

TEAM MYANMAR UPDATE

Dear Praying Partners & Friends,

April 2021

Mingalaba! Good day everyone. On behalf of TCM Team Myanmar, it is my honor and privilege to share with you God's ministry in Myanmar through TCM in these deep trials and troubles.

LOOKING BACK: Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is a country in Southeast Asia with 54.05 million people. It is a multi-religious country where there is no official state religion, but the government shows extreme preference for Theravada Buddhism. As much as 88% of the Burmese population practice Buddhism, making it the main religion in Myanmar. My family arrived here November 7, 2016 with the vision of reaching the Burmese with Paul's gospel. Prior to our arrival, Christianity was only around 5% of the total population. Christians now make up 6.2% of the population – more than three million people.

The Christians in Myanmar today are the legacy of the American Congregational missionary Adoniram Judson, who on his journey to Myanmar (Burma) became a Baptist preacher. A few missionaries continued Judson's missionary endeavor and helped the growth of Christianity in the country. With this in mind, there is a great need to reach the local people with the gospel of the grace of God and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery.

Doing cross-cultural mission is characterized by separation. Aside from leaving our own country Philippines, we experienced separation from our former local partner in the ministry due to personal differences in running the work. In 2019 we started a new congregation, **Myanmar Grace Believers Church** with Pastor Mawi, a local pastor who is deeply convinced by the grace message and understands TCM policy in conducting the work. That same year we opened the **Myanmar Grace Theological Seminary** to train grace leaders and workers to reach their own people with the gospel of the grace of God. After a year of intense training, we welcomed Pastor Caleb, a second year student from our former Bible school who joined us in the ministry. He is currently teaching at MGTS and at the same time, serves as the Student affairs head of the school.



PANDEMIC AND MINISTRY: Our local Bible school is partly supported by the Good Soldier Fund foundation (GSF). We are grateful to the donors for funding the board and lodging of our Bible students. The pandemic did not stop us from providing sound teaching to our students. It challenged both teachers and students to adapt to a new learning platform through virtual meetings. The pandemic closed churches and schools but it opened a lot of opportunities to learn new ways to conduct the work of the Lord. My family has been doing online studies and ministries since last year. Amy and I are teaching our students online, while Daniel and Daniela are studying online.

There have been no in-person church meetings from last year until now. but we try to connect with our members through virtual Sunday church services and prayer meetings. We visited our members before the stay-at-home policy was implemented. Since February 1 this year, most of the Townships in Yangon are under martial law so it is no longer safe go out and travel. The COVID restrictions on public gatherings were intensified after the military takeover. Gatherings of more than 5 people are prohibited across the country.

We are COVID survivors. The 2nd week of January we experienced almost all of the COVID symptoms. Dr. Ruth Improso, our online Filipino doctor, advised us to self-quarantine for 14 days with the prescribed medications. We praise and thank God that there were no complications and we were healed. God is our Healer!

MILITARY COUP AND MINISTRY: Exactly a month after the new year, the whole country was surprised by the military takeover that deposed the duly elected leaders of Myanmar including the State Counselor Daw Aung San Zuu Kyi, Myanmar's mother of democracy. Now, the pandemic is overshadowed by the military coup. Living in Myanmar is no longer safe compared to 4 years ago. Two weeks after the coup, about 20,000 criminal and political prisoners were released. That made the local people afraid. They bang pots and pans every night at 8 pm for 15 minutes to cast out "evil spirits". This noise barrage is a form of protest against the military coup.

Many constitutional and civil rights were suspended since February 1st, resulting in illegal detentions and brutal killings of their own people, especially those who participated in anti-coup demonstrations. For two months now, we just stayed at home for our safety. Our movements are limited to the path from our house to the local market. This political crisis has tremendously affected the activities of our Bible school. Our students were disturbed in their studies due to the tension between the anti-coup protesters and the security forces across the country. We decided to close the school earlier than scheduled for the students' safety.

Myanmar is in considerable socio-political and economic crisis. Most of the Townships in Yangon region are under martial law with companies of soldiers guarding the movement of the people and tracking the houses of opposition political leaders, prominent personalities and protesters. Myanmar's economy is now in a free-fall. Only a few banks and ATMs are open, and they are being forced by the Military government to operate. By the grace of God our needs have been met, and we are grateful to God every morning we awake, that we have another day to serve our risen Savior. Please always remember us in your prayers. We really appreciate it!

The worst scenario is that the military government is indiscriminately conducting air strikes over the ethnic rebel groups in the countryside, and thousands of innocent civilians are suffering across the country. Thousands of people have been displaced, forced to hide in the jungle then trying to cross the border to Thailand or India for refuge. In light this situation, the Philippine Embassy in Myanmar has been conducting voluntary repatriation flights since March 15 for Filipinos who wish to go back home. My family has decided to stay for the sake of the ministry with the newly formed grace congregation and Bible school. Our presence here is essential for our members during this time of deep trials and trouble. Myanmar is our second home and our presence here has a significant impact and meaning to our people for their spiritual, moral and financial support. "We must be



**THINGS
TO COME
MISSION**



**NEWS FROM
TEAM MYANMAR**



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the first to show God's smile and the last to cry." We are honored & privileged to suffer together with our people in their afflictions.

Today, we live in Myanmar full of uncertainties. We don't know what tomorrow brings (Acts 21:14). But one thing for sure, our life is in God's hands and we are persuaded that neither life nor death nor any other can separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:38-39) Once



again, thank you for partnering with us in the gospel, for we are laborers together with God! (Phil. 1:5; I Cor. 3:9) (Photos: Our family with Filipino friends since the coup.)

OUR HIGH SCHOOL AGED KIDS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE COUP

DANIEL: Three months ago, I woke up on what I thought would be a normal day, but the events that occurred as we were sleeping that evening were far from normal. At first, the news of the coup did not bring worry to many. Some thought it was only a rumor spread by military supporters who were dismayed by the election results, but this turned out to be untrue as news slowly trickled in. The military cut off the internet connection in a bid to conceal their actions from the populace and the world.

As the days went by, peaceful protests were started in various cities and towns in the country. Police units responded to these protests by blocking their path or redirecting them away from downtown areas. For a few weeks no lives were lost. Military units were also deployed, but that did not stop the Myanmar people from protesting against the actions of the military junta. I felt that the military was just restraining itself in order to win the support of the people. The longer they refused to give in to the demands of the people, the bolder the population became.

Anybody who is familiar with Myanmar's history would know what to expect after the first weeks of this coup. When I heard about the first casualties, I felt like history was repeating itself. The military, despite its "efforts" for democracy in this country, never really changed. I feared more lives would be lost once the soldiers would use their weapons against unarmed civilians. I watched the videos and saw the pictures of the brutality our people are suffering. Even as I write now, innocent civilians—even children—are losing their lives. But I also believe our decision to stay in Myanmar is not in vain. I can see that our presence here gives encouragement to our local contacts, and allows us to see with our own eyes the situation and share it with you. I continue to pray for Myanmar, which has been a second home to me.

I know that God is with us and that we should not fear. I thank you for your prayers and support to the ministry here. Please continue to pray for us and the people of Myanmar that this situation would be resolved quickly so that fewer lives would be lost. Please pray that Myanmar would experience change politically and, more importantly, spiritually. Thanks!

DANIELA: On February 1, 2021, I woke up to the prospect of being late for my online classes. Strangely, instead of my mother waking me up with hurried sentences, I was awoken by hushed whispers of my family. I then learned that in the early morning hours while I was sleeping, a life-changing, yet somehow expected event had happened. The news of the coup had spread like wildfire in a bone-dry forest even when the internet had been cut off on that day. Everyone was nervous and uncertain about what was going to happen in the future. I, for one, was worried about what these events forbode for our stay in Myanmar, since I'm not particularly keen on leaving.

We read the news daily as peaceful protests were organized and carried out. I remember the first night our neighborhood started banging pans and pots as an act of defiance against military rule. It was quite heartbreaking, honestly. Maybe that was the night I truly recognized that this was something very serious. It was different when you just read on the internet about all those protests and noise barrages downtown. They say you only know war when you've experienced it yourself. At that moment, I understood what that meant. I only managed to understand what the people were feeling when I myself heard the noise barrages.

Weeks passed and blood was shed, yet life goes on. We tried our best to do our daily tasks while confronting the possibility of leaving anytime. When the first repatriation date was set, my family decided to stay, knowing that our presence here would be an encouragement to local people. We hope that through our ministry, the members of our church will be firm in the faith and not waver in strength. Please remember to keep us and Myanmar in all of your prayers. It's greatly appreciated. Thank you and may God bless you all.



Dan & Amy, Daniel, Daniela BANAC