

# Depth Discipleship Consultation



Global discipleship for a changing world

Yangon, Myanmar

24-27 April 2016



## Background

In the context of a nation emerging from an era of military government and restrictions on religious expression, Faith2Share has worked for the past four years with a small group of local church and mission leaders to encourage them in mission. These leaders are from different denominational backgrounds but agreed to collaborate in mission as they partner with Faith2Share.

Following a successful Leadership consultation in 2015 Faith2Share was requested to return to Yangon this year for a consultation focused on whole-life discipleship. This was part of the international programme "Depth Discipleship" which has been sponsored by Faith2Share over the past few years.

## Facilitation

The consultation was largely planned and organized by a team of four local leaders who have adopted the name 'Faith2Share Myanmar Chapter'. They come from quite different backgrounds but have been working together effectively for almost four years now. They are Martin Lalthangliana (pastor of the Lutheran church in Yangon); Manaai Cheng (leader of Christ for All Nations Mission, Myanmar); David Naingki (pastor and leader of Soul Winning Mission Myanmar); and Hung Ling Dai (director of Fellowship Missions Network and Myanmar Bible College)

The programme itself was facilitated by the local team augmented by four people provided by Faith2Share from within our network and associates. These were Bishop David Nyi Nyi Naing (Bishop of Mandalay); Rev. Manik



Corea (from NAMS Network, based in Thailand); Mr Johnny Know (of Opportunities Now, Myanmar) and Canon Mark Oxbrow (International Director of Faith2Share).



## Participants

All participants were selected and invited by our team in Myanmar and in the end 32 mission and church leaders attended from a range of Christian backgrounds including Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican and Independent. Twelve were from outside Yangon and were residential at our center (the Yangon YMCA) whilst the rest travelled each day (some of them for four hours each day) from within the Yangon area. Most of the consultation was conducted in local Burmese language, with translation for sessions delivered in English. About half of the participants had previously attended the Faith2Share Leadership consultation in Myanmar in 2015.



All of the participants were engaged in mission, most of them doing this in conjunction with other roles such as pastoring a church, running a Bible school or looking after a local ministry such as a children's home. Some of the missions represented are sending people internationally (notably across the border into China) but the majority are working with tribal groups within Myanmar – sometimes in very remote places. A minority are working with the majority Burmese Buddhist community and we had a special time of prayer for them towards the close of the consultation.

This is probably the most challenging mission assignment in Myanmar today, reaching Buddhist-background people within the country.

## Consultation Programme

Whilst all the Bible studies and worship were led by local leaders the facilitation team (see above) led the main sessions. These followed an established pattern for Faith2Share Depth Discipleship Consultations with each of the three days focused on a different discipleship context: Day 1 – Family, clan and tribe; Day 2 – Work and economic environment; Day 3 – Community, Politics and Multi-faith. During the course of each day we dealt first with the Biblical background, then with Christian character formation, followed by a look at available and needed resources for discipleship in each context and finally took time to tell each other our stories of discipleship. These personal times of sharing were (as usual) some of the most powerful. On the first day we struggled a little to stimulate group discussion as this is rather counter-cultural in Myanmar where most learning happens didactically with a teacher up front and everyone else listening, but by day three groups were really buzzing and we had difficulty

calling them back into plenary sessions. One drawback of operating in local language (which was the right decision) was that the facilitators, who except for Bishop David, were non-Burmese speakers, came away with only a partial understanding of what learning had taken place in the groups. We trust the Holy Spirit to reinforce this in the months to come! All teaching materials were left behind in Myanmar with a request (from participants) that those that were in English be translated into Burmese for future use within the country.



## Conclusion

Despite exceptionally high temperatures (even for Yangon) and frequent failures of electricity supply, all those attending participated enthusiastically and were very appreciative of the content offered.



We were disappointed to see only one woman amongst the registered participants but this is simply a reflection of local culture and church leadership which has not yet been challenged. On the other hand it was good to see a number of younger participants present, mainly recent graduates from Bible colleges, who were responding to a strong call into mission service.

We heard some powerful stories of mission service. One participant is a merchant seaman and spoke of his calling to reach out to seamen in the context of his work where he mixes with people from many different faith backgrounds. One of those working amongst the majority Buddhist community within Myanmar spoke of the persecution and opposition he faces and the real struggle to keep going. Myanmar remains a poor country and even those from the capital city were sharing how difficult it is to obtain the basic resources they need for mission such as transport costs, or Christian books.



Faith2Share will continue to work with these leaders through the local facilitation team, the 'Faith2Share Myanmar Chapter' but a key objective now is to build better partnerships with Faith2Share member agencies, especially those in the area. NAMS Network is already committed to this and IEM have shown an interest. CMS will soon have new mission personnel in the country but other partners are needed.

Mark Oxbrow  
30.06.16

