

# FRIENDS OF BURMA ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2012

548 Home Ave., Fort Wayne, IN 46807-1606

## A COMMITTEE OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANS FOR AIDING THE PEOPLE OF BURMA

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What is Friends of Burma?  
What are our goals? What  
have we accomplished?

There are many times in the  
year that we ask ourselves  
some of these questions. We  
started out in 1985 after our  
initial trip to Burma (now  
called Myanmar) with Bill  
and Marion Hackett.  
Although we had had long  
distance contact with many

Burmese Christians through Neil's missionary parents, our trip with the Hacketts, who were American Baptist missionaries, opened many doors to us and opened our eyes to the needs.

We, Neil and Diana, came back to the U.S. determined to do something to help. Originally, it was just the two of us. We would look at each other and say "Well, should we do this—or should we do something different?" It was a simple, two-person operation. We used our own money. At that time Neil had left the ministry and had gone into business. The business was modestly successful, so we were able to do that.

Later, as we carried on the work—mostly scholarships for poor pastors' children and other poor children, we began to branch out into some other areas. Early on, we were asked to help in building projects. This takes a great deal of more money than simple scholarships, so we began speaking and reaching out to others, asking for help for these building projects and other programs. Building an apartment building for Myanmar Institute of Theology professors was one of our first efforts at raising support for buildings.



Along the way, others with an interest in Burma began to help us, both in donating money, time and in offering advice. Their donations were tax exempt due to our association with an American Baptist church. Later, we did the paperwork (all by ourselves) to become a 501(c)(3) charity, registered with the U.S. government. I say “all by ourselves.” Up until recently, we have had very little professional help. We have prided ourselves on being an all volunteer organization. We now have 380 faithful supporters.

We are now proud to have an all volunteer executive board, which has people on it who advise us, help us with our tax paperwork and our accounting and administer various parts of our programs. Phil Schock, a member of the Executive Committee, visited Burma in January, 2013 at his own expense.

We do not have any paid manager, or fund raisers. We do not have grant writers. We depend on YOU, our mailing base, to talk about us, tell other people about what we are doing, and tell about our remarkable organization, in which 99% of our income goes to the people of Burma. There are few organizations which can say that, and that information does make a difference to some people.

Our goals, as always, have been to help the people of Burma as they wish to be helped. Our three largest programs are:

1. Assisting orphans or children in need. I say “children in need” because many of the children in the childcare centers are from single parent families which cannot support them or provide even elementary education for them. This is what happened in the U.S. during the Depression. Many children went to orphanages because the families could not feed them. Much of our support this last year has come in as \$240 donations to help these children in need. So, increasingly, that is what our achievements have been. Our donations for orphans have been approximately \$46,842, supporting children in 5 childcare centers. I think we cannot visualize the enormous impact this had had on the lives and futures of these children, in spite of the fact that we do not provide detailed biographies of them as do so many more sophisticated and professional organizations do. However all of these donations go to help the child and none for persons writing letters on their behalf.

2. Scholarships for children of pastors studying for full time Christian Service. 398 were awarded by the Myanmar Baptist Convention in 2012.

3. Aiding two hospitals and various clinics.

We have been increasingly asked to help with building projects. After years of failed



efforts to get permits, that changed about 3 years ago.

We also fulfill a key function for some other organizations, to supply their donations and grants to their own projects—such as the Blind School, Women’s work or the Gideons. This, we are happy to do, insofar as they fall within the limits of the U.S. government regulations. We have operated with a license from the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC). There are very strict sanctions against any kind of aid to Burma. If we wanted to continue our small aid for microcredit lending, such as a \$50 loan to a woman starting a mohingha business, we would have needed a special license to do that. Thus, we ended that aid.

Our focus on humanitarian and educational assistance falls within the purview of the OFAC regulations. But this license must be renewed every 2 years, and as of Jan. 15, we have not had any response to our request to renew our license in February. There is a general license, under which we are assuming we can also operate as we have been doing for the past 27 years. Perhaps the sanctions will be eased as the Burma government improves its humanitarian efforts.

We have about fifty other smaller programs. **Supporting those studying to be doctors** is one of these, supported by one donor. Two have now completed their training and are helping out at the Matthew 25 Love Hospital until they get their post graduation mandatory assignment.

Another program involved bringing the **most outstanding student** from each of thirty villages to Pathein so they could complete Middle and High School. 79% of those taking the Matriculation Test passed compared to less than 30% nationwide.

Each year we give the various Bible Schools and Seminaries a grant which they use as they think best. The Paku Baptist Association Divinity School at Taungoo used its 300,000 kyats to aid three of its **faculty to get more education** (Bachelor of Theological Studies).



The **Dr. Chit Maung Memorial Library** which FOB help found, celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> year of service in 2012. Besides the usual books and magazines, this library has a computer room, exercise room, and various classes—several levels of English and computer.

**School of Inductive Bible Study** led by Saw Daniel. A program to give existing pastors more advanced Bible study. It is supported by several FOB members.

**Small Clinic aid.** Several donors are giving \$200 a month to allow several small clinics to give medicine to the poor. One in Sittwe, in the center of ethnic violence between the Muslims and Buddhists, is particularly ministering to a great need in a difficult situation.

**Myo Mission Project.** Over the last eighteen years several FOB donors have heavily supported the evangelistic work among the Myo people in the Arakan district (west coast of Burma.) The work has steadily grown so there is now a Myo Bible School and enough churches for a Myo Baptist Convention.

**Nyaungleben Bible School.** Another FOB supporter has greatly encouraged this school with several very large donations which has greatly aided in the building of several buildings. This school is in an area where the Burma army has done much damage.

We have finished another year and are greatly encouraged by the sacrificial giving that you, our supporters, continued to give to help the people of Burma. This is so important because with each mailing, we find out several have passed on. They are sorely missed. With so many good organizations all seeking money, we are finding fierce competition. If you received a hard copy of this newsletter and would like an electronic version in color, please contact us at [neildianasowards@juno.com](mailto:neildianasowards@juno.com) You can then send it or portions of it to friends and maybe they would feel moved to help the people of Burma. In this way, you can help us.

Our website is [friendsofburma.org](http://friendsofburma.org) and you could mention you support FOB on Facebook, Twitter, etc.



Times appear to be changing in Burma. One sign was the **First Delta Pwo Karen Fellowship** meeting (above) with 218 participants who were Catholic, Baptist, Anglican, Seventh Day Adventist and Buddhists. They met December 26-29, 2012 for the purpose of working together to raise awareness of Pwo Karen language and culture. In previous times it was not wise for ethnic minorities to emphasize their uniqueness. The fact that such diverse groups could meet and discuss their Pwo Karen culture is a step forward.

Donations are tax deductible and can be sent to Friends of Burma, Inc., 548 Home Ave., Fort Wayne, IN 46807-1606. E-mail: [neildianasowards@juno.com](mailto:neildianasowards@juno.com) Phone: 260 745-3658.

This report compiled by Diana & Neil Sowards.

**Wish List.**

1. Grant to Retired Christian Worker \$20.
2. Eyeglasses examination and prescription glasses. \$20.
3. Medicine for the poor at small clinics. \$200 per month.
4. Supporting an orphan or neglected child for a whole year \$240. For example at Pu Saw Bu in Yedwinyegan we have Saw He’K’Baw DOB 1/1/08. He is in Kindergarten, Karen, Christian, and in good health. He lost both parents in Nargis Hurricane. (134,000 people lost their lives in that disaster.) He needs a sponsor.
5. Supporting an outstanding student from a village to study in Pathein \$200
6. Scholarship for a student at a seminary studying for full time Christian Service \$300.
7. Supporting a Christian studying to become a doctor \$1000.00.
8. Naming a room at MIT seminary in honor of a loved one \$5,000.
9. Building Projects: Pathein Myaungmya Karen Office Building, Pwo Karen Classroom Building Pathein, Nyaungleben, Library Extensions of Myanmar Institute of Theology, Classroom Building Paku Karen Baptist Seminary at Toungoo, Shan State Bible School at Taunggyi, Baptist Hostel at Taunggyi, Building for patients’ families at KBC Hospital. Any amount appreciated.



**Total Giving by Category**

\$ 99,489.87	CE	Building projects, Bible Schools, Seminary, Scholarships
\$ 50,421.05	GF	General Fund
\$ 712.00	IMO	Memorial Donation
\$ 245.00	LI	Library Support
\$ 13,903.00	LP	Loan Repayment
\$ 27,583.77	MED	Health Care, Clinics, Training, etc
\$ -	MI	Support of Ministry by Individuals
\$ 70,940.00	MIT	Myanmar Inst Theology support, building
\$ 65,062.00	MO	Support of Ministry Organizations
\$ 46,842.66	ORP	Support of Orphans, Child enrichment, hostels
\$ 20,810.41	SI	Support of Individuals
\$ 18,739.81	SP	Special Project, Eyeglasses, well, nets, retired workers, etc
\$ 19,915.95	SR	Special Humanitarian Relief
<b>\$ 434,665.52</b>		<b>Total Giving</b>

In my old age I’ve reconnected to people of my past. One revelation was with a college roommate and his wife. She was a trust officer in a bank for thirteen years. She revealed that many left money to grandchildren who rarely used their windfall in ways that the originators would have approved. She could only think of four examples of young people using their

inheritance in a constructive way! In the Sharp-Sowards family tradition, money was left to causes and programs, not descendants.

The money that comes in that is not designated goes into our General Fund. The Executive Committee then uses it to meet needs no one has given to specifically. For example we loaned \$50,000 to Myanmar Institute of Theology so they could finish their much needed building. They have repaid us.

The Baptists of Burma will celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Adoniram and Ann Judson. Stan Murray of Baptist International Ministries is taking a tour. E-mail him for details at: [stan.murray@abc-usa.org](mailto:stan.murray@abc-usa.org)

Neil & Diana will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>.



Our Executive Committee in 2012 (four absent)

Phil Schock, Neil Sowards, David Horton, Diana Sowards, Jim Tompkins, Ruth Peterson, May Pearl, Adam Maung, Tansy Kadoe, John Peterson, May Hmun.