



感恩与代祷 Praise & Prayer

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The New Era Challenges for Churches in Myanmar

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Myanmar has been ruled by a military regime since the 60s. For more than fifty years, citizens of Myanmar were oblivious to what democracy and civil rights even were. However, today Myanmar is gradually advancing towards democracy, which has given every citizen of Myanmar cause for delight. Unfortunately, due to ongoing civil war, some areas within the country still remain 'closed.' Because of this, it is difficult to determine just how far democracy in Myanmar will progress. Most citizens of Myanmar acknowledge that the journey towards complete democracy is a strenuous one.

Ever since the new government gained control, they have been putting much effort to reform and rebuild the country. In fact, there have already been some significant changes (with the goal of improving Myanmar's global image), such as improvements to the nation's hydraulic engineering and telecommunication endeavors.

Although this new image of Myanmar is still emerging, it is tough to change existing traditions, customs, cultural habits, laws and even church practices (including pastoral reputations). While the focus is primarily on changing the country's policies, it is equally important to care about how these changes might affect citizens' lives. In the local churches, if missions strategies are used as well as efforts to better the members' lives in every respect – individual, familial, social and church, then the goal of democracy will have gained ground.

How should churches prepare for the increasing transformation of this country? To answer that question, the author must first illustrate the challenges faced by the country as a whole (macro-perspective) and then the challenges of the specific area in the Golden Triangle (micro-perspective), which is where the author has been serving.

Challenges for Individuals and Families

Myanmar has been an agricultural country for the past few decades. In the past, when farmers were actively working in the fields, a family consisting of ten or more was able to be adequately sustained. However, as the country shifts from an agricultural to urbanization lifestyle, these farmers' lifestyles have been significantly affected. They now face more challenges – not just the increased difficulty of filling their children's stomachs but also the added burden of paying for their children's education, especially if the only opportunity for education is in the cities. Parents who pay for the costly school fees in cities usually struggle to get by each day. When children end up having to leave school in the city due to financial issues, churches can extend help before the problems sprout into even bigger ones for the children's families and communities. Therefore, the challenges for individuals and families are related to challenges for the churches.

Challenges in Church and Society

The Lord has called us to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world." As society advances, we see that morality has deteriorated, with one result being that human relations have become increasingly frayed. This result is an inevitable one and it signifies the beginning of a decline of a civilization. In the past, Christians were restricted by the government but now they are able to



Huang Guo Yuan Mission Church



Bulang Ministry

compete on an equal level with others in different areas since the country has become more open. Democracy has given Myanmar equality. Churches should grab these opportunities to serve society as more needs arise within the community. For instance, in Tachilek, there used to be only one available high school, but now there are three. In addition, the number of student centers has also increased from one female center to more than twenty male and female centers. We thank and praise the Lord that most of the student centers have been founded by our local pastors. Our student centers not only educate young people, but more importantly, teach them about God. The students' worldviews are further cultivated under church guidance in order to groom them into Christian leaders. There are also a handful of them who responded to God's calling to serve as pastors. These messengers of God are placed in different regions to effectually spread His Word. Furthermore, churches there seek to nurture believers to become helpful individuals and leaders of the country.

The Challenges of Missions in Democracies

History has proven that many churches of the Lord were built up during periods of extreme difficulty. In times of democracy and openness, however, many challenges in missions were brought to attention. True Christians can be easily found in suppressed places, whereas in more liberal countries with widespread peace and freedom, it is difficult to discern who the true Christians are. The reason for this is that whenever people experience peace and happiness, they do not acknowledge the reality of God. Therefore, we pray that the Lord may grant us wisdom to face these new challenges!

Philippians 4:11-12, "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every

situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

May the Lord help us as we strive to fulfill the Lord's Great Commission. Let us work hard on the following items: stability in our faith and serving the Lord with endurance.

Stability in Faith

In the past, Myanmar did not have many denominations or heresies. However, now that the country is more tolerant than before, it is possible for other teachings (sometimes with questionable content) to influence the existing churches. These churches might then differ from us in doctrine and heresies could emerge to confuse local believers. It is, therefore, important for pastors to teach Christians the Word of God so that they will not deviate from His truth.

Serving with Endurance

The Lord Jesus Christ has set us church co-workers a good example. All servants of God can become physically exhausted due to work but also mentally weary as they are continually exposed to injustice. Only those who have suffered in the past have the ability to carry the cross of Jesus Christ and walk with Him. Saving faith in the Lord during persecution is insufficient – believers must also learn how to rely on Him. Dependence on Him aids believers in persevering in His service, which always brings Him glory. Only when we have utter reliance on God are we then able to stand firm in our fight against Satan, the

one who always tries to lure us away from God.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

In this new era of Myanmar history, may the Lord raise more youths to volunteer in His churches. May the Lord equip them so that they will be more familiar with His Kingdom. We need a younger generation who is willing to serve the Lord, foregoing external trappings such as status, reputation and money. In addition, may they understand the Lord's heart by walking closely with Him daily and build healthy churches according to His will. With the fulfillment of these prayers, we will be able to continue to address the needs of this new era and courageously face every challenge.

Last but not least, may the Lord call upon His people to come together to serve Him in this generation, similar to His calling of King David to serve in his generation. Let us thank Him for placing all of us in different areas in order to better share the gospel, so that His Great Commission can be fulfilled in His time!



An Tribe (Unreached people group) Ministry



Abundant Life Student Center



Abundant Life Drug Rehab Center



A Missions Trip with a Difference

On the 11th of December, a missions team consisting of ten Malaysians visited Yangon, Myanmar, with high spirits and much anticipation. The missions trip coincided with the opening of the country with the visit's purpose being to extend help to the co-workers and local churches there. Although it was the first time on a missions trip for some of the team members and the travel itinerary for all participants was more or less the same, the Lord blessed each and every one with an individual, special experience.

Happiness with a Difference

God graciously blessed the week-long missions trip with His great guidance and all the members had a wonderful and fruitful trip. One person who expressed his thoughts on missions (after spending a day in the country) was a twenty-year old young man on his first missions trip. He mentioned that though it was different from what he imagined, he felt the true essence of the trip. A variety of events took place, with all of them leaving their mark on him. Another young man also shared his feelings towards the country during the testimony session. The chaotic traffic and polluted air deeply affected him and he mentioned how he was impressed that the locals could still live in peace despite the unpleasant living conditions. When he compared Myanmar with his own country, he realized how much God had blessed him with the convenience, development and prosperity of his homeland, which filled his heart with gratitude to the Lord.

When the team arrived in Dala, a village immersed in poverty, one young woman on the team was put in charge of leading a group of local children in worship. Even though all of the children were dressed in worn-out pants, their faces shown with sheer joy as they sang praises to the Lord, which puzzled the young woman. However, she understood these children's situation better when she heard how a co-worker had invited one of the children to a tuition group but the father had asked if the child would be paid to attend. This made her realize that, because of their poverty, the parents of these children would rather have their children work instead of study. In that moment, she realized just how fortunate she was! She thanked God for the opportunity to bless others through giving instead of just receiving. Giving is, indeed, one of the greatest sources of happiness. As the Bible says, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Different Experiences

An experienced sister joined this missions trip to Myanmar after previously visiting the country three years ago. This time, God provided her with new and refreshing experiences. As she witnessed more chances for the Good News to travel, she gave thanks to the Lord for liberating the country. Because of the increasing openness within

the nation, the gospel can be spread more widely to many more unreached corners of the country.

One huge difference that she noticed was the appearance of more shops on either side of the roads (which were cleaner and wider), a result of an increasing number of both local and foreign investors. One clear example can be seen in many of the shopping malls with businesses established and funded by Chinese and Japanese immigrants. She prayed that the Lord would bring more Christian business people into the country so that the concept of business as missions can create platforms for the gospel to be shared with both locals and foreigners, as well as the many unreached people groups in the mountainous areas.

Praise the Lord! While staying at the hotel with her team, the sister noticed that the citizens of Myanmar have become more educated. We thank God for this since it means that there are more literate people around. This kind-hearted Christian lady also took the opportunity to give her Bible to a new friend she met in the hotel when the woman expressed a wish to learn more about God. She was very pleased to do so and promised herself to carry more Bibles along with her in future visits to this country.

Moreover, this sister also realized that it is necessary for missions teams to be sufficiently educated in the language of the area where the team plans to minister. While visiting several places on the trip, she met many people with high academic levels. She realized that even though preaching the gospel in Chinese is sufficient, it is much more effective and comprehensive if the gospel can be delivered in the Burmese language. In Yangon, where there is a high concentration of Bamar, knowing Burmese is a definite advantage when sharing the gospel. May the Lord open our eyes and let us take a clearer look at the mission fields. May He send more mission teams to the fields ripe for harvest! We also pray that the Lord would aid Bamar believers in bringing the gospel to their own people because, as we strongly believe, our God loves all nations and all people groups with an unwavering and unconditional love. *"He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

Finally, this sister felt that, due to continuing progress in the country and changing times, churches need to be more flexible and learn to adapt as well. May the Lord continue to empower us as we impact ever-changing society with His Great Commission. May we adequately use advances in technology – particularly those in social media – and wisely adapt our administration and strategy in order to advance His kingdom around the world!

Steps of Grace

Rev Agnes Hoang

New co-worker of CNEC (SEA), SAC Dept

Jonathan and I just moved to Singapore to join CNEC in serving the countries in Southeast Asia. As soon as we arrived, we immediately flew to Myanmar for the co-leader's summit.

God allowed us to see almost two hundred pastors and seminary students together, with some from distant, less accessible tribes such as the Lisu, Hmong, Akha and Burmese. We spent a few days learning and praying together as a group. Singing and worshipping with them was almost like heaven, where all tongues and nations worship the Lord!

Some of them had traveled to the conference three days by train and bus from areas where the gospel has not yet been heard. One area is still at war and things are very difficult there. There was a widow with three children who was trying to decide if she should continue to lead the 22 children at the Miao student center. She was crying as she shared her prayer requests with the rest of the group.

We also visited a chicken farm where they had just purchased 1000 chicks (only 4 to 5 days old) and 1000 chickens (about 25 days old). This family had previously lost a large sum of money due to their lack of knowledge on how to raise chickens. However, after some coaching



Brother Jonathan Mandat & Rev Agnes Hoang

and encouragement to keep working at it, they had been able to pay off their debts in 3 years. Jonathan also visited the pig pen at the student center, where all the animals were healthy, pink and plump. Raising animals has helped churches to become financially independent and their success has led increasing numbers of others to step forward and take on this challenge.

We are praising the Lord for His faithful servants who face challenges in the mission fields, persevering and overcoming by the grace of God. Even as we have newly arrived on the missions field, we are facing a new challenge: there are nearly 900 un-sponsored children. (Please read the details in the insert.) We invite you to pray with us to seek God's wisdom on how we can be a blessing to these children, give them the opportunity to know God and receive an education. May many children be blessed through your love for God in sponsoring a child.

Over-Head Projector (OHP)

If you have any OHP in good condition that you are no longer using, please consider giving them to further our ministry endeavors.

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