

FRIENDS OF BURMA NEWSLETTER – FALL 2008

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A COMMITTEE OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANS FOR AIDING THE PEOPLE OF BURMA

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Well Deserving Honor



**Dr. Neil and Diana Sowards accepting the
Peace and Justice Award**

and Allen County. It was established in 1944, and represents over 120 congregations in Allen County. Other ministries include A Baby's Closet, The Food Bank System, and the Weekday Religious Education Program.

On June 11, 2008, The Peace and Justice Commission of Associated Churches presented the Peace and Justice Award to the founders of Friends of Burma (FOB), Dr. Neil and Diana Sowards, for faithfully serving the refugees in Fort Wayne, IN, for nearly two decades. The co-recipient of this award was Catholic Charities, which helped resettle nearly 3000 refugees in Fort Wayne.

**** The Peace and Justice Commission is a part of Associated Churches of Ft. Wayne*

Helping Storm Survivors!

Friends of Burma continues to offer support to the victims of the cyclone Nargis in Myanmar. Right after the storm, FOB executive members voted to release an emergency relief fund in the amount of \$20,000 to the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC). The storm killed one third of the population under KBC association, including 28 pastors, and



**Tractor & power tillers
handed to storm survivor**

destroyed many KBC-affiliated churches. KBC was in the forefront in assisting all victims and used FOB's initial fund in the rescue and recovery effort.

Another \$8,500 was released from FOB's own budget later and Friends of Myanmar Governing Board decided to purchase the following items to resettle the storm victims: eight boats to transport people and goods, 250 subsidized houses for pastors whose houses were destroyed, 3,000 mosquito nets, 100 educational scholarships, 2000 flashlights, 9500 yards of plastic tarp for temporary shelter, and 50 guitars.



Collapsed churches

The devastating outcome of Cyclone Nargis affected FOB's members and contributors in unimaginable ways. Many raised funds and engaged in activities to help out in special ways in which they felt called. The following describe a couple of highlights of the collaborated effort:

- Philip Htoon and Nwe Nwe Win, executive members of FOB, embarked on an organized fund-raising effort by forming the Myanmar Burma Relief Organization (MBRO) affiliated with Friends of Burma. Since MBRO was founded in May 2008, nearly \$35,000 has been collected. Ninety-eight percent of this fund was used to purchase and distribute most urgently needed relief items, which include mosquito nets, drinking water bottles, clothing, medical supplies, and consumption goods (rice, sardines, etc...). Currently, MBRO and Project C.U.R.E. have made final preparations to deliver a 40-foot container of medical supplies and equipment (worth an average wholesale value of \$400,000) to the victims of Cyclone Nargis. For the latest updated activities, please visit www.myanmarburmarelief.org.
- Dr. Ardeth Thawngmung, executive member of FOB, visited the areas affected by the storm. She had the opportunity to meet villagers, conduct interviews, identify their needs, and offer encouragement and support with the funds raised in the U.S. Donated materials included five tractors, rice seeds and diesel fuel sufficient for 50 acres of farm work, one boat, and medicine.



MBRO delivering aid and hope



Friends of Burma helping to rebuild houses

Erville Porwy, the secretary of Pathein Myaungmya Karen Baptist Association, reports – “It is now rehabilitation time. We are building shelter, pumping out salty water from ponds and wells, and providing food, drinking water, medicine, power tillers, diesel oil, fishing nets, engine boats, paddy seeds, etc. We tried to dig tube wells 300 feet deep in some villages and only salt water came up! We promised to support the victims' children's educational expenses. The school is already open and so far we have 1212 students in primary through high school who are Nargis students. Please pray for us and help us!”

Helping Deliver Healthcare

Report from Kayin Baptist Healthcare Center (KBHCC)

On May 4, 2008, two days after the storm, Kayin Baptist Convention Healthcare Center (KBCHCC) started its relief work. People from Pathein, Myaungmya, and Bogalay were evacuated and refugee camps were set up at the Pu Tha Phyu Seminary in Pathein, Myaungmya Sakaw Kayin Association Headquarter in Yedwinyegan, and Myoma Baptist Church in Bogalay. Many were without food and drinking water for three to four days. Some older villagers and children died due to severe cold and starvation. Many sustained serious bodily injuries and almost everyone suffered from acute respiratory tract and gastrointestinal tract infections. A large number of pregnant women and new mothers in postnatal period were present. All the people were fearful and greatly saddened. KBCHCC set up mobile medical clinics in Pathein, Myaungmya, and Bogalay.



Storm survivors seeking help from KBCHCC



Reroofing the Bogalay church

Emergency medical treatments were given. Those who needed operations were sent to nearby hospitals and KBC clinic in Yangon.

Then, the emergency situations arose as the church that housed 500 survivors lost its roof and the pastor's house providing shelter was near collapse. Food and water were

running out. As more villagers sought shelter, KBCHCC team decided to recruit more volunteers from Yangon to repair houses, build more shelters, and travel to remote villages to help.

Throughout this time, God had been faithful. Words cannot express how much the money you sent helped us with the relief work. On May 16, when we helped deliver two new babies in Myaungmya camp, it made all of us shed tears of sadness and joy; sadness because lives were lost; joy because new lives were born, which is a sign of hope. Later, survivors were sent back to their villages. Now, mobile clinics at Pathein and Myaungmya are closed. But the Bogalay clinic operating at the church is still open as 150-200 patients come to seek medical treatment daily. The clinic committee identifies that a new, permanent clinic in Bogalay would bring healthcare to 47 villages in upper and lower Bogalay regions. The Bogalay Church already received construction permission. They need \$15,000 to build this clinic. Please help with this healing ministry!



KBCHCC doctor treating a monk



Ambulance FOB donated years ago still delivering despite countless breakdowns

Helping Orphans



Eight-year-old Naw Catherine died in the storm.

Many children became orphans as a result of cyclone Nargis. Hpu Saw Bu Orphanage in Yedwin Yegan added 56 orphans to its already crowded facility. Kwe Lwe Orphanage also added 45 orphans. FOB is sad to report that Hpu Saw Bu lost six of their children to cyclone Nargis: Naw Pearl Land, Naw Catherine, Nant Sanda Oo, Naw Shwe Ei, Khu Heh Su, and Naw Nway Nay Paw. These two orphanages are providing counseling for the orphans and doing everything they can to care for these children. A dining hall and kitchen is 75 percent complete and a new building is also underway to accommodate additional orphans at Kwe Lwe. The cost will be \$30,000. FOB provided \$5,000 for his building. KBC is also making plans to construct a new building for Hpu Saw Bu that will cost \$33,000.



New orphans at Kwe Lwe Orphanage

Please continue to support orphans. Last year, the fees were \$156 (\$13 per month) but we need to increase it to \$180 for 2009 (\$15 per month) because of devaluation of the dollar and inflation. Persons wishing to help purchase new school uniforms could do so for \$5 per child. Most orphans have just one uniform. Pray for the workers and directors who are laboring under such severe circumstances.

Helping with Education

Inductive Bible Study

FOB continues to support the Inductive Bible Study Program of KBC, designed to assist all Christians to be faithful Bible readers, obedient to the command of God, and productive in serving God. Thara Daniel Ban Doo is spearheading this program. He was trained in the U.S. for this specific ministry. Those that attended this program stated that this is a very thought-provoking, Bible-based teaching that is much needed for the spiritual growth of Christians in Burma.

Hpu Mya San Bible School, Pathein



Students of Hpu Mya San Bible School studying on the floor. They allowed children affected by the storm to use their facilities.

Hpu Mya San was a missionary to Thailand and Burma border areas. He became the first martyr while working with the Pwo Karen people and this Bible school is named after him. Hpu Mya San Bible School is affiliated with the Pathein-Mayungmya Pwo Karen Baptist Association. In the aftermath of the storm, Hpu Mya San Bible School started caring for refugees. The adults have returned to their devastated villages, but 150 children remained on the Pwo Karen compound to go to school. Much of the resources of the school have been given to the children. The thirty seminary students gave their tables and benches for these children to use while they study on the floor. They are attempting to raise \$130,000 for a three-story building to build classrooms and a library by 2010 when they will celebrate the school's silver jubilee.

Emergent Outstanding Students Program

The Pathein Myaungmya Karen Baptist Association helps students from villages with great academic potentials to attend high school in Pathein, as many villages do not have high schools. In Burma, to graduate from high school is extremely difficult; less than 20 percent graduate annually. Fifteen out of 20 students from this program graduated from high school this year. In Ayerwaddy Division, where the graduation rate is only 30 percent, this is an astounding 75 percent success rate. Five students graduated with distinctions in English, Math, Chemistry, and Burmese. Three of these five students were sponsored by individual donors through Friends of Burma. We thank all of them very much. Please continue to support this program!

Dr. Chit Maung Library

Last year DCML celebrated its 10th anniversary. What a wonderful journey it has been! The last decade has seen a transformation from an ambitious idea to a vivid reality and from a subsidized project to a financially independent non-profit entity. Many have contributed to this successful story, but Neil and Diana deserve much of the credit for wholeheartedly supporting DCML. Also, had it not been for the librarian Anna Barbara Maung, the library would have ended as one of the many short-lived international projects in which the locals have



Dr. Chit Maung Library – closing ceremony of summer English course (left); students learning at the library (right)

little clue as how to execute the “foreign” vision. DCML has been most successful in providing English courses. Summer enrollment totaled 128. Weekend English classes are designed to prepare students for the Cambridge Young Learners English Test (YLE) offered by the British Embassy. The YLE Tests are a series of reading, writing, listening, and speaking examinations for learners of English as a foreign language. The beginner tests are available at three levels - Starters, Movers and Flyers. After getting the Flyers’ certificate, students can aim for the next levels: Key English Test (KET) or the Preliminary English Test (PET). DCML offers preparation courses for all of these five levels. Twenty seven students from DCML’s English classes recently passed the YLE tests. Wishing the Library many more successful years!

Go Forward Press



Go Forward truck transporting goods to storm victims!

For the first time ever, Go Forward Press with 28 full-time staff is not only running its business debt-free but also generating a monthly net income of \$700 - \$1000 for the Karen Baptist Convention. FOB donors helped Go Forward purchase an offset machine and a truck. The truck has been transporting relief teams and goods to disaster areas after the storm. We extend our appreciation to all of you who always pray for us and help us.

Report from Naw Ler Blute Po



By the grace of God, I am now in my second year pursuing a master’s degree in Teacher Education Training & Professional Development at Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand where I serve as a president of PKSf (Payap Karen Students Fellowship). Our fellowship went to Karen villages to promote the gospel and literacy during summer. I also participate in activities of PMSF (Payap Myanmar Students Fellowship). I enjoy being a group leader and choir member of Chiang Mai City Karen Baptist Church. I am very thankful to God for these wonderful experiences. My heartfelt thanks go to all of my sponsors in America and Australia! God bless you!



Ler Blute Po (in white blouse holding choir book) singing with Karen villagers

Helping Refugees in America

Many more refugees continue to arrive in the U.S. Challenges abound as the refugees have to make drastic adjustments in a new country. The following describes how FOB members are involved in helping the refugees:

Fort Wayne, Indiana

Diana and Neil Sowards have been heavily involved with the Burmese Karen Refugees in Fort Wayne. There are now close to 1,000 with little English skills and many medical problems. Diana drives over 800 miles each month taking them to various appointments. One of the problems she solved was getting Pro Bono lawyers to get the

court to appoint an aunt as a legal guardian for a severely retarded girl. She had them write a thank-you letter to the lawyers who said it was the third thank-you letter they had received in 35 years! Neil purchased a run-down house for a widow with eight children and is fixing it up so that her monthly outlay is now within her means.

Moline, Illinois

In September, 2007, John and Ruth Peterson, executive members of FOB, made their first contact with a Karen family they agreed to care for upon arrival. Within a couple weeks they met more of the newly-arrived families. Here are their own words: "When asked what we did, we said we were pastors of First Baptist Church, Moline, Illinois. The word spread quickly and we now have 55 to 60 Karen getting involved in church activities. Our Sunday School has grown from a half dozen children last year to more than 30. Our children's choir has renewed vigor. The Karen community worships in their language at 8:30 a.m. each Sunday. During that time the children are involved in Sunday School in Karen and in children's choir in English. At 10 a.m. the Karen community joins the rest of the church for a worship service in English. Beginning in September, an afternoon praise service was established to be held once a month for those who work on weekends and cannot make it to church in the morning. Thirty five baptized Karens joined the First Baptist Church of Moline. The church recently purchased a new 15-passenger van to supplement the 12-passenger van they had. We are a wonderful family of God. . . and more are coming each month!"

Phoenix, Arizona

Judy Lundy, executive committee member of FOB, and her friends continue to provide backpacks and school supplies for refugee kids in Phoenix for the fourth year in a row.

Tansy Kadoe and Adam Maung, also executive committee members, translated AZ Driver License Manual and application forms to apply for government assistance. The manual is available for \$15 and application forms are free. Tansy and Adam conducted classes on completing application forms for government assistance, driving in America, and banking and finances for refugees.



Karen refugee children happy to get backpacks to start school in America

Wish List

▪ Support farmers in Pathein.	\$	3,000	per tractor
▪ Support 101 new orphans at Hpu Saw Bu and Kwe Lwe orphanages.	\$	180	per child
▪ Support student refugees in Pathein to attend school (\$265 each for a year includes tuition, textbooks, uniform, food, mosquito net, etc...).	\$	265	per student
▪ Give Burma-made mosquito nets.	\$	5	per net
▪ Provide supplemental aid to Bible School students who can no longer receive support from their families, affected by Nargis.	\$	30	each
▪ Give guitars to churches under rehabilitation.	\$	50	each
▪ Sponsor doctors and nurses to work at KBC mobile clinic.	\$	600	per month
▪ Give an ambulance/truck to KBC clinic.	\$	21,000	
▪ Help build a new dormitory and library for Hpu Mya San Bible School.	\$	130,000	
▪ Help build a new dormitory at Kwe Lwe Orphanage. They already raised \$13,043.	\$	16,957	still needed
▪ Help build a new dormitory at Hpu Saw Bu Orphanage.	\$	50,000	
▪ Help build a new clinic that will bring healthcare to 47 villages in Bogalay.	\$	15,000	

All work in the U.S is done by volunteers. Friends of Burma is a 501(c)(3) organization. "All donations are tax deductible."