Massive crowds filled central Yangon, Myanmar, in Southeast Asia on December 5–8, 2013 for the Bicentennial Celebration marking the arrival of American Baptist missionaries Adoniram and Ann Judson to Burma 200 years ago.

A total of over 32,000 people had registered for, and some 14,000 more reportedly attended, the four-day Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) event. The crowds were far larger than the new Franc Auditorium on the Karen (kuh-REHN) Baptist compound could accommodate, and closed circuit TV broadcasted the event to people in nearby locations. While some attendees were foreign guests such as my wife Gail and me, the vast majority were from Myanmar, and the sheer number of those present was quite a testimony to their commitment.

Hundreds of musicians led worship in choirs, worship teams, bands and string orchestras. Guest speakers included Rev. Dr. Neville Callam, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance; Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, general secretary of American Baptist Churches, USA, and Rev. Dr. Molly Marshall, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Baptist leaders from around the world brought greetings.

One could definitely have been overwhelmed by the sheer number of people attending the celebration, as well as by the range of ministries in which they are involved. The event had plenary sessions and many opportunities for interaction, instruction and inspiration. We explored different areas of the Karen compound where the event was held, including a historical exhibition near the Pwo Kayin.
Had we been in Oxford in 1941, we might have heard C. S. Lewis preach on following Jesus. Surprisingly, instead of emphasizing self-denial, he urged his listeners to more strongly desire their own good:

“If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

This issue of International Ministries ON LOCATION invites us to consider what it means to rise to the challenge of global mission. By calling it a “challenge,” we recognize that it tests our abilities. And while mission does involve risk, effort and self-denial, these serve the higher purpose of joy—of hearing God say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” As Lewis noted:

“To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.”

We face a challenge. About a third of today’s world population identifies as Christian, but that percentage was the same in 1900. We send many long-term missionaries around the world, but in 1900 we sent seven times more. We consider ourselves generous, but spend more on pet food than on religious causes and give an average of two cents per dollar to global mission. We are far too easily pleased.

What would it mean to take an increasing role in global mission? Together, may we rise to that challenge . . . for the gift of joy that God offers!

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

Acts 16:9-10 NIV

2014 Theme — Rise to the Challenge

Biblical Reflection: Acts 16:9-10

by Stan Slade, Associate Executive Director, Program

“Come over to Macedonia and help us!”

It sounds so simple. And, in some ways, it was. God’s servants heard the call and they acted. (Acts 16:10).

But Luke tells us much more! He shows us that when God’s people rise to the challenge of mission, searching and struggle can be part of the process. That was just as true in the first century as it is in the twenty-first.

Even before Paul’s second missionary journey began, there was trouble. Paul had a sharp disagreement with Barnabas about John Mark. So, Barnabas set out with John Mark, while Paul left separately with Silas.

Paul’s goal was to strengthen the churches that had already been planted. Things went well at first. Timothy joined the mission team. Paul found the churches growing in depth and numbers.

But then things got difficult and puzzling. Luke does not tell us how God called Paul to move out beyond the established churches and enter new territory. But Luke does give us surprising news: Paul tried to head west, toward Ephesus, but he was “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia” (v. 6).

The surprises continued when the missionaries tried to head north, toward Bithnia. Again, Luke tells us that “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” (v. 7).

Prevented from pursuing mission opportunities to the left and to the right, Paul and his companions surely wondered what God was up to, as they continued on the road.

No wonder they were so ready to jump when the Macedonian vision came! (v. 9) After many false starts and over 400 miles of soul-searching uncertainty, when God finally opened a new door at the seaport of Troas, the missionaries were eager to respond!

This, too, is part of mission. God uses everything—including our struggles to see the way ahead—to shape us for more effective mission service. Clear visions in the night go hand-in-hand with uncertainty on the road. God uses it all to prepare us to rise to the challenge when new mission opportunities appear.

In 2014, American Baptists are entering our third century of participating in the international dimension of Christ’s mission. The same God who called Paul to come to Christ, who enabled Paul to grow to maturity in Christ and who sent Paul to change the world in the power of the Spirit, is still sending us today.

The same God who invited Paul and his companions to rise to the challenge in Macedonia, invites us to do the same today. With confidence in God’s call, in the power of the Spirit and in Jesus’ promise to be with us always, let us together Rise to the Challenge!
2,000 years ago, Jesus gave Christians the Great Commission. Yet, today, 68 percent of the people of the world still have not experienced the fullness of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is time for God’s people to rise to the challenge.

So much has changed since Jesus left his disciples with the Great Commission. And a lot has changed for foreign missions in the 200 years since Adoniram and Ann Judson sailed for Asia.

But the Savior’s challenge has stayed the same.

Jesus asks his followers to make disciples of all nations, and that is what Christians today and throughout history have done. For ten generations, our missionaries, home staff, international partners, local churches and mission-minded individuals have played a part in changing lives, now and for eternity.

But work still remains to be done.

With 68 percent of the world’s population yet to experience transformation through Jesus, the Great Commission challenge remains as urgent today as when God led Adoniram and Ann Judson to Burma.

That is why American Baptist International Ministries (IM) has created the Judson Mission Advance Fund, a three-year fundraising initiative designed to strengthen and expand our global outreach.

Gifts given to the Judson Mission Advance Fund in Year One (2014) will help underwrite a gathering of IM global workers, representatives from partner international ministries, potential IM missionary candidates and many pastors and lay leaders. This landmark time of discernment, planning and celebration of 200 years of IM ministry will take place during an intensive gathering in July 2014 at the Green Lake Conference Center in Wisconsin.

Generous giving. Not all can go, but all can give prayer and financial support to IM’s global ministries. Through the Judson Mission Advance Fund, you can join a long line of faithful Christians who have risen to the challenge of Great Commission giving.

This is an especially exciting moment to support IM’s mission of transformation! In the Spirit’s power, we are working together to share the gospel with more and more of the 68%.

Please pray, encourage others and give now to the Judson Mission Advance Fund. The world is waiting.

Gifts toward the $1.1 million goal can be made through your local church, by check directly to IM or online at www.internationalministries.org/drives/18.

LEARN MORE
Career missionary service: contact Jim Bell. Jim.Bell@internationalministries.org, (513) 582-8824
The World Mission Conference gathering: contact Carole Sydnor. Carole.Sydnor@internationalministries.org, (800) 222-3872 x2313
The Judson Mission Advance Fund: contact Ray Schooler. Ray.Schooler@internationalministries.org, (800) 222-3872 x2347

Go Into All the World and Make Disciples
by Rebekah Basinger

Myanmar Baptists celebrate 200 years at an historic event in December 2013.

Adoniram and the three Mrs. Judsons were surely singing with the heavenly hosts as Christians from Myanmar (Burma) and abroad joined in celebration to God for a faithful church that has withstood time and persecution. The 2.2 million Christians in Myanmar today are the spiritual descendants of those who were introduced to Jesus by the Judsons and other missionaries.
Great Shouts of Praise…  
(continued from page 1)

Theological Seminary. The exhibit included statues of Ann and Adoniram Judson, a miniature model of the zayat (the structure that Judson built where pilgrims could rest and hear about Jesus) and a life-size, walk-through depiction of Judson’s torture in the “death prison.”

Most of the local Baptist churches canceled their Sunday morning services because their members were attending the celebration—and because their buildings, filled with sleeping mats and personal belongings, were housing visitors from other parts of the country.

The Celebration’s closing service was hot. We were tightly packed in our seats, the service was long and we had been through many such services within the past days. But it was still wonderful, and we were deeply blessed. The service began with a time for praise and worship songs, led by an energetic group of youth in their respective ethnic clothing.

The message, alternating between English and Burmese, spoke about the Judsons’ ministry and emphasized that the greatest thing to be celebrated was that it was God who was at work through them.

Serving Communion to such an overwhelming crowd was a bit hectic—but, like everything else, it had been planned carefully and was carried out well. The sense of being part of the great family of God, because of Christ, was very strong. For us, this Communion was the high point of the celebration. Afterwards, the benediction was pronounced by Rev. N. Gawk Yaw, a 110-year-old pastor.

This experience of unity was not limited to the Communion. In fact, the entire Bicentennial Celebration gave me a strong feeling of connection with my brothers and sisters in the faith in Myanmar, and it also enhanced my sense of belonging within our American Baptist family. These are just two aspects of the same reality.

Now, the party may be over, but the work of God continues. Cleanup started at the Franc Auditorium just minutes after the benediction was pronounced, but the building did not stay empty for long. The next day, about 2,000 Baptist pastors assembled to begin a week-long conference. At the Myanmar Institute of Theology, though the campus was quiet, some of our friends were talking about two gospel teams that were going to travel to remote locations during the Christmas break. The Bicentennial Celebration had praised God for the past, but it also definitely looked forward to the future.

What a privilege it was for Gail and me to be able to share this historic event with Baptists from Myanmar, the U.S. and other places around the world. Indeed, God has done great things—and continues to do so.

Rev. Dr. Paul D. Aita is a special assistant to IM Area Director Stan Murray. He is also a former executive minister for ABC of the Northwest (1994-2000) and a guest lecturer in pastoral theology and biblical languages at the Myanmar Institute of Theology (2000-present).
Rev. Cheryl Jones Returns to Service with IM

Rev. Cheryl Jones, IM’s newly endorsed missionary to South Africa, has a great appreciation for the way that her circumstances have shaped who she is today. She writes, “I have experienced the greatest spiritual growth through my challenges. As a result of having major surgery, I was led to visit chronically ill patients in hospitals and prisons. Having been a victim of crime, I became even more passionate about the discipleship ministry to convicted criminals.”

Rev. Jones was ordained by her local church in 2001 and commissioned as an IM missionary in Durban, South Africa. She served in women’s ministries and leadership development, and as a facilitator for a multicultural HIV/AIDS support group. When her service as an IM missionary ended in 2005, she continued to minister in South Africa for eight more years.

With this endorsement, Rev. Jones is looking forward to her renewed ministry in South Africa at the Baptist Convention College in Soweto, training a new generation of church leaders. She explains, “My experiences in social outreach ministry can help Christian men and women focus not just on preaching, but also on community-oriented servant leadership that improves people’s lives.”

To learn more about Rev. Jones and to support her ministry, go to www.internationalministries.org/teams/640-jones.

Responding as a Family to God’s Call

The Rev. Peter and Sarah McCurdy first heard the call to overseas ministry when Peter went on a mission trip to Peru in 2011. Sarah explains, “I thought it would be a ‘one-and-done’ experience, but during Peter’s trip, while I was having my devotional time, I received a cherished vision from God. I saw the whole family together in a field doing mission work.”

That vision was confirmed in November 2013, when the entire McCurdy family went to the Dominican Republic (DR). “What gripped our hearts in the DR,” says Peter, “is how much pastoral encouragement is needed. Most pastors were moved to tears as we told them we’d soon be there to provide spiritual and emotional support.”

Peter most recently served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Painesville, Ohio. God has also used him to help form a pastoral prayer group, in the area. This ministry is similar to what the McCurdys will do as IM missionaries—provide support and encouragement to pastors and pastors’ families in the DR and, ultimately, in Cuba.

Peter and Sarah will be embarking on this life journey together with their four children: Elizabeth (12), Nathaniel (9), Samuel (7) and Elianna (4). As they see it, Peter, Sarah and their children will all be serving together, and they are all eager to begin their work in the DR. As Sarah says, “Each member of our family is excited about what God is calling us to do.”

To learn more about the McCurdys and to support their ministry, go to www.internationalministries.org/teams/638-mccurdy.
How is God calling IM into the future of global mission?

This is the key question of the newly-initiated planning process: Responding to the Call: Discerning God’s Direction for a Third Century of Mission, led by the International Ministries (IM) Board of Directors.

“The purpose of the Responding to the Call process is to discern and articulate a fresh vision of how IM will serve the mission of Jesus Christ in 2015–2020,” explains Stan Slade, IM associate executive director for Program, who is serving as process leader for this initiative.

“I am especially moved by this combined effort of board and staff. The key feature of Responding to the Call is the process of listening to our partners,” says Dr. Reginald Mills, IM Board of Directors president. “We have partners in the local churches, regions, in our churches and institutions, in host countries, in mission work groups and discovery teams, in women’s circles [and] in the lives of our pastors, our missionaries and home staff.”

The IM Board believes that God calls to IM, not in isolation, but together with those with whom IM is privileged to share the mission of Jesus Christ, both around the world and across the United States and Puerto Rico. Responding to the Call was authorized by the IM Board of Directors in September 2013.

Karen Smith, IM missionary and consultant to the New Life Center Foundation in Chiang Mai, Thailand, is lending her organizational expertise to this initiative in her position as lead facilitator.

The results sought through this process include: a shared statement of vision, priorities, goals and an operational plan for the work of IM in 2015–2020; deepened mission relationships throughout the entire partnership network in which God has placed IM for the sake of Christ’s mission and the release of fresh energies into the transforming work of Jesus Christ in our world.

For more information on the process and outcomes, contact Karen Smith at karen.smith@internationalministries.org.