

## FRIENDS OF BURMA ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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“SOME VILLAGERS ARE EATING  
PIG FEED” (Free Burma Rangers)

“PEOPLE ARE DIVIDING PAIN PILLS  
INTO 4 PIECES AND SHARING” F.M.



Sorting supplies for refugees (IDPs)

Dear Friends and Supporters of Friends of Burma,

The comments above are some of the things that are being conveyed to us about the situation in Burma. This has been a year of great suffering for many people. There is a civil war going on between the military and long time ethnic armies, joined by volunteers from the cities and villages. If this is not bad enough, the military has been paying people to form militias to fight against the Peoples' Defense Forces (PDFs). This will have long term consequences because it is neighbor fighting neighbor. There is little prospect for a cessation of fighting.



Living arrangement for IDPs

Since this is happening, the long time focus of FOB (theological education, microcredit, orphans, etc) has taken a backseat to humanitarian assistance. As people are bombed and strafed out of their villages, they have moved into what are perceived as safe areas such as monasteries, churches, and schools. However, these have become targets also, so the suffering is great.

Since the military coup in 2021, the economy has been under great pressure. A 111 lb. bag of rice costs twice as much as it used to, and sometimes more than twice.

When we send \$50 in support, it can buy only half as much cooking oil as previously. Friends on the ground have gone out into neighborhoods at some risk to themselves to donate rice, oil, and tarps. In conflict areas such as Chin State and Shan State, it has become difficult to transmit funds because of electricity deficits. Please keep the people of Burma in your prayers.

As always, we have a primary concern for the children in the centers, some of which are run by the Karen Baptist Convention and some of which are run by associations, and some are independently run by concerned people. A shortened story of Agape orphanage in Loikaw follows.

**Sent by Dr. M..H of Loikaw as of Dec. 15, 2023**

“When fighting broke out in Loikaw on Nov. 11, many people left for neighboring Shan State. Some made it to Taunggyi, but some were stranded and formed refugee camps. The orphans were first moved to a small village, then to Naypyidaw (the capital city) and then to a village near Taunggyi. But these places were not convenient for them. Finally they were moved to another village near Taunggyi. They were given refuge in a 2 story building which serves as a church in the small town which has only three Christian families. They are now attending school there. The two girls who qualified for university cannot join because they cannot provide the paperwork necessary. Meanwhile the Loikaw Baptist Church has sustained damage from a shell which exploded. Other buildings were hit by artillery and windows were blown out and walls damaged. Many houses and buildings have been looted. Please remember us in your prayers.” Continued assistance is required for all the childcare centers because of inflation and war and floods.

Although there is conflict in many parts of the country, some parts are untouched by war. Good news from the Myanmar Baptist Convention. A new book, Myanmar Baptist Chronicle 2 (1963-2013) is in the works, being proofread and corrected and readied for printing around February 2024. The proofs were sent to all 18 conventions for their input and corrections. This book will be a continuation of the historical Baptist Chronicle 1 which was published in 1963. Neil’s parents were editors of that first book. We are so hopeful that the new book will be historically correct for the history of the Baptists.

Evangelical work goes on in spite of floods and dangers. Teacher and evangelist, Nant H..H...continues to go out to remote villages to spread the gospel. FOB was honored to support one of her trips. She spreads the word of God, and hope, and cheer among all she meets.

Some of our self help groups (aka microcredit), although experiencing difficulties because of the situation, are very interesting, and are carrying on. One such group is being run by the Ministers’ Dept. of the KBC. They are earning money in order to provide

supplemental support to ministers age 80 or over. In other words, they are attempting to fund pensions to help elderly ministers. They are producing what they describe as “cover boards” which marriage certificates can be inserted into. By selling these through networking with



Evangelical group bringing cheer to villagers



Binders to raise pension for elderly pastors

churches, they are helping needy pastors. We think this is a wonderful idea and project. As with most of the self help projects, more capital means more profits so they are looking for increased funding for this project.

One of FOB's most popular projects is the Christmas gift program. When it started out several years ago, it was, I believe, a \$20 gift to a needy person. Now, donors are giving \$50 gifts to be given to a needy family. What is so amazing about this is the rewards it brings to the people who are chosen to give out these gifts. Over and over we hear stories about the prayers and decision

making the givers go through and how much it means to them to choose a needy family and to present it with love and prayer for their well being. One such story follows.

This story comes from a final year student at Myanmar Institute of Theology. This has been edited somewhat. "I chose a widow in my church because she is leading a family of three grandchildren and all the family's financial burden is on her. She does not have any property and is struggling. Especially nowadays many people are preparing and collecting food to flee to the safety zone because the military often came to our village and attacked. In the countryside, most of the families were farming for subsistence, but she does not have any farm to support her. When she received the gift, she wept and said a word of thanks to God. She was so happy and said that God heard her prayer. She said she had felt helpless in her situation. But she kept praying and believing that God would provide in time and unexpectedly she received the gift from you (FOB).

"When I saw her expression of joy and hope in her face and heard her testimony, I was so touched and cried with her and prayed and said thanks to God. This experience encourages me to have faith in God in my prayer for my country. I would like to thank you.....for letting me participate in this wonderful work of God."

FOB keeps establishing Self Help Groups. Here is an update on one called Beauty Farm.

This farm was initially funded by FOB 7 years ago but it is still going on and I want to report on the update progress information. It is 3 hours driving from Yangon.



They started raising the cows from 2 cows but now we have 7 cows even though we sold 2 to 3 per year because we don't have enough space for more than 10 cows. In 2023, October we get 3 more baby cows and in December we get one more baby cow. So, in 2023 we get 4 more new cows. So now we have 11 cows and we have plan that we will sell 2 cows in next year.

As the space and food for them are very limited so we have to adjust with the numbers of cows and budget. From the benefits from the cows, we support the mission field

which has 21 households in Ayeyarwady Division.

It is good to get an update. Fourteen groups were lost in Cyclone Nargis because their participants were killed or their inventories were destroyed.

### **Genevieve and Erville Sowards Memorial Scholarships**

This program was established by Diana and Neil Sowards in honor of Neil's parents. Each year \$20,000 in scholarships are divided and given to the top school of each ethnic group. The schools recommend students to receive it and the Myanmar Baptist Convention gives those schools scholarships for the recommended students. This program was endowed by Diana and Neil so that no donor's money is used for these scholarships. The endowment is with Baptist Foundation. About 360 students, who are studying for the ministry, receive this scholarship each year.

FOB has been able to help alleviate a lot of suffering thanks to our faithful donors who give generously year after year.

Will you make a donation to Friends of Burma so that we can feed children, give medicine to the elderly, and comfort the dispossessed?

### **FREE BOOKS**

We have multiple copies of a book from my sister's estate that Neil wrote back in 2009. It is "Life in Burma" and is composed of 50 short descriptions of everyday life at that time (216 pages). It is a paper bound book. Anyone wanting one of these books can have one free plus postage which is \$5.00. We would be happy to send you one.

**Financial Summary:** In the year 2023, FOB received \$832,025.05 which we distributed in Burma. Less than 1 ½ % was used for overhead.

If you have names and addresses of Karens in the United States or around the world, please share them with us so we can send them a copy of our newsletters. Our donors are aging so we constantly need to recruit young donors.



### **Partner Organizations**

FOB works with about six other organizations and individuals who want to help the people of Burma. This saves them the long process of becoming a 501(C)(3) organization and allows them to give tax deduction to their donors. Here is the story of one such organization.

**Lightning for Learning.** Bob and Cynthia Wu visited several orphanages several years ago. They realized the children in the orphanage were not motivated to do their best in school work or on the government Matriculation Test. Students who did well on the Matriculation tests were allowed to go on to the government colleges and universities. Why should they do well if they did not have the money to go on for higher education?

So Bob and Cynthia established Lightning for Learning. They raised money from their friends and then sponsored any orphan who had earned the right to attend college. This motivated some of the brightest students who then scored high enough on the Matriculation Test to go on to University. Volunteers came from nearby churches to tutor the students. So fourteen students are now getting higher education thanks to Bob and Cynthia Wu.

**Leprosy Hospital.** The father of a Karen now living in the United States was treated for Leprosy and so was able to return to society. Eventually the son was able to come to the United States. In thinking about how he has had a good life because of the treatment his father received, decided that he would collect money for the two leprosy hospitals in Myanmar to show his gratitude for the treatment his father received. His job is making deliveries for a company all over the United States. This allows him to visit many Karen churches and collect donations for the two leprosy hospitals. By partnering with FOB he is able to give his donors tax deduction and avoid the extra work of being a separate nonprofit corporation. We can partner with him because goals line up with FOBs mission statement.

### **Letter of Appreciation and Report (Sharing Love Gift to Widows from IDP camps)**

“We would like to send our heartfelt thank and appreciation to the persons who have deep concern for the needy and vulnerable persons as widows in the different IDP camp sites in Karen State. We received the fund as exact amount of 4651500 Myanmar kyats to contribute to the widows in different parts of Karen State. We really thank Sayama F.B. for her earnestly concern to the needy as a focal person of this program, too.

With the fund we could contribute to 57 widows in five different camp sites of Karen State. Amazingly the fund could help the widows between the ages 105 to 21 years old. Some women

became as widows just recently because of civil war. We could make three in person trips to meet them in sharing love gift, encouraging, listening and praying for them. For the rest we just transferred the fund to the local persons and they helped us in reaching out to the widows.

We could not get all the names list of the widows for the difficult transportation and communication. But we tried our best in listing the names and ages of the receivers. We do appreciate your love and concern and on be-half of the widows we would like to express our heartfelt thank to the donors. We will attach some names list, the targeted regions, the expenditures and some photos of the program.  
May God bless you all in whatever you do.”

With much thanks,  
Name edited for safety

### **Wish List**

- \$300 to fund a self help group or to increase capital in an already existing group, such as the ministers pension fund project.
- \$500 for supplies for childcare centers in the Bago region to replace items damaged by floods.
- \$500 for supplies for children as they study online in areas where there is no school and for supplies for those studying at government schools.
- \$200 for humanitarian supplies for various groups (many) of displaced people, including medicines, blankets, tarps and rice.
- \$200 Scholarship aid for theological students in some conflict areas, such as Nyaungleben, where they are beginning a BTh 4 year program in the coming year. \$200 for one student. This is just one school. There are others.
- \$500 for medicines for Matthew 25 Love clinic in Pathein to supplement what they have.
- \$300 to support an evangelistic team from Kawthulei Karen Baptist Bible School who go to villages to help them and tell about Jesus.



Gifts to the most needy



Gifts to the most needy