

Myanmar



Myanmar—officially The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and formerly called Burma—is a Southeast Asian nation of more than 100 ethnic groups bordering India, Bangladesh, China, Laos, and Thailand. In area, it is slightly smaller than Texas with about double the amount of people. The capital city is Yangon (formerly Rangoon).



The Irrawaddy Delta is a low-lying region in southern Burma that plays a dominant role in the fishing and rice cultivation industry. The region was devastated in May 2008 by Cyclone Nargis that, by official estimates, left 84,500 dead and 53,800 missing.

Most of Myanmar's population live along the coastline and make a living from fishing or growing rice.

89% of the people in Myanmar are Buddhist, 6.2% are Christian, 4.3% are Muslim, and many other small denominations make up the rest. Although Christianity was first introduced to the country in the 16th century, it truly began to grow centuries later. The Catholic faith was reestablished in Myanmar in 1954 by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME).

Myanmar was granted independence from Great Britain in 1948 and was a democratic nation. That ended in 1962 when the military took over the country and it became a dictatorship.

In 1966 all foreign missionaries who had entered the country for the first time after independence in 1948 were forced to leave. While Catholics are only about 1% of the total population of Myanmar, The Pontifical Mission Societies (the parent group of MCA) are there to aid help them as they grow in faith.

Since 1962,, ethnic strife has been constant, plunging Myanmar into one of the world's longest ongoing civil wars. Many human rights violations were reported by the United Nations and other world organizations.

MCA in Myanmar

In 2010, the military government was dissolved and free elections were allowed. Myanmar's most famous human rights activist, Aung San Suu Kyi, was released from house arrest after almost fifteen years. Her party won the majority of the governmental seats in 2015 but the military remains very powerful, politically.

In April 2021, the military cracked down on the country. They re-took control of the government and arrested those who disagreed with them. Many journalists and, once again, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Protesters have taken to the streets and the military has used lethal force to disperse them. Hundreds have died.

In the Diocese of Hakha, The Missionary Childhood Association is there to help children weather the political storm by providing education. Located in the mountainous region of Chin State, it is one of the most remote areas of Myanmar. There is very little development and school facilities, where they exist, are inadequate.

Chin State has one of the lowest literacy



rates in all of Myanmar. About 26% of all people there have never been to school.

With funding from MCA, Saint John's School is changing the educational status of the area. Since the beginning of construction in January 2017, one of two planned buildings is finished and fifteen Early Child Care

Development teachers have been trained. The teachers have also been trained through the Church's teacher-training program. There are currently, 155 students attending Saint John's School.

Saint John's School strives to be a model of best practices in education. While other schools in Myanmar are still teaching by outdated memorization and rote learning techniques,



Saint John's is teaching using child-centered practices. Children are encouraged to learn at their own pace. To watch a 360° video of the first fifty students attending pre-school and kindergarten in July 2017 as they sing their morning greeting song, go to this link: <https://bit.ly/2Gn0tZs>

The construction of a second classroom building will increase the school's capacity by an additional 240 students. More teachers will be trained and formed in the Catholic Church's catechetical programs. Current teachers need on-going formation as well. The school hopes to buy a second bus so the children who live in the furthest reaches of the area can be served by the school.

In November 2017, Pope Francis visited Myanmar and said *"Through the generous assistance provided by The Pontifical Mission Societies, the Church in this country is helping great numbers of men, women and children, regardless of religion or ethnic background."*

He was thanking YOU—the Missionary Childhood members—who helped send \$24,500 to the Diocese of Hakha, at last report. MCA members of Myanmar sacrificed \$18,155.63 for children around the world in need of the help of missionaries.

*Thanks to Catholic Mission Australia (their name for TPMS) for the mission pictures and story.