



LEGACY INSTITUTE

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A devastating cyclone has hit Myanmar! As I am preparing this letter to go out, shocking news about the cyclone that hit Yangon and the delta region of Myanmar is coming over the television news channel. I tried to call Deacon Myu Zaw in Yangon but telephone communications have been cut and there are no



responses to our internet messages. The news we hear is discouraging. As of this writing, there are reports of over 22,000 dead and the count keeps growing. Over 40,000 are missing and one million are displaced. Thousands have absolutely nothing left. Their homes have been leveled. There is no electricity and there is immediate need for drinking water, food and medicine.

There are two COG congregations affected: one that meets in Yangon and one that meets in the delta region near the village of Sakangyi. We have no news from them. We keep trying to contact them and will let all of you know the situation as soon as possible. In the meantime, we are preparing to get funds to our Church brethren so that

Yangon (Rangoon), Burma
Sakangyi is just S.E. of Myaungmya in the "Irrawaddy Delta" - See 95°N & 16°30' W

they can purchase food and other necessities. Please let God know how much we care about the safety of our brethren in Myanmar by fervently petitioning Him in our daily prayers.

Gloria and I recently visited Myanmar for the Passover. Following is the letter I wrote after our return to Thailand:

Dear Fellow-laborers,

Gloria and I went to Myanmar (Burma) for Passover and the first Holy Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Our brethren there face many hardships on an everyday basis. Myanmar is a socialist country controlled by a military oligarchy considered by many countries and the UN to be a rogue government with human rights violations common. Many people there are truly poor with malnutrition and widespread disease. This even affects our brethren and we heard several stories of COG brethren who do not have enough to eat. Myanmar is a very sad and depressing place to visit. It is a stark contrast to the bountiful blessings of Thailand next door.

This Passover we decided to visit the Church of God congregation in Taungoo, a city on the north-south rail line about half way between Rangoon (Yangon) and Mandalay. Actually, this congregation lives in a village called Kyawk Taing (pronounced *Jawk Tang*) about 15 miles to the east of Taungoo. But Gloria and I cannot visit their village as it is off limits to foreigners. It is very near a war zone and several years ago some French doctors were kidnapped by one of the private armies that operate along the Thai-Myanmar border.



Kyawk Taing Congregation. Leon and Gloria Sexton in Back Row: Far Right.

The Church of God congregation there was founded by a man known as Pastor Htoo Saw. Htoo Saw had been a Protestant Lay Pastor for over 30 years. He was introduced to the Sabbath and other Church of God doctrines and after careful study, accepted them. I soon baptized him and his son Saw Eh Gloo Kwey. Several years later I baptized his wife Naw June Hai. A small congregation began to grow in this remote village in the mountains near Taungoo.

One day Pastor Htoo Saw was climbing a tree to get honey from a bee's nest. He slipped and fell out of the tree. He sustained some spinal and internal injuries. Because proper medical treatment was not available in his village, Htoo Saw became feverish and died some months later. What a terrible tragedy and loss for the Church of God in Myanmar! Htoo Saw was a highly respected church leader and had been educated in a four year, English language seminary. This also meant that the fledgling Kyawk Taing congregation filled with new "babes in Christ" was without a pastor.



Leon with Naw June Hai and Eldest Daughter Naw Eh Moo Paw; Leon Sexton with Saw Eh Gloo Kwey (right) and family

But somehow, under the leadership of Naw June Hey and Saw Eh Gloo Kwey, the church continued to grow. Gloria and I felt we needed to visit and encourage them since the last time we had been there was three years ago. Our only contact was an occasional letter and the few Sabbath tapes with Burmese translation we sent to them.

We arrived in Yangon early morning on April 15. Waiting for us were Myu Zaw (the church deacon in Yangon), his family and Legacy graduates Seng Aung and his wife Seng Hpa with their two children. I had asked them to hire a large van to take us to Taungoo. April 15 was right in the middle of the Water Festival when everything shuts down and transportation is difficult to get, including train tickets. Myu Zaw and his son Zin Maung Zaw had searched for a reasonably priced van to rent with driver. Most were very expensive, but they were able to find a nice van for the six days we would need it and negotiated a reasonable price per day. But we would have to buy the gas. Gasoline in Myanmar is \$5.50 per gallon and they mix it with kerosene to make it go further. You can only imagine the pollution that creates!

The next day we loaded up and started on our journey to Taungoo. Mid-April is very, very hot in Myanmar. It reminds me of mid-Summer Dallas, *only hotter!* The van had no air conditioning. So we had to keep the windows rolled down. The only problem was that we were traveling during the water festival when drunken people set up road blocks so they can soak the unfortunate traveler with water taken from very questionable sources!

If you don't get your window rolled up fast enough, filthy water is tossed through the window, soaking all the passengers. We spent the next six hours running the gauntlet of roadblocks manned by young and old alike, many inebriated and all hoping to soak the westerners in water taken from some canal or open sewer! My left arm became quite sore from constantly rolling the window up and down.

God created the Passover to be a sobering and inspiring time of spiritual introspection and rejuvenation. Satan invented the pagan Water Festival. Both Passover and the Water Festival fall near the same dates on the first month of the lunar calendar. This is NOT coincidence! During almost every Passover we keep in Myanmar, we continuously face difficulties traveling to visit our brethren during a time of drunken debauchery. Thailand also has "Songkran" or an annual water festival about the same time as Myanmar's festival, but the Thais are much more polite about their water tossing.

We arrived late afternoon in Taungoo at the Myanmar Beauty Guest House where we would hold the Passover. Waiting for us was Legacy graduate Seng Htun who had arrived earlier from Myitkyina, Kachinland. Legacy graduate Lallian had also arrived, but stayed at Kyawk Taing village because he had come down with a fever.

We got settled in and then met with Eh Gloo Kwey to discuss preparations for the Passover. Since we had the use of the rented van for the whole period we were there, we could easily have the driver pick up the brethren and bring them to the Myanmar Beauty Guest House in Taungoo. Three years previously we had only about 20 in attendance. We were shocked to learn that at least 35 would be coming for Passover this year!

I stand in awe of the great and transforming *power* of Almighty God! Here was a small, poor and pastor-less congregation which one would think would have split apart or disintegrated because of lack of leadership and no real guidance in Bible study. But we found instead a thriving, growing and faithful congregation, still keeping to the faith that had been given to them – even in the face of wolves in sheep's clothing that had come and taught them they didn't have to keep the annual Holy Days and that it was alright for a Christian to eat pork! What a testimony to the grace of God and the power of His Holy Spirit!

The brethren brought their cooking pots as we would have to cook our own food. I thought it would be nice to have a special treat so I instructed Seng Htun to buy a goat for a feast meal on the weekly Sabbath evening (the night we traditionally call "*Night To Be Much Observed*"). We dug a pit and placed bricks in the bottom. We then put charcoal and wood in the pit and let it burn down to coals. We added more brick and then shoveled in several inches of dirt. Over this we placed banana leaves. Then we carefully wrapped the goat meat in banana leaves and placed it in the pit. Over top of this we put more banana leaves and then shoveled in the rest of the dirt. This created an underground oven in which the goat meat baked for over 20 hours.

I have to admit that the brethren were skeptical about goat meat buried in the ground! They even built a fire over the top of the pit because they were afraid it would not be cooked enough!

That evening we held the Passover with 27 baptized members washing each other's feet and taking the symbols of Jesus' broken body and His blood of the New Covenant. Forty six attended the next day, the weekly Sabbath. I gave sermons about the annual Holy Days, Passover and the meaning of the symbol of unleavened bread for the New Testament Christian. I also held a Bible Study about unclean meats. For two days out of the four we were joined by two Seventh Day Adventist evangelists who were very curious about the differences in doctrine between the Church of God and SDAs. This led to some very lively discussions, especially about the Trinity. They were happy to join with us for the weekly Sabbath and Holy Day and seemed very interested in what I had to say.



Isaac Samuel Daniel Receives Laying on of Hands from Leon Sexton; Eight Children were Blessed on the 1st Holy Day

On the Holy Day, I also had the honor of baptizing a new member into the Body of Christ, an Indian man named interestingly, *Isaac Samuel Daniel*. His family had been in Myanmar for many generations. It reminded me of Matthew 8:10-12 where Jesus said:

“Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”



Tu Mar Making Rotis

Very soon after arriving we discovered that our Karen brethren from Kyawk Taing had voracious appetites! We kept making more and more food and it was never enough. Seng Hpa and Tu Mar (Myu Zaw's wife) were in charge of preparing the food with the help of the church ladies and came to report after the first day that we needed to get more food! Every day it was completely finished off in the early evening. One day we made unleavened bread in the Indian style called “roti”. Gloria, Seng Hpa, Tu Mar and even Isaac Samuel Daniel must have made hundreds! But the stacks of rotis kept disappearing!

We found out later the reason why they ate so much. It was because they just didn't get enough to eat – especially food like we bought for them. Meat was rarely part of their meals. They never could eat goat. It was just too expensive. (The goat turned out magnificently, by the way. The meat was so tender it just fell off the bone! I think I won over a number of skeptics concerning my pit-goat BBQ.) And the goat meat didn't last long!

They told us that as long as there was food, they would just keep eating until it was all gone. Contrast that with our own America where food regularly goes to waste in the refrigerator or is thrown out. We found out that one church family was so poor that they could not eat every day. They owned no land so the husband was a day laborer. He would find work one day and then the family could eat the next! It was particularly heart wrenching to hear their story because his wife was nursing an infant daughter.

We decided to buy goats for Eh Gloo Kwey to raise with the help of the out-of-work member. We negotiated for 5 goats for \$250 dollars. Nanny goats bear twice a year and usually have twins. Goats are hearty, easy to raise (at least for our Karen brethren), and eat almost anything! Within a short time they should be helping supply our church brethren with meat and milk. This is the kind of self-help investment we like to make – one that gives an ongoing return. There is the old saying I am sure most of you have heard: “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him to fish and he will eat for the rest of his life.”

It was quite a feast – both physically and spiritually. The accommodations were adequate but very, very hot with usually no electricity available to run the fan. I slept outside on a reed mat. But with all the happiness and joy surrounding me, how could I Complain? It always amazes me how it seems the people of God who have the least physically – have such abundance *spiritually!* I am always humbled after my Myanmar trips.



Naw Eh Moo Paw in the Feast Kitchen

I also want to say how impressed I am with the COG brethren in Yangon. They also have no Pastor, but conduct regular Sabbath services with a song service, Bible reading and prayer. Deacon Myu Zaw will only allow visitors who want to speak – to read from the Bible and not elaborate. He told me that he doesn’t feel comfortable teaching the Bible since he is not confident enough in Bible knowledge. By limiting speakers to Bible reading only, he maintains doctrinal integrity. He is regularly joined by two other Sabbath keeping groups and the numbers have expanded so much that he can no longer hold services in his “upper room”. He now has services on his first floor where attendees sometimes spill out onto the sidewalk.



Gloria Sexton taking Family Photos

We all really enjoyed fellowship with each other and it was difficult (as always) to part ways. But we have already planned that, if it is the will of God, we will return to Taungoo for Pentecost.

Also, after returning to Yangon, we had the honor of meeting the widow of long-time COG pastor Saw Ley Bey, Tial Hniang. She came to Yangon to meet me with her grandson, Saw Moo Kaw Phur. The brethren in the delta region of Myanmar are also poor. When their rice crops fail, they face hunger. She told me that they have a problem with insects eating their rice crops and this has led to poor harvests in recent years.

Last year we started the same goat-raising program

with Tial Hniang as we did with Eh Gloo Kwey this year. Only she told us that her goats produced triplets – not twins! We together gave the glory to God for His wonderful blessings! Gloria was also able to find her some reading glasses because she had trouble reading her Bible. I was really happy to meet her since I never had the chance to meet the legendary Saw Lay Bey before he died.



Leon and Gloria Sexton with Tial Hniang

Please pray for our brethren in Taungoo, Yangon, Kachinland, Kalaymyo, the Delta area and other places in Myanmar. They face increasing hardships because of runaway inflation. Rice has now doubled in price – even in Thailand, the world’s leading exporter of rice.

We westerners can only imagine what the price of rice is doing to families who eat mainly rice, with only a few vegetables and a little fish paste.

Why has God chosen to call more and more from this land of poverty, corruption and war? He does things according to His own plan and His own timetable. Our job is to do our best to teach these new members of the Body of Christ

– THE TRUTH! And we must do this with increasing fervor and dedication. We also need to train young workers for the fields of God. These new churches need trained pastors to feed and protect them from the wolves who inevitably appear. Legacy Institute in Thailand hopes to fill that need by training young men and women to lead the new Church of God congregations cropping up in Myanmar and elsewhere in South East Asia. Graduates Seng Aung, Seng Hpa and Lallian will be returning to Legacy this year to receive more Bible and Pastoral training. Please pray that we will be able to get their visas to come to Thailand without trouble.

Please also pray that God gives Gloria, our volunteer teachers (and me) increased strength and health to weather the many physical and spiritual storms that fall upon us as we serve the Living God here in Asia until the soon approaching End of Days.

We hope you all will be protected and blessed by God so that you too can weather all the physical and spiritual storms back home.

I remain your brother in the service of Jesus,

T. Leon Sexton