



REPORT ON A CONSULTATION FOR MISSION AND CHURCH LEADERS IN MYANMAR FACILITATED BY FAITH2SHARE

Background and need

During 2012, with the political situation changing in Myanmar, Faith2Share was contacted independently by a number of church pastors in Myanmar who were seeking to develop small mission movements to other regions of their own country and into neighbouring countries. When the Faith2Share International Director visited Yangon in the autumn of that year he met with several of these pastors, three of whom were already engaged in recruiting and sending missionaries with minimal resourcing. During 2013 and into 2014 Faith2Share worked with four of these leaders (who previously did not know each other) to form a cohesive mission team. The leaders themselves chose to call themselves the Faith2Share Myanmar Chapter. They are from Lutheran and independent church backgrounds.

As Faith2Share discussed with the leaders of the Myanmar Chapter how best we could support their ministry one of the major ideas they put to us was the facilitation of a leadership consultation. They suggested that there were many Christian leaders like themselves who had a vision for mission but were struggling to explore how they could be effective in mission with the meager resources they had and in the particularly challenging political and social conditions of their country. Faith2Share therefore agreed to seek resourcing for a consultation of around 30 leaders which would be held in March 2015 (later postponed to May 2015). This proposal was made possible by allocating funds made available to Faith2Share by the Hinchley Charitable Trust.



Many of the 'historic' churches in Myanmar (notably Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Anglican and Lutheran) were planted in the early 19th century but most of the growth of the Christian community took place amongst the minority tribal groups leaving the majority Burmese

(Buddhist) community largely untouched by the gospel. Years of military dictatorship (in the late twentieth century) also led to decline and nominalism within the historic churches. The missional challenge for the Myanmar Christian community today therefore is three-fold: (a) to rekindle the faith within the nominal churches of minority tribal groups; (b) to plant the seed of the gospel within the majority Burmese people group; and (c) to respond to the missional needs of China and other neighbouring countries. Within the Faith2Share Myanmar Chapter there is a vision to engage with all three of these challenges although different members have different priorities.

The Leadership Consultation



The Leadership Consultation was held in Yangon at the National YMCA from 17-20 May 2015 with 36 participants, 12 of whom came from outside Yangon and were residential (the rest travelling in daily). The 36 participants included mainly pastors and missionaries but also a few bible college teachers and students and at least one church youth worker. All had been selected by the local team because of their current involvement in mission or vision for mission. The churches represented included the Baptist, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Assemblies of God and Independent congregations. Although we had offered to hold the consultation in Burmese most of the sessions were in fact held in English (which the majority of the participants understood) with interpretation into Burmese.

The Facilitation Team

The four members of the Faith2Share Myanmar Chapter, Manaai Cheng (Christ for All Nations Mission); Hung Ling Dai (Fellowship Bible Church of Myanmar Mission); Martin Lalthangliana (Gospel Outreach Mission); and David Naingki (Soul-Winning Mission Church) acted as the planning group, took full responsibility for running the consultation, financial administration etc., and led many of the sessions.

In addition, for this consultation, Faith2Share drew together a team of facilitators from within its network in Asia. The main facilitators were Manik Corea (NAMS Network, Thailand),



Bishop David Nyi Nyi Naing (Anglican bishop of Mandalay), Mark Oxbrow (Faith2Share) and Johnny Knox (Opportunity Now, Myanmar). We had also planned to have Jonathan Chauhan and Rev. Kirivasan from Indian Evangelical Mission (IEM) but sadly they were refused entry at the border and so their materials had to be presented by other members of the team.

The Programme

It had been requested that this consultation should focus on leadership for mission and so the main sessions were as follows:

- Joining the God of Mission
- Vision for Mission in Myanmar
- Leadership in Mission
- The Character of the Christian Leader
- Effective Leadership for church planting
- Effective Leadership for churches in mission
- Building sustainable mission movements (2 sessions)
- Leadership multiplication – growing new leaders
- The vulnerable leader (the way of the cross)
- How to turn vision into strategy and mission programmes

Many of the sessions gave space for group work, discussion and prayer together. In addition each morning we began with worship and Bible Study led by one of the local leaders. Our closing session was also a wonderful time of corporate prayer and worship led by the local team.



Outcomes

There have been a number of direct outcomes from this consultation and others that are still developing or are harder to measure. Some of the more obvious outcomes include:

- Over 30 local Myanmar Christian leaders have received high quality training in leadership which was contextualised and can form the basis for multiplying leadership skills within the churches. (All of the Powerpoint presentations and notes from the presentations have been made available to participants for their own use. Bishop David's two sessions are in Burmese and can easily be used locally – others require translation.)

- The four Faith2Share Myanmar Chapter leaders are now working together on income generation projects (with a start-up grant from Faith2Share) to enable them to become self-sustaining in mission work. To support this one of them is also attending the Opportunity Now 'Sustain' course.
- Another of our Faith2Share members, SOMA-UK, will be taking a team to Myanmar to work with Bishop David and his leadership and mission teams in Mandalay.
- NAMS Network (through Manik Corea) have now adopted one of the leaders as their representative or ambassador in Myanmar and are committed to his support and training and to further work in Myanmar.
- The Indian Evangelical Mission leaders who were refused entry (and therefore could not help with the consultation) later entered Myanmar by a different route and are continuing to explore how their mission can work in Myanmar. At least one very specific missionary placement in the Yangon neighbourhood is being explored.

At the end of the consultation there was one session when we intentionally looked at the future of mission in Myanmar, the coordinating role of the Faith2Share Myanmar Chapter, and how Faith2Share can continue to support this work. Some of the specific suggestions which were made (and many of which we are currently following up) were:

- Ongoing collaboration with Opportunity Now to develop sustainable structures for mission within the country. (This is happening – see above)
- The development of specific placements for Christian workers from outside the country, which currently cannot be 'missionary' but need to be business or educational placements. (These are being developed currently by the Lutheran and Anglican Churches and responses are possible from IEM and CMS and possibly others).
- The replication of this Leadership Training in other parts of Myanmar. Faith2Share was requested to come and facilitate these but we are currently working with our key leaders in country to explore how these can be facilitated with local resources (reusing some of the materials used in Yangon).



- The development of links with Christian literature ministries who might be able to help overcome the dire shortage of Christian books in Bible colleges, churches and homes.
- There was a specific request for a Faith2Share "Depth Discipleship" consultation in Myanmar. Faith2Share are currently considering this possibility for late 2016 or 2017.
- A new relationship has been established between mission-minded leaders in

several of the churches, notably the Anglican, Lutheran and Independent churches, which should lead to mutual support and encouragement, and even joint ventures, in the future.

Faith2Share remains committed to fostering the vision for mission in Myanmar but as far as possible wants to see this facilitated and resourced locally and with the support of mission movements (many within the Faith2Share network) in neighbouring countries.

Budget and Funding



One of the major advantages of this consultation being organized by a local team in country was that they were able to secure accommodation, food and other requirements at a very sustainable level. All participants paid a registration fee equivalent to five days wage for a local daily-paid worker (US\$5). The costs met by Faith2Share were US\$100 each for the twelve people coming from outside Yangon, US\$3 a day for day participants' transport, US\$9 per day for three meals per participant and US\$5 a day for overnight accommodation, together with meeting room costs, etc. The total 'in-country'

cost to Faith2Share was US\$2,629, on top of which we covered the flight and time costs of staff and one facilitator (from Thailand).

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Conclusion

Myanmar remains a very difficult context for Christian ministry and especially cross-cultural mission. The majority Buddhist community is largely resistant to the gospel, and its current alignment with the national government, itself only recently emerged from military dictatorship, means that the Christian community faces restrictions, prejudice and many practical problems (e.g. in the importing of Christian books). A very weak economy means that most Christian workers, especially those serving as missionaries live on a hand-to-mouth basis and struggle to resource the vision they own. Faith2Share will continue to encourage our member movements to stand alongside sisters and brothers in Myanmar but our modalities of support will be carefully monitored to avoid the development of a dependency culture and to foster local sustainability for mission.

Mark Oxbrow
International Director
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