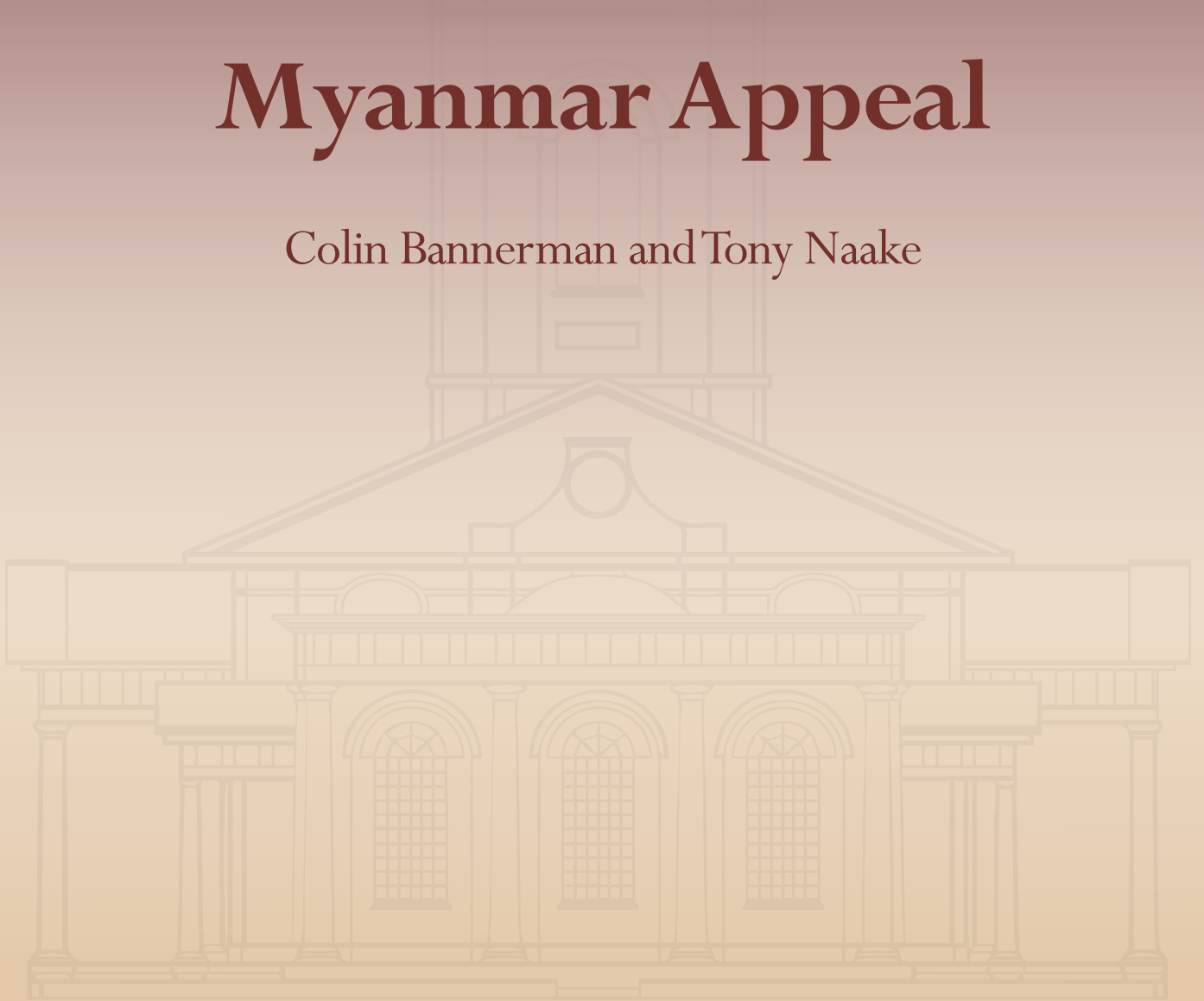


^TS. JAMES' *Connections*

Bicentenary 2019-2024

Myanmar Appeal

Colin Bannerman and Tony Naake



Extracted Article:
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Mindful of the needs of others: The Myanmar Appeal

Colin Bannerman and
Tony Naake

*'GIVE us grateful hearts, our Father,
for all thy mercies,
and make us mindful
of the needs of others;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.'*

U.S. Book of Common Prayer, 1928.

This now traditional prayer of thanksgiving before meals stands as a reminder that a blessing of plenty comes with an obligation of generosity.

The communication revolution that started with the invention of the printing press, and reached wildfire proportions with the emergence of digital media, has presented a new challenge. It is easier than ever to be informed about the needs of others, but harder to decide which ones to respond to. And do we actively seek information or passively rely on a daily feed from news and social media?

With growing fascination, we have watched the news media rush breathlessly from one spectacle to another—the antics of POTUS, the Australian bushfires, the overthrow of Myanmar's fledgling democracy, the storming of the US Capitol, the progress of COVID-19 and its rising body count, the conquest of Afghanistan and the retreat of western forces. We have been fed a daily diet of hardship stories, as reporters seek new angles to explore or individuals enduring real or imagined misfortune reach out, hoping to be heard. Through it all, there is a lingering suspicion that whatever



The famous Burmese 'Green Tea Salad' containing fermented green tea leaves, split peas, fried garlic and toasted peanuts

Image: Tony Naake

algorithm drives the selection of news gives more weight to sensationalism than mindfulness of need.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, has supplied plenty of sensationalism, though there has been less mindfulness of its peoples' needs. The Myanmar people themselves are an uneasy mix of many ethnic groups with a variety of cultural traditions. They are overwhelmingly Buddhist; indeed, Buddhism is the official state religion. (The Rohingya, living near the border with Bangladesh, are Muslim; but they are not even counted among the 135 officially recognised ethnic groups.)

The country has a troubled past as well as a troubled present. Burma has been in a state of civil war in one region or another almost continually for at least two centuries. The British withdrawal in 1947 from colonial rule resulted in neither peace nor stable democracy. And certainly not in prosperity:

Myanmar is counted by the United Nations among the world's Least Developed Countries (low-income, 'severe structural impediments to sustainable development', 'highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks', 'low levels of human assets').

The Church of the Province of Myanmar (CPM) is part of a quite small Christian minority. Its origins lie in the arrival in 1825 of Anglican chaplains to the British army; it became an independent province of the Anglican Communion in 1970. It doesn't use the label 'Anglican'—nothing associated with British colonialism is acceptable to the Myanmar people. The Anglican Board of Mission (ABM) has had a long association with CPM. Even through the dark decades of military rule, ABM nurtured its partnership with the local church and found ways of getting money into the country from time to time, helping

to fund local projects such as preschool education, clean water supplies, and sustainable agriculture.

All the participants in our pilgrimage attended Mass in the Yangon cathedral in February 2020. The building was dilapidated; the church is impoverished. The organ was a squeaky little electronic thing, hidden somewhere. (In many places a guitar is the only instrument available.) English-speaking visitors sang from the English Hymnal, beloved by generations of high church worshippers. Theirs were falling apart; how we regretted having thrown out dozens of surplus copies in a storeroom clean-up back home! The sense of reverence and awe in the presence of the blessed sacrament was palpable. The people removed their footwear and approached the altar rail only barefooted. The sermon was given by Fr Peter (Sei Hao Mang) in Burmese and in English. Fr Peter also manages a Men's Association project in sustainable farming in the Diocese of Yangon.



Fr Peter - Yes, he's in the pigsty!
Image: Tony Naake

When we visited, a year before the latest coup, COVID-19 was already circling Myanmar. The border with China had been closed; the hotels were nearly empty. We practised hand hygiene obsessively. There were signs everywhere of the power and privilege enjoyed by the Tatmadaw, the military. There was never any doubt about who was really running the country. But



Uncle Peter of blessed memory, standing by one of
ABM's water projects at Yatarley village
Image: John Carroll

the future looked bright: at last, the people had a democracy of sorts, construction was booming, there was an air of general optimism, even in the shanties...

When the third wave of COVID-19—the dreaded Delta variant—arrived, it must have seemed to the humble folk—those in the fields, villages and shanties—like disaster piled on disaster. Testing was almost non-existent. The limited vaccine supplies from China were largely reserved for the military and their families. Our friend Fabian, one of millions whose livelihood had simply disappeared, volunteered to stand in a queue for hours to try to secure an oxygen supply for church workers who needed it. There was good reason for this: the hospitals did not have the capacity to handle a pandemic and routinely turned COVID-19 cases away. An oxygen supply was their only hope of survival. The military tried to disperse the oxygen queues because they were against public order. Fabian caught the virus and isolated himself from his wife and daughter; fortunately he survived. Not so 'Uncle Peter' (U San Lin). With his wife Joy, Peter had worked tirelessly for more than a decade to grow a substantial programme of relief and development among many of the poorest

throughout Myanmar. Peter will be sorely missed. Several of Myanmar's bishops have caught the virus, but (at last report) are recovering.

Surprisingly even with the military coup this February, most of ABM's Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) projects have continued. This is great news to Tony, as his commitment to supply clean drinking water to remote communities is his passion! In the financial year 2019-20, eight villages of 1,606 people benefited, and for the financial year 2020-21, seven villages of 2,643 people are expected to benefit from the WASH projects.

In February and April this year, the diocese loaned funds to the village for this project, then were reimbursed by ABM's WASH funds when they were able to access the funds from the bank in May.

Workshops on hygiene and sanitation, gender, and environment were carried out in most of the project locations before COVID-19 struck. However, during the last financial year there were minimal meetings and training activities due to the combined negative impacts of COVID-19 and the coup.

ABM has launched an emergency appeal to raise funds to contribute to the relief and



community development programmes of CPM. Getting financial aid into the country is difficult, but possible. A small group of ABM supporters has joined forces to help with the appeal. We had planned to host a fundraising event after Evensong at Christ Church St Laurence (CCSL) last July. We were excited at the prospect of sharing some of our cherished experiences of Myanmar and its people, serving a splendid supper of authentic Burmese food and—most of all—raising some funds to help the Church of Myanmar through this very difficult time. The supper will still happen, just as soon as COVID-19 restrictions allow. After that, we hope to take the 'Myanmar roadshow' to other parishes.

Meanwhile, you can join with us now in supporting the ABM emergency appeal at <https://www.abmission.org/myanmar>.

Double your impact!

A generous ABM donor has offered to match \$ for \$ for the first \$10,000 of donations received!

Colin and Lyn Bannerman (Parishioners at CCSL), Paul Lee and Tony Naake (Parishioners at St James') visited Myanmar in February 2020 as participants in a pilgrimage conducted by ABM.

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