

Central Myanmar Mission

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Central Myanmar Mission is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Myanmar (formerly Burma). It is part of Myanmar Union Mission in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. It was organized in 1967 and covers the following territories: Kayah, the southern portion of Shan state, the upper portion of Karen state, the upper portion of Bago region, the lower portion of Magwe and Mandalay regions, and the Southern Chin state¹

Statistics as of June 30, 2018: churches 31; membership 4,859; population 13,997,174²

History of Organizing the Mission

On January 4, 1955, the Central and Upper Myanmar region was organized and Phillip A. Parker was appointed as the president of the Upper and Central Myanmar Section.³ Ministries were already established in some of the areas in central Myanmar before the Central Myanmar Mission was organized.

The Central Myanmar Mission is comprised of eight districts: Kyauk Taing, Shan/Kayah, Phado, Kokogone, Shwe Pan Daw, Tha Yet, Mindat, and Matupi. The history of each district, or circle as they are called in Myanmar, will be mentioned as follows: Kyauk Taing Circle. One of the churches that needs to be mentioned in special way within the Kyauk Taing Circle is the Taungngu Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is the church where the office of the Central Myanmar Mission resides. It is one of the earliest churches that was organized in the Central Myanmar Mission.

The first missionaries who came to Taungngu were Robert A. Beckner and Tha Myaing in 1932, sent by the Burma Union.⁴ They rented a house and evangelized in Taungngu. One day they met Thara Paul, a teacher in a Baptist mission school, and requested Thara Paul to serve as a teacher in the Meiktila Adventist School. He accepted the request, and mission work began to grow in that region.

In 1939, Pastor R. A. Beckner and his wife, Mabelle Mc Moran, went to Shwe Nyaung Bin village, Kyauk Taing Circle, Kayin state, to serve as missionaries.⁵ In 1941, R. A. Beckner went back to America, but he returned to Myanmar in 1956. During that period, the Shwe Nyaung Bin Church was established in 1948.⁶ R. A. Beckner continued the missionary work, along with local workers Tha Myaing and Baw Dee. In 1956, Baw Dee bought a piece of land in Lawkoktaya which is known today as "Saturday Hill," due to the Adventists there. The Taungngu Church was organized in the center of Taungngu in 1958 with 22 members.⁷ During this time, Baw Ko was

working as a church pastor for the newly organized church.

Land was purchased to open a union level high school at Kyauk Taing, Taungngu township in 1956.⁸ Buildings for workers and staff were constructed in 1957. Government permission was granted to open Taungngu Seventh-day Adventist High School on May 29, 1957, with Chit Maung as the first principal. The Taungngu Seventh-day Adventist High School was nationalized by the government on April 5, 1966, and was henceforth a government school.

Mountain View Academy was opened in 1978 to give Adventist children an alternate educational option since the government schools required exams on Saturdays.⁹ The student enrollment in the seminary for 2018-2019 is 320.¹⁰

In 1960 Chit Maung bought land at 19 Bayintnaung Road for the mission headquarters, a location where the mission office still resides. During the years of 1962-1963, the Paul Myaing Memorial Adventist Church in the center of Taungngu was built by Elisha Paul.¹¹

Churches in Central Myanmar continued to be established. Kyauk Taing was organized in 1958;¹² New Thangdaung, Mon Gone in 2006; Letpangone in 1989;¹³ and Myathagone, Tabyay in 1979.¹⁴ The gospel was spread through evangelism, education, and care ministry. This circle has eight churches and a company with 1,514 members.

Shan/Kayah Circle

Shan/Kayah Circle first received the Adventist message through Kyaw Din I, a pastor in Loi Kaw, Kayah state, in 1959. Kayah Circle is comprised of two churches: Koikaw Church, organized in 1974,¹⁵ and Nampeh Church, organized in 1967.¹⁶ Kayah District has 304 members.¹⁷ The majority of the area is occupied by people of Kayah, Padaung, and Shan nationalities.¹⁸

The part of the Shan area that belongs to the Central Myanmar Mission has only one church in the Mine Sat township. The Mine Sat Church was started by Ngo Hu, a retired veteran from the Chin tribe. Ngo Hu received the Sabbath message by reading Adventist literature. In 1974 he accepted the Sabbath message and was baptized into the Adventist church.¹⁹ Soon after his conversion he converted another three families and, in 1977, the first Adventist church was organized at Mine Sat.²⁰ Ngo Hu become the first pastor at Mine Sat. After that the Central Myanmar Mission sent several ministers to carry on the mission work at Mine Sat.²¹ There are 311 members in Shan/Kayah circle. These areas are populated by Lahu, Shan, Arkha, and Chinese with the majority religions being Buddhism and Animism.²²

Kokokone and Shwe Pan Daw Circle

In 1939, a couple named Poe Han and his wife Daw Chaw started an elementary school at Kokokone. It operated for 24 years and in 1965 it was taken over by the government. Even though the school was closed, the church remained. The missionary work spread from Kokokone to several places such as Myo Gaing in 1960 and Tha Yet in 1967.

On May 15, 1963, Po Han and his wife Daw May were called to serve at Byu Gone and then the gospel spread over the Shawe Pan Daw area through the efforts of other ministers. Byu Gone was organized as a church in 1970 by Lun Kyin.²³ In 1970 Lyun Kyin was transferred to Thit Taw and the Thit Taw Church was organized 1987²⁴ and the Byandee Church in 1994.²⁵ Due to the vastness of the mission field, the Central Myanmar Mission decided to divide the whole area into two circles, namely Kokokone and Shwe Pan Daw.²⁶

At present Kokokone Circle is comprised of two churches and four companies with a total membership of 359. The church has existed about 74 years already. Shwe Pan Daw Circle is comprised of five churches and six companies and has a total membership of 539.²⁷ There are people of Chin and Myanmar nationality present and Buddhists are the majority.

Phado Circle

The Adventist message was introduced to the Phado area by evangelistic meetings conducted by Pastor Aye Dwe and Steven Sein in December 1979. By the end of the meetings, a number of people were converted. In the summer of 1980 evangelistic meetings were held by Kyaw Zan, Denny Tun, and Sydney Kyi. The Phado Church was organized in 1980.²⁸ Next, Jolly Din bought a piece of land and built a church. In 1985 the Phado Church was dedicated. The Adventist message was well rooted in the Phado Church and spread to several places. In 1965, Lu Lu Chit, an evangelist, went to Bechan and organized the Bechan Church in 1967.²⁹ In 1989, the Latpangon Church was organized. In 1990 the message reached Myat Ni Kwin, and the Myat Ni Kwin Church was organized in 2007. In 2000, Samson Chit, an evangelist, went to Nyan Inn. At present Phado Circle is comprised of three churches and three companies and has a membership of 544.

Tha Yet Circle

Tha Yet Circle started from a small school. In 1960, U Poe Han from Byugone came to the Thayet area and started a small school. Through education the gospel seeds were sown in the hearts of the local people. Subsequently, Tun Mg, Ah Gray, and Kyaw Zan, conducted evangelistic meetings at which several people were converted. In 1969, Brown along with the seminary students from Mountain View Academy (Kone Myint Tha), came to Tha Yet and conducted a month-long evangelistic series. The meetings were quite successful and resulted in many converts. In 1984 the Tha Yet Church was organized and extended its mission work to the surrounding areas such as Magyi Sin, Thik San, Put Kyi Twin, and Na Myaw Kyi villages.³⁰ The Magyi Church was organized in 1987. After that, missionary work expanded to Nyaung Bin and the Nyaung Bin Church was

organized in 2000.³¹ It continued to expand and reached Yet Din and Bwet Nguke. In the same year the gospel also reached Pyay.

Significantly, all of the companies and organized churches in this area were started by volunteer mission workers. At present, Tha Yet Circle has five churches and one company with a total membership of 479.

Matupi Circle

Matupi Circle is comprised of two churches and one company. Matupi Church was organized as a church in 1996 and is the largest in the circle. It has a total membership of 134. Lalui Church was organized in 1980 and its membership is 68. Leisin is a company with 27 members.³²

Mindat Circle

A missionary worker named Thang Kawl was sent by the Upper Myanmar section in 1997 to serve in Mindat. The Mindat Church was organized in 2010 with 349 members.³³ The missionary work extended to Hte Pan village, and the Pan Church was organized in 2013 with 77 members.³⁴ The Htee Lin Church was organized in 2013 with 72 members. Mindat Circle is comprised of three churches and two companies with a total membership of 498.³⁵

Challenges

Evangelism is challenging in the Central Myanmar Mission because it is comprised mostly of mountainous areas with firmly established traditional religions. Additionally, the region is vast, with the eastern part of mission territory close to Thai border areas and the western part of the territory reaching to the Bay of Bengal. It is also challenging to reach the diverse nationalities in the area such as Burmese, Indian, and Chinese, as well as the Kayin, Kayah, Shan, and Lahu people.

List of Presidents

Baw Dee (1967-1968); Tun Maung (1968-1971); Moses Po (1972, 1976); Kyaw Din II (1976-1982); Hla Chit (1983-1987); Sandy Dee (1990-1991); Sidney Gyi (1992-1996); Montana Paul (1997-2001); Lun Kyin (2002-2005); Do Za Thang (2006-2006); Bo Than (2007); Saw Timothy (2007-2010); Kem Thang (2011-2015); Avin Po Po Hla (2016-present).

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NOTES

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