clarify three times, I refused by explaining that we never got the chance to make nominations in electing church Elders. The assistant in charge of the election who came from another village could do nothing. An Elder from our church said, “she made those statements supported by the Constitution, so we have nothing to say more. Therefore, there must be an election as per the Constitution”. Finally, the election took place.

I may be a troublemaker in the eyes of many people. In fact, we have the right to vote or elect whoever we want as church elders, but our rights were suppressed. If I had not spoken up in the right time, it would be pointless to say it later. I knew I needed to proclaim and reveal the truth instead of allowing the church to continue doing the wrong things. And I will stand firm with God’s help in the face of opposition and blaming. Another thing that makes me so sad is the way the church treated me. There are important services in the church, such as mourning services for the dead, thanksgiving services, birthday celebrations, memorial services for the deceased, etc. The congregation expected me to take charge of those services only when the pastor was not available. They probably did not think that a woman like me should be in the leadership position when the Pastor was available. Even though I was not a Pastor, I regarded myself as a minister and I always accepted their invitation to lead those services even though there were a number of church Elders that did not want women to handle those responsibilities. I realised now that what prevented me from doing what the Pastor does is the notion of “not being an ordained minister”. This makes me wonder, does PCM practise the ordination of Pastors, Ministers and Elders only for men? Why not for women too?

My sole ambition was to be involved in women’s ministry, which was partially fulfilled. But when I worked as the women’s secretary, I

wanted to become an ordained woman minister, not just a “worker”. Throughout these hardships, restrictions and opposition, I wanted to show the congregation that I can be an ordained minister and that I can do what any male ordained minister can do. I struggled so much in different ways to be an ordained woman minister, which resulted in hatred and anger towards me. I may not get the right to be an ordained minister during my lifetime but I want to make a way for other women who come after me, that they can become ordained women ministers. I sacrificed for my ministry and I worked so hard for women. Now, there are so many privileges for women in our churches resulting in the churches opening up opportunities for women, even though it may still be hard to accept for some Pastors. When we had a training on Women’s Ordination at the General Assembly (GA) Office, we held conversations with some Pastors. A pastor who participated in that training said, “if our main problem is about women ordination, then let the church allow and ordain them”, but another Pastor said, “there are no women in the church committee and this will remain so”.

His words were so bitter to hear. But this is an indication of how PCM systematically oppressed and marginalised women through committees, meetings and conferences. Once, there was a training programme on ‘Promoting Women’ in every Synod of PCM, which was organised by the Presbyterian Women General Conference (PWGC). A pastor said to me, “why are you, an unmarried woman, teaching us about Women’s Rights? Is it because you do not have a husband? It will better if a man were to teach us.” However, I did not teach Women’s Rights because I do not have a husband. I teach women’s rights to women who do not know that they have been oppressed and because I want to enlighten them that God allows us to possess a safe, good and equal society and existence, above and beyond how they are currently living. I maintain that this kind of training is spiritual but many church



Mrs. Sangi promoting the PCM Mission Stories



Rev. Ramthanga, General Secretary of PCM

leaders, members and even some other women regard it as “fleshly teaching”.

Although I am the least in the sight of God and the church, my emphases in ministry are to care for the poor and the needy, to protect women’s rights and promote them by developing their skills in different ways, to proclaim to all the people that salvation is not only for our soul but for our whole being – heart, soul and body and finally to teach the congregation that there is no gender division (male and female) in Christ and God impartially wants to use us as His servants. I conducted several training programmes, which were tiring but made me happy. In particular, the poor and the needy in our church were so friendly to me, and whenever they come to me in times of their hardship and happiness, I give thanks to God, proclaiming “God, they do not come to me but to You”.

A great division between male and female in the church makes me sad. There is little gender equality when it comes to electing church leaders and appointing responsibilities in church conferences and meetings.

If male favouritism and the subjugation and marginalisation of females could come to an end, true happiness would be heard and seen in the church. I want to urge my fellow women to raise their voice out loud in their family, church and society in order to claim their rights. Let’s help,

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If male favouritism and the subjugation and marginalisation of females could come to an end, true happiness would be heard and seen in the church.

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support and elevate our fellow women. There is value in believing that our other fellow women can do it even if we personally cannot do it. Let’s cultivate a practice of helping our daughters, mothers, and sisters.

My mother is the person whom I admire most and a source of my inspiration in life. In times of distress and sorrow, I feel relaxed and refreshed whenever I see her face and hear her voice, which gives me new hope. My mother is a godly person and she does everything by believing in God. She is kind and labourious, and never differentiates based on gender. She never disappoints but always strives to be contented in everything. She cannot write but can read very well. Therefore, she regularly reads the Bible. She told us Bible stories every night and taught us how to live in the light of Biblical principles, which has led and guided my life till this day.

Although all Bible verses are inspirational, my verse for life is Matthew 2:6, “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.” This Bible verse is the very first Bible verse that my mother tested me in my childhood to assess my reading abilities. My mother chose this text for my verse of life, and I always remember it. This text always reminds me that ‘I am able’ even when I am disappointed and weary.

I am so humble that God has allowed me to serve Him for twenty-two years. During these years, I learned many things; there were times of hardship, sorrow, and depression.

On the other hand, there were indeed times of happiness, joy and blessing through God’s strong hand. In 2003, I visited the Thantlang area on foot with one of my friends, carrying our baggage by ourselves. On our way back home, we took a motor Jeep from Lungler village since we were tired. The road was in very poor condition, and I asked the driver to get off from the Jeep so that I could walk by foot. Then, we continued ahead by foot. Subsequently, the Jeep nearly slipped off the cliff because of failing brakes not long after we got off. When the Jeep

approached us, the driver said to me, “Please, get back into my Jeep. We nearly had

an accident because you, the ministers, were no longer in it”. I replied that we did not dare to take the Jeep anymore. But he insisted, “Please, you – God’s servants – must be on my Jeep in order that we can reach home safely”. Then, I prayed, “Thank you God! I, an inadequate servant of yours, will take the Jeep again for the sake of others’ safety”. That evening, we safely arrived back in Thantlang village.

I will tell you a final story for the sake of God’s glory. Indeed, I am just a simple and rural woman, and many of my male counterparts do not want to acknowledge my ministry. On the other hand, many people have witnessed God’s presence through me at the right time. In September 2012, I headed to Rih village from Tahan to conduct a training programme in the Rih Area. At that time, the road was in an indescribably bad shape. We stopped for prayer after Tahan village and someone said, ‘who will say a prayer for us?’ After I prayed, we started conversations to get to know each other and our work. They asked me who I was and I replied that I was going to conduct a training programme. One person warned me, “don’t go there for your training programme. The road is so bad and dangerous!” His words kept me thinking for a while. But the other young man said, “Don’t worry! We will be safe in the midst of bad roads because we are with God’s servant”. We safely arrived at our destination that same evening.

For some people, the things that I have shared above may not seem to be worth sharing. Although I always had a feeling of inadequacy and I do not dare to profess myself as God’s servant or minister, I wish to testify that God works through people like me - one of the least among people. Over these twenty-two years, I am thankful to God for allowing me to serve Him in the midst of rain, sun, walking through leech-

infested waters, and even during times of food and water scarcity. As a song aptly describes, “the perfect happiness is serving God”. I want to continue serving God faithfully as long as God allows me to do. To God be the glory!

# Pray without ceasing



Lal Ruat Kimi

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**Lal Ruat Kimi understands the need of education for women and is involved in teaching theology.**

**She has devoted her whole life to Tahan Theological College (TTC) as a teaching staff resulting in her not being able to live with her family who have settled in Mizoram.**

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My parents are Elder Manghrima and Mrs. Lalzawmliani who belong to PCM Vengchhak. I am a full-time lecturer at Tahan Theological College and at present, I am on study leave in order to pursue my Doctor of Theology in Christian Education. My academic education can be summarised as follows –

**Matriculation: Tahan, Myanmar – 1998**

*Bachelor of Theology: Tahan Theological College, Accredited to ATESEA, Myanmar, 2002.*

*Master of Divinity: Myanmar Institute of Theology, Seminary Hill, Insein, Yangon, Myanmar.*

*Master of Theology (Christian Education): APGS: Hanil University and Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Jeonbuk, South Korea, 2016.*

*Bachelor of Art in History (Q): Kalay University, 2018.*

*Doctor of Theology (candidate): Global Institute of Theology, Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea.*

There is a time for joy and happiness, but also moments of sadness and challenges that every human encounter. Each of us encounters happiness or sadness uniquely differently from others. Hence, the challenges which I have encountered in my life may seem small for some. However, they have helped me to be more persevering and courageous throughout my life.

Surely, as a human, I face joyful and miserable moments as well as great challenges. These can be taken in a cheerful spirit. Nevertheless, one's sharing of their hard times can bring motivation and good learning for others. Thus, I have written down the paths I have trodden, as well as moments and events that happened to me.

## **Road to Education**

Everyone has aims and goals like me. During my matriculation, I used to attend classes regularly. However, I did not think I would pass my examination because of my bad health. I completed my exam and waited for the results. On the day our exam results came out, people rushed to see whether or not they passed. However, I stayed home as I could not fathom myself passing the exam. I remember the year was 1998 when only a few could afford to ride a motorcycle. My aunt came up riding her new bicycle from the lower street of our village and told me I passed the exam! It really shocked me as I did not have any hope - my pass marks were fairly low indeed. I could not believe it at once because I never thought that I could pass. I will never forget that day when my dream became a reality especially after I had almost given up. Then, I started to pick up another dream to spend my college student life studying a B.A programme.

With great expectations and big hopes in my mind, I prepared for college. Just like many youths of that time, I was eager to be a college student because then, I would be able to spend my leisure time having fun with friends. To enjoy college life with little effort put into studying was one of the reasons why I was so enthusiastic to enroll in college. However, my intentions were altered.

My father is an ordained Presbyterian elder. It would not be wrong to label him as a hardcore Presbyterian who already had my future all planned out. My father told me, “Mapui, you will not be able to attend secular college. You better join a Bible College first and you can continue with your B.A in a distance learning education programme while studying in your Bible College.” My sulky face would have been very ugly at that time as I expressed my displeasure towards studying theology. I clearly realise now how difficult it was to disobey an

ordained elder back then. Being totally uninterested, I declined to fill up my admission forms for a while even though my father had done the necessary. “Anyway, I will join the B.A in distance learning while studying in Bible college,” I relented. So, I enrolled into Tahan Theological College in 1999. To my surprise, the College did not allow two simultaneous tracks of studies like I intended. What I dreamt of and what I was facing were complete opposites. I fainted. With little hope I went on to study at TTC, which was not an easy task. With the intention in mind to join the B.A program after this College, I proceeded with my theological study step by step with a great anticipation of the end of the study. Finally, I completed my theological study and I was still hoping to enter a university. However, I could not join a B.A programme due to certain interruptions.

After graduating from TTC, I worked as a teacher at Tahan Vengchhak Presbyterian nursery. I never lost track of my aim to study a B.A. My father urged me to continue to study a Master of Divinity programme and as a result I went down to Yangon. There, I attended tuition classes. I sat for the entrance examination at Myanmar Institute of Theology with my friend Ma Chhuangi. When the result out, I was not in the list of candidates who passed but Ma Chhuangi was. My friends tried to comfort me by saying that I would be successful next time. I thought to myself, “Never!” It might well have been my happiest day! I was joyful in my mind because I still assumed that I would be able to join a secular university where I expected to live a most fantastic and blissful university life.

Then, something strange happened inside me. Since I failed my M. Div. entrance exam, I started to feel an intense longing that made me decide to sit for the entrance exam one more time. It was difficult for our household to afford to get me to Yangon a second time. With the

assistance of my friend in Yangon who sponsored my tuition fee, I once again travelled to Yangon. At the second attempt of my entrance exam, I managed to put myself up into the name list of eligible candidates for the M. Div. However, there were some challenges - I could barely settle my school fees and I was also troubled about other expenses beyond the tuition fees. Often, I only had 200 Kyats in hand for a day! We usually attended worship in Presbyterian Church at downtown Yangon on Sunday. I recall that the church did very well by giving the congregation bus fare every Sunday. On the way back to Insein (my Institute) after church service, the smell from the road side snack shops made me hungry. It was very hard as I had no money to buy it most of the time. On many occasions, I was displeased and blamed God for this.

Sometimes, I heard about some of my classmates received sponsorships of fifteen hundred thousand Kyats sent by their relatives staying in the United States and I was so envious of them. Truly, they were so enviable from my pitiful point of view. There was a time I will never forget when our church leader Rev. Lalhruaivela visited us in our Institute. He led us into a restaurant and told us that we could order any of our favourite food. It was such a wonderful and encouraging time! Such precious memories of our church ministers paying a visit to us will never fade away in my mind. By God's grace, I finished my Master of Divinity study at last without any disgrace.

After completing the M. Div, there was only one thing on my mind. That was my lifelong desire to attend the B.A programme. Although I had dedicated myself for ministry, I could

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I recalled my prayer to God that I would offer my life, skill and knowledge to serve in ministry.

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not find any occupation so I went down to live with my parents in Mizoram, India. Marvelously, our cousins living at Yangon begged me

to stay with them as they were about to give birth to a baby. So, I once again returned to Yangon and there I prayed to God to give me a chance to study the B.A programme. God did not neglect my prayer. I received an invitation from the Tahan Theological College faculty to teach there. However, I did not know how to respond then. I consulted my parents and my father advised me not to join the faculty as the salary was very low. He instead urged me to stay on with them.

Nevertheless, I did not see it right to decline the call. I recalled my prayer to God that I would offer my life, skill and knowledge to serve in ministry. Finally, I made up my mind that I could not reject God's calling and so decided to join the TTC faculty. While teaching at TTC, I enrolled in a B.A Distance Education Programme. That year, unfortunately, the University extended the study period from three years to four years. After attending for two years, I paused my B.A studies as I was admitted to APGS, Hanil University, Jeonju, S. Korea to pursue their Master of Theology programme. So, I left my B.A and flew to Korea to begin my M. Th. study. I said to myself that it would be sufficient if I could finish this M. Th. programme well because this was my desired end-goal in both secular and theology study programmes. I wanted nothing more than these.

My M. Th. study while being a one-year course was a demanding and tough time for me. Even so, I managed to finish the programme, not because I am bright and capable but because of God's grace in which I put my trust in and prayed without ceasing. During my research, I almost quit and left the course several times because of certain irreconcilable outbursts between me and my supervisor. We hardly had any agreement at all. However, due to the great impact made on me from the manner and teaching of one of my professors, I managed to persevere and to keep studying. I cannot forget my professor's

exemplary treatment towards me in teaching me lessons and nourishing me with God's words simultaneously. She was converted from being a Buddhist to Christian after becoming an adult. Regarding faith, it could naturally be said that she would not have a firm and mature belief. In contrast, she was living out her faith in her everyday life and I was overwhelmed by her faith journey. Meanwhile, I learnt from her manner and example. Without her, I would not have completed my Master of Theology study.

When a believer prays without ceasing and asks for something, God fulfills the request in their life. On 25 March 2018, my request and dream which I have been asking God for was also fulfilled as I graduated with a B.A degree. Praise the Lord! I fully understand that what I am today is neither because of my ability nor my strength but only by the grace of God. I also figured out that I can go through times of despair, as long as I put my trust in the Lord. Besides, I am very well aware that God answers my unceasing prayers. At times, I would head to school for my examinations without any prior studying but asked God for help at the examination room by praying that I pass the exam – I now know such a prayer may never be answered. This is not the way God's power works in a believer's life. Rather, God blesses our laborious and diligent toiling. This is what I clearly experienced in my own life.



Nursing Aid Training



Women Bible Study

## **Conclusion**

I obviously know that I am a weak human being. However, all the adversities I have faced in my life has led me to see the face of God. Nothing is impossible in this world with God. The composer's words, "He knows all my ways", has guided my life all along. It is so vital not to run away from our problems but to face it and move forward no matter how hard it might be. Let the proverb, "try and try again", be our guiding principle. Instead of lamenting about our own weakness and saying we are unable to change or become like someone else, we should instead say, "God, use my little and limited ability". Submitting to God is the most important thing in serving in ministry. We may come across many problems in our ministry but we should not be afraid or run away. Rather, we must keep on trying and continue serving since our small ability may become an effective instrument God can use.



# A widow's message



Nem Hniang

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**Mrs. Nem Hniang is presently the women's secretary of Chin Synod, PCM and is a single mother with one son. She has never given up her women's ministry even though she is a widow. She is a creditable PCM woman among many people who criticise her for being a widow and she never stops raising her voice for the rights of women in PCM.**

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I was born in Falam township, Chin State. My parents are Mr. Hrang Vung and Mrs. Tling Men. My mother was a government corporation office staff. Our family moved to Taungphila Ward - Kalay township, Sagaing Division in 1976.

### **Educational Background**

I successfully completed my B.A (History) study in the year 2000, and a Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE) from Tahan Theological College (TTC) in 2007. My marriage life has been blessed by God through giving me a son, who is now doing his matriculation. My mother passed away when I was in ninth grade. Two years later saw the demise of my father and my two brothers. I struggled with life with my young son; life was depressing and very difficult. At that time, it was very difficult just to imagine what the future could hold for me. While my head was bowed down to earth with very little hope for the future, I was advised to take the BRE night study course at TTC. Since I joined the BRE course, life became more positive and my spirit was revived; I could spend valuable, enjoyable time among church members and friends. Matthew 11:28, which says “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”, became true in my life since then.

### **Ministry**

I have been serving as the Women’s Secretary of Chin Synod, PCM from 2007 until now. Initially, when my application for this ministry was accepted, I felt a little regretful because I looked at myself and saw very little in myself. With a heavy heart, I prayed unceasingly before I started the ministry. What I realised later on was that thinking lowly of myself only brings shame on myself. I should have known better - that God is always with me.

## **Vision**

The person I looked up to in ministry was the late Pastor Man Za Cing from Leipi Baptist Church, Kalay Township. We used to serve together at Kalay Council of Churches Women Fellowship (KCCWF) as office bearers. She was the President then. One day we held a meeting at her house because she was sick. Her sickness did not stop her from calling for the meeting. “It must be very painful and difficult?” I asked because we found out that she was already in a very serious condition. She answered me, “I was sick already by the time I was elected as president. My thinking was it is better to serve with sickness than simply staying at home sick and doing nothing”. Her answer really touched me; she was one of the best role models to look up to.

## **Thoughts on ministry**

I really enjoy serving the Lord and labouring for His Kingdom as well as for my country and people. The good thing about not having a husband is that I can serve in ministry freely without any restriction from others. It feels good that I can participate in many organisations without any extra burden from household matters. I really enjoy being part of many ministries through my utmost commitment. Bullying and strong words are no stranger to a widow like myself. Sometimes such experiences can be very difficult to bear. However, I always try my best not to run away from any responsibilities appointed to me because I believe in God; I have a heart that loves and fears God. At some point in the past, I used to fear people might think that I am too focused on positions and opportunities. I have to remind myself from time to time that God knows me better than I know myself.

But now, there is nothing to be worried about because it is God whom I serve. And in serving God, there are only blessings to be received. Now

I just try to accomplish whatever ministry has been given to me, doing my level best. In chapter 4 of the gospel according to John, we read that Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for water to drink. God knows what we have, we only have to give what we have, and God will give us the water of life.

## **Workplace**

I really love my work place because I am surrounded by supportive co-workers who are very committed and good Christians. I feel very fortunate to work in a workplace that is full of church leaders who are trustworthy and reliable. A long time ago, I used to work at a car transportation office. Since that was a business place,

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Just like a family is completed by the togetherness of the husband and wife, we can also improve the church ministry even more by the good cooperation between men and women

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money was everything. At times, in order to get the highest profit, we had to communicate with people using small lies and dishonesty. What I learnt from my current workplace is, Christians should be very careful in choosing the type of job we apply for; money should not be the major factor in our decision. One thing that makes me sad is that there is gender prejudice in the workplace. Men and women should work and think together in good harmony. It makes me very sad when I see women sometimes sharing poor opinions of fellow female workers. For example, calling and shouting at a woman, “you are so silly and stupid” could cause that person to develop an inferiority complex. Therefore, appreciating each other for what we accomplish is very necessary and important. Otherwise, we will not be able to improve ourselves. This is the same for church leadership; if we really want to promote the role of women, we don’t necessarily need men to vote for us. We women can

vote for ourselves and materialise our visions. Just like a family is completed by the togetherness of the husband and wife, we can also improve the church ministry even more by the good cooperation between men and women. A doctor was once asked if men or women had a better brain. "Which man and which woman?" he answered. His point was the brain ability did not depend on the gender, but on the environment and the community lived in.

### **The Importance of the Church**

The church is very important as it is the closest refuge we can go to in times of need and sorrow. Sometimes it seems we have an even closer relationship with our fellow church members than our actual relatives who are in different local churches or denominations. Something which bothers me is that certain people care too much about others' opinions. They care so much to the extent that they sometimes can't even discern which side is right. We have to remember that church ministry is not a family business. The focus should be on God's mission and not on individual interest or relatives' benefits. Such selfish acts could slow down the mission of the Church as a whole. Lessons:

1. Poor opinion on the female gender has to be eliminated everywhere.
2. Let's increase cooperation with other church organisations and government-recognised organisations. Even if we can't participate in person, let's give our greater support to those who can. While we pray for the future of the country, some think that being involved in secular affairs is very unspiritual thing to do. That is a very wrong concept in our society.
3. We need to be more respectful when we address our ministers or any church office staff. Let's call them with their rightful title. If we don't respect our church ministers, no outsider would do that for

us. It is so true that showing genuine respect towards someone can change that person's life.

4. Some PWS units might have to change their mindset regarding the nature of the relationship between PWS and the main church body. It is very important to note that PWS and the Church body are not separate or different entities. In the same way that PWS is ours, so is the Church. Mutual support would bring the best outcome.
5. Having regular family devotion time is a very important activity for all Christian families. We shouldn't serve just to fill up our free time, but we should offer the most precious of our time to serve God. Just like how we feed our body to get strength for everyday living, so we have to strengthen our spiritual life by spending family devotion time together. That is the best family management tool. Let's pray for wisdom so that we can offer good guidance and parenting for our children. The closer we bring our children to God, the further they will be from sinful things. To build a profound love between husband and wife is also very important.
6. A bible verse which gives me strength every time I read it is Psalm 118:8, "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man". Nothing else on earth is worthy to put our faith in. Nothing will last forever. Not long ago, we never thought the earth's soil could get rotten. When the flood came in 2015, it destroyed all of our crops. Even the human being whom we trust the most will eventually perish. Therefore, let's just put all of our trust and faith in the LORD who sent His Begotten Son for us. Then our life will become peaceful and we will find eternal joy.

# My Journey



Vanlalhmingangi

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**The first Women's Secretary of Presbyterian Women General Conference. This is a story of the challenges she faced in her theological journey and her vision for women in the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar.**

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I have had many experiences in my life. I believe that my theological journey that has been shaped by my life will be a challenge and encouragement for others. So, I have recalled them and have written them down. They are as follows.

### **My dad, my life example**

My parents migrated from Mizoram (India) to Kalay Valley (Myanmar) because of poverty. Since my childhood, what I heard most about my parents was how they struggled all their lives with poverty. My dad, Elder Zaselthanga (1943-1996) was one of the former leaders and well-known persons in the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar. He was an uneducated man and did not attend school. He learnt to read and write by himself though he hardly read or wrote. Therefore, he was a man who wanted all of his children to be educated. He was even willing to invest all he possessed if it would be the way his children could receive education. His friends and church members saw him as a man who always loved justice and who even dared to endure hatred for the sake of justice. They also noted that he was a man who persevered, was hard-working and deserved to be rewarded. He loved the church earnestly and protected the church from straying off, and he made his family and church members happy by telling jokes. These personality traits are true of my father. I have not seen such a huge number of church members and sorrowful people as gathered at my father's funeral service. My father is indeed my hero.

### **The benefits of reading**

There was no news of peace when we were young. The military ruled us and there were many people who held authority in our society. Both highly-ranked and lowly-ranked officers had power and a voice, even in the church. There was no peace and security in the community at all. As



a result, people did things secretly and engaged in corruption. Everything could be done through bribery and those who did not want to give bribes did things in secret. The military practiced censorship in many aspects of people's lives. Censorship of the "right to information" was one of their worst practices that I disliked and found offensive. The reason was that we were students and there were no books to enrich our thoughts and sources for reading in order to widen our knowledge. Books were only available in Mizo. Although there were Burmese and English books, I did not understand them since I was only a third-grade student at that time. A Seventh Day Adventist woman often displayed and sold pictorial Bible Story books in front of our house on Sunday. I used to read those books. By reading those books, I improved my Mizo reading skills. Since there were no other books, I read those pictorial Bible stories again and again. I memorised all the dialogues in the stories and could even recite all the dialogues on the next pages without looking at them. I felt very proud doing this in front of my family members and found it enjoyable. I also often read whole articles, including the obituary section, in the Kristian Tlangau journal sent from Mizoram.

Knowing that I was fond of reading, my father used to bring me books that were good and appropriate for me whenever he went to Mizoram to sell goods. Hence, I had a chance to read many good books during those times. My father actually wanted to bring me many more books from Mizoram, but he could not manage it because the border security often checked all their bags, including their bedding. The books he managed to bring me were books that he could hide among his clothes.

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Since books were more valuable than money for students like us, we often asked the favour of some powerful traders to hide our books among their goods.

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If the border security found many books, they asked some people whom they trusted to translate the text in the books. If they did not like the subject of the books, they did not allow bringing those books into Myanmar. I did not miss those times at all. While I was doing my B.D. program (2002-2005) in Mizoram, we were always checked at the Myanmar border gate. Since books were more valuable than money for students like us, we often asked the favour of some powerful traders to hide our books among their goods by paying them secret transportation fees; they often took months to reach our village.

I know that the Bible stories and church-related books I read guided my life from following the wrong paths; the good books that I read in my childhood are the driving forces that continue to push me to pursue theological education. My father often encouraged me by saying, “Try to be a very educated person... Try to be able just like others are able...” My father never spoke to me in a gender discriminating manner. He treated all his daughters and sons equally. Therefore, I myself did not see differences between men and women in my early life, and never differentiated them. Till I attended school, I did not know the differences between men and women; the criteria used at school were grades; our marks and results depended on our efforts; there were no differences between men and women. When I attended Bible College, however, I learnt and started to know that there is great discrimination between men and women in our society.

### **Started walking along the path I did not intend to**

In the year I attended tenth grade (1996), my beloved father and sponsor passed away in a car accident on a journey. Our family encountered hardship, which badly affected me physically and spiritually. All the colleges and universities across the country were closed at that time because of the people's uprising of 8.8.1988.

My family considered my future and decided that it would be such a shame for me not to pursue further education. They advised me to attend Theological College. The colleges that remained opened in those days were religious colleges, but I did not intend to attend Theological College at all. I enjoyed secular subjects. I dreamt that I would earn a high degree in secular studies and become a University lecturer. My family could not convince me to attend Theological College that year. Colleges were still closed the following year. In the end, I convinced four of my friends to join a Theological College with me rather than just doing nothing. I attended Tahan Theological College for four years (1998-2002) and finished the B. Th. program with good grades.

What I found difficult most in the B. Th. programme was the memorising system that I needed to apply in my study. We did not know much English, but we needed to write the exams in English. We did not know what to write in the exams unless we had memorised the lessons. My friends were bright as they could memorise the lessons easily, and I wished I were like them. I spent more time than my friends in order to catch up with them in memorising the lessons. Mostly, when I studied at night, I used to stay up until 2:00 am in the morning. Some of my classmates used to comment to me that I was bright and good at studying. But I replied them, “If you study the lessons like me, you will be brighter and better than me.” Actually, I was good in science and mathematics. I was not interested in Philosophy and Arts subjects since I was in Middle School; they were the subjects I could not understand very well. Since theology is a branch of Philosophy, I found it more difficult than other people.

### **I did not want to attend B.D. program in Mizoram**

After I finished the B. Th. programme, my family insisted I continue my study at Aizawl Theological College (ATC), Mizoram, India. I told my

family that I did not want to pursue a B.D. degree in Mizoram, and I said that I wanted to do it in another place. But during those times, the internet was not accessible, and it even took almost a year to get the application forms from foreign countries. One reason that I did not want to study in Mizoram was because I could not stand the people there labelling us as “Burmese men/women”, which is one of the discriminating terms often used by the people of Mizoram. Moreover, during those times, people often needed to walk through jungles where there were no paths on the mountains, and they sometimes needed to risk their lives like my father had paid his life riding vehicles to get to Mizoram. I felt really hesitant undertaking those journeys.

Besides, for a lay woman like me, it was impossible to get scholarships or sponsors, and I myself could not afford college fees for my study. Therefore, studying in Mizoram was not a desirable thing for me. However, my family encouraged me to take those risks, pushing me to attend the B.D. programme in Mizoram. Our family even sold the only estate that we had for the fees and expenses of my study.

### **A mind of protest and never giving up**

In 2003, my cousin Mr. Zoliankhuma (now Rev. K. Zoliankhuma) and I wrote the Entrance Exam of ATC. Since there were many applicants, and the two of us did not have assurance of sponsorship, the college assumed that we would not be able to complete the courses and did not give us admission. In my childhood days I was smaller than my same-age peers and was not as beautiful either. At Children’s Sunday School, teachers often chose taller and more beautiful girls and let them collect the offering, walk at the fashion show at fellowship programmes, do bible action, dramas and skits. My friends were often chosen and participated in those activities while I was always left out. Until I attended the B. Th. programme, I did not have much chance to appear

and express myself in front of the crowd. I often thought that my friends were more blessed than me. Despite having desired to participate in those kinds of activities, I could not join my friends since the leaders and in-charges did not choose me. As a result, I felt weak, not valued by others, outcast and suppressed. One good thing that resulted is that I can easily understand hardship and difficulty in the life of the suppressed and the discriminated. Once more in the college, I was fed up with being a loser all the time.

At the interview, I learned that I was rejected. I, who had previously rejected studying the B.D. in Mizoram for a long time, and who was now supposed to be very happy at this result, was not happy and satisfied at all! I had been rejected too many times, and I was fed up with being a loser. I had spent a lot of money on transportation and food. I felt broken and did not dare to see the faces of my family and my friends without gaining admission. I insisted to my uncle (Rev. K. Zoliankhuma's father) that I was going to make a phone call to the principal. At that time, I was staying at his rented house without any charges. He said to me, "If you want to and dare to, make a phone call to him," and he let me use the landline phone in his room.

I then made a phone call to the Principal, and he explained to me the reasons why they rejected us. He told me that it was not that we were not qualified; however, there was only one spot for Myanmar students and it was set aside for a pastor. I asked him curiously and honestly whether the college would give admission to the lay applicants, whether or not there were ordained applicants from Myanmar, and if lay people could really study at ATC. I asked him, "Would ATC only let a few people study the word of God?" as well as other subsequent questions.

After the Principal kept silent for some minutes, he answered me like this, "Ok, let's plan it this way. I have special quotas for admission for

non-ordained applicants from Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura. I have no reason not to grant admission to my own Mizo people from Myanmar. I will let our faculty know about this, and we will look for ways to grant you admission using the position of Principal.” We were very happy to hear this. When we were initially rejected, I who did not have much desire to attend ATC felt frustrated, and was afraid of not gaining admission.

After many years, I was doing my M. Th. at Madurai, Tamilnadu State, India when I met the ATC Principal Rev. Dr. H. Vanlalauva once again. He said to me, “Hming Sang, during that time before your call, I had never used my authority. I had great faith that your boldness in pushing me was God’s calling for you. I was never contacted directly and boldly by students in such a manner. I felt that you were very bold. Therefore, I used my authority and gave you admission.

Among all the things I had done, that was one thing I did not feel any regret about. Now, I feel very happy when I see what you have done in your church and in your country.” When I heard the words of our former Principal, I was inspired and made up my mind that I would serve God my whole life.

### **Things happened as I had feared**

During my three-year study period, the “great act of expelling Burmese people” happened in Mizoram as I had feared. Despite knowing that the act would not affect theological students like us, I saw that people from my country were expelled with great contempt, and that made me very upset. I shared about my anxiety with our Principal and he comforted us, making me feel really relieved. In my final year, we went back home during the New Year holidays and along the way encountered a fatal



Attending the Women Conference in Mizoram, India.



Women Bible Study

jeep accident on the hill of Tedim. Our driver died and one female passenger got a leg injury, but I got out of the jeep without any injury. From that time on I was not only hesitant but also afraid of taking the journey to Mizoram.

### **Some experiences at ATC**

During my three-year B.D. studies at ATC, I gained both theological and life experiences. I also learned that there appeared to be different opinions and thoughts among the students regarding our context despite us belonging to the same tribe. In particular, I discovered that the women had little voice in Presbyterian churches. One of the negative things in my life during my studies at ATC was having no ambition to get good grades. Among the many books in the library, I mostly read only books I was interested in, which were not related to our lessons. I had the idea that passing the courses was sufficient. I did not intend to compete against my classmates in academic performance at all. It seems that the words, “only men will effectively benefit from their studies and women will not be able to use what they learned effectively in the church” (which was often spoken among the students) made me feel like there was no point trying. Neither did my female classmates intend to compete against the male students.

I heard some male students who spoke ill of female students that were particularly intelligent, labelling us as jokes. Sometimes, I even felt that they intentionally tried to make us female students believe we were not able. They did not try to encourage female students who did not do well in academics. There were even some male students who said that female students did not need high marks and it was enough if they passed the courses. I knew that such an environment made me depressed; as a result, I was not mindful of getting good results and working hard. Conversely, I found that being lazy and having no vision for further



theological education was more enjoyable and relaxing. Although I passed my B.D. with second division honours, my exam results ended up being the worse I ever got.

### **Struggling with different subjects (textbooks)**

While I was studying the B.D. programme, we often learned about the great contributions of Christians to Indian society. I was lost. Formerly, we often thought that theological students need not know about the history, political and social movements of our country. The Indian students had been learning Social Sciences since State School. When we learned about secular movements at Theological College, I felt lost since we the Myanmar students did not know about Indian history. That made me sick. When they discussed the ideology of BJP, LTTE and Marxism in class, I did not even know what BJP stood for. Such a situation made me want to cry. World history and other books I read years ago helped me a lot in those subjects, but still I nearly failed those subjects.

### **A PCM female lecturer at TTC**

By the grace of God and the church, I taught B. Th. courses as a lecturer at Tahan Theological College (TTC) from 2005-2007. TTC is recognised by the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA). ATESEA had some criteria that TTC was obliged to meet. One criterion very important to ATESEA was that the recognised theological college should have at least one female lecturer among the faculty, and the college must include Feminist Theology subjects in its syllabus. Therefore, TTC also needed to teach Feminist theology to their students. Women understand the situation of other women, therefore female lecturers are more desirable for this course. There had been female lecturers at TTC established by PCM, but there was none among

PCM's member churches fit to teach, so the college often called for female lecturers from other denominations. PCM was in need of female lectures fit for teaching ministry. When the college crucially needed female lecturers from PCM member churches, I who had no prestige in academic performance and had just gotten a B.D. degree was warmly welcomed for that position. I dared not reject the invitation of the college to become a full-time lecturer; I dedicated myself in the name of God to be the first female lecturer from among PCM's member churches.

I had many experiences in my two years of teaching ministry. Although I was only 25 years old then, I did my best to be involved in the local ministry of the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship (PYF), PCM Tahan Venglai. I served as the joint editor of the monthly PYF Inleng journal. I feared that my fellow young people might not keep abreast with the news, current affairs situation and issues around the world. Knowing how news and knowledge shape our characters and thoughts, I often collected as many news articles as I could and translated them into Mizo for our journal. Besides, I also often wrote short article contributions. During that time, I did not have the idea of empowering women in our society. It seems that my theological knowledge and thinking was not yet developed since I was only a B.D. graduate. When I recall those times, I found that I did not write any articles which focused on empowering and promoting women, but I really liked and enjoyed reading the histories of great women.

### **I needed to attend an M.Th. program**

TTC started offering the M.Div. programme that year. As I only had a B.D. degree, I could only teach B.Th. classes. We had no female lecturers for the new M.Div. programme. In order to meet that need, I knew well that I myself had to try hard. Previously, I had to be

encouraged and pushed in order to pursue theological education. However, I now had to ask my family for permission to register for the M.Th. programme, after serving God for two years in TTC. My family was facing great financial hardship at that time. We knew that we could not afford it, but as I had a great desire, I knew that God would not turn His face from me, and I did not feel discouraged at all.

The specialised subject that I wanted to focus on was Social Analysis, which I was not an expert in and found it most difficult while I was doing my B.D. course. It was said that even students who thought themselves good at this subject never got high marks, and most B.D. students hated this subject. Those who continued with the M.Th. programme did not enroll in this department. Moreover, this department was run only at Tamilnadu Theological Seminary (TTS), Madurai. The Seminary was located in a place difficult to access, which was crowded with Dalit people. There were also not many students studying there. There were many M.Th. graduates among the Presbyterian members in Mizoram, but if I am not mistaken only two people had graduated in Social Analysis during that time. Those graduates were Rev. Lalramliana Pachuau and Mrs. Lalrindiki Ralte. Mrs. Lalrindik Ralte, who had taught us at ATC, was doing her Doctoral studies at TTS. She sent me an application form for the M.Th. programme, and she helped me in everything relating to application procedures.

As I had never been to Southern India, I took the train to Madurai together with Rev. Lalrinmawia, who also planned to study an M.Th. in Church History. We passed the entrance exam and interview without any problem. However, the Seminary advised me to take the programme over three years. When I asked for the reason, the Serampore Senate replied that the subjects I learned in my B.D.

programme were very few, and I would not be granted admission unless I passed two qualifying papers (subjects). So I did the M.Th. programme for three years. Some of my friends who had not entered in ministry were also similarly enrolled for three years so that they might be well equipped. When I heard that there were such students like us among the alumni, and learning that the Seminary wanted to train us well, I willingly accepted their advice.

### **My experience while doing M.Th. programme**

During my M.Th. programme, my professors were Dr. Gabriele Dietrich and her husband Rev. Dr. Bastian Wielenga, Rev. Dr. David Rajendran and Rev. Dr. Solomon Victus. They

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My faith in God who provides in the time of need comforted me.

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treated me as their own daughter. They were concerned for me and cared for me very much. They also offered to look for a scholarship for me. I denied their offer saying that my elder brother would be able to support me financially. In my first year, a good friend from Korea, Rev. Dr. Bae Gwangjin, sent me some money through the General Assembly (GA) of PCM. This was just sufficient for my college fees. Not long after, Rev. Gwangjin passed away. I thought I would indeed encounter financial difficulty in my second year. However, my faith in God who provides in the time of need comforted me. My eldest brother who lived abroad as a refugee supported me in my second year and third year, paying for all my expenses. Throughout the course of my study, I did not have to worry about my college fees; my studies went smoothly.

I wish to share many things related to my experience while doing my M.Th. programme because the programme itself was my guide and the driving force that made me choose my future path. Many things changed my views and led me towards the path of maturity.

While I was doing my first-year courses, I was totally lost for three to four months. Most professors had Indian accents. I did not understand the Indian English accent, and I was also very ignorant about the subjects. Since they were scholars, their language expressions and usage were high context and I could not understand much. I hardly caught what they were saying. Since all men had moustaches, they all looked alike to me and I often talked to the wrong man whom I thought I had correctly identified. However, I did not feel discouraged in those days. The many things that I had to learn kept me busy from feeling distress or sadness.

The most senior professor from our department, Dr. Gabriele, was afraid that I would give up my studies. She usually asked Ms. Rindiki who stayed near by my room and whom I called “U Madik” (elder sister Madik) to encourage me. U Madik always visited me in my room and made me happy. After five months, she said this to me:

When you asked me to send you the application form for the Social Analysis course, I thought that you would not really want to write the entrance exam like others who had previously requested for the form. I never thought

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The many things that I had to learn kept me busy from feeling distress or sadness.

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that you would really come to this place of difficult access that is crowded with Indians. But, when I heard that you were indeed coming, I was very glad. At the same time, when I learned that you would need to attend the programme for three years, I thought that you would give it up. But you said that you would do it. At first, I thought that you would be like some of our Mizo young people who were very lazy and intended to study without much effort; I was totally wrong. Now, you have attended the programme for five months. I still remember how you got

lost in your subjects. Your classmates learned the subjects with help from their background knowledge, but you started without any existing knowledge and with an open mind. Now, you have caught up with your friends. Keep up the good work. I strongly believe that you will improve in your study and will go further in your academic performance than your classmates.

U Madik and I stayed together at TTS for one year. Since she needed to continue her teaching at ATC, she left the Seminary and continued her study through distance learning. Although she was no longer at the Seminary, we kept in touch by telephone and we had many long conversations at night. Like U Madik, some of my friends and my relatives thought that I would not want to study in Madurai which is located at the most southern region of India. However, by the goodness and encouragement of my classmates and professors, I happily completed my M.Th. course at TTS in three years. I gradually enjoyed my studies more and more. After I had studied for two years, I often joked with my classmates, “I now know more than what my country needs!”

Among what I had learned from TTS, the new “courage” in me was what made me most satisfied. Our department prioritised the status of women. Since we often heard some words that made women feel discouraged in our society, we felt restrained and small even though we did not do anything wrong. In our department and TTS, we never spoke words that despised women. Everyone was afraid of making women angry and saying things that women disliked. That gave me courage and helped me see the wrong things practiced in our society. Moreover, that gave me confidence and great ambition to start enabling other people. I often met Mizo people, both male and female, who were timid and fearful in Madurai. I also found some who dared not go outside by



Women Leaders at the General Conference



Performance while promoting Women training

themselves. Those people never intended to venture beyond the town. Unlike them, I visited the places I liked in order to enrich my knowledge during the holidays. In India, the train fee was very cheap. Since the government managed the trains to make them available even for the poorest citizens, we could reach very distant places with only 20 rupees. But there were no seats and we needed to sit on the floor of the train near to the toilet, among the Indians. If it would give me the chance to get to the places I wanted to go, taking a train without a seat for one night was fine with me. Therefore, I was able to travel around other towns on holidays. People who knew about this commented that I went too far. However, I knew that there were a lot of people from other countries who did the same things as me. Therefore, I did not mind when some talked bad about me.

Once, I wanted to visit a very far place. I needed to spend one day and one night on the train to get there. The name of that place is Rathnagiri (Maharashtra), the burial place of the last king of Myanmar, Thibaw. I had decided that I would surely visit that place during my stay in the southern part of India. I booked the tickets with one of my friends who planned to go back to Pune. Since it was the Christmas holidays, my Professor Gabriele invited me to spend Christmas at the house of Mrs. Nalini Nayak (Fisher's Folk leader). I told her that I had another plan, and I intended to go to Rathnagiri. She then said, "Oh no, you should have informed me about that! I also want to go there. You should take me there too. You have stayed here only a short while but you have already visited many places." She was happy with my plan; she even talked about it to others. What I wish to point out here is that my professors knew how to recognise and comment on even the little things we did. This gave me a lot of strength and courage.



I enjoyed Southern India because I often heard words of commendation from my professors. From my professors, I noticed that human beings cannot live alone. I was also reminded of the truth of being happy with the happy and mourning along with the mourners, a principle taught in the Bible. At the same time, I learned that words that make people feel down can cause bad consequences on them (downtrodden people). From this experience, it is evident to me that it is important to stay together with people who motivate, encourage and enable others to do things that are supposedly impossible. What my professors encouraged me most about was continuing my studies and extending my ministry beyond the boundary of the church. But I have not fulfilled these two goals yet and I feel sorry for that.

After I had finished my M.Th., I joined TTC in June 2010 once again as a full-time lecturer. We named my subject (Social Analysis) as “Understanding Present Society,” and I taught it to B.Th. and M.Div. classes. The theological colleges under ATEM (Association for Theological Education in Myanmar) had desired to offer a subject related to society for a long time, but because of the shortage of resource persons specialising in this field, they could not offer it; only TTC could offer it.

When I first taught this subject in class, many students got lost as I previously did during my B.D., but I did not judge them for that. It was a subject related to the history of society which they were not familiar with, and it was indeed difficult for them. However, by studying this subject, students came to know more about the changing world and the social issues around the world. When I saw that students were eager to study it, I was very happy.

## **As the Women's Secretary of PCM**

After I had served as a lecturer at TTC for six years (2010-2016), the General Assembly of PCM issued an advertisement for the post of Women's Secretary. I really wanted to do that kind of ministry, but I did not intend to apply for it since I already had a ministry.

I leave that ministry for others who were interested and could dedicated themselves to it. The need for a Women's Secretary had been made known by the Presbyterian Women's General Conference (PWGC) to the leaders of PCM for many years.

Since the General Assembly had financial difficulties, it could not initiate the position; however, the leaders of the Church of Scotland heard about that matter. When they visited PCM, they had fellowship with the women leaders, and they at once considered a way to help us. They said, "If there is a way you can find a Women's Secretary, we will support five years' salary for her." Remembering that guarantee, the GA opened up the post of Women's Secretary, but there were no applicants from members of PCM at all until the interview day. The reason seemed to be with the requirements – both theological degrees and English skills were required for the post. I was sorry in my heart that there were no applicants. I asked some questions about whether there was something wrong in the advertisement or if there were no women who wanted to do that ministry at all. At last, I told myself that it would be nice to talk to our Principal, Rev. Lalchunglura. He felt sorry to lose me, but he also thought that this ministry was important. He wrote a recommendation for me and I applied for the new post of Women's Secretary carrying with me great worries. With the favour of several church leaders, I was eventually chosen as the new Women's Secretary.

I will not carry on doing this ministry for a long time. Hoping for the emergence of many good women leaders after me, I want to challenge the good young women. At present, the government of Myanmar is changing and people are less interested in doing the ministry of the church. In this kind of situation, we need to think carefully about God's calling for us as real Christians. If this is the place God calls us for ministry, we must respond to the call even if the salary is not good. I also would like to encourage mothers who have daughters that we can always get enough financial support from the church for those who are involved in the ministry of God.

There is not much to share about our ministry through the Presbyterian Women's General Conference yet, but God has blessed us in what we have done. There are many people from other countries who are concerned about our women's ministry. We are very blessed that there are so many out there who want to uplift women in our church and want to help us in fighting for the privileges of women. Doing women's ministry throughout the entire PCM is very beneficial. These days, many Synods have been giving priority to the development of their own Synods. But PWGC searches for possibilities for the development of PCM women. We do not discriminate tribes and languages, rich and poor, educated or uneducated. Instead, we engage in ministries that let the uneducated learn vocational skills and keep them up to speed with others in the area of education.

### **My vision for women**

One vision that I have had in the ministry of PWGC for a long time and which has not yet been fulfilled is to help and uplift women in education. Men are still prioritised and treated highly in every part of our society, and what women have unknowingly lost is the opportunity for education. While male ordained pastors receive good scholarships,

there are rarely chances for women involved in ministry to get scholarships. Moreover, there are women who are intelligent and can pursue further education, but these women stop their studies at matriculation or do not pursue higher education because of financial

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difficulties. Even in the field of theological education, the number of female students is very few. Although some Synods need Women's Secretaries, there are no theologically trained women who are good and fit for that ministry. As a result, women's ministry becomes weak in the church. At present, women have been allowed to be involved in ordained ministry. We need many women to dedicate themselves for this ministry with the support of their families. If we look at the statistics in PWGC, it is very sad that there are some Synods that do not even have women who receive new degrees every year. Opening more opportunities and doors for women is what I want most at the moment.

# Mother of Orphans



Denghluni

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**The Children Development Department, previously known as PCM Baby Home, was born out of carrying the Gospel Box (Chanchin Tha bawm) around the Dai mission field by Mrs. Denghluni and her friends. Denghluni remains in Dai to be the mother of orphans. God's calling through this mission changed her life and ministry in a way she didn't expect.**

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I was born on 19 April, 1958 at Hualtu village (Mizoram State, India). I am the eldest of 5 children in the family. My father married another woman in order to become parents for all of my siblings throughout our lives. Now, I am married and live in Kanan village (Myanmar) with my family. In 1982, I was spiritually born again through the ministry of Elder Lalmuana. From that moment on, I dedicated myself to God's mission. However, since I had no educational background, there wasn't much I could contribute in the church ministry. Finally, I asked God to send me into the mission field. My prayer was followed by the news that the church was calling for members who wanted to follow the carrying of the Gospel box.

### **Carrying Gospel Box**

Mrs. Liankimi had a belief that the Gospel Box would arrive in Dai land (Southern Chin Hills). With her leading the way, we started to move out from Tahan town on March 7, 1984 toward Dai land carrying the Gospel Box. We were 11 in number: 5 men and 6 women. We set our feet on the Southern Chin Hills following this timeline: Mindat town (10th March, 1984), Matupi (12th March, 1984), Amsui (15th March, 1984) and Madu (16th March, 1984). We waited and were welcomed at the graveyard of Elder Bukchhuaka, the first missionary in Dai land. From there we visited the villages in the area. Thanks to the missionaries working in the land, there were already some Christians there. They welcomed us very warmly.

### **The Culture of Dai People**

People used to call Dai Land the "Mystical City". They still believed in their ancestors' religion and still upheld strict traditional practices. They took the matter of "debt" seriously. Debt had to be repaid. If one didn't pay his debt, revenge had to be taken. If one couldn't pay off the

debt, it would be passed on to his children. There was no concept of forgiveness in their lives. Most of their debts were borne out of their failure to accomplish their traditional practices. The biggest traditional practice we had to resolve was related to the illegitimate children born out of wedlock between two people who were prohibited to marry each other.

Dai people are scattered around the three main areas - Mindat, Matupi and Madu. Madu is the biggest town among them. According to their traditional tribe law, there were certain groups of tribes among them who were prohibited to marry each other. However, a lot of children were born out of the prohibited sub-tribes. The reason for this sad circumstance was this: single women tended to sleep together in a house. Single men would often visit and just sleep among those single women. The rule, however, was that the man could sleep and have intimate interaction with a woman only if the woman liked and allowed it. This made rape cases extremely rare in the community. Some parents didn't allow their daughters, who became of age, to sleep at those sleep-over houses. Such parents were mocked, “your daughter would have wanted a man too”. After engaging in sexual intercourse, if the woman found any dissatisfaction or problem in the relationship or met another man she was interested in, she had to confess about her situation. The man who had been with her would then be fined for their previous encounter; he would have to give a pig, money or whatever the woman asked for. For a woman to be in that kind of relationship was not regarded as a disgrace, and men wouldn't hesitate to marry a woman who had been in such a situation before either.

### **Destiny of Illegitimate Children**

If a woman conceived, she would confess about it. Normally, she would then get married with the man she was with. However, if the man didn't

want to marry her, he had to give in to any demand (as a form of penalty) from the woman. In the event that the man did not want to marry the pregnant lady or if they were from the tribes who were prohibited to marry, the lady had to go and give birth at the house of the man and then hand the

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If she neglected this customary law and breastfed the child, they believed evil spirits would descend upon the child's mother.

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child over to the child's father. The mother would not be allowed to breastfeed her child. If she neglected this customary law and breastfed the child, they believed evil spirits would descend upon the child's mother. Since no milk was available in the area, the child was fed pure rice soup. Normally, the child died out of starvation or the father would just end the child's life. One method that was used to end a child's life was, as soon as the child was born, to dip the child to death into a mud vase full of lye (lye is a metal hydroxide/potash solution traditionally obtained by leaching ashes). Others would make a basket (out of bamboo), put the child in it and take it far into the woods. Then they hung the basket on a tree branch. The basket would fall down as the wind blew it or insects would fly in and kill the baby.

### **Starting Orphan Care**

Knowing that lots of illegitimate children lost their life in that unimaginable way hurt us deeply. Since we were on the mission of carrying the Gospel Box, we had nothing else with us apart from our own clothes. It was not easy to make communication with people outside the area like we do today. If we had any clue what we were going to face in Dai land, we would have brought clothes, garments and milk powder for those children! That was how I unexpectedly devoted myself to become the mother of orphans and how the PCM started the Baby



Home (now the Children Development Department). While we were in Dai land, we managed to adopt 16 orphans (6 of them did not survive). For now, I will write about the life stories of three of our children. The initial plan was to return to our town, Tahan as soon as the Gospel Box carrying mission was completed. However, two women among those Gospel Box carriers, who moved out on 7th March 1984, returned only on 25th March 1988.

### **1) Gospel Vanlalmuanpuia**

He was born on 19th December, 1983 of parents who were from tribes prohibited from marrying each other. The mother left him at the father's house as soon as she gave birth to him. By that time, the father had already become a Christian. He wouldn't obey his parents' order when they told him to kill the child. The father tried his best to keep the child alive; feeding the rice soup. But it was clear that the child won't survive by such poor care. After taking care of his child for nine days, he handed over the child to one of the missionaries. After keeping the child for 10 years, the missionary named the child 'Vanlalmuanpuia'. The father missed the child so much, so he came and took the child back to his own village. Just as before, the father gave up on the child caring and gave his child to a woman in the village. The woman tried hard to keep the child, but she also gave up after some time after and gave the child back to his father. The father brought the child back to the missionary. At that time, the missionary gave the father an advice, saying, "Some Christians will come with the Gospel Box. They might wish to take care of your child. Don't kill your child yet but wait for those people." The father took the advice and put the child into the hand of his niece who was only 10 years old to look after until the missionaries came with the Gospel Box. When we arrived, a girl approached and put a 5 month old baby into my hands. Since we were in the middle of a

service, I asked another mother to hold the baby while we were having a choir singing. But she didn't even want to touch the baby.

As much as I wanted to take the baby Lalmuanpuia, since we still had to carry the Gospel Box around the land, I gave the baby back to the babysitter with a promise to take the baby after the mission trip. However, the girl kept following us and met us again six miles away from their village. I had to finally take the baby as my own child on April 5th 1984. The orphanage mission in Dai land started on that day. We added 'Gospel' to the baby name, so he was called 'Gospel Lalmuanpuia'.

Even though my son Gospel Lalmuanpuia was already five months old, he couldn't smile yet. We immediately changed his cloth which he had been wearing since our missionary took care of him. We fed him food and water, and took him all the way with us under the hot sun. When we arrived in Madu town we could finally find milk powder to buy. We tried our best to take care of him. Through the hard work of Elder Bukchhuaka, there was already a proper church in Madu. Missionary Rev. Lalhulha and his family lived in the mission quarters. We stayed there too and continued our orphan care from there. We would adopt another six orphans within six months. We had to work tirelessly day and night for our childcare work.

## **2) Lalramzauva**

Lalramzauva was born of a father who was a married man and a mother who was single. Since the father didn't want to marry the child's mother, he was fined with a gayal/mithun. Since the child was illegitimate, the mother left him at the house of his father. His father did not want to take care of him, so he consulted with a missionary, Vanthangpuia, on what to do with the child. The missionary suggested him to send the

child to an orphanage. So the father made two other children bring his child to us at Madu which was seven miles away from their village.

### **3) Vanlalrinchhana (RIP)**

He was born on 13 May, 1984 in Madu town. Even though his parents were from the tribes which were not allowed to marry, they seemed to have thought that their respective families would have allowed them to marry for both of them were already Christians. After the man's girlfriend conceived, the man tried to find a way to marry her by approaching the village head and the families. However, the community couldn't allow them to marry each other. So, the child had to be born as an illegitimate one. Being afraid of traditional beliefs of evil spirits, the mother didn't dare to breastfeed the child. We, the orphanage workers, asked for permission to see the child, and fortunately we were allowed. When we arrived at the house, we saw that the child was lying down along with their house dog. We cleaned up and gave water to the baby because he was crying out from thirst. When we did that, the father's family shouted at us, "Why are you people doing such a thing?" We were worried and asked if we could pray for the child. After getting permission, we prayed to the Lord to keep the baby alive and make the family believe in the Lord. When we asked to take care of the baby, the father didn't allow. However, after just ten days, the father brought the child to us and said, "I will continue to try to marry his mother. When I can do that I will come back for the child." As soon as the father of child's mother heard about our adoption to the child, he got rid of his daughter and told her to come only after she killed the child because she had disgraced the family. The angry grandfather continued to threaten to set the church building and mission quarters on fire, and to kill the child. We were worried and couldn't even sleep peacefully at night. After three months, the mother of Lalrinchhana got pregnant

again, and both of them ran away. After their families cooled down, the couple came back to the village. Since they were forbidden to marry, they got fined 5000 kyats. They lived happily after. Finally, after their successful marriage, the father came and took Lalrinchhana back.

The sad thing was that his mother was not willing to accept Rinchhana because of his birth identity (illegitimate). His mother did not want him, so sometimes he was not allowed to eat. She sometimes torched him with live embers. He got scars all around his body because of that. By that time, we already moved into Matupi town with other children. Even before a month passed, the villagers who visited the town told us to take Rinchhana back because of his suffering. One day we finally made a visit to Madu to see our son Rinchhana. Our reunion was full of tears. As I saw his face, my heart was broken and we both cried out to each other. He sat on my lap and never wanted to leave. We asked to bring him back with us but his father didn't allow us. For me, this was the saddest and hardest experience of leaving a loved one. Vanlalrinchhana passed away on 3th October 1987 from his own mother's heartless and hostile treatment.

### **Mindat Baby Home**

The Presbyterian Church was well-known as a "mission church" with its main mission to convert non-believers into Christians. After the church realised that there were so many non-believers and the terrible extent of the fate of illegitimate children, the church members became deeply concerned with Dai land. Lots of orphan songs were composed. The church decided to establish a "Baby Home" in Mindat and then built a proper building there. On 29th November 1986, our family, including me, two other women (who were the Gospel Box carriers) and our children started to live in the new Baby Home building.



Women's Ministry Training



Women's Ministry commemorating Thursday in Black

Pi Liankimi (leader of the Gospel Box carrying mission) made a big financial contribution in building the Mindat Baby Home by going from town to town for the sake of our orphanage, collecting financial aid and clothes. At first, we didn't receive any salary for doing our orphanage ministry. However, starting from 1985 the church gave us 200 kyats per month as our monthly salary.

### **Some Difficulties we faced during our Orphanage Ministry**

On the very first day we received our first child, a member among us suggested us to return home immediately. He said, "In this poor land, how will you raise a child? Furthermore, now you are sick!" If we went home then, a lot of children would have lost their lives. We thought hard before taking this ministry. Even if we took the baby and went home along with other friends, the child would have died on the long journey. We decided that if we had to die, we would die in the name of our Lord. We stayed and waved our friends goodbye.

We troubled the Madu pastor's family a great deal. We just moved in and stayed at their home, which already had lots of children to take care of. The pastor had to go out every day for pastoral visits and the pastor's wife taught at a school. Despite their busy and tiring life, they never showed us a long face. Since I was so sick, the pastor wife, Pi Biaksiami, took care of me and my son for a long time. I have never met any pastor's family as committed in their ministry as they were. One of my friends who stayed back with me received medical treatment at Matupi town for her lung problem. As soon as she came back, she moved in with us in the same house. Every day we had to clean rice and wash baby garments because we had little of those. To wash those baby clothes, we had to go a well that was the only water source in the area. No one would come to the water place till we finished because they were disgusted at us for taking care of illegitimate children.

No one would make baby cradles for us, so one of our friends who lived in another village five miles away had to come and make some for us. Since the children we received were the ones abandoned by their families, they were mostly in a near-death condition by the time we received them.

For that reason, in between 1984-1986, six of them died after they were handed over to us. We buried all the dead children in the best way we could. We had to find tomb stones by ourselves along the streams. The villagers never wanted to offer a hand. When our children met their real families again, they would be so afraid; they used to cry a lot out of fear especially when they met elderly people.

After we settled in Mindat, we used to go out in search for children whom the families threw away. I still remember one incident - we had information that a family would kill the baby as soon as he was born. So, we moved out to save the baby. The journey was one day's travel long. We asked two men from the church to accompany us. We lost our way and had to sleep along the way. By the time we arrived, the family already ended the baby's life. It was very hurtful and difficult to bear; my heart was crying and suffering a lot for the baby.

### **When I think back...**

I left my orphanage ministry on 25th March, 1988 and went back to my home. On that day, I thought back and cried out to myself, "If I had gone back with my friends and taken my first son Lalmuanpuia, I wouldn't have to cry now for missing all of my children... I miss them so much!" Managing the Mindat Baby Home from the church's headquarters in Tahan town was not easy. The Baby Home was moved to Tahan town on 9th May 1990. I often visited my children after they moved to Tahan. They missed me and I missed them so very much too.

The Baby Home department made new rules for the management year after year. After some years, because of financial challenges, a new rule was made: a child who reached 18 years of age has to leave the home and find their own way in life. As soon as I heard that news, I went to Tahan from my village (Kanan). I talked to some of the church leaders I personally knew, saying,

“How could you do something like this? They have been rejected since their birth. We say now the church is taking care of them with love. The parents gave them to us for the rest of their lives. The church took them and vowed to be their parents for the rest of their lives. I cannot allow my children to be released with nowhere to go.”

However, I knew very well that the voice of a woman like myself would never make a sound in the ears of the church leaders. I met my children and told them to come with me. But they didn't want to move to my village. They wanted to stay on in Tahan where they had grown up. Some of them were just starting their college study. So finally, I went back home alone. I love these children so much. I worry about them even more than my own children at home. I cried for months thinking that they would be without parents and a home once again in their lives. Two of my children have now settled in USA as refugees. They still keep in contact with me. They send me money for my medicine. Some of them went to Mizoram state in India to look for jobs. Others couldn't continue their college study, so they just learnt some handiwork to sustain their lives as best as they could. They would never ever say out again the name of the land they were born in, Dai land.



# My vocational calling



Thida Lin Mon@Lalawmpuii

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**She dedicated her life to her Master of Theology studies and she is very interested in education. She then got married to a Presbyterian minister and could not continue her studies and teaching. However, her past education has helped her so much in looking after her family.**

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I am so grateful to be invited to participate in CWM Mission Development's Mission Stories project. Additionally, I am very humbled by this wonderful opportunity to share my life and ministry. As I am just another ordinary housewife who takes care of her household and children, I am afraid my efforts might not be enough. My prayer is that someone might receive the Lord's blessing through this humble work of mine.

## **I. My Life**

I am the older of two children of Rev. Dr. Lalengzaua and Mrs. Lalmunsangi. My younger brother is Mr. Lalinmawia. I married Rev. K. Zoliankhuma on Dec 16th 2009. God has blessed our marriage with three beautiful children, a boy and two girls. My husband left the country in September 2018 for Yonsei University in Korea to pursue his D.Th studies. So now, my three children and I have settled down in Tahan township.

Throughout my childhood education, by God's grace, I passed all my school exams from elementary to high school with flying colors and received some proficiency prizes as well. Those prizes and blessings motivated and gave me a strong desire to finish the matriculation exam with distinctions in all subjects. Even though I tried my best, I eventually passed the exam with a distinction only in Science (the matriculation result was what determined our future study options). The result was a big disappointment to me; it hurt me so badly that I even had to question God's judgement.

As I was dealing with this sorrowful moment, my friend's mother paid a visit to our house to congratulate me. Her words of encouragement on that very day lightened up my heart and gave me new hope. I am still very grateful to her to this day for her powerful words to me, "Why are

you so sad, my daughter? Despite all your efforts, your dream was not fulfilled. But never have doubt in God's plan; I believe God has a better plan for you. Why don't you try to find out that better plan of God's and shout to the

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Struggles and problems take place in order to open up my eyes to see more of God's grace.

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Lord even louder? God will surely show you this new vision for you". I did pray and ask God for an answer, and God helped me understand this, that He is the only one who can fulfill dreams (Proverbs 16:1). Whatever may happen to me, I have to stand firm and believe in God more than ever. Struggles and problems take place in order to open up my eyes to see more of God's grace. I should not doubt but rather praise God. After this peace was upon me, I was filled with new hope. While there were several choices I could choose from, I knew which was God's calling. So I answered it, and decided to pursue theological studies.

I joined the Bachelor of Theology course at Tahan Theological College, Tahan-Kalemyo. With many blessings from God, I managed to study the entire four years without any big problems. During my final year of study in 2005, the Theological Education Board selected me to participate in the Face to Face programme (from August – September, in Bangalore) facilitated by CWM. After participating in that wonderful programme, I continued my studies and finished it with an A+ grade. As for my secular education, I completed my Bachelor of Science (Mathematics) from the Open Education programme at Kalay University in 2003. Three years after my graduation, in 2006 and 2007, I taught English at the "Children Summer School" organised by PYJC. Again in 2006, the PCM General Assembly sent me to participate as a youth delegate in the CWM Assembly in Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

As the next step in my theological pursuit, in July 2008 I applied to study the Master of Theology (New Testament studies) at Trinity Theological College, Singapore. After satisfying all requirements, which included acquiring a 6.5 score in IELTS and a research paper proposal, I could finally join the course with a scholarship from the Sweden Korean Fellowship. With the help of God, I finished the Master's course with a B+ grade in May 2010. I would like to give much appreciation and thanks to Rev. Dr. Choong Il Cho (Sweden Korean Fellowship), Rev. Phua Chi Seng and Elder Richard Chong (Presbyterian Church in Singapore) and Rev. Dr. Jooseop Keum (formerly World Council of Churches) who supported me with prayer and finances.

In the same year I finished my study in Singapore, I joined Tahan Theological College as a part-time lecturer. However, in 2011, since my husband was assigned to a far, remote area for his pastoral ministry, I had to leave my teaching ministry at TTC. My husband was re-appointed at TTC as a full-time lecturer in 2013, hence I could also teach again at the same college. As I wasn't given enough time to prepare teaching materials for class due to all the household work and parenting, I had to stop my teaching job in 2018.

Despite all the support I received from the church and the people of God throughout my theological studies, I feel sorry for being unable to contribute more at this point. On the other hand, even though I am not a full-time church minister, what I have learnt has benefitted me in my daily life. I continuously praise God for this. Life is not always easy; sometimes it can be exhausting. But I have now learnt how to live a good, thankful life through Christ. Every day I try to build a deeper faith and seek guidance on how to use God's gift in me for a better purpose. Life becomes more purposeful and more fruitful with God; no matter how big the trouble may be, I can now solve it with my faith in God. God

has made me a stronger and better person. If we hold our faith in God without doubt, God will make us a better, stronger version of ourselves and put us in positions we never thought we could achieve.

Looking back at the relationship between God and His people, the Israelites, we can see that they were blessed during the times they followed and obeyed God's will. Likewise, since I've dedicated myself to God's ministry, God has shown me great things and blessed me in ways I could not even imagine. Moreover, over my six years of studying about God, I have been guided towards mental and spiritual maturity. To this day, the verse I've been holding up in my life is from Proverb 3:6, "...in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight". This is my belief that if we call on God, He will always provide a way in the midst of all troubles.

## **II. Ministry**

For now, I am unable to contribute to any women's ministry in church. In the words of Reuben A. Torrey, "Nothing is as honorable as being a good wife". Now I am fully focusing on looking after the most precious gifts we receive from God - our children. I totally accept that is the duty God has entrusted me for now. Till God gives me a new challenge or bigger duty in ministry, I believe this is the best I can do for the kingdom of God. Here are three of the most important ministries I believe a wife in a household can do:

### **i. Raising our children with the Word of God**

It is very important to remind ourselves of the importance of fulfilling our vows when we have our children baptised: to raise and guide our children in God's way and in faith until they become adults. As parents it is our sole duty to make sure our children receive salvation (Ps. 127:3;

Matt 16:26). We should not just depend on pastors, elders or Sunday school teachers for our children's spiritual salvation.

To teach the word of God is one of the foundations in raising our children. We should start when the baby is still in our womb, with unceasing prayer and reading the bible. As they are growing up, to read bible stories to them, buy and teach the Sunday school textbooks, make them memorise some bible verses before bedtime and have family devotion, which is very important for planting the seed of God's word. Believing that the word of God can transform even the most difficult heart, it is vital to let children grow up with the word of God so they won't live sinful lifestyles in the sight of our Lord (Ps. 119:11). In such a manner, everything we do for our children in God's name won't fade away; God will bless us and we will see the result in our children. Again, I have to stress how important it is to bring our children to Sunday School, and also to bring them with us to regular church services so they could have a positive impact on our children even though they might not be able to understand everything that is going on during the services. People used to say, "Children who are brought to the path of the church will never end up on the streets". In times of sorrows and struggles, they will always find refuge in the house of God. When we are at the church with our children, it is very important that they realise how sacred and important a role the church has. In that way, they will learn how to worship God in the right manner and attitude.

The church should be able to offer creative programmes that will attract the children's attention, such as praising and chanting the word of God. In that way we would be able to worship God in a livelier manner. Elder K. Saibela was right when he said, "The importance of children in the church is that they will one day be the ones who look after the church". The church should pay more attention to this new generation and seek

advice on how to provide more productive children's projects for the sake of the future of the church.

Now we as a society are embracing the development of new global technology and media progression. Parents are increasingly competing with others on their children's educational progress. This new trend reveals a visible effect on how parents give increasingly lesser emphasis on their children's involvement in church activities. Another effect is on the children; they would rather stay at home playing games, watching their favorite movies or doing something fun with their friends than go to church. This would certainly have a negative impact on the church's future progress. Therefore, we as parents need to evaluate and focus on how to balance our efforts to improve our children and their involvement in the church. As long as our children embrace Jesus Christ in their hearts, their future is safe. To bring our children to God is also the best way to avoid conflicts and troubles we face every day in the family, the church and society as a whole.

## **ii. The Status of Women**

Lots of women in the church and society tend to stop their education when they get married. While we were younger, we could work and study hard. But when we become older, women choose to give up on pursuing further studies. John Dewey said, "the main purpose of education is to train one to be skilled and become a mature and reasonable person". To become a mature person, even if a proper education is unavailable, a person could read and study from good books so that his/her knowledge and reasoning skills will improve resulting in them becoming a successful person.

In developed countries, they say life starts at the age of 40. Even into their 60s, which is our parents' age, people are still working hard with

lots of their experiences. So do the elder people in their 80s. These people are still working and learning at their level-best. It is very important, especially for women, to be educated for acquiring jobs, family management and parenting skills. An undeniable fact in church ministry is that educated and learned people are productive and are likely to be more useful than those who have no educational background. Educated and self-motivated people know how to better face and react accordingly in certain situations of joy or sorrow; they know what to say and how to handle these situations. A mother who reads books about child parenting would know better how to guide and look after the children. Her studying would give her confidence in whatever she does for her family.

According to a UNESCO report regarding the pursuit of higher education, the number of women with degrees is higher than men. That is the same case in our community as well; there are more talented women who are qualified for ministry. Sadly, however, the traditional concept, which is entirely patriarchal, is still at the centre of decision-making bodies of the community. This results in most of the qualified women standing down and being unable to take part in any important position.

Women aren't just supposed to take care of household chores and cooking. But the truth is that these tasks demand management skills, and household management is not an easy task to successfully look into. Without the wisdom of the housewife, family life can be very messy and difficult. A wise housewife manages everything in order; she knows what to do first, and handles certain situations in certain ways so that everyone in the family would live together in harmony and peace.





Women's Tailoring Training



Women's Ministry Training

If those wise women who could manage their families perfectly take leading roles in the community and the church, the church's mission would be taken out more effectively, and harmony would have been preserved in a better way. Hence, as our national women leaders have been demanding all along, I think a quarter of seats in decision-making bodies should be allocated to women candidates both in the community and the church.

Being a minister's wife, there is one thing that has constantly crossed my mind: pastors' wives are expected not to engage in any paid jobs (eg. government jobs, teachers, nurses, doctors, engineers, etc.) Though there is no written rule as such, the unwritten law in the church suggests pastors' wives should not work outside or even at home. Two women whom I was personally close to were working at the church office. They had been working at their posts for very long time and could have gotten their pension shortly. Sadly, they had to give up those jobs with heavy hearts due to their marital engagement with their husbands who were pastors.

Terminating the jobs of pastors' wives could result in a negative impact on their family development, and it could also mean the neglecting of God's given talent to these poor women. It is a very urgent agenda to sort out a solution for pastors' wives and provide an opportunity to exercise their God-given talent without affecting their commitment to their husbands' ministry.

Another issue I would like to point out is about women's ordination as ministers of the church. Even though the church has opened the door for women candidates to apply for pastoral ministry, no woman has applied for it (in Phai Synod). We need to reconsider the prospect of having women candidates. We as women would need to look at ourselves anew; we need to improve our conviction on how much we

want it and how open we are to women pastors. In order for educated and able women to contribute more in church ministry and the social transformation process, we need to support each other, holding our hands together and moving forward together. For such a great ambition, let's widen our knowledge and wisdom to the best we can.

### **iii. Parenting (Child Care)**

The last thing I would like to discuss about is how we are parenting our children. Some may think being a housewife is of lowly status, but we should consider in a deeper sense that to look after the family and our children is a very important and noble role God has granted upon us. The sooner we realise this, the more effort and concentration we will put into this role. Scholars say that the most important period in parenting is the first 5 years of their children's lives. Psychologists also point out that infants understand most of their mother's thoughts, and that between the ages of 3-5 children learn the most. Therefore, we must put in our best effort and concentration during this golden period of parenting. A proverb goes like this, "you will never be able to catch a 13-year-old child". This is because by the time they are 13, children would have already become very difficult to teach, having already developed their own ideas and mindsets. Due to the above, let's try our best to shape our children with the teaching of the bible so that they will grow and walk in the path of righteousness before our Lord.

Unless we receive a special calling from God, let us not spend too much of our time with the church and other social activities, or in things which we simply find interesting. Rather, let us spend more time with our family and our children. Let us not think that our children are too young to know anything and consequently neglect our parenting duty. Let us remember that once our children lose their way in life, it is very difficult to bring them back into the light of God's grace. We can find many bible

references about the importance of guiding our children while they are young. The book of Proverbs teaches that we should not release our anger upon our children, otherwise the shame will be upon the whole family in the future; rather we should feed them the wisdom of God with love and care (Prov 19:18; 22:6; 29:15b). One of the main reasons there are conflicts within the family which impact society as a whole is the lack of proper teaching and guidance in the family.

Parents should set certain limits in granting their children's wishes. The family is the first school where children learn morality, discipline and behaviour. The way children are taught during their childhood speaks a lot about what they would become as adults. What we teach, how we live and how we behave are very clear to our children. Hence, we must be very careful of what we do, what language we use, how we communicate with other people and how we talk about other people in front of our children. Let's not forget that our children are our life mirror. Some of us might not possess much parenting knowledge. Therefore, let's start putting our existing knowledge into practice as much as possible. Moreover, never cease praying to God so that God will grant us wisdom, knowledge and power to become able housewives, powerful women who can successfully manage our own families under the light of God's grace. Let's work hard for our noble role in the family in the right time so that we will reap the fruit of our hard work in our children and family as a whole.

# Family Mission



Biaknguri

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**She is a former PCM missionary from Rakhine State and focuses on the importance of doing mission as a family. Since she gave up her missionary work after getting married with a PCM pastor, she wholeheartedly continues to do mission by following her husband everywhere.**

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I was born on January 6th 1969 in Khampat village as the 7th child of Mr. Vankhuma and Mrs. Liankungi. I grew up in Khampat village. I started ministry through my involvement in the local church youth fellowship and children Sunday School teaching. My biggest challenge was to reach out and save the people in remote areas who worshipped unknown (evil) spirits, bound by the power of Satan. I have always been empowered by the testimonies and preaching of missionaries who returned from the mission field. Those are the main factors that inspired me to become a missionary. Several times, I prayed with tears for those lost souls in the mission field. In 1986, I tried to go to the Dai mission field. However, since I had a shy personality, was a single woman and had doubtful support from my family, my plan to travel to the Dai mission field did not materialise. In the March 1989 issue of “Kohhran Tlangau” (the church monthly periodical) there was an announcement that the Church needed ten missionary candidates to be sent to the Mro tribe in Arakan (Rakhine) state. I was so sure that it was time for me to step up and answer God’s call for me to evangelise with the gospel. With tears I spoke to God saying, “Lord, I want to go as your missionary. You know my character and all my struggles. I might die there, but my desire and commitment are that if I die, I’d like to die for the Gospel.” I was so determined to apply for this missionary ministry.

### **Becoming a Missionary**

After making up my mind, I got the necessary recommendations from my church and sent my application to the Assembly Mission Board. On 21 May 1989, I was interviewed by the panel of the Mission Board. I was so nervous. The Board accepted seven candidates out of eleven, and I was one of the accepted ones! I was so happy. Before being sent out to the mission field, we took a three-month training course arranged and organised by the Mission Board.

## **On the way to the Mission Field**

After training for three months, in September 1989, the new missionaries and I moved to Arakan (Rakhine) state, where we had never been before. The journey took longer than I expected, allowing me to experience new forms of transportation, like boats. I witnessed the beauty of God's creation in those huge rivers, making my heart full of joy. When we arrived, I was surprised by the language and character of the Rakhine people. After continuing our journey for another week, we finally arrived at our final destination, Kyauk Taw village.

## **Ministry in the Mission Field**

After arriving at my appointed town, Mrauk U, I rented a house and started my mission work by evangelising and teaching songs to children and youth in the village. Words like “Jesus” and “Christian” were new to them. Learning

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I could have complained and taken action against those violent actions, but instead I prayed for them.

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new things made them happy; I could quickly make a good connection with them. On the other hand, however, their parents and some villagers were not very happy with what was going on. From time to time, while we were having prayer and worship, they would throw rocks at my house. I could have complained and taken action against those violent actions, but instead I prayed for them. One night, the owner of my rented house caught a person throwing rocks at my house. How God solved the problem for me was amazing. I determined that this mission work would not be easy; there would be lots of struggles and difficulties. My heart was always happy and at peace with God. God gave me the power I needed all the time.

After one year of living in Mrauk U town, my appointment was shifted to Chaung Tha village which was within the same township area. The only possible transportation was by river boat, making it very difficult to travel around. There I stayed in a small bamboo house along with the host family. For a family of six with children, the house was very small. The house had no door and the floor was made of bamboo. I found my own small place at the corner of the house. Everything was strange to me. This new experience was not easy for me and I didn't feel safe at all. I had to comfort myself, thinking, "God is with you, you will be fine". The next thing I did was to enter the village and invite the people to visit and come to the house I lived. When they visited, I talked with them and explained the Gospel to them. The people who lived there were called Meo Khami.

Once, I was sick with malaria. Since there was no medicine to be bought, I asked the family I lived with to take me to Mrauk U town. The family didn't have a boat, so they just told me that they were busy. I went into the village asking for help, but no one could offer help and I was feeling so helpless. Later a man came to the village delivering wood. I asked if I could ride along, but he told me that lots of water would come into the boat if I rode with him, so he refused to take me. I was very sick and my temperature was high by then, so I just hopped into the boat. He had no choice but to take me. I didn't know who or what kind of person he was. If he had turned out to be a bad man, anything could have happened. But I prayed and prayed to God. Finally, everything went fine and I got the medicine I needed. After one year, I moved to another village where I experienced the same conditions –living with a family in a bamboo house and travelling only by boat. There were times when the flood came and covered the entire area underneath the house. After the flood, the mud would smell so bad that it was very difficult to bear. To make the experience worse, there were no proper toilets. But not all was



bad; the people were eager to listen and learn about the gospel. We had new believers continually.

After serving as a missionary for three years, I got married in 1992 with my fellow worker from Home Missionary, Lalriliansa, at Khampat local church. After that we returned to our own different mission fields. The Mission Board did not allow a couple to work together, so we had to live separately in our own appointed mission fields. After one year, I left my job as a Mission Board worker only to join and live with my husband. I moved to Tein Nyo village where my husband was working. We happily served the Lord together afterwards.

We started our poor family life with certain challenges. Our house was made entirely with bamboo. When it rained, we needed to use umbrellas in our own house. When a strong wind came, we had to run to other houses for refuge. God gave us two beautiful sons, Roneihhlua and Lalramtawnenga. We were so happy. We tried our best in our ministry, offering free teaching to children and young people who couldn't afford any education. We were very successful in that regard. Eventually we established ourselves as a small church. When my husband was out for field visits, I took care of the church. The people regarded us as parents of the church; we had a good, happy life then.

In 1998, we moved to Kyauk Taw town. There was a very vast field area for us to cover. During our stay in this town, I had to arrange hospitality and accommodation for visitors. These were mostly people who came to the town for medical treatment. I evangelised to them as much as I could. We always had guests, even though it wasn't easy to host guests all the time. We even accumulated lots of debt because of the amount spent on food. However, the Lord gave us a daughter while we stayed here and we could not be happier.

After staying two years in Kyauk Taw town, my husband was allowed to pursue his theological education at the Church's theological college in Tahan (TTC). My husband had to live in Tahan town. Since we were struggling financially, we could not afford to live in Tahan. Therefore, we lived in my husband's family village Pyin Oo Lwin. I worked in a handloom factory to support my family. After another four years, the Mission Board decided for us to go back to the mission field in Kyauk Taw town. We were very happy. Our relatives even said out of surprise, "Are they out of their mind? Why they are so happy to go back to Rakhine land?" We happily returned to Kyauk Taw town and served there another two years. God granted us another daughter, Lalpathuhriattiri.

In 2007, we moved again to Mye Bon town. Since it was near the ocean, there were lots of fishes. We needed to use speedboats to travel around. The water was so salty and it was difficult to get fresh water there. The people there

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I believed helping my husband with his mission work was my mission as well.

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were from the Sungtu tribe. We learnt their language. Some young people from the remote villages came to the town for their high school education. They had to live in very poor accommodation around other people's compounds. We were very sympathetic towards them. Therefore, the very next year we built a house for them in our quarter compounds, which became a very important part of our mission work. Later we would establish it as a boarding house for students. We got lots of children and I tried my best to help them with accommodation, food and education. We also planned worship and bible study for them. I believed helping my husband with his mission work was my mission as well. Sometimes, I followed him on his field trips. I talked with women

and tried to help and improve their living conditions as much as I could. I also preached on the pulpit from time to time.

In October 2010, we experienced a very strong cyclone (Giri Cyclone) in the Mye Bon town area. Our lives were in danger. It was so frightening. But being a mother to several children, I hid my fear and prayed as much as I could. Our prayer was that we would die if we had to die. However, the Lord was our Refuge; we were kept safe. After the cyclone, many families lost their homes and lived without any shelter. I visited and encouraged the housewives, offering as much help I could give and preaching to them.

After serving in Rakhine land for 21 years, we applied for Phai Synod to be our mother Synod. Our application was accepted, and we were given our first post in April 2011 in Namsang, Shan state. There was a well-established church there in Namsang with good living Quarters. Having enough electricity at our disposal, I cried to the Lord with tears of joy, “Lord, have You allowed us to live such a good life?” I realised all the struggles we faced in the mission fields were just part of God’s important life teaching for us. I praise God for it. Knowing God’s grace in our life, we gave a tithe to the Women’s (PWS) Ministry Box, and another half to the church (as thanksgiving to the Lord).

I desire to participate in all church ministries. But I am a mother of a family so it is quite impossible. However, I have never thought of it as an excuse for myself to be away from the church and my husband’s ministries. What I always tell my children is this, “We are a God-serving family, and all of us are ministers. Whatever we do must be for the sake of God’s mission”.

## **Conclusion**

While I was still a single woman, I used to admire the pastors and their wives a lot. I had always wanted to be a wife of a minister, but I never expected for myself to be able to become one. I devoted myself to be a missionary before becoming a missionary's wife; I was satisfied. And now God made me a pastor's wife; it is an undeserved blessing for me. Therefore, I testify that I have nothing to complain about in my life. To serve the Lord with a joyful heart and to go wherever God sends us is the purpose of me and my family's life. Though I am just a woman with no wisdom nor good educational background, my life commitment is this - I will always follow my God to whichever door He shows me to enter. I am a wife of a minister. To look after my family and my children is my utmost duty as a mother. At the same time, I don't think the minister's wife should only stay at home and take care of the family. Rather, while I am taking care of my family, I believe I should also contribute as much as possible in the ministry. We should never run away from the calling we receive to serve. In that way, we will become a mother of the family and of the church.

# Called to serve



Lalbiakhnemi

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**She is the only female pensioner (former women's secretary) of Phai Synod, PCM. She grew up among Burmese-speaking people and hardly speaks her mother tongue - Mizo. But she came to Phai Synod and served her synod since she knows that language barriers will not make her stop serving God and women in the church.**

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I was born in a famous, beautiful town called Pyin Oo Lwin. For the glory of God, I have spent most of my good life serving God especially with Christian Women's ministry. Currently I am holding the following ministerial positions: (1) Vice Chairperson of Presbyterian Women's Society (PWS), Tahan Venglai Unit, (2) President of Presbyterian Women's Joint Conference (PWJC), Phai Synod, (3) President of Kalay Christian Women's Fellowship (KCWF). As for my educational background, I completed my G.Th (1989-1992) and B.Th (1995-1997) study at Tahan Theological College.

The reason why I pursued theological study was to dedicate my whole life to serve God. I started ministry when I became the Women's Secretary of Phai Synod in 1999, the post I worked in till I got my pension in 2016. Currently I live in Tahan town with my family. My husband's name is Mr. Suithanga. God has blessed our marriage with a beautiful daughter, Jenny Lalengmawii.

Many of God's people have inspired me a lot. The one who inspired me the most is Rev. Moe Moe Eih, a minister from the Upper Methodist Church. I admire her very much for her great commitment in her ministry and for being a respected, influential pastor. Some of the things which made me admire her were the way she looked in her minister dress, her neat and perfect Eucharist performance as well as her good and spiritually touching preaching. I once told her, "I want to be a minister like you!"

I would like to share the reason why I dedicated myself for God's ministry. Back when I was in my old town, May Myo (Pyin Oo Lwin), I met a minister. After he prayed for me, he told me, "You are chosen to serve God. If you deny or hesitate by walking out on God's ministry, God will call you out anyway through certain hardships in your life." At that time, however, I didn't believe him; furthermore, I didn't want to

commit to the ministry. Afterwards, difficulties and hardships always followed me in everything I did. Finally, I gave in and answered God's call to serve.

Phai Synod supported my entire study expenses. Since I was born and raised in a Burmese community, I couldn't speak the Mizo language (which is the first language in our church ministry) very well. During

the final year of my study I asked God to make me fluent in the Mizo language. God answered me with a question, "Do you want to be fluent in language, or instead have my words come out of your mouth?" At that

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God's unceasing care has been unbelievable, so great towards me.

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time, my vision was enlightened and I began to realise that in order to serve God, my commitment was sufficient: God is able! During my entire 17 year career, God's unceasing care has been unbelievable, so great towards me. In all of my preparation for training sessions and preaching, God always filled me with necessary knowledge and experiences relating to the topics I was preparing for. I would then share my experiences in the training sessions, from which I myself gained lots of empowerment.

When I visited the local churches, the Lord helped me understand the true nature and condition of those churches, and gave me insight into how to empower their weaknesses as well as ways to bring unity among those who were not united. My Lord always provided me with words to speak out in those situations. Sometimes after being well-prepared to preach, God would suddenly change the topics and words I was supposed to preach. I can only wonder how much my God has been guiding and protecting me throughout my ministry! On some occasions, out of my high expectations for a better future, I might have used harsh and strong words for the purpose of encouraging unity

among women leaders. Every time I did something like that, I felt sorry that I might have hurt their feelings. So I prayed to God to heal their hearts and to bring peace upon all of us. It was only later that I found out that those tense moments brought better mutual understanding and a closer connection among us.

Thinking about the place where God has put me now, I am happy and full of joy. I believe God has honoured me so much. Knowing that there are lots of things in our ministry we still need to improve on, I feel sorry that my full-time ministry has come to an end.

I believe God has recognised and blessed my humble contribution in the ministry for many reasons. God has been using the words from my mouth to touch people's hearts. I have also never really faced big troubles with my physical health so far, and my family (my husband and children) has been very supportive of my ministry, especially my husband who has been a tremendous help and encouraging partner. Even though I am just a working staff of a single Synod (Phai Synod), I have had the huge privilege of visiting all ten synods and mission fields of the church.

In 2001, when I visited the Rakhine mission field, I gave four training sessions in different places. One of my biggest struggles at that time was that there was no toilet at all; we had to go to the nearby bushes to answer nature's call. Additionally, there were lots of bugs in our sleeping places. Those were new experiences for me and I found them very difficult to adapt to. However, when I think back on those moments, I realise that those are the best memories which made my life more interesting and joyful. I will never forget those beautiful memories.

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I recognise that things changed very quickly during the period of my ministerial service. When we visited our ministry fields previously, sometimes we had to go on foot, sometimes on local ox carts, bicycles, cars, trains, ships and even boats. These days, we can now make visits with nice cars. But I can confess that the experiences in the past with rough transportation were my best experiences. Another thing I had to struggle with during rural visits was the food. The food was for the most part a cultural shock to me because what we ate in the field was very different from what we had every day at home. An amazing fact was that I never had any stomach problems because of food. When I think back on all of these, I can only praise God's unfailing love and care throughout my ministry.

My dream for the future of women in the church is this, that most of us housewives, who are the ones managing, teaching, guiding and arranging things in our household, can show and carry over what we do in our own household to the wider environment (the church and society). This is so that we will become more important and productive contributors in church ministry and community development.

During my ministry, I gave several trainings in different local churches on certain topics that people received great benefit from. Some of those topics are:

1. The motto and calling of PWS: Only when we realise our calling as the women's society of the church will we be able to improve and move forward.
2. The importance of ministry at the global level: Since we are a small number even at the national level, only when we hold hands with other churches and women's ministry bodies in the country will the world hear our contributions.

3. The importance of mothers in a Christian Family: This is the most frequently taught topic in my ministry. With more detailed and constructive sub-topics, we learn how women can become more effective and productive contributors in the church and community.
4. Child Care (Parenting): Due to poverty and the lack of proper education, there are many mothers who have difficulty in their parenting journey. We train and empower those mothers, meeting their needs with different topics.
5. Leadership: In spite of their great contributions in the family, women are given few leadership roles both in the church and the community. This results in lower status and seemingly less confidence among women to stand up and take up leadership when needed. Therefore, we organised women leadership trainings on several occasions.
6. Economics: Wherever we may live, women need to know how to properly manage family finances. Though our income could be very little, it is still very important that we have knowledge and experience of how to generate income lawfully.
7. Women empowerment: No doubt the church and community are run in a very patriarchal tradition; women can easily be oppressed and exploited. Therefore, it is a very urgent and important agenda for us to protect the rights of women according to the teaching of the Bible and universal human rights.

With a thankful heart, I testify that my life and everything I have done are gifts from the almighty and merciful God. Through the church, I have served my Lord this far. The church is my father and my mother; I will be forever grateful to the church for giving me the chance to serve my Lord.

### **My message to fellow women:**

I want to say that our families and the world are in the hands of the mothers. It is the mother who will make sure the family she is building is a true Christian family. From that point of view, we the mothers are the ones who make the world a better, peaceful place to live in. One thing we need to give much attention to is child abuse, which is now a big issue around the globe. To protect our children from abuse and drug addiction is now a big task for all mothers. Let us remember that if we hold hands, pray and stand together, we can protect the safety of our children's future. We know we have strong and effective women's rights and protection laws, so let us study them and use them to help and liberate all the women around the country who are suffering and being oppressed in many ways.





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