

MYANMAR: Doors Opening for Discipleship

SOMA has been privileged over the last five years to partner with Archbishop Stephen Than, Province of Myanmar, in growing the Church in this country whose population is ninety-six percent Buddhist. During this past year, SOMA returned to Myanmar for two different missions held in the Diocese of Mandalay with Bishop David Nyi Nyi Naing and his wife, Mary. The opportunities for mission have come as the government began to allow more religious freedom, evidenced last year by permitting all Christian denominations to celebrate Christmas openly in a huge public park—a first after decades of restrictions.

The clergy and lay leader conference for the Archdeaconry of Mandalay Diocese was inspired by Psalm 46:10, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Goals established for the conference centered around building unity within the diocese and drawing those attending into a deeper relationship with the Lord. Key themes included praising and exalting the Lord in daily life, with a teaching on silence and solitude that called for a forty-five minute exercise to simply listen to the Lord. Most of the priests had never participated in an exercise like this. One of them shared with tears in his eyes, “I didn’t know that God really wanted to speak to me.”

Another conference was held for clergy and spouses in the northwest part of Mandalay Diocese, a place called Homalin, situated on the Chindwin River. The conference theme was “As for me and my household we will serve the Lord,” based on Joshua 24:15. Bishop David sought “to encourage strong marriages and families to develop vibrant churches” through discipleship training—learning how to pray, understanding the importance of prayer in their lives and churches, and practicing forgiveness, reconciliation, and conflict resolution.



Clergy wives gained greater appreciation for the role of the family in ministry and how to pray effectively. Several of the pastors spoke of how they received new insight for engaging the culture with the Gospel and how the Holy Spirit convicted them to be men of prayer.

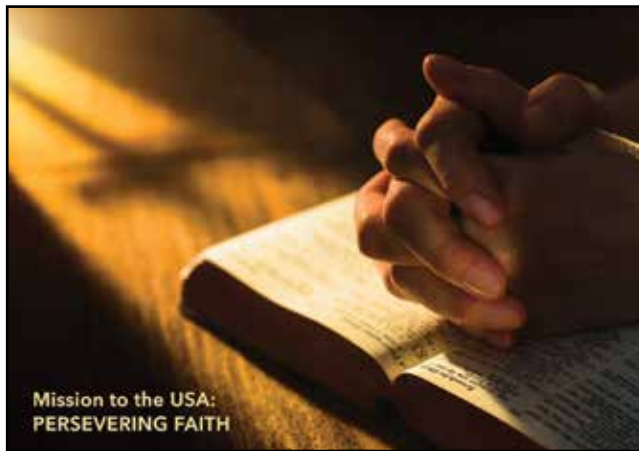
Participating as a team member was the Rev. Alan Kyaw Myo Naing, who commented, “I was able to experience the importance of team building and the team covenant, deepening my own spiritual insight and understanding.” Grateful for SOMA’s help to equip clergy for ministry, Rev. Alan expressed appreciation for the model that SOMA demonstrated of continual reliance on the Holy Spirit’s guidance in discerning the topics and flow for the training—a distinctive of SOMA missions everywhere.

Team: Dr. Glen Petta, TL; Bishop David & Mary Nyi Nyi Naing, Diocese of Mandalay; Bill & Jane Parrott, Good Shepherd Anglican, Granbury, TX; Rev. Alan Kyaw Myo Naing, Director of Evangelism & Mission for the Province of Myanmar.

MISSION TO THE USA: Persevering Faith

By the Rev. Francis Capitanio

This past August, three clergy from the Anglican Diocese in New England attended a leadership conference sponsored by Sharing of Ministries Abroad (SOMA) in Kansas City. The conference's theme was "Persevering Faith" and included workshops from various leaders from around North America on incorporating prayer and intercession into ministry. The



guest speaker for the conference was Archbishop Stephen Than of Myanmar. Its purpose was to empower the pastors attending to find the freedom and courage that prayer provides for leading their communities. The Rev. Piper Runnion-Bareford, the Rev. Craig Vickerman, and I (Deacon Francis Capitanio) traveled together to learn from Archbishop Than and the other clergy present, as well as to fellowship with other clergy from the USA.

We experienced vivid renewal in the shared privilege of Gospel ministry as the Holy Spirit met us powerfully through Archbishop Than's teaching and his testimony of how God had strengthened his faith through prayer. We were encouraged to pray with faith and lead with passion. Archbishop Than's recounting how he encountered God in impossible situations over the course of his

many years of ministry struck deeply resonant chords for each one of us. The message was clear that all clergy must

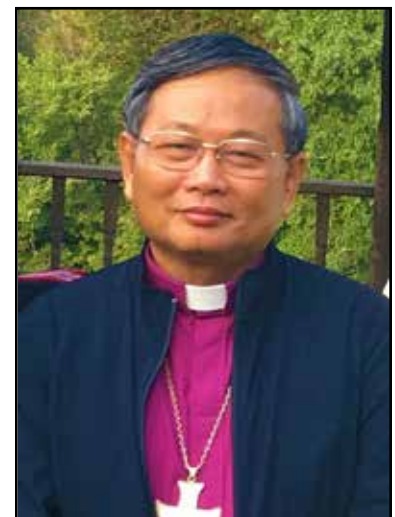
not hold back from engaging God in prayer and battling the spiritual powers that inhibit the Gospel. Those who serve in ministry must not shrink back from giving everything that they are, not just to other people but to God, confident in the knowledge that time in prayer is never wasted, and eighty percent of our battle is won through prayer.

The Rev. Craig wrote about his experience: "Too many ministers inadvertently get caught up in the rat race of ministry, believing that their success is based on their leadership skills, trying to create the perfect pipeline of programs to attract more people. Unfortunately, most leadership conferences play to this temptation. I went to SOMA as a rookie rector, still in my first year of ordination and ministry because I was already overwhelmed . . . What I received was three days of Sabbath rest, and I experienced a sense of my heart catching up to

my head. I left the SOMA conference with great peace in my heart and two amazing friends, who, because of our shared SOMA experience, continue to meet with me weekly and encourage one another through prayer and intercession."



The Rev. Piper came to a SOMA clergy conference three years ago when she traveled with the Diocese of New England's first delegation to the SOMA event. This time around, however, her vocation as a church planter was much different than during her first visit. "I accepted the invitation to return to the SOMA clergy retreat this past August during a huge life transition," she writes. "My heart was ready for a fresh word from the Father as I prepared to step out in faith in a new way to lead a church planting team starting this fall. As I flew to Kansas City, I asked the Holy Spirit to give me faith and a transforming hope that would anchor me in this new season . . . Archbishop Stephen Than came prepared to let the Holy Spirit move through his words and ministry, and the Spirit came in power, opening my eyes through the Archbishop's words and testimony to experience a new kind of faith. My heart was transformed by story after story of Jesus' faithfulness and saving power, and I was reminded of the need for spiritual fitness as we actively engage the darkness of this world. The simple assignments the Lord gave me during the workshops have been exactly what I needed this first month on the ground."



The SOMA workshops encouraged us to recognize the great importance of prayer as the foundational act upon which all other acts are built. We are profoundly grateful for the prayers we received from Archbishop Than, the fellowship we shared with so many others, and the encouragement to pray more in courage and in faith.

SOUTH SUDAN: The Peace of the Lord

Bishop Abraham Nhial invited SOMA back to the Diocese of Aweil last year to continue the clergy training begun in previous missions. The Church in South Sudan is facing enormous challenges as people recover from twenty years of civil war. Because the government provided for the people's needs during wartime, communities—now experiencing a time of growth and peace—have come to expect the same provision from the Diocese. As part of the training in Aweil, the SOMA team helped clergy to see that the sustainability of the Diocese depends on godly leadership and wise stewardship of God-given resources. The pastors in Aweil were eager for the teachings, which were taken from the book of Titus on leadership, discipleship, conflict resolution, and managing the resources God has entrusted to the Church.



Bishop Gwynne College (BGC) in Juba, the provincial theological seminary of South Sudan, was the setting for a separate SOMA mission for 130 students who represented thirty dioceses of the Province. Since many had come from areas affected by the war, a priority of this mission was ministering to their spiritual needs, with teachings on trusting God, developing leadership skills, and embracing a life of discipleship. The College's principal was deeply grateful for the conference: "We rejoice because South Sudan is a country badly in need of trained church leaders to make disciples for Christ."



Most of the students had lost one (some lost all!) of their family members during the many years of war. It became clear that one of the main obstacles to sound leadership was unforgiveness. Many students said, "We can forgive but not forget." The team spoke about forgiveness as a process where the Holy Spirit continues to heal the pain of events as we are open to Him. The trauma experienced by each of these students is unimaginable. Yet, by God's power and love working within them, these students continue striving to be the best leaders possible by not allowing the painful memories to hinder them. A time of prayer ministry followed the discussion where three of the students accepted the forgiveness and saving grace of Jesus into their lives.

Steady progress toward effective stewardship of resources is already evident in the Church of South Sudan, and the government is now looking to the Diocese of Aweil as an example of self-sustainability that they will share with others. The day the SOMA team departed, they were happy to learn that new peace agreements had been signed. Bishop Abraham asked for prayer "that this peace agreement will be like no other before, that it will be lasting peace."



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DIRECTOR'S CORNER *by Dr. Glen Petta*

This year marks forty years of ministry for Sharing of Ministries Abroad (SOMA) International. Taking missions to over fifty countries on six continents, SOMA USA has also brought dynamic international leaders to the USA to revive the American Church. Over the years, SOMA teams have ministered to countless leaders in the Anglican Church abroad—from youth leaders to archbishops. Some leaders shared that prior to a SOMA mission they had been ready to leave their ministry. But through the ministry of the SOMA team, they were revived, restored, and encouraged to continue to walk out their calling. Those from around the USA who participated as SOMA team members have returned home to serve their local churches in greater capacities or to enter vocational ministry.

SOMA's ministry is formed by relationships through the work of the Holy Spirit. Each mission is different; the team relies on prayer for the continual guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit to discern the topics and teachings for the day, a practice that contributes to the uniqueness of SOMA's ministry. Three essential components have sustained SOMA USA's short term missions over the years—a proven short-term team building program, consistent and intentional intercessory prayer support for every mission team, and a commitment to work under spiritual authority. SOMA's approach to mission has influenced many mission agencies and global Church initiatives around the world.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve as the National Director of SOMA USA and for each of you and your partnership in ministry. Countless lives, dioceses, provinces, and countries have been changed through SOMA's forty years of ministry. As we continue missions in 2019, we thank God for the many ways He has blessed the work of SOMA. To God be the glory!

