

MYANMAR MISSION FOCUS – 2011 FIRST STEPS

THE GREAT COMMISSION

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
Matthew 28:18-20

All who are followers of Christ are called to be His witnesses. (Acts 1:8) As Damo has shared with us, it is more than any specific activity, but is instead the natural overflow of our relationship with God. As a local congregation the expressions of our witness are many and varied and the leadership would desire to acknowledge and affirm the significant ministry that is represented through the lives of each person. In addition, however, we desire to develop a corporate mission focus to be an added encouragement to one another as we each continue on our journey of discipleship to Christ. It is our intent that everybody would be able to be actively involved in some way in accordance with their gifts and capacities as Christ lays it upon our hearts. While the motivation behind our mission is to share with others the love that we have ourselves received in Christ, I believe the purpose of God is to allow our offerings to be a source of ongoing revelation in our lives whereby the words of Jesus are fulfilled: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Acts 20:35

MYANMAR (BURMA):

Myanmar was a British colony until 1948, known as Burma after the Barma who comprise 57% of the population. It was a key supply-line to China for the Allied forces during WWII and, consequently, the site of some of the most brutal fighting. Burma has been ruled by a military oligarchy almost continuously since its independence. Parliamentary elections were held in 1991 in the newly renamed Myanmar but the military junta prevented parliament from sitting. Uprisings have been harshly quelled and elections again in 2010 were condemned as undemocratic. Economic isolation has led to large scale forced labour and other violations of human rights. This cycle of oppression, isolation and autocratic rule has left Myanmar one of the world’s poorest countries in Southeast Asia and the world.

Myanmar is predominantly Buddhist, which the government actively promotes. Despite espousing freedom of religion, the government regulates life to such an extent that evangelism is difficult. Christian churches and Bible Colleges endure numerous restrictions. Despite the difficulties of ministry in Myanmar, the church continues to grow both in depth of understanding and number. The lack of trained evangelical leaders is a critical challenge. Leaders must be trained in sound theology but also in practical ministry to reach a nation in need of reconciliation yet strangled by unbalanced military power.



Population: 50.5 million
 Buddhist: 80%
 Christian: 9%
 Muslim: 7%
 The junta calls Christianity “the C virus”; churches are illegal and 3000 Christian villages have been razed in the last decade.

2 INTENTIONAL INVOLVEMENTS FOR 2011

1 SPONSORING A STUDENT LEADER— Biak Run Sang:

Through Overseas Council Australia, who partner with strategic Bible Colleges in the developing world, we are able to sponsor Biak Run Sang, a Burmese national who is beginning the second year of a four year Masters of Divinity at Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. A copy of his testimony follows. We believe it is important to be committed to training Christian leaders and Biak's heart for mission connects with our own. As a church we have committed to sponsor Biak for 2011 but with the possibility that we could continue our support through to his graduation in 2013. The cost involved is \$2000 for the year and this covers his tuition, food and accommodation with a little left over for some spending money. We thus recognize the value of sponsoring a national student as they seek to equip themselves to become a future leader of the church in their country. Ways to be involved include:



1.PRAY: We have provided bookmarks to assist you in this and included Biak's testimony so you can have some understanding of who he is. Overseas Council Australia will send letters from Biak twice a year to assist us in following his progress and specific prayer needs.

2.WRITE: Should anyone like to relate more directly with Biak it is possible to write to him. I'm sure he would be encouraged to hear something of the story of those who are supporting him in his ministry journey and that we would be blessed as we commit ourselves to relationship with him.

3.FINANCE: Those who would like to contribute financially can do so through the envelopes provided, or please see Gerdine if you would prefer to make alternate arrangements.

4.TRIP: Gay will be seeking to travel to Myanmar to visit MEGST and Biak with the view to being able to relate personally our commitment to their mission in Myanmar. Details are still to be arranged but anyone who may like to share in this trip would be welcome.

Gay had the opportunity to meet with Dr Aung Mang, the Principal of MEGST where Biak studies, when he visited Perth last year. Sharing with Aung and hearing something of the MEGST vision and mission in Myanmar was very encouraging. Following are some details of MEGST:

MEGST AT A GLANCE

- ◆70 Full time students representing 20 denominations.
- ◆11 Full time faculty, 4 part-time faculty, 9 adjunct faculty (in training) All are Burmese.
- ◆Principal—Dr Aung Mang.
- ◆Over 120 graduates since founding in 1996, all working in ministry in various parts of Myanmar.

MEGST—Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology

MEGST was founded in 1996 by the Myanmar Evangelical Fellowship with a vision to create a graduate school for the evangelical churches of Myanmar. This was a strategic decision in order to retain developing leaders within the country. The college is strategically located in the capital Yangon and began with a principal and a few part-time faculty members. In a difficult economy and political context, the leaders of the college have shown extraordinary competence to fulfill their vision, with MEGST now being one of the fastest growing colleges in South East Asia. While the college is not immune to the pressures on the Christian church and local authorities are aware of their presence, the college is able to keep growing by being sensitive to their political and religious context. One key to the college's growth is a focus on biblically-based, culturally relevant ministry. All faculty and students are involved in church planting and students are actively encouraged to share their faith amongst their Buddhist neighbours. Dozens of churches have sprung up throughout the capital and the region. *MEGST seeks to impart a vision for evangelism and mission* so that its graduates will be prepared either to go forth as missionaries themselves, or to raise up mission-giving and mission-sending churches. About half of MEGST students go on to lecture in other colleges across Myanmar but always continue to plant and pastor new churches.

2 BIBLE SOCIETY:

The Bible Society of Myanmar has a number of possible projects which include equipping the growing churches with scripture needs in national and ethnic minority languages, bible translation for ethnic groups, literacy promotion projects of scripture engagement for minority languages, bible ministry promotion programs and reaching out to the youth with the Word of God. Due to the restrictions and complicated procedures in obtaining official permission to print bibles and other literature, there is a great

need for bibles as well as other resource materials to nurture the spiritual lives of the people. Despite the restrictions and limitations, the Bible Society is making every effort to meet this urgent need for believers as well as for evangelism. This task is compounded by the large number of ethnic groups in Myanmar which means translation is an ongoing need. A real limitation that is also faced is the status of literacy being relatively low. The



The Bible Society therefore perceives the need to support literacy, particularly for minority language groups, to support wholistic personal development and in particular to allow meaningful use of the scriptures for spiritual development. In addition to the unfavourable situation in Myanmar, a leadership crisis in the mid to late



1990's also impacted the function and performance of the Bible Society. This reinforces the need for leadership development. They had a reshaping launch in 2000 and since then programs promoting the bible ministry have been planned and implemented effectively. However, Bible Society Myanmar has not been able to develop sufficient partnerships to make a lot of headway in many of their projects. Bible Society Australia is not, at this stage, directing any funds to Myanmar, given that they have to make prayerful decisions on the most strategic allocation of limited resources.

We support the ministry of the Bible Society as they seek to make the written word of God available to people of all nations and languages and develop programs that encourage people to grow in their relationship with God as they encounter him in his living word. Ways to be involved in supporting this significant ministry:



1.PRAY: There are no organizational limitations on the opportunity to pray. We would therefore invite you to pray as God leads for the Bible Society Myanmar and draw from the information above, with particular emphasis on leadership and partnership development. Pray also for the world fellowship of Bible Societies that appropriate partnerships with Myanmar may become possible. However, above all may we pray that the lives of many people around the world would be touched and transformed by the revelation of God through the provision of his living word and the faithfulness of his disciples who share it with those they are in contact with. Those who would like a Bible Society Prayer Calendar please see Hazel or Gerdine.

2.SUPPORT: While Gay will pursue possibilities of relationship with Bible Society Myanmar we can support the work of the United Bible Societies. Seth Brooks will be with us on **29th May** speaking about the significance for us all, not just to possess a bible but to engage with God through his word. We will have envelopes available to those who would like to make a financial offering to be entrusted to Bible Society Australia to distribute.

3.RECYCLED BIBLES: Many Christians around the world struggle with the grind of poverty, making the bible a luxury they just can't afford. It has become economically viable for the Bible Society to collect second-hand bibles that are in good, preferably unmarked condition, to be distributed to areas of need. If you have any extra bibles at home that are not being used or know of anyone else who may have the same, we will collect these during the month of May and pass them on to Seth when he visits. If you don't have a spare bible you may like to participate in the '*Greatest Gift*—Bible Sponsorship' program. For \$10 you can sponsor the gift of a bible for those in poverty and/or in prison in South Africa where Bible Society is providing bibles for every prisoner who completes World Hope Ministries' initial discipleship program. Details will be made available through the In Touch in May.



May our offerings towards Myanmar and through the Bible Society serve to honour God and be to the glory of His Kingdom, and develop a relationship between us and the people of Myanmar in a way that makes a difference and transforms all our lives by the power of our God!



OVERSEAS COUNCIL AUSTRALIA

Student's Name **BIAK RUN SANG**

Student's Number **MYN084**

Gender **M**

Birth date **27 FEBRUARY 1987**

Nationality **Burmese**

School **Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology**

Country **Myanmar**

Anticipated Date of Graduation **February 2013**

Major or Emphasis of Study **Master of Divinity**

Marital Status **Single**



Testimony:

My name is Biak Run Sang. I came from Chaung Khuah village, Kalay township, Sagaing Division. My parents are farmers. My father is U Tho Nawl and my mother is Daw Zung Kim. Our families are attending at Jesus Christ Church.

From my childhood I wanted to attend Bible School. When I was studying at Kalay University in 2006, I heard God's voice that I wanted to share the Good News to others. Before I heard God's voice I was afraid to share the Gospel to others but after His calling I went to many places and preached the Gospel to other people. I enjoy preaching to those who do not know the Gospel and to unbelievers rather than preaching in the church. So I do believe that I will be in mission field after my graduation.

I was very excited learning English at MEGST with teachers who came from New Zealand: Judith, Dorothy, Viviane and Bronwyn. I really appreciated them because of their patience, love and concern for us. They took care for everyone in the classroom and if we did our homework they used to appreciate us for our works. Because of their teaching I came to know that how to summarize the paragraph while Judith was teaching us. We spent most of our time in conversation with each other in the classroom that's why I improved my speaking English. I knew how to write the using of transition signals for comparison and contrast when Dorothy took our class. When Viviane was taking the class I improved in hearing skills because in her class we used to practice listening tests. For me, I have never learned about academic writing, it is my first time to do it at Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST) with Bronwyn. I realized that I have improved my writing and listening skills while I was studying Summer English School. We not only improved our English skill but also improved our mindset.

I am a first year student. I am studying six subjects: Research and Writing Method subjects help me to write academic papers, Christian History is also very important because the historical study explains how God protected His people and so it reminds us to lean on God. Another one is Christian Theology. It is also very good to think new ideas. Old Testament and New Testament Studies help me for future ministry.

We have qualified teachers and a good library at MEGST. I get different ideas which will help me for my future ministry. I enjoy studying at MEGST because we are from different tribes and background, so we can learn from each other. I know that my spiritual knowledge has been improving and my relationship with other people as well.

Finally, I thank God for giving me such good health until today to study His Word at MEGST. I would like to thank all of my friends in Christ who are from abroad and those who help me by prayer and finance. Because of your help and prayer I hope that I will finish my M Div first year successfully and I may continue the rest of my studies at MEGST. Therefore, I would like to request all of you to pray for me during my study at MEGST and for my future ministry.

Your brother in Christ,

Biak Run Sang
MDiv I, MEGST