

Friends of Burma, Inc. Newsletter

Friends of Burma Annual Report 2022



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Recently I was reading ProPublica, a news station, on my computer. They were talking about how to evaluate a nonprofit before you donate. Although we are a small charity, we are proud of careful handling of the money our donors send us. Here are some of the ways to evaluate us.

1. Look at our [990 form filed online](#).
2. Check our IRS status. We are a 501(C)(3) charity and all donations are tax deductible.
3. Program spending: Check [our website](#) to see how your donations are being spent.
4. Professional fund raising. FOB spends no money on professional fund raising.
5. Executive Salaries. All work in the U. S. is done by volunteers who receive no compensation. They also spend their own money to attend our Annual Meeting. We do have a paid Financial Secretary in Burma who distributes funds.
6. Advertising Expenses. FOB spends zero for advertising.

Overhead: Our overhead for 2022 was \$5,102 mainly for our three newsletters--postage and printing. Also for our Financial Secretary in Burma. So our overhead is 0.8% of our income (less than 1%) There are very few organizations with overhead that is less than 1%. This is one of the lowest in the U. S.



Karen refugees fleeing Burmese aerial attacks. Photo courtesy Free Burma Rangers.

It has been a very difficult year for our friends in Myanmar (Burma). Since the coup by the military generals in February 2021 there has been constant fighting by ethnic groups and the general Burmese population. Many houses have been burned and over a million persons have become IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). Inflation has been rampant with the kyat falling from 1500 to 2950. Our donors have really responded to their needs.

FOB in 2022 received \$695,704. This includes \$122,405 from likeminded organizations whom we help carry out their mission ministries.

We sent \$63,149. to support the nine orphanages which means support for 175 orphans. Two of the orphanages we support have had to flee to rural villages to escape the fighting. We have sent \$25,977 in Humanitarian Aid and more will be allotted at our annual meeting in February 2023.

Because of the Civil War and virus, most of our efforts have been directed to keeping people and institutions alive and hospitals functioning.

One board member raised over \$9,000 by getting sponsors for her 100 meter race for a generator of Matthew 25 Love Hospital in Pathein.

Alternative Christmas Gifts. This year FOB continued its program of Alternative Christmas giving which is \$50 to a very poor person or family. Here is one report:



Naw Myint Nwe lives in Byin Nyar village, Hinthada Township. She is 39 years old and has 5 boys, the eldest one is 17 years old and the youngest boy is 1 year old. Her husband was suicide last year because of a depression issue. She was 7 months pregnant and has 4 boys when her husband left her. Now her eldest son goes to the Yangon and works as a waiter in a small restaurant. The second son is dropping out of school and working as a daily wage worker in his village. The rest 2 boys are attending primary school in the village and the youngest one is still an infant age. So Naw Myint Nwe could not work for a family income.

Her 2 sons can support the family with only 100000 kyats (\$67) per month but for some months only 80000ks (\$53.) because his salary is only 150000Ks per month. The second son, 14 years old, can support his family as much as he can. So when we went to her house with her pastor her youngest son was sick and she had no cash in her hands. People, in her surrounding, also help her family as much as they can. So when I gave the Christmas gift (150000 Ks-\$50) from FOB to her family, I explained about the gift. She was so happy about the unexpected gift and said words of thanks to FOB. After that, I prayed for her family and came back to the pastor's house. Naw Myint Nwe received the Christmas gift on 20th November 29, 2022. Naw P. G.

MIT Report from Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) is the highest level Baptist school in Burma which also trains leaders from other denominations. Because of the virus, it has not had physical classes the last two years and therefore no income. Fortunately FOB was able to give \$10,000 and a couple on FOB's board gave \$11,000 which enabled MIT to give its teachers half pay which helped keep them from looking for jobs elsewhere.

Self Help Groups. Naw Paw Gaw continues to form groups of women into self help groups so they can learn about business and earn money for their families.



Naw Rosemy George, a member of a self help group, with her raising pig's project.

Aid to Mission Field. A Chin couple reports:

We are told that the people who live in the mission field of Sayama Aye Aye Taw are facing a very difficult situation. Because of the factories which are shut down, many people near Shwe Pyi Thar became jobless and some houses did not even have rice to eat.

We heard that some parents in Shwe Pyi Thar are giving away even their children to others to adopt.

My husband and I decided to go there and distribute it in cash. This time we did not want to distribute rice bags because we heard that some rice distributors in Shwe Pyi Thar were reported and arrested. Distributing rice bags is very obvious and attracts many people.

We went there and Sayama invited 32 households to her house, one person from each house. My husband encouraged them with the Word of God for about 30 minutes. He gave them moral and spiritual support, not to give up.

After encouraging them, we distributed each of them one envelope which has 10,000 MMK. (\$3.30) We gave the mission center 50,000 MMK. The taxi fee is 30,000. Please kindly see some pictures.

They were very very happy to receive the cash. Some of them are taking medicine for kidney, lung, liver etc. They said the cash was very helpful to buy medicine. According to them, some families are hardly eating one meal a day.

My husband and I were happy to see their joyful faces.



Sowards Scholarships. The Erville and Genevieve Sowards Memorial Scholarships were given to 36 students at MIT. Each received 100,000 kyats. (\$66.00). Three hundred and ninety one students all across Burma received this scholarship last September.

Refugee Relief Supplies. Christians are helping those without food which FOB pays for but they have to buy and take the risk of giving it out.

WISH LIST

1. Glasses for a Bible School student \$25.00

2. A woman wants to take the MDiv program at MIT so she can go into ministry. She is recommended by a professor \$424.00
3. Supplemental rice and oil for destitute families \$40.00
4. Humanitarian support to associations helping IDP's \$500.00
5. Scholarship aid to needy students \$150.00
6. Orphan sponsorship for one year (this is a supplement and doesn't cover all expenses.....\$360.00
7. Medical supplies to small clinics \$500.00
8. Starting a self help group for women to learn business \$300.00

Why I support Friends of Burma.

When I married Neil I did not know what giving was. Everything I learned about generosity came from Neil, especially after we returned from our first visit to Burma in 1985. It has been such a joy raising funds to help the hardworking Burmese, who do such a good job with so few resources. They truly know how to help the poor, sick, and downtrodden people of Burma. I support Friends of Burma because I know practically every penny is spent in the most careful way possible. You have only to see the reports sent to us to know that FOB is meeting important needs in the most cost effective way. *Diana Sowards*

Please tell your friends. We hope you will be satisfied with FOB and this Annual Report. Please tell your friends and churches and organizations about the work we do. An electronic version is available that is easy to pass on. Request it from neildianasowards@gmail.com

Check out our website: <http://friendsofburma.org>

This newsletter was compiled by Neil & Diana Sowards.

Neil is working on a book "When God Was Most Real to Me." If you are interested in passing on your religious experiences to the next generation, please contact Neil Sowards.

My story is that Diana and I went to Burma in 1985. We expected that we were just adding number 34 to the list of countries visited. But God had other plans. God spoke to me in Rangoon and told me He wanted me to get involved with helping the Burmese. He told me to listen! I heard ministers sorrowfully saying their sons wanted to be a minister but they could not afford to send him to school. So I asked God, "Do you want me to establish a scholarship fund for minister's children?" God answered, "Yes!" "But God," I answered, "It would take a hundred thousand dollars just to make a dent in the problem." "Two!" God answered. "Two hundred thousand dollars! I don't know anyone I could ask for that kind of money!" "Don't ask anyone. Raise it yourself! I've given you a real ability to make money. Use it!"

So Diana and I founded Friends of Burma. We have given, through Myanmar Baptist Convention, over 11,000 scholarships to children of ministers. And we have been able to do

more and more each year. We have been joined by a board of sixteen very dedicated persons who give generously of their time and money. Plus we have over six hundred faithful donors who give regularly to help the Burmese. So God was most real to me in that hotel room in Burma when He told me to redirect my life and do His work. It had been a very fulfilling journey!!!

Years later, I was walking on Seminary Hill in Insein, Burma. An approaching woman stopped me and asked, "You're Neil Sowards?" "Yes," I acknowledged. "My husband was a pastor and we have three sons. He died. Each of my sons wanted to go into the ministry but we had no money. One son got a Sowards Scholarship from MICT. Another got at Sowards Scholarship from KBTS. And my third son got a Sowards Scholarship from MIT. Thank You!"

So please share with me how God has been real to you so we can pass it on.



Karen Refugees hiding in cave from Burmese army. Photo courtesy Free Burma Rangers.

We do not share our donors' list with anyone! And, to keep our costs down, we do not send address labels, note cards, pens, pictures, etc.



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April 02, 2021