

BLESSINGS FROM MYANMAR

At the foot of the Shan Hills you will find a place where time can stand still in the waiting heart of an orphan child... the same place where minutes and days become mere fleeting moments for those of us who have been blessed with the privilege of sharing their lives for little fragments of time.

I invite you to take a journey with us to this place in the heart of the Myanmar Mountains, a place called Pyin Oo Lwin, also the home to the 95 orphan children of the St Matthews Orphanage Center.

It all started in Pyin Oo Lwin or formerly known as May Myo, as far back as May 1987, when with the help of a compassion program called, Compassion Home, the Calvary Baptist Church began to search for sponsors for orphan children in America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. During those times a sponsored child received about 80 Kyats which is about 75c in today's terms. Unfortunately, this sponsoring program lasted only 4 years before it was stopped due to insufficient funds.

In 1990, the children were moved from the grounds of the Calvary Baptist Church, to the St Matthews Church compound. A few Christians who truly loved these children started praying to find a new place for them to live and after continues prayers every day for 440 days, finally and mercifully the St Matthews Church was sold by the Anglican believers who owned it until then and the St Matthews Baptist Church came to be. The St Matthews Baptist Church continued to raise these children due to the demand of parents that could not take care of them. The needs of the children were divided between the parents and the church and although the children were very, very poor, they were not real orphans in the sense of the word. Even today there are still many kids at SMOC, that still have some family members somewhere in Myanmar that cannot take care of them, so they are sent to live at the orphanage.

In 2002, the story of these kids took on a whole new turn, with a visit of Rev. Htun La, to a city called Minneapolis. During his stay, Rev Htun La ended up living with Jon and Julie Wright for about 40 days where they received him with great love and care. During one of their many conversations, he learned that they were taking care of the needs of orphans throughout many countries in the world, so he requested them to consider a partnership with the St Matthews Church to take care of not only the children that were currently staying at the church compound, but also Kachin orphans from all 9 states of Myanmar that will be brought there to receive not only a school education, but will also be raised in a loving Christian environment – that, in one of the world's 10 most persecuted countries – what a vision! So, in March 2002, the OrphanAge Foundation together with the St Matthews Baptist Church formed the St Matthews Orphanage Center with about 60 children at that time.

Since then the SMOC has become the home of about 95 kids from all over Myanmar. These are children that would otherwise be living on the streets, forced to beg for food and money to earn their keep.

Myanmar is a closed country where adoption is not a possibility, the SMOC are blessed with dedicated staff members, that does not only take care of these kids, but who truly treat them as their own, caring for them, teaching and guiding them, but more importantly, loving them 24/7!

During this last year much has happened in the lives of these precious kids at SMOC. They faced many challenges, but also achieved many and great accomplishments.

The country was shaken by violent political unrest, with persecution at its highest in the last 10 years.

Then Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in May 2008, with the lost of thousands of lives of which many were children and even more people who lost all of the little possessions they had. By God's grace, the kids at SMOC were spared from the direct effects of this storm, but they together with the staff, are not able to escape the economic effects that touch all of their lives daily.

Together with the challenges, there were also many blessings and accomplishments. The choir and orchestra went on their first ever Christmas performing road trip to Lashio in the northern part of Myanmar. Some of the kids finished their High School education, and through scholarships provided by partnering organizations are now getting ready to become college students. The English program at SMOC has grown from 15 students in 2006 to more than 60 students at this time. What a blessing to see and hear these kids express themselves with more confidence in English every day.

By the grace of God, the SMOC is currently in its sixth year of existence, and together with its supporting partners they are still taking care of the least of the least.

To God be the Glory!

"I will take nobodies and make them some bodies,
I will call the unloved and make them My beloved"

Rom 9:25