

Annual Report of Friends of Burma for 2007

Dear Friends,

Another year has passed and we have much good news to report. Our programs have benefited many persons in Burma and that is what FOB is all about--helping people and spreading the good news. Let me tell you about some wonderful people.

- In 1985 when Diana and I visited Burma, we heard that many children of ministers and Christian workers wanted to study for full time Christian Service but could not for lack of money. We established the Sowards Scholarship Fund (in honor of Erville & Genevieve Sowards). This year 360 children of Christian workers and others from poor families received this scholarship. Over 2,500 have received it over the years.
- The Pathein-Myaungmya Sgaw Karen Baptist Association has a program where they bring the most promising student from each of 36 rural churches to the city so they can complete high school. Six passed matriculation and five were able to go on to the university. Saw Nelson was unable to go on due to lack of family finances.
- The book "Where There Is No Doctor" in Burmese was given to the thirty young women who completed the Community Health Helpers Course. Copies were given to evangelists and mission workers in areas of little medical services. They would like to give copies to pastors but the cost is \$2.50 each.
- Mu Nay, a graduate of Agape Orphanage, has completed her second year of university majoring in chemistry. She is the only orphan to pass the matriculation test from this orphanage. Esther is doing fine in her third year LTh course at Demawsoe Bible School. She is currently on a evangelistic campaign to Dawei. These two represent the 140 orphans sponsored by you. The farm attached to Agape yielded twelve cart loads of paddy (unhusked rice) which will feed the orphans for half a year.
- There have been three great evangelism campaigns among the Kachins, Chins, and Karens. Sixteen young people lost their lives while participating, and FOB remembers them with a scholarship to the seminary or Bible School related to each. Their parents appreciate that their sacrifices are still remembered.
- A supporter of FOB and FOMGB purchased 27 key boards, and 43 guitars. These were distributed to BARS (a secular educational program), Bible schools, seminaries and orphanages. Word of this program spread quickly and many other worthy places requested them. They strongly feel music contributes to a lively worship and praise.

Learning to use keyboards



Promising High School Student



- Through FOB, the Pwo Karen Baptist Association's Women's Department purchased ten sewing machines to train women to earn a livelihood.
- Thanks to a generous donor 2000 copies of Zondervan Bible Dictionary and 3,000 copies of Summarized Bible were distributed to Bible schools, seminaries, pastors, evangelists and deacons.
- Neil's parents were editors of the Burma Baptist Chronicle (with another missionary) in 1963 celebrating 150 years of Baptist work in Burma. FOB contributed \$3,000 for printing a book on the last fifty years of ministerial work in Burma in order to give a copy to each of 3,000 Baptist ministers.
- Due to rising prices of commodities, FOB granted two month bonuses to the faculty of several Bible schools that have been unable to adequately pay their staff.
- Naw Paw Gaw of the Rangoon Karen Baptist Women's Development Center reported on a number of micro credit projects ranging from pig raising, leather bags, new seed for those whose fields were destroyed by floods, small garden tractor, video taping, and pea and corn growing. One example: Wife of pastor took loan and bought a sewing machine and now she gives back her loan. Pay back rate is about 50%. Should we consider the program a failure? Many, even if they can not pay back, are making a better living.
- Amy Barker from Sunrise Methodist church in Fort Wayne was concerned about the Karen refugee children having only hpanats (rubber sandals) to walk through the snow. She went to a number of businesses and churches and raised over \$1,000 to buy snow boots. She then went on to buy socks and gloves.

On March 1, 2008, 14 very committed volunteers and Board members met in Phoenix for our third annual meeting. We had a very productive meeting. Fourteen of the fifteen Executive

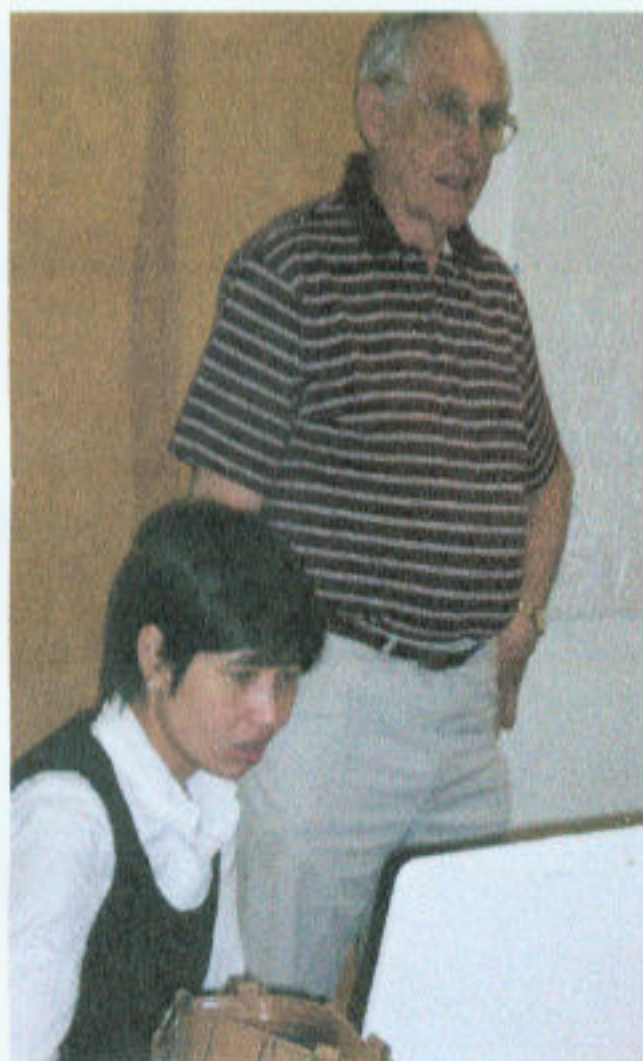
Committee members were present. They came at their own expense. There are no paid Board members at FOB! Several important things that came out at this meeting. We welcomed Dr. Ardeth Maung, daughter of Dr. Eh Wah and granddaughter of Dr. Chit Maung as a new board member.

- FOB spent \$1,699 for promotion--printing, envelopes, postage. That's less than 1% of income. \$1,200 is paid to our financial secretary in Burma (Myanmar). She is the only paid employee of FOB. Everything else is done by volunteers.

- In addition to FOB's programs, FOB helps other organizations in their ministries by transferring funds to Burma because we have a license to do that and know how.

- All but one of the students FOB brought to the U. S. have made regular repayments on FOB money spent for their education.

- A motion was made and carried to have FOB establish a relationship with the American Baptist Foundation for anyone to set up a Charitable Remainder Trust to benefit FOB. This allows the donor to receive income for life with FOB benefiting upon his or her death.



Ardeth Maung & David Horton The value of the U. S. dollar has fallen around the world

even against the Burma kyat. Therefore the cost of caring for an orphan has risen from \$156 to \$180 and a student from \$150 to \$175, and Myo evangelists from \$6 per month to \$8. We hope sponsors will be able to meet the increased cost but realize some donors are on very fixed incomes so we will work to make up the differences.

- We voted to increase the annual grant to Friends of Myanmar Governing Board (FOMGB) from \$10,000 to \$20,000. This is the group of leaders who volunteer their time to administer money to causes that they feel are the most important.
- The Karen Baptist Convention has established two new orphanages at Kyaukkyi and Thandaung. We voted to give each \$1,000 out of undesignated funds. These are those donations that some of you send and say "most urgent need".
- The next annual meeting will be February 28, 2009 in Phoenix. All FOB supporters are welcome to attend. As is normal in this kind of organization only the Executive Committee has votes.
- Various members took on additional responsibilities--Judy Lundy will improve the FOB folder, Ruth and John Peterson will track Matthew 25 Love Clinic & University Christian Fellowship, David Horton will monitor the hostels, Phil Schock will oversee the student sponsors.
- Our webmaster is now in Thailand with many responsibilities so we decided to ask Doug Lent and Jim Tompkins to add to our existing website. Philip Htoon will develop e-news e-mail.
- In order to follow normal guidelines for organizations like FOB, we decided to have five year terms for members of the Executive Committee with three expiring each year.
- Our officers are now President: Neil Sowards, Vice President: Phil Schock, Secretary: Diana Sowards, Treasurer: Jim Tompkins.



Eyes Glasses Waiting Distribution.

In addition to FOB's "traditional" long range projects, a number of donors have their own personal interests, deriving from their past experiences and history. One of these donors supports projects in Hpa-an, which are overseen by a respected minister. He gives financial support to poor pastors, helps people get jobs so that they can support their families, works with translation of books for the purpose of "bringing souls to Christ", and supports the Done Yin School, which has, under his supervision gone from 7 students in 2000 to 20 students in 2007. He also is working to upgrade the educational level of the school to be able to offer the BTh, a 4 year theology bachelor degree by 2009.

In 2006 about 9,000 Burmese Karen came from the Refugee Camps on the Thai-Burma border. In 2007 20,000 more came and another 19,000 are expected in 2008. Many of these 50,000 Karens are Baptist and if the Baptists of America help them resettle, there is a potential of 100 new churches of 300 members each. These refugees speak very little English and need a lot of help getting their medical and dental problems taken care of before their Medicaid runs out.

1. So volunteers are needed with a cell phone and car to take them to



Typical Karen Refugee Family

appointments at doctors' and dentists' offices and other appointments.

2. Friendship American families are needed to relate to a Karen family on a one to one basis.

3. Many American Baptist Churches and former ABC churches are totally unaware of these refugees and they need to be told about them. These refugees are spread all over the country so if you have friends in Baptist churches anywhere close to where Karens are being settled, please give us their names.

If you want to help Karen Baptist Refugees, please contact us and we will tell you the nearest one to you. Or check www.karenconnection.org

Report from FBC of Quad Cities, IL: "The Karens (and Chins) are being settled here in low cost housing but the housing seems to be good. Our church is falling in love with the 20-25 who come. The Karen Choir now has guitars and looking to a future date when we will have a Karen Sunday School class (with music) preceding the worship which they attend with all of us. The morning prayer is in Karen and English as well as the opening Scripture of Good News.

We had a dinner Sunday for them and I talked about the need to cut down on sugar especially for the kids and to drink water from the faucet instead of bottled water. We passed out the Nutrition material we have in Karen from the govt. About 45 people came to a baby shower that we had for Hei-Roh and Hey Nay who are expecting their second child in a month or so. All gifts were overwhelming. Thursday Sweet Salye Htoo, age ten, arrived with her grandmother. She had to wear her Aunt's shoes until we took her to the family store for clothes." John Peterson.

We regret to report the passing of Soe Soe Mar who was studying for her Doctor of Theology degree at Chung Chi College in Hong Kong. This will be a great loss for Shan State Seminary in Taunggyi. The second sister of the three sister orphanage in Taunggyi died leaving only one frail sister to run that ministry which has 134 children, all of whom need school fees paid.

We are trying our best to prepare for the future of FOB so that work can continue to help the people of Burma. To this end we have recruited some very talented and committed younger people to be on the Board. We hope and pray that things will get better for Burma in the future, both educationally and financially. The Baptist Christians there are doing a wonderful job of coping with many difficulties. Although some programs do not show the success that is hoped for--not every child in an orphanage does well scholastically--not every micro credit project succeeds--we feel that we are on the right track, and that even helping one or two justifies the time and effort that is put into trying, and that by our trying, we give hope to those who are struggling to do their best there. We thank all our supporters, both those who talk about Burma to others and educate others, and those who contribute, and those who pray. Please continue to keep the Board members, Neil and Diana, and all those laboring in Burma in your prayers.

We tried send this newsletter by e-mail but few told us of changes in their e-mail so we lost contact with some supporters. If you want an electronic version of this newsletter or wish to down load it from our website, please let us know.



Celebration Dinner after House Dedication. First FW, IN Refugee Family to Buy a House.



Orphans at Kwe Lwe, Pathein. Many need Sponsors.

Friends of Burma Wish List.

1. Sponsor for Saw Nelson who matriculated but was unable to go on to university at Pathein due to family lacking resources. \$300.
2. Sponsors for the brightest student from each of thirty mission fields so they can come to Pathein and attend high school \$50 per year.
3. Copies of "Where There Is No Doctor" at \$3.00 per copy. Word of the usefulness of this book has spread and many leaders want it.
4. Orphanages need sponsors for their orphans. Cost is \$180 per year.
5. Entrepreneur Loans. \$300 per group of sixteen. Frankly only about half will repay their loans due to inflation and unfamiliarity with business. You must decide if it is worth it.
6. Other worthy programs: Eye examination and glasses \$12. Aid to a Retired Christian Worker \$12. Hearing Aids for Ministers \$25.
7. The Karen Baptist Church at Taunggyi is building a hostel so youth for villages can get a middle and high school education. Cost is \$36,000. Any amount appreciated.

All donations are tax deductible. Checks should be made out to Friends of Burma, Inc., South Wayne Baptist Church, 548 Home Ave., Fort Wayne, IN 46807. E-mail: neildianasowards@juno.com Phone (260) 745-3658. Website: www.friendsofburma.org