

**MYanmar
HOPE**
Christian Mission, Inc.

"You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."
— Amy Carmichael

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Greetings

Well here we are at the end of November already! I cannot believe how quickly time passes. Autumn is in full swing, and winter is just around the corner. As the Thanksgiving holiday approaches, we always want to take stock of the many spiritual and material blessings Almighty God has bestowed upon us. It is also a time to remember those who have not yet received the abundant material blessings, and to share with them what we have so gratefully received.

America, along with much of the rest of the world, is experiencing what many are calling a "global financial crisis." While times are indeed becoming difficult for many, much of the world has been experiencing their own financial crisis for decades. Compared to the vast majority of people in Myanmar, Americans are still fabulously wealthy. It is rare in American to not have abundant food, clothing, shelter, electricity, heat, warm blankets, reliable transportation, and adequate health care. Yet most of these things are still a dream for the poverty-stricken of Myanmar.

Perhaps the most important blessing of all – freedom – is the one we take most for granted. In light of the recent situation in Myanmar (some people were sentenced to sixty-five years in prison for writing pro-democracy sentiments on an Internet blog), we Americans should pause each day and thank God for our freedoms of religion, speech, assembly, and all the other freedoms with which we have been blessed.

Cyclone Update

Our relief efforts in Nakhongyi and Nakhonglay are going very well. We were able to supply the villages with enough food to keep them going during the rice planting season, and together the two villages were able to plant nearly 800 acres of rice. We also loaned the villages the money, at no interest, to purchase or repair several tractors, gasoline, and rice seed. The village elders will repay this "seed money" over the next three years, and it will be recycled into other ministry efforts at that time.

When we first received the funds to help these two villages plant a rice crop, we prayed that the rice would grow very well

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and would be the best rice in the whole area. It was getting late in the planting season, and the rainy season was just starting. The villagers had to work around the clock to get the rice planted in time. We prayed that their efforts would not be in vain, and that the rice would grow well in spite of the terrible conditions.



Part of the rice crop, growing strong and healthy

As of late October, it appears that the Lord has answered our prayers! Not only is the rice growing very well, it is the envy of the whole region! All of the surrounding villages are talking about how well our rice is growing, and how it is the best rice crop this year. It has grown so well that the villagers will be able to begin harvesting in December, nearly a month early!

Another great blessing upon this particular crop was how it was spared from an invasion of crabs. In late July to early Au-

gust, millions of little crabs came through the delta, feeding on the tiny shoots of new rice. Many villages had their new rice crop totally destroyed. Our two villages, however, had planted early enough, and the rice had grown up strong enough, that by the time the crabs came through, the rice stalks were too thick for them to cut.



Buddhist villagers hearing the Gospel

We have not just been helping these two villages with their physical needs. Our volunteers have visited the villages a dozen times over the past few months, and each time they visit, they share the Gospel with the people. On one visit, several of the leading men of the villages accompanied our volunteers back to Bogalay for a day-long session of Bible teaching and fellowship. After the evening meal, they all watched the Jesus Film. We have also helped the villagers by providing school supplies for their children.



Preparing to distribute food aid

Please continue to pray for these two villages. Now that the rice is almost ready to harvest, the villagers need four rice mills (two per village) in order to process the harvested rice. The mills cost about \$1,500.00 apiece. We are completely out of Cyclone Relief funds, so we need donations right away.

If you or your church can send any amount to help purchase the rice mills for Nakhongyi and Nakhonglay, it would be greatly appreciated! Make your check payable to "My Hope" and indicate in the memo, "Rice Mills." Thank you!

Another Close Call

The following story is an example of what some might call "coincidence." We call it a "divine appointment."

In the Myanmar Delta, after the cyclone, the government made it illegal to take food aid directly to the people, as our volunteers have been doing. Many people have been arrested and put in prison for doing so. This is one area where we believe the Scripture, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) takes precedence. If we were to give our rice to the government for distribution, we doubt that any of it would ever reach the people who need it most.

As our volunteers were secretly transporting rice from Bogalay to the two villages in the Delta, they were stopped by a high-ranking military officer and another government official. These two men were in charge of the region in which our volunteers had been working, and somehow had found out about their actions.



Transporting rice in the delta

The two men questioned them for quite some time about their activities. Our main volunteer, who has been overseeing our delta relief effort, is a young man from Northwest Myanmar, and a recent Bible college graduate. He is very well-spoken, and tried his best to convince the officials that they were only trying to help the people, and were not opposed to the government. As part of the proof that he is not opposed to the government, this young man shared with the officials how, five years before, he had personally helped many government officials out of a jam. This is the story he related to them.

When he was nineteen years old, a government-owned elephant in his village was stolen by a militant group from across the Myanmar-India border. The loss of the elephant was a terrible embarrassment for the local government, and unless they were able to recover the elephant, many police officers and government officials would lose their jobs; some might even be arrested.

The local and regional leaders all met together and tried to

come up with a plan to recover the elephant. The decided that someone needed to go across the border and negotiate with the militant group for the release of the “hostage.” After discussing this at some length, the village chiefs “nominated” our volunteer to do the job. They all recognized his qualities as a person of high moral character and winning personality, so they told him that he would have to get the elephant back.

Being only nineteen years old, however, our volunteer was not eager to take on such a dangerous job. His family was extremely distraught over the situation, knowing how violent the militants were, and how likely it would be that our volunteer would be killed. No one in the village really believed he would be able to recover the elephant, and they all thought the government was just using him as a scapegoat.

In the end, however, our volunteer decided that he should do this thing, and he set out to try to find and recover the stolen elephant. He soon found the group’s headquarters on the India side of the border, and then spent several days negotiating with them, going back and forth between the militants and the government officials.

Finally, one morning, much to the surprise of everyone involved, our volunteer came walking into the village, proudly leading the elephant behind him. He had been able to negotiate the release of the elephant, and the village did not even have to pay a ransom! Needless to say, the local officials were extremely happy, and many jobs were saved as a result of our volunteer’s heroic efforts.

Fast forward five years. Just as our volunteer was describing the above events, the military officer’s eyes lit up. “I was involved in that case!” he said. “I was a junior officer charged with returning the elephant! If you had not been able to get the elephant back, we would have all lost our jobs!”



One of our volunteers addressing the villagers

From that point on, the incident went from being an interrogation to a meeting of friends. “What can we do to help you?” asked the official, who is in charge of the whole region. Our volunteers were then given permission to continue distributing aid directly to the villages, as long as they kept the official informed of their whereabouts and what they were doing.

What are the odds of our volunteer meeting up with this person of influence, whom he had helped in a big way over five years previous, in a village hundreds of miles away, at this very time and place? Was this just a coincidence? We think not. We know that God is answering the prayers of his people, keeping our volunteers safe, and guiding their every step.

Support Programs: Critical

Thanks to the generous donations of many of you, we are able to provide monthly support for dozens of widows, orphans, and other poverty-stricken families in Myanmar. We are also providing a monthly stipend for many poor ministers of the Gospel, so that they can better feed the flock of God without worrying about feeding their own families.



A needy Christian family in Myanmar

Unfortunately, perhaps due to the trying economic times, several of those who committed to providing monthly donations to support these families have either stopped sending their monthly gifts altogether, or have fallen several months behind. We understand that if a family is struggling financially, discretionary giving is one of the first items to be cut from a family budget.

However, as an organization we want to continue supporting those widows and orphans that we have committed to. When a supported family’s monthly gift does not arrive, we move funds from our general account into the pastor and family support account so that our supported families do not have to go hungry. However, our general account is now nearly exhausted, so if you can help in any way, please do so as soon as possible.

CHANGE LIVES—BECOME A SPONSOR

If you are interested in becoming a family or a pastor sponsor, give us a call at (217) 415-9187, or email us at info@myanmarhope.org. You can vastly improve the life of an individual or a whole family!

\$30.00 per month is all it takes to provide a family with life-saving rice, medicines, clothing, and other necessities. \$60.00 per month will provide a pastor’s family with food and necessi-

ties, and will also allow him to spend time doing the work of ministry.

OTHER WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

There are many things that you can do to help our brothers and sisters in Myanmar. Here are some ways:

- Purchase a bicycle for a pastor (\$80.00)
- Purchase a short wave radio for a village (\$35.00)
- Purchase one or more Kuki language Bibles (\$5.00 each)
- Purchase a pig (\$150.00) or a piglet (\$40.00)
- Purchase a mithun cow (\$500.00)

Special Report: Rat Plague!

Every forty to fifty years in parts of Myanmar, India and surrounding areas, a certain species of bamboo comes into flower. This natural event sets off a chain of events that sometimes leads to widespread famine and pestilence. This species of bamboo has been coming into flower now for the last year or so, and many villagers are experiencing the dramatic effects.

How does bamboo coming into flower lead to famine? It happens because when bamboo flowers, it produces an enormous amount of seeds, which are a source of food for many animals, including forest rats. As the massive clumps of bamboo begin flowering, the rats are attracted to the area. As the protein-rich seeds are produced, the rats gorge themselves, and the increased stamina and nutrition leads to increased birthrates. The rats begin multiplying exponentially.



A Forest Rat

It does not take too long before the bamboo seeds are completely wiped out, leaving mass numbers of rats hungry and looking for food. They start coming down out of the mountains and forests in incredible numbers, devouring anything and eve-

rything in their path that is edible. During this plague of rats, whole villages can lose all of their stores of rice and other grains, as well as any rice that is still in the paddies waiting to be harvested. After the rats are gone, the villagers are left destitute. It can take years for a poor village to recover from such devastation.

This is now the case for many small villages in Northwest Myanmar. When we heard about the rat plague, we wanted to do what we could to help. Our volunteer workers in that area told us about one Christian village that was extremely hard hit – Phoilen Village. We were short on funds, but we sent what we could right away.

Phoilen Village is quite remote, so it took a lot of time and effort on the part of our faithful volunteers to bring the aid, but it was well worth the effort. These men risk their lives to help their brothers and sisters in Christ, and to bring the aid which your donations provide. They put together a short “journal” describing some of their activities:

October 12 : We left from Tamu Town and headed for Phoilen Village in the morning. Our first stop was Kalay Town to draw funds from the bank. Someone in Yangon made a mistake in the wire transfer, and they put down the wrong ID number. We had to wait three days (Oct. 13, 14, and 15) for the bank in Yangon to correct their error and send the correct ID number. Finally, on the 15th we were able to withdraw the funds.

October 16 : Traveled from Kalay Town to Kalewa Town by bus. From there we had to go to Mawlaik Town by boat. Stayed overnight in Mawlaik, because there were no more boats that night.

October 17—18 : Traveled from Mawlaik to New Canaan Village by boat. Stayed at New Canaan for awhile to greet and encourage the Christians. Travelled to Shwepyiaye the next day to greet and encourage the believers there.

October 19 : Continued on by boat from Shwepyiaye to Joljam Village.

October 20 : Finally made it to Phoilen village where the rat plague has affected the paddy farms. Met with the village chief, elders, and church leaders. We told them, “The believers in the U.S. have heard of your desperate situation and could not ignore you. They love you, even though they do not know you personally. They love God and love His people, especially those who are suffering from disasters. They shared what they had to comfort you, provide food for you, and pray for you. They cannot come to you, so we are coming to distribute the aid which

we received from them”.



Unloading the rice for Phoilen from the boat

They all were so overjoyed on hearing the news which they had not expected and never hoped to receive! It was the first time in the life of their village that they had ever received rice from others in the name of Christ! The chief, elders, and church leaders requested us to encourage them and teach the Bible in the midst of their hunger and sufferings.

There was no rice anywhere nearby to purchase, so we had to go to Homalin Town to make the purchase.

October 21 : We, along with some Phoilen villagers, went to Homalin Town where there was rice available for purchase from some Burmese businesses. We purchased thirty bags of rice, which we loaded onto a boat and carried up to Waedauk-changkong Village. We got the boat as close as we could to Phoilen, then we carried the rice to the village in bamboo-baskets.

October 22—23 : We distributed rice to all the villagers, along with the help of the village chief and the church leaders. They were so happy to receive rice for their families.

Later that day, and the next day, we held a seminar on Christian Unity and Christian Leadership. We encouraged them, and



Some of the villagers pose for a photo around the rice bags

taught them, that the followers of Christ must be united in Him, and follow his steps in their daily life, and to use the Bible as the main source of teaching for Christian life. We encouraged the villagers to trust in the Lord, to work hard for their livelihood, and to love one another as Jesus loves us.

October 24 : We came back to Joljam Christian Church and encouraged the believers to stay strong in their faith in the Lord Jesus and strong in their beliefs.

October 25—26 : We came back to Myenigon in Homalin Town where minister Ngamhao serves as the minister of Myenigone Christian Church. The Methodist church, the largest church building, opened their church for us to have a seminar for the whole village. There were at least ninety people there, including the ministers and elders from different denominations in the village. We taught them the importance of Christian Unity, especially in the midst of persecution and oppression. We strongly encouraged them to read and learn about unity from the teachings of Jesus.



The rice being distributed to the families

October 27—28 : We came back from Homalin to Kalay Town by boat and by bus. We copied our photos at a photo-shop in Kalay Town, and sent Palal some of the photos from the rice distribution at Phoilen village.

October 29 : We left Kalay Town and arrived back at Tamu Town. We all arrived home safe and sound. Our families had been waiting anxiously for us, and praying for us and for their brothers and sisters at Phoilen who were suffering such hardships.

Conclusion: When we hear about the difficult situations of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering under natural disasters and persecution, we cannot ignore their pleas for help. We prayed for them and asked God to provide for their needs. It is God who heard the voices of the suffering people

and opened the hearts of the believers in the West, who He has blessed so abundantly.

We used half of the funds which you sent for the first distribution at Phoilen village for the month of November, 2008. We are planning to visit them again in early December, 2008 and will use the rest of the funds to distribute enough rice for the month of December. We hope that the villagers may be able to harvest some new crops in January, 2009.

Going to the Dentist

Have you ever been to a dentist for a regular check-up or to have your teeth cleaned? In the U.S., most of us would answer "yes." In Myanmar, the answer for most people is, "no." We recognize that people should see a dentist at least once a year, preferably twice a year. In many developed countries, most people do that. In Myanmar, however, things are quite different. Most people in Myanmar are not aware of the importance of oral health and only visit the dentist when they experience severe problems. For most people in Myanmar, the cost of preventative dental health care is too expensive.

One of the problems in Myanmar is a lack of qualified dentists. There are only about one thousand dentists practicing in the country, which has a population of about 54 million. That means there is approximately one dentist for every 54,000 people; but even though most people live in the country, almost all of these dentists are in the big cities. The clinics are located in the center of the cities, in expensive buildings in the downtown area.

Most dental clinics in Myanmar are not up to international standards. They do not use modern instruments or techniques, and they are usually not safe from infectious diseases.

Because of all this, even when a person has a dental problem that has reached the critical stage, they have second thoughts about visiting a dentist because of the high cost of dental



City Dentist

treatment, the difficulty in obtaining the treatment, and potential for even worse side-effects.



Village Dentistry

When Palal first arrived, he was experiencing a toothache. When we made an appointment for him to see a dentist, we could tell he was very nervous about going. After that first experience with American dentistry, Palal was no longer nervous about seeing the dentist, and indeed has been there many times since, fixing years of neglect and poor dental hygiene.

Shortly after his first visit, Palal told us about an experience Kikim had, and then we understood why he had been so nervous. They were living in Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar. She was experiencing severe pain, probably an abscessed tooth. When she could finally not take the pain anymore, they decided to go to a dentist.

They had to get up very early in order to get to the dentist's office in time to get a number because people start lining up outside the office as early as 4:00 AM. To get there, they had to walk a half hour to catch a bus, which they then had to ride for one and a half hours. Then they walked another twenty minutes to get to the dentist. They arrived just after 4:00 in the morning, and got Kikim's name on the waiting list.

At 8:00 am, when the office opened for the day, Palal and Kikim were back at the office, waiting for her turn to see the dentist. Palal says that sometimes they call the names in order, and sometimes not, so you have to be there in case your name gets called, regardless of when you signed up. You just never know how long you will have to sit and wait.

When Kikim finally got in to see the dentist, she was given some anesthetic and then he got to work drilling on her tooth. About half-way through the procedure, however, the anesthetic wore off, and she had to suffer through the remainder of the drilling in extreme pain. Palal said that this is very com-

mon—the dentists do not have enough medicine to treat all of their patients, so they cut corners wherever they can.

After the intense pain and stress of the dental work, they had to retrace their steps back to the bus stop, ride a very hot, crowded bus for an hour and a half, then walk another half hour to get home. All of this in the extreme heat of the afternoon Yangon sun, after being up all the previous night with a bad toothache. She couldn't eat or talk for two days, and her gums were swollen for a week. Fortunately, she did not get any infections during her dental work, which is quite common.

If this is the state of dental care in the largest city in Yangon, you can imagine what dental care is like in the more rural areas. When dental work is available, it is very crude and dangerous, due to lack of electricity, modern tools, and know-how.



Solomon checks out something at the dentist's office

Things we take for granted in the west, such as abundant sources of calcium, fluoridated water, and so on, are just not available to people in Myanmar. The children do not drink milk, other than from their mothers until they are weaned. Mostly they drink water, and their diet consists mainly of rice, which does not contain much calcium. Toothbrushes and toothpastes are rare and expensive; instead they use their finger, or a stick, and a paste made from charcoal dust or the bark of a tree.

Because of all these things, from a very early age children have problems with their teeth. By the time they grow up, they have a lot of cavities, and it is normal to have lost some or even most of their teeth. It is very rare for an adult in the rural areas of Myanmar to have healthy teeth.

The next time you go to a dentist, or even when you brush your teeth, say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the wonderful blessing of modern dentistry. Also, say a prayer for your brothers and sisters in Myanmar, and elsewhere, who do not

share the same kinds of blessings.

We want to say a very special word of thanks to Dr. Rob Burris, of Springfield, Illinois, for providing many hours and thousands of dollars worth of free dental care for Palal, Kikim and Solomon. Dr. Burris is a great blessing to thousands of people in many parts of the world, where he travels (on his own dime, sometimes several times a year) to provide them with free, high-quality, dental care.

Family Update

Kikim and Solomon have been in America since June, and are adjusting quite well. Kikim is attending English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at Lincoln Land Community College. Solomon goes to preschool at Christian Day Care. They both love attending school!

They are also both learning English quite well, and Solomon especially is picking it up very fast. At his current rate, he will be speaking English almost as well as a native-born American by the time they go back home next summer!



Solomon and Kikim are ready for school!

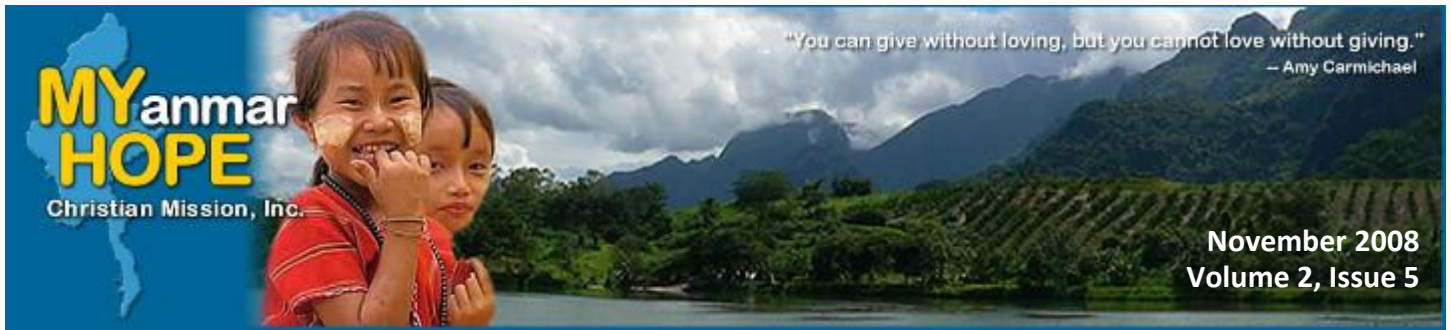


Solomon had his fourth birthday this month (November 26th). He loves to sing "Happy Birthday," and never seems to get tired of blowing out candles!

He also really loves our Miniature Schnauzer, Schatzie (who seems to tolerate him, most of the time :-)

We are always looking for opportunities to share about the work of Myanmar Hope Christian Mission! If your church or group would be interested in hearing our story, please contact us. No group is too large or too small.

Call us at 217-415-9187, or send an email to our engagement manager at MaryFern@MyanmarHope.org.



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**Bringing the eternal hope of Jesus Christ to the people of Myanmar in a holistic manner
 by addressing their spiritual, physical, emotional and educational needs**

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Recent Speaking Engagements and Road Trips

We are thankful for the many opportunities we receive to spread the news about our needy family in Myanmar. Some of the places we have been since our last newsletter:

- Onarga Christian Church (at Prairie States Camp, Watseka)
- Countryside Church of Christ, Hesperia, MI
- Nebraska Christian College, Omaha, NE (Missions Week)
- Wildewood Christian Church, Pappillion, NE
- Kingsway Christian Church, Omaha, NE
- Antioch Christian Church, Toluca, IL
- Hickory Point Christian Village, Forsyth IL
- National Missionary Convention, Tulsa, OK
- "Alive With Christ" Women's Bible Study, Springfield, IL

We are Thankful for the Little Ones!

Several young men and women were moved with godly compassion this past summer to help their brothers and sisters in

Myanmar. We are always blessed when others catch the vision for helping the needy in the Body of Christ, but even more so when it is children who do so!

One young man donated his entire race winnings to My Hope! Another group of wonderful children, all from one incredible family in Michigan, donated funds which they raised by selling items at their state fair!

Yet another group of enterprising young ladies solicited items to sell at a fantastic garage sale, and then donated the proceeds to missions! These girls bravely let their patrons know about the needs of the missions they were supporting, and this undoubtedly led to even more sales. Another great group of kids, a 3rd/4th grade Sunday school class at West Side Christian Church, donated their weekly offerings to My Hope!



Solomon and Kikim enjoying Joseph's race.
 Solomon loves race cars!

**Praise God for the little children,
 and their heart for missions!**