

Upper Myanmar Adventist Seminary

KENNETH H. SUANZANANG

Kenneth H. Suanzanang worked as a teacher, evangelist, ordained pastor, school principal, ADRA director, district administrator, mission president, and union communication/public affairs and religious liberty/legal director. He retired in 2009. His wife, Lian Za Dim, and their three children live in Yangon, Myanmar. Suanzanang continues to be active in his church. Under Suanzanang's leadership, a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Health and ADRA was signed on July 20, 1993, and the Declaration of Ownership of Trade Marks of the Adventist Church—the logo and typeface—was registered on August 28, 2007. He received an Award of Merit from Adventist World Radio in December 2009 and the General Conference Communication Department's NET Award in May 2011. Suanzanang has written one book, *The Gospel Echo from Genesis*.

Upper Myanmar Adventist Seminary (UMAS) is a coeducational boarding institution located at Siyin, Gyothonbin Block 1, Bogyoke Road, Kalay. It was established in 1957 and reorganized in 1974. It is a complete secondary boarding educational institution owned and operated by Upper Myanmar Mission.¹

Developments that Led to the Establishment of the Seminary

Robert H. Pierson, president of Southern Asia Division, was anxious to reach new areas and asked Arthur Eugene Anderson and his wife if they were willing to go to Chin Hills, an unentered area. In early April 1953, a survey team composed of C. B. Guild, president of Myanmar Union Mission (MYUM); Arthur E. Anderson, principal of Myaungmya High School; Freddie Batin; and Myat Pe arrived in Kalay.² On April 6, 1953, they gave a courtesy visit to Reverend Za Khup of American Baptist Mission in Thuklai, 42 miles west of Kalay.

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rangoon (now Yangon), Dr. Sithu Vum Ko Hau, Reverend Za Khup's son, granted the survey team permission to visit Chin Hills. After spending a night at Thuklai, they left for Falam, 60 miles south of Thuklai.³ From Falam, they planned to go to Rih Lake to meet Pastor W. G. Lowry, a missionary to Lushai Hills (now Mizoram State), and two other missionaries, Zakhuma and Lalkhuma. As these missionaries could not speak Tedim Chin, they worked along the border villages, Darkhai and Bukphir, where Mizo was spoken.

On April 14, 1953, Anderson, who was the first missionary to Chin Hills, visited and studied the Bible with Ngul Khaw Pau, a local lay Baptist church leader. Ngul Khaw Pau was among the first converts to Adventism in Chin Hills and became known as one of the "three mighty Adventist evangelists" in Burma.⁴

Tedim is 56 miles northwest of Kalay. Anderson chose Tedim as a mission station, for it was a subdivisinal administrative town with a civil hospital, high school, and police station. The Baptist missionaries had also chosen this place because of the northern Chin Hills. Anderson and his family arrived in Tedim on December 9, 1953.⁵

From January to March 1954, Anderson conducted a series of evangelistic meetings at Lawibual in Tedim. On May 8, 1954, Pastor P. A. Parker, mission president of Central and Upper Burma Section, baptized 14 people, and, on the same day, Lawibual Adventist Church was organized as the first church in Upper Burma. Another 12 people were baptized at Lawibual on October 16, 1954.⁶

A group of believers in Siyin Village organized as a company on October 29, 1955, as a result of a series of evangelistic meetings conducted by Ngul Khaw Pau and Go Za Kham from October 3-23, 1955. Go Za Kham was Anderson's interpreter. Go Za Kham and Ngul Khaw Pau were baptized on May 8, 1954, and they both became evangelists. Siyin was 51 miles from Tedim. Pastor Parker baptized 28 people. On the same day, the Siyin Adventist Church (SAC) was organized, becoming the second church in the Upper Burma field.⁷ MYUM and Southern Asia Division allotted 5,100 Burmese kyats for the construction of a church, which was dedicated on April 27, 1957.⁸

The leaders of MYUM and Central and Upper Burma Section voted to open a school in the Upper Chindwin area. The leaders recommended that the school be located at Siyin. Others suggested Tahan because it was three miles west of Kalay. Kalay was the gate city to which people traveled to reach other parts of Burma and abroad. Resources at Kalay included postal and telegraph services, an airport, merchandise goods, and agricultural products such as rice, oil, and beans.

After deliberations, Siyin was chosen as the location for the proposed institution for two reasons. First, the land was cheap. Second, Siyin was seen as a more ideal location for an Adventist school as it was in a peaceful setting ten kilometers away from Kalay.⁹ The mission secured 11 acres of land as follows: Suang Ko Kam, headman of the Siyin community and the first Adventist convert, sold the mission six acres of land at 800 Burmese kyats; and Vum Za Pum, a Baptist friend of the first converts, sold them five acres at 1,000 Burmese kyats.

On June 3, 1957, Siyin Middle School opened with education levels from kindergarten to Standard 2. A standard level was added each year, going up to Standard 7 in accordance with the government's middle school requirements. A solid administration building measuring 25 by 100 feet with teak and *pyinkadoe*, or ironwood, was dedicated on November 4, 1963, by William L. Murrill, president of Myanmar Union.¹⁰

The school was nationalized by the Union Revolutionary Council, Burma's government at the time, on April 5, 1966. To avoid confrontations, the mission sent Sam Gaw and this article's author to serve at the nationalized school. The government gave them permission to resign from the school on January 11, 1967, because of problems with the Sabbath. Sam Gaw became an evangelist in Lashio, Northern Shan State, but was unfortunately killed later in an automobile accident. His wife, who was a nurse, continued to serve the church. From April 1966 to May 1975, Adventist children had to attend national public schools, where they faced problems with the Sabbath.

The church leaders knew that education was one of their most useful tools. Therefore, in December 1973, MYUM voted to open seminaries instead of schools – not to seek outside jobs but to educate the church's young

people. By naming it a seminary, it would avoid government restrictions. The seminary would offer academic education and Bible and music classes. MYUM voted to establish Junior Bible Seminary at Siyin to provide middle school education. It was mainly for Adventist students, but many non-Adventists desired to take the good English courses offered by Adventist education since the government's English education was very limited. Many non-Adventists accepted the truth and served the mission faithfully.¹¹

When the school was nationalized in 1966, the humble lay leaders lost hope. At the time, they did not think of what would happen to their land. They would have been satisfied if the government would only have run a school for their community. By God's grace, an employee of the land record office, Myo Myint, kindly set aside 4.5 acres of land for the church, and, years later, the leaders gratefully used it. At MYUM's constituency meeting in December 1973, the leaders voted to establish Adventist seminaries since the government had nationalized all schools. In 1973, this article's author was a church pastor/evangelist stationed in Tonzang, a township 26 miles north of Tedim, and was appointed to the construction of an administration building and two dormitories at 40,000 Burmese kyats and a cafeteria at 7,000 Burmese kyats on the 4.5 acres set aside by the land record office employee.

Founding of the Seminary

On June 17, 1975, Junior Bible Seminary was opened offering Standard 5 to Standard 8. Thang Khuma was its principal, and Kenneth H. Suanzanang, Montana Paul, V. Thansiam, F. Lalsanga, Tingh Khan Niang, and Lian Za Dim were staff. In 1977, Chit Sein became the seminary's principal. In 1982, Kenneth H. Suanzanang replaced Chit Sein as principal.

In 1978, the seminary's name was changed to Upper Burma Adventist Seminary and taught kindergarten up to Standard 10.¹² Captain On Poom, a retired army officer and laymember, was instrumental in the establishment of the seminary at Siyin, Kalay Township, Sagaing Region.¹³ On January 17, 1979, he and his wife, Awi Cing, donated their entire On Poom Villa compound to the church and built for themselves a smaller house. Furthermore, in 1982, Captain On Poom and his wife sold 6.1 acres of rice fields to the seminary for only 10,000 Burmese kyats. In 1984, Awi Cing, now a widow, sold an additional 6.1 acres of rice fields to the seminary for the same amount as two years earlier and also donated her house and land to the seminary.

On July 21, 1989, a newly-built administration building was dedicated by Ba Hla Thein, president; Do Hen Pau, treasurer; and Sidney Gyi, director of education of MYUM. It cost 200,000 Burmese kyats gathered by the 1988 Sabbath School's third quarter overflow offering. As the name of the country changed to Myanmar in 1989, Upper Burma Adventist Seminary was changed to Upper Myanmar Adventist Seminary (UMAS) in 1990.

In 1995, Lanh Sawm Mang was elected principal, and the seminary started offering Grade 12 education.¹⁴ In 1997, Suan Khen Go was voted principal, and he introduced first-year college courses, which were discontinued

the following year. MYUM's administration closed the college program for not complying with their operational policy.

History of the Seminary

On June 3, 1957, the first Church school was opened and offered education levels from kindergarten to Standard 2. On November 4, 1963, Pastor W. L. Murrill, president of MYUM, dedicated its first administration school building. On June 17, 1975, Junior Bible Seminary was opened. In 1978, the seminary's name was changed to Upper Burma Adventist Seminary. On July 21, 1989, the new administration building was dedicated. In 1990, the seminary's name was changed to Upper Myanmar Adventist Seminary. On January 12, 2014, UMAS's multipurpose hall, the largest of Adventist seminary halls in MYUM, was inaugurated.

On May 3, 2017, to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of UMAS, Kenneth H. Suanzanang, former principal, led the ground breaking ceremony for a three-story building of almost 20,000 square feet. This new administration building was generously donated by Martin Muik Ro, husband of Elica Chun Ro, sister of Pastor P. D. Chun, former Far Eastern Division president. The construction work was supervised by Hau Go Thang, principal of UMAS.¹⁵ The three-story administration building was inaugurated on November 13, 2018, by Timothy Muna Paul, president of MYUM. After Elica's death, Martin sold their house in the United States of America to donate \$300,000 USD to UMAS. At the request of MYUM's education director, \$20,000 USD of the donation was given to Ayeyarwady Adventist Seminary, Ayeyarwady Mission. This was received through Pastor Thang Kang Lo from Adventist Laymen's Services and Industries of MYUM.

Historical Role of the Seminary

The seminary believes in and emphasizes the harmonious development of the physical, mental, spiritual, and social wellbeing of the individual, encouraging physical training and arranging weekly and annual sports days. When students participate in a soccer tournament, they do not play on Sabbaths. On two occasions, they had to be satisfied with the third-place prize. In 2017, they received the ZOFA Cup since the finals did not fall on a Sabbath. Students were known as clean players not just for keeping the campus clean but also for helping clean portions of the community once a quarter.

The community knows the seminary and its students quite well. It knows that they do not smoke, drink, or quarrel, and it is happy to listen to beautiful songs each morning, evening, and Sabbath. UMAS's campus bell is a timekeeper for the community, striking every thirty minutes, day and night. Those who do not own a watch or clock appreciate it. In 2012, the community needed water, and students were involved in digging ditches to lay pipes. When Kalay floods, students readily help displaced people. The students are known as angels without wings. UMAS is proud of former students who obtain academic excellence awards at overseas schools.

UMAS and SAC have been intertwined, inseparable units since their beginnings. SAC produces faithful members. The stewardship department of MYUM honored Myanmar's top ten faithful tithe-payers in 2014, and three from SAC were among them. The first of these three was Gin Khan Niang, wife of the late Thuk Kim. Niang and Kim were supporters of UMAS. At the union convention in 2012, they hosted a nice dinner for all 3,000 delegates. Four of their children had studied at UMAS and now have their own businesses. The second of the three was Chian Cin Hung, nurse and daughter of faithful laity parents. The third was Dim Uap, daughter of faithful parents. Her father was a carpenter, and she married the late Pastor Thang Pu.

Accreditation and Enrollment from 2008-2019

Upper Myanmar Adventist Seminary is accredited by the Adventist Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities based in Washington, DC, USA.¹⁶ The 2008 enrollment was 376 students with a staff of 18. By 2017, student enrollment was 505 with 24 staff members. Total baptisms for these years was over 160!¹⁷ In 2019, 524 students were enrolled, and 27 teachers were employed at UMAS.

List of Principals

Kam Za Kim (1957-1958); Kyaw Tun (1958-1959); Gin Khan Nang (1959-1960); Sandy Dee (1960-1961); Ah Gray (1961-1963); Sandy Dee (1963-1964); Henry Tun (1964-1966); Sam Gaw (1966-1967); Thang Khuma (1975-1977); Chit Sein (1977-1982); K. H. Suanzanang (1982-1990); Thang Khuma (1990-1992); Zen Do Lian (1992-1995); Langh Sawm Mang (1995-1997); Suan Khen Go (1997-1999); Suak Khaw Ngin (1999-2000); Tingh Khan Niang (2000-2001); Yang Kho Mang (2001-2006); Kap Lian Thang (2006-2015); Kham Khan Lian (2015-2016); Hau Go Thang (2016-).

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4. "Anderson met NKP," *Myanmar Adventist News*, Myanmar Union Mission: Communication Department, December 2008, 57.
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6. *Ibid.*, 57.
7. *Siyin Adventist Church Diamond Jubilee and Church Rededication Bulletin*, December 29, 2015, 7.
8. Burma Union Committee, 1956-138. Myanmar Union Mission Archives.
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10. *Ibid.*, 9.; and Central and Upper Burma Committee, 1962-15, 176, 227. Myanmar Union Mission Archives.
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