

**American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin
American Baptist International Ministries – Discovery Trip to Malaysia/Myanmar
January 6-23, 2019
Rev. Dr. Marie Onwubuariri, Regional Executive Minister**

#AsiaJan2019 Journal Entries
(originally posted of ABC/WI Facebook Page)

January 6-7 – Travel Days

#AsiaJan2019 Day 1 - Tuesday 1/8

Visits with leaders of three different refugee communities in Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia Karen Organization, Shan Refugee Organization, and Arakan Refugee Relief Committee. Heard from each about the realities that their community members are facing, both the documented and undocumented, the impact of immigration practices and policies in third countries (including the US), and why repatriation is not a viable option for many. Learning about the importance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' UNHCR), and the dependency on local enforcement of protections. Top concerns we have heard about so far: unprovoked arrests by local law enforcement; group raids and detention; lack of access to education; employment abuse; high levels of stress and growing mental health concerns. Unfortunately, due to US government shutdown we will not be able to have our visits with US Ambassadors as originally planned. A full day...lots to process.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 2 - Wednesday 1/9

WHAT IS YOUR HOPE? "TO BE TREATED AS A HUMAN."

The other three of our Malaysia group of 7 arrived in the middle of the night. Thankful to God for safe travels for the team. Today we visited representatives from five more refugee communities: Kachin Refugee Committee, Alliance of Chin Refugees, Chin Refugee Committee, Organization of Karenni

Development, and Mon Refugee Organization. We also had an opportunity to visit with some students of one of the community learning centers, housed at the Kuala Lumpur Baptist Church - a church that consists of seven language-based congregations. Today we listened to more first-hand stories of daily challenges and top concerns of the various refugee communities: unlawful arrests, detentions, and abuses undergirded by inhumane policies, inefficient government agencies, and downright discriminating treatment. We listened to reluctant admittance of waning hope and cries for help regarding growing mental and physical stress. When one leader was asked, "What is your hope?" She responded, "To be treated as a human. To experience human worth."

Yet we also saw examples of committed and strategic leaders who want nothing more than to serve and help their communities. The same leader went on to say that she also hopes to study more - particularly about mental health - so that she can help her people.

We saw examples of collaboration. The eight groups we have visited on yesterday and today together make up the Coalition of Burma Ethnic, Malaysia (COBEM). This is an organization that works together—across tribal, language, and religious differences—for the betterment of their communities. After having heard from reps from each community we will hear their collective voice tomorrow.

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Again — more things to process. I'm seeing parallels between their communal experiences and situations — historic and current - of people groups in the U.S. and other places across the globe. How fleeting the kiss between justice and peace. Can systemic oppressive discrimination cease?

Our biblical narrative encourages us not to give up, to not lose hope. One young student said to us today when she was asked what message she would like us to bring back — “Do not forget us.” This cry was articulated in various ways and from various voices throughout the day.

Lord, hear their cries, hear our prayers.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 3 – Thursday 1/10

COLLABORATION. YOUNG LEADERSHIP. INSPIRATION.

What an incredibly inspiring day! Our first visit this morning was to Manghta (translated to “Sweet Dream” in Chin language). This organization teaches women to develop skills to make various products from traditional Chin culture fabrics. They also provide a platform for select women to develop their entrepreneurial skills and avenues for them to sell their goods. Manghta is one of five similar-type organizations that make up Tanma, a cooperative that advances the individual and collective purposes of these organizations, as well as provides additional training to the members — such as English language, computer, and life skills. The pictures show the beautiful goods from all five groups. We also met a young lady who is from France who has given at least a year of her life to live in KL and work as a coordinator for Tanma, undergirding the leadership of the local women.

After an afternoon rest we then met with COBEM [Coalition of Burma Ethnics, Malaysia), the collaborative organization of the individual refugee communities that we met with over the past two days. The passion and abilities of the leaders were so evident as they shared their joint projects and their requests for solidarity and assistance. Our day ended with a wonderful dinner fellowship, where we continued to learn about personal stories and develop personal friendships.

When I asked one young leader how he understands the theological phrase “to have joy In the Lord” in the midst of the situation he and his community faces, he replied [paraphrased]...“I can do all things through Christ strengthens me...I have to believe that things will change...I know it is my call to be a leader among my people...the efforts are ours, but the results are God’s.”

To the readers...if you haven't yet begun to do so, I am asking you to please pray for all those we were blessed to meet this week and the communities they represent.

Tomorrow morning, we leave for Yangon, Myanmar and meet up with three more colleagues who will join us for the next part of our discovery trip.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 4 – Friday 1/11

Today was a travel day — 4:30 AM wake up call. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to Yangon, Myanmar. “Excitement” checking into the airport: I didn't have a print out of my visa — but luckily the bookstore/convenient store around the corner from the airline check-in counter provided an email-to-print service! Brilliant! Thankfully I had no trouble getting onto wifi (not always a guarantee), emailed the visa, and got it printed out for only 2

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ringgits! Several of our group had to track down proof of our flight out of Yangon (yes, while in Malaysia!) Another had a slight mistake on airline tickets so had to track down where to get that fixed. Immigration line was significant. No problem making our plane, but not much time to spare.

Arrived safely in Yangon and met up with 2 of the 3 additional folks to our group — two of our ABC IM missionaries - Jeni Pedzinski and Ann Borquist!!! Yay! And several gracious hosts from the Myanmar Baptist Convention. After checking into the hotel and getting lunch, we caught a little sightseeing... because our original plans to meet with the US Ambassador was canceled due to the US govt shut down.

We were joined by the 3rd of our new three team members - ABCUSA General Secretary Emeritus, Roy Medley, for our afternoon team meeting, sharing reflections so far and prepping for the next few days.

We were joined by two local missionaries for an informal dinner who shared about their ministries in Yangon, particularly their mission outreach and evangelism. What faith and vision for true peace!

I am falling asleep writing this post...looking forward to a good night sleep.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 5 – Saturday 1/12 FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: LONGSUFFERING

This morning our group went to the Myanmar Institute of Theology for another meeting that was just full of educational information that was both head-spinning and heart-wrenching. While I can't say too much I'll just say how complex the process of peace-making is. I know that sounds

obvious. But it's sobering to hear about real examples of the complex web of history, economics, politics, and geography and the equally complex resulting impact on human welfare: identity, belonging, addiction, disease, etc.

These are things we see, if we are open to it, in our own country—and I cannot help but think of the parallels: far-reaching strategies and decisions driven by economic interests for select populations; drugs as weapons of manipulation; mentalities of “tribal” superiority; exclusive decision-making tables; and on and on...

But a part of this web of systems are the human stories. Again, there are parallels...yet...the peoples of and from this land have their own stories, and their stories are worthy to be heard as that—lived experiences of particular humans who yearn for real, not representative or allegorical, lives.

Longsuffering...a characteristic of one who claims acceptance of the love of Christ and the submission to the Holy Spirit. Contrary to the instant culture we have been shaped by, the path of peace-making has taken and will still take longsuffering. It is the collaborative work of multiple generations. This is sobering yet still calls for action today.

After our morning meeting we drove several hours through lush countryside to Karen state where we find home for the next couple of nights.

Good team debriefing at dinner. Our team is made up of staff from three national entities (OGS, IM, ABHMS), four region execs, two IM missionaries based in Asia, and global ambassador (GS-Emeritus) sharing this

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experience from diverse geographical, theological, racial, ethnic, ministry-emphasis, generational, ideological perspectives—and with all different personalities. What a gift of the Spirit's work among us—unifying us around a recognition of injustice and a call for compassion and companionship.

God grants us the capacity to do this. To BE this.

Let it be so in many more areas of our joint lives together.

Abcwi....rootedness...collaboration...growth
...transformation

#AsiaJan2019 Day 6 - Sunday 1/13

PRAYERS FOR PEACE

Today is Sunday. When planning, we thought our hosts might bring us to visit several churches for worship. Instead our hosts brought us to worship with about 200 students and young adult teachers at a school for those who have no access to other schools—IDPs primarily (internally displaced persons). Grades 7 thru Jr College. We walked into their second worship service (because we arrived later than scheduled, they already had their service) as they beautifully sang with strong melody and sweet harmony. We continued on with introductions, more singing, an encouraging Word from Pastor Roy Medley. Then each of the team members paired with a group of students for prayer and conversation.

My group of about two dozen were shy...with only a small few responding to my questions and asking questions of me. Few expressed hopes for life after school; my translator said others had little hope. Curiosity was evident in only select students

but all expressed gratitude for our visit. I asked if they found it hard to pray every day. One young man responded quickly, "I pray every morning and night;" he prays for the school, the teachers, families, health, and for peace for his country.

This township has not seen active military violence for at least six years, despite being in an active training zone for the Air Force, due to a cease fire agreement, yet there is still no peace; no signs that stability is on the horizon. Fear of conflict is still very present. A lack of opportunity makes repatriation unviable. Even those who come back to the land from the refugee camps on the border find the land unable to offer hospitality. Some have returned to camp where perhaps at least some things were familiar.

These were the testimonies of leaders and elders from the nearby village whom we also had a chance to meet. Under the mango trees we met with a 95-year-old man who was forced from his village—a day's walk away—over 40 years ago. He has had no contact with his village since, no idea of the condition of it now, yet still longs to return...if only there was peace.

This township of about 1500 are able to sell some resources — crops, bamboo, bricks that they make. All the children in my circle said they knew how to make bricks or weave fabrics, and roofs. They find a way. Today is Sunday. They made it through the day.

Some will pray before they lay their head. I believe God will hear their prayers.

"Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matt 6:34 (niv)

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After the village welcome, the sun was too low to try to go to the border. So, we retraced our tracks on the unmapped roads, again full from hospitality, full from what we have seen and heard.

I know they say our presence is encouraging. I believe their smiles and giggles come from some deep source of joy.

Yet my spirit tells me in today's case it has nothing to do with us, with me, that I'm ABC, that I'm from "America." I feel that if God used us as a blessing today it was God's Spirit kissing a longing in these students, these teachers, these villagers, for humane human connection.

To even muse about if and how God has used me is a privilege, a gift of capacity to know agency, born in a culture that is free and plentiful.

If God has not gifted these humans with agency in the way I know it, God has gifted them with a strength and resilience that I have not known, and that I have never even needed.

Let's just say they gave ME the ministry of presence. May all our prayers for peace be steadfast. May us, who know agency, be active advocates for and makers of peace as well. That is our gift to use.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 7 - Monday 1/14

MISSION ALIVE AND WELL

This morning we visited the headquarters of the Padu Karen Baptist Association (PKBA) in Taungoo, one of the various Karen associations in Myanmar. Rev. Dr. Nee Doh Htoo serves as General Secretary, and he was one of our hosts during our visit to Karen

state. (He told me he visited with Milwaukee, Symrna church, one of our three Karen congregations, twice already in recent years!)

This organization was established in 1856 by American Baptist missionaries. As we drove into the expansive "Mission Compound" we heard a band playing in the distance. We went to the school building, then into a classroom, and saw the band in full sound. We worshipped with dozens of the students, teachers, and administrators. Following similar protocol as the day before, we were warmly welcomed, our team leader introduced us to the "congregation," offered a beautiful song, introduced themselves to us, one of our team leaders preached the Word, this time Associate General Secretary, Rev. Marsha Scipio, another song was offered by our friends, then a closing prayer. Inspired by the prophetess Anna of Luke 2, Rev. Scipio brought an encouraging word about the importance of intentionally staying in God's presence in dark days, standing in hope as a act of "divine protest against suffering." The song after the sermon was an upbeat offering by the band. It was an unfamiliar post-sermon song, I think, to most, if not all, of our team, and one team member smiled and said that perhaps that is what it is like in heaven — the hosts of instruments being played triumphantly declaring, "God's Word was preached!" What an image!

Our worship was followed by a presentation sharing more about the PKBA and their ministries. In this one association there are 163 churches, 40 mission fields (in the country), and close to 17.5K members. Of course, we were offered a wonderful spread of snacks and beverages to prepare us for our journey back to Yangon. How

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encouraging it was to see a strong community who are raising leaders and other young people who perhaps see possibilities before them and positioned to offer assistance to their expansive communities.

Throughout this trip the informal conversations with one another have been an integral part of our learning and relationship building. On this portion of our trip I was blessed to room with ABC missionary, Jedi Pedzinski, who serves at the New Life Center in Chiang Mai, Thailand, a ministry that works toward abolishing global slavery. She previously visited ABC/WI and shared about ministry at West Allis, First. On our long drive to Yangon, I had wonderful connecting time with Ann Borquist, who serves as an IM Global Consultant (training/capacity building) in Southeast Asia with her husband, Bruce. I met Ann fifteen years ago, and we got along right away as we share various commonalities, and since we've connected briefly at conferences, and I admired her work as a missionary from a distance. What a joy to connect on a deeper level with both of these incredible servants of God!

At dinner I was able to briefly meet a Kachin leader who came to meet with some on our team, and he shared this recent video made while ABC GS Emeritus visited the Kachin Baptist earlier this trip, which expresses ABC support and actions, and references grave concerns for the Kachin communities: <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialKBCKAC/HIN/videos/2034285269999239/>

Today there was space for my soul to smile.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 8 - Tuesday 1/15

BAPTIST STRONG

I'm posting this a day late. Last night I was able to catch up on much needed rest as the trip "proper" came to an end and I stored up strength for the add-on portion.

So, our team of 10 started the day by saying farewell to Dr. Medley who continues on to Bangkok to meet with UNHCR to discuss the many concerns we have seen and heard from the refugee communities.

The rest of us went back to the Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) to worship in chapel with 200+ students, faculty, and administrators. This Baptist school has long and many ties to our denomination. I had the incredible honor to be the preacher for chapel service. I peached from Isaiah 40 and Matt 14—"God—Giver of power, perseverance, and possibility" (though I forgot to say the sermon title! 😊). It was an opportunity to bring greetings from ABC Wisconsin and Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Our team also offered a song—impromptu choir! (To learn more about this seminary you can visit www.mit.edu.)

After lunch and informal conversations about some of the seminary's newest initiatives, we visited with next-door neighbors, Karen Baptist Theological Seminary and the Karen Baptist Convention Hospital. Like ABC/Wi, KBTS is 175 years old this year!

We then went over to the Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) headquarters for a time of informal fellowship and dinner with their leaders. Some topics of discussion were Christian Ed curriculum, repatriation, women ordination, and theological

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education. MBC is the largest Baptist group in the country, numbering over 2 million believers, 5000+ churches, 51 theological schools, and 18 associations. (FYI, to put this in context, this outnumbers ABCUSA). One director shared over dinner that Baptists constitute over half of the Christian population in Burma, which is about 45% of the country (the majority identify as Buddhist).

Today was a day seeing the STRENGTH of Baptist identity, presence, ministry, and witness in this country. Separation of church and state was a Baptist value mentioned a few times on our trip. Religious freedom, autonomy, and voluntary association are other values clearly evident.

A cultural value I must comment on is Hospitality. We have experienced it throughout our trip in many ways. As an Asian, it is quite familiar. But as an American leader, I am just struck by how leaders here go out of their way to accommodate our agenda. Most (if not all) of MBCs dozen+ leadership board/staff just came back the night before from a 3-day long meeting in Chin state, a 24 hour+ journey by bus. By the time we arrived we were already close to two hours behind schedule. Yet there they were in the late afternoon receiving us with smiles, knowing there was no formal agenda, except to meet, learn about one another, and build relationship. And then they had a gift for us, each bag prepared with our names! Now you know it took effort to get all ten names of our team to be that thoughtful! At one point I wondered if I would be able to pull together staff and board members to do the same should we have guests coming to our region. Even if we could do this, I would have lost the crowd after waiting 30 mins I'm sure. And I'm SURE

all those who have hosted us have had other things to do! Another form of the ministry of presence...and the generous gift of time.

Our team ended the day with our last debriefing session. It was a wonderful group to travel with, and another affirming experience of why I'm American Baptist.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 9 - Wednesday 1/16

#ACCESSEDUCATION

Today the journey continues to the northeast of Myanmar - to Chin state, now just with one teammate, fellow Region Exec. Robin Stoops (ABC-Nebraska). Though he has been to Myanmar before, this is his first visit to Chin state.

As we boarded our domestic flight, I briefly exchanged words with a gentleman in front of us in line, confirming we were on the right flight! As we boarded a bus that would take us to our plane, I had two brief thoughts about this man: I wondered if he was a pastor, and I thought - maybe we will be seated next to the each other on the plane. These thoughts were so brief that I hardly paid attention to them. Turns out...we were seat mates. We didn't chat at first, but when our snacks came, I offered one of the pastries I was too full to eat...and we didn't stop talking for the rest of the flight! Guess what? Yep, he is a pastor!!! He is from Chin State but is now living in the US. The first place he landed when arriving in US was Milwaukee, though within a week or two, he settled on the East Coast! My ability to communicate with him was limited, but I understood enough to know that we knew people in common, I learned about his family, his home village, and ministry journey. But wait...it gets better!!! He also lived in Malaysia (in KL) for two years!!! He

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shared a little about his reasons for fleeing Chin State and his dangerous experiences in Malaysia as a pastor. Wow — I was just so blown away that I would be seated next to someone who would add his own personal story to the things I have been hearing and learning about. He said, “the Holy Spirit put us together.”

Apparently, our conversation was overheard by another couple, who upon deplaning introduced themselves to me because they are friends with our very own Chin pastor in Milwaukee, Pastor Ronald Nunuk! What a small world!

I just love seeing how small our world is 😊

We were received at our destination, Kalembo, by Rev. Dr. Lalpek Lian, former pastor of Milwaukee, Emmanuel Chin, who is our host for the next several days. We visited Lai Baptist Church (pastored by his brother), the Chin Baptist Association (Kalembo area), Kalay University, and a beautiful vista outlook point from the Chin State, overlooking Kalembo.

While at Kalay University, we sat with a professor who shared with us a little about the school and helped us understand the education system and lack of opportunities for those who do not have access to government-registered schools. All the Christian schools we have visited in our trip are not recognized by the Myanmar government, which poses a variety of challenges. We were told today that there is only one school they know of that is privately owned that is recognized by the Myanmar government (British-owned). As we have heard many times on our trip — access to education is a top concern of the minority tribal groups.

Dr. Lalpek, who has also ministered in Malaysia, is just the perfect person to help Robin and I continue to process through our experiences. We are also just beginning to hear more about the situation that Chin people face in their home state. Tomorrow we will drive several hours to the state capital city. I’m sure we will learn much more.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 10 - Thursday 1/18

IT’S COMPLICATED

Today’s adventures started just before 6am, before the sunrise. As we drove through Kalembo we could see the outdoor markets already bustling, even though it was hard to see through the settling fog without the help of natural and much artificial light. Townspeople on foot, motorbikes, and cow-drawn-carts buying their needs for the day. Within the hour the sun slowly shed light on the climbing hills.

The six-hour drive to Hakha was, well, thrilling! I got to sit in the front seat, escaping car sickness and having a captive audience with my dear friend, Pastor Lalpek. My questions were endless, curious about his experiences and perspectives on everything from church ministry to politics, from east to west, from obvious to nuanced, but all from truth and sincerity. These situations regarding conflict, refugees, repatriation, human access, etc...it’s complicated y’all! Which makes it even more disheartening when folks form rigid opinions and dig in their heels against others regarding controversial issues without even know much of the many perspectives of the same story.

Soon after arriving in Hakha Robin and I each taught a 90 min lecture for two different

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classes at the Chin Christian University. It was good interacting (or trying to) with the students. In my class we talked about Strategy and Agency as faith leaders. They are attentive, thoughtful, appreciative. This was an incredible honor and privilege! (Central WI has a joint book project with Milw, Emmanuel Chin, sending needed books to CCU for their library).

While all students who were willing to share were interesting, there was one young man in particular who I wished I had time to talk with because of the nature of our trip. He was the first one on this trip who really seemed to want to engage with the question about the role of the church in peace talks in the midst of armed conflict.

We then had a wonderful dinner fellowship with CCU President and Academic Dean and a short visit to our host's wife and daughter.

It is cold in Chin State. I will be wrapped up tightly as I sleep.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 11 - Friday 1/18

NOW WE'RE TALKING...

Local coffee and warm bread with some sweet buttery spread was just the right breakfast on this frigid morning. We drove through beautiful countryside on our way to ThanTlang township: resting rice patties and terraces, forest reserves, and bright blue skies inviting the fog to lift. We also passed a lot of action along the roads—much road construction was being done with lots of manual labor with minimal assistance from heavy machinery. Townspeople making much ado in anticipation of a visit by national dignitaries in the area this weekend.

We visited the Thantlang Baptist Church, the oldest baptist church in the township. We had two meetings with local pastors and leaders of the Thantlang Association of Baptist Churches (TABC), with an amazing lunch in between. Pastors shared concerns facing their churches, such as dealing with “false doctrine” from evangelists that come through town and the lack of opportunity (education/livelihoods/family reunification) for their people. We also talked about the realities facing those who might repatriate, both to their home villages or even developed cities — hope was hard to find, especially in the national leaders proposing a plan to receive them back. Like we heard among Karen villagers, one Chin pastor said, “even though one might say it is physically safe, they are not safe psychologically.” We did, however, also talked about the role that the church can play and there appeared to be interest to continue exploring this question.

On our way back to Hakha, just as we were about to enter the town, police asked us to pull over. Soon, a convoy of police, military, and unmarked vehicles rolled through. We had heard that Vice President Henry Van Thio was passing through on his way to the special event of the weekend – the dedication of a new dam in Tikir. One of those cars carried him! It was crazy how close we were — too bad! He is the first Chin person to make it to such a high-ranking position. Wow!

After a short siesta we went to Immanuel Baptist Church, our host church for this trip (where Pastor Lalpek is pastor). We had a brief time worship — singing in Lai language, sharing some greetings and words of encouragement, and Pastor Lalpek leading in a time of devotion. The words shared by

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these beloved people were incredibly heartwarming.

Again, we had a very special meal with the leadership, heard some of the vision of the pastor to build up resources for home/family devotions, and then Robin and I each had a group of youth (young adults) during which we learned about what young people are doing and curious about, and fielding questions from them.

All the insightful, honest conversations today were so important to getting a more detailed picture of the lives of our beloved Chin family here.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 12 - Saturday 1/19

AN EMOTIONAL DAY INDEED

I doubled up on layers last night and had a very warm and restful sleep. Sightseeing was the agenda for the morning...but oh I had no idea! After breakfast at our favorite spot (can you have a favorite after only two times?) Pastor Lalpek took us up to a prayer and retreat location, managed and used by the Hakha Ministers Council (or Council of churches). In other words...Holy Ground! (SF Bay Area friends...Fort Funston has nothing on this spot!). Perhaps it was the towering cross, or the prayer edifices, or the fact that I actually have connection to people that fought for this space that made this space especially precious. In the cool of the morning I wanted to stay here much longer; I could have probably written much and taken the time to pray and process through my experiences. It was striking how this location felt in my spirit, as compared to many other view points with breath-taking scenery that I've visited, even the spiritual places. But alas, we had many more places to visited, and I'm glad we continued on.

We proceeded to drive through places that were impacted by the 2015 landslides and the new communities that were subsequently built. One Great Hour of Sharing funds at work! We drove through fairly new Hakha College and visited an extension ministry of Immanuel Baptist Church, a chapel run mostly by volunteers at the local civil hospital. We then went to the Hakha Baptist Association compound, the oldest of the Baptist associations in the state. Here we walked through the missionary museum and nearby missionary tomb/mausoleum and oldest Baptist church – Hakha Baptist Church.

Prior to this trip I knew that Baptist mission work in Chin state was strong, making Chin State the only majority Christian state in the country, with over 95% identifying as Christian, and the Baptists making up the majority of them. I heard of Missionary Carson only cursory and of David Van Bik, who was the father of two my friends stateside. I also know of other important leaders in the Chin community in the US — like Stephen Hre Kio, who has encouraged me on my ministry journey, as if I was one of his own people. Yet seriously, I had no idea of the depth of the impact of all these and other leaders, and their families. Walking through the museum and the mausoleum was like connections across many generations coming together. I was both saddened at my own lack of knowledge of my American Baptist history and the lives of people I have known for many years while also feeling so humbled to have now entered into this story. Knowing I was impacted, Pastor Lalpek sincerely said to me — now, you are, your visit is, part of this story. It was also inspiring to see how much development and mission work the Chin churches in US

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contributes to (in the past and present) back here in their home state.

I have learned to cherish the experiences that God makes possible because you never know how these will lead to what God has in store for you in the future. I'm not sure exactly what this visit will unfold, but I am so grateful to have a glimpse into this rich history. I learned today that Missionary Strait (the family connected to the clinic we visited in Kalembo, was born in Glenwood, WI (outside of Hudson) and he went to my alma mater — Berkeley Baptist Divinity School (now ABSW).

Over yet another delicious and hearty lunch, we continued to speak with the Association leaders about conditions facing Chin youth, repatriation concerns, US politics (yes, we have been fielding several questions about our own President) and data collection for the betterment of current conditions. More friendships have begun.

We did a little local shopping and visited a Weaving group and watched weavers masterfully perform their craft, creating traditional Chin fabrics. The remainder of the day is for rest, reflection, and preparing for our preaching assignments tomorrow. I am feeling the gravity of this experience. Please pray that God will speak a mighty Word for us all on tomorrow morning.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 13 - Sunday 1/20

THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING

"This is just the beginning, okay?" Pastor Lalpek said as we had our last meal together on Sunday night. This visionary leader has been an amazing host to Robin and me, arranging a wonderful immersion in Chin State.

Our last day was marked with an opportunity to worship alongside several we have met over the past few days. Robin preached at Agape Baptist Church with Rev. Dr. Za Char, and I had the privilege to preach at Immanuel Baptist with Rev. Dr. Lalpek Lian. These two recent Central DMin graduates are pastoring thriving churches in Hakha. As I have experienced in our own Chin churches in WI, worship experience was joyous, included familiar hymns, and the sanctuary was filled. I was gifted with a Chin bible earlier in our visit, so in my closing prayer after the sermon I shared our ABCWI vision text from Ephesians 3:18-21. With the coaching of Pastor Lalpek and his daughter, I practiced my pronunciation and inflections. But as to not completely butcher the language, I also asked if the whole congregation would read it aloud together!! In moments like these, of worshipping outside of your own comfort zone, the Spirit reveals what it truly means to be one in Christ.

Our breakfast and lunch were provided by the cooks of our favorite breakfast place...but since it was Sunday and the restaurant was closed, we instead went the cooks' house and they fed us there!!! Really! 😊 Actually they are IBC church members, so Pastor arranged for this wonderful treat. This also gave us the opportunity to meet the cook's sons, one who was comfortable enough with his English that he stayed and talked with us for a while. But then he said a phrase to excuse himself from our company that will forever now be in our code language!

As we were leaving, Hakha was bustling as they waited for a visit from State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi. The town was invited to

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her public address, to take place at Carson Hall (where we were the day before). Ahh...so close yet so far. Our schedule didn't permit us to stay longer. I would have loved to see and listen to her, or even the VP, but this wasn't the time. I pray that the local leaders and people we met on our visit heard something from her that strengthens their hope and agency.

We took a different road to head back to Kalemmyo in order to pass through Falam, where the headquarters of the Chin Baptist Convention is. Fortunately, one of the CBC leaders received us for a short visit. (CBC is the umbrella organization of the Associations we have been meeting with and is a member of Myanmar Baptist Convention (who we met with in Yangon), which is equivalent to a country-wide denomination.)

In this brief visit the officer did share about some conversations they have had about assisting with repatriation as necessary and also efforts they are doing with peace talks, bringing together political party, local government and church leaders (for the first time). This sounded like a major step forward.

We continued down the "short cut" road—a little rougher but shaved off some time. Pastor Lalpek is really a good driver—handling the bumpy winding roads at night!! What an adventure!

At dinner he insisted that this was just the beginning, and I believe it, too! To all who welcomed us, ka lawm.

If anyone is interested in visiting Chin State, I have just the host for you!

#AsiaJan2019 Day 14 - Monday 1/21

RELAX DAY

Now begins the transition back to the US. Return flights were scheduled conservatively — just in case domestic flight was canceled. So, we had a late afternoon flight from Kalemmyo to Yangon. Time to pack, have a casual lunch, and do a little more local shopping. Flight to Yangon was smooth and uneventful.

In Yangon we were met by two hosts from Myanmar Baptist Convention, friends we met earlier last week. They got us safely to our hotel and we enjoyed a dinner together...a time to continue to learn more about the Ministers Dept of MBC and things of interest and concern.

Internet is spotty tonight. So, again, just relaxing, getting rest for the long journey home. I don't leave until late tomorrow, so we will be able to get in some sight-seeing before going to the airport.

Back in US I've missed all the lunar excitement and MLK commemorations. No worries...got lots of beautiful views and opportunities to think about and advocate for human worth for all people on this trip.

Good night.

#AsiaJan2019 Day 15 - Tuesday 1/22

SIGHTSEEING / FRIENDSHIP-BUILDING

Turned out to be a full day of sightseeing. Visited more Baptist-mission related places with our hosts from Myanmar Baptist Convention staff. Visited two complexes of Karen Baptist associations, which included historic churches, theological center, and the Franc Auditorium, where thousands

#AsiaJan2019 Journal Entries continued...

celebrated in 2013 the 200th anniversary of American Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson's 1813 arrival in Burma. We also visited the busy Bogyoke (General) Aung San Market to see (and buy) some more local artistry, followed by more meal fellowship. My fellow teammate headed to the airport while I spent a little time visiting with one of my hosts and his family, who then proceeded to take me to the National Races Village, a large park-like outdoor space where you can visit exhibits that show aspects of the different ethnic groups (i.e. races) in Myanmar. We had time to visit the Karen, Kachin, Chin, Mon and Burman exhibits, seeing traditional homes, housewares, costumes, and landscapes. During our drives throughout the city I tried to learn a little Sgaw Karen. Wow! I had to laugh at myself. Imagine one of those movie scenes where one person is trying to teach another how to say something and the learner thinks she is saying exactly what the teacher is saying, but the teacher keeps saying "No, like this..." – and on and on! These tonal languages are tricky! Nee Luh Ghay (but with an r?) – good afternoon; Ta blurk – thank you! One last delicious meal and fellowship near the airport, and on to a night flight to Tokyo. A very nice way to end a trip: more cultural immersion and friendship building!

#AsianJan2019 Day 16 – Wednesday 1/23 ONE LAST STOP

I arrived in Narita International Airport early this morning, and my layover is long enough for me to get in one last mini-tour! I love that this airport has this program (Narita Airport Transit and Stay) – several free-ish tour options, both self-guided and with volunteer guides. I opted to go to the guided walking tour of the Naritasan Shinshoji Temple and Omotesando Street. There was another couple from the U.S. also going on this tour, but we each had our own personal tour guide. My guide's name is Aya. She was such a wonderful company. She volunteers twice a month to take tourists like me on this hike (10K steps easily) plus one other time to work the customer service desk. She travels an hour on the train one way to do this! She also likes to travel and has been to the US before and plans to visit other cities. Maybe one day we will meet again?!? I ran into the other couple a couple of times while on the tour, and turns out the wife is a pastor, too! What are the odds! (They are from Tennessee.) Anyway, other than getting confused with money exchange and spending more on souvenirs than I planned to, this was the best way to spend a long layover. The temps were a little cool but all the walking, especially the steps at the temple, warmed me up. Beautiful gardens, pleasant company, and the best unagi meal ever! One of these days I'll come back to Japan for more than a layover (last time was an overnight in 1984!) Looking forward to getting home! Thank you, Asia,! I love you



To view an online photo album of this trip, go to: abcwisconsin.shutterfly.com and enter in the password **abcofwi**.