

CLM MYANMAR REPORT 2024

April 2021 two months after the declaration of coup d'état in Myanmar, the CLM had left Bhamo through relief flights and went back to the Philippines for security reason although the contract was not finish yet. Several days since we arrived the Philippines, the CLT initiated a special session for us individually for a trauma and recovery process to help us to cope about what we been through. Michael was asked to take 4 months holiday while there was no decision yet to come back Myanmar because of the current political situation.

September 2021, he finished his home vacation and he was asked to join and help the Vocation Promotion in Mindanao base in Cagayan de Oro for the mean time while waiting the right time to go back his mission assignment. He was involved in some church activities, Columban activities and accompanied the young people in the youth ministry together with other lay missionary in the area.

After more than a year of waiting, he signed his long-term agreement to CLM last June 2022 that was held in Barra parish. It was witnessed by the Columbans both lay and priests in Mindanao and the parishioners. At that time the restriction of Filipinos to go to Myanmar was lifted from level 4 to level 2. So Michael had the chance to process all his documents to go back Myanmar. By July 16, 2022 Michael arrived Myitkyina and learned the national language the Burmese language since he knew already the local language the Kachin language (dialect). Since Michael arrived alone in Myitkyina, he couldn't go back to Bhamo yet because the situation in the country was still difficult especially in Kachin State. He has to wait his companion Catharina.

Catharina after her term in the CLT, was in Korea took some courses until her term completed while she was discerning to continue CLM. Finally she made a decision to renew CLM for another term and then continued to study as her Sabbatical studies, such as Self-integration and spirituality, Trauma healing through body self-awareness workshop, Non-violent communication, Pastoral counseling, Art therapy for the children. She started her course during the Covid time so some of her class was done through online but some are face to face class. While she was taking the course she was also actively joined the online meetings for CLM and MMU matters.

She renewed her contract as a long-term LM in August 2022 while she was on sabbatical. Catharina concluded her sabbatical with an eight-day retreat and arrived in Myanmar in early February 2023. New to Myitkyina, Catharina was given a brief orientation to the area and was brought to Columban priest's ministries.

Catharina was assigned to Myanmar 2015-2018 in Bhamo before she was elected in the Central leadership team (CLT); she learned the Burmese language that time. But since the medium of the people where Catharina and Michael will work, in Kachin land is Kachin language, so Catharina needs to learn the language.

At present the CLM Myanmar is composed of two LM's (Michael and Catharina) and Ordained (Kurt Zion Pala) as a member of the LMLT. Since LM's has no chance to go back to Bhamo because the current situation did not permit us to go, the MMU members, LM's and Bishop Raymond of Bhamo diocese has come to decide that the LM's are assigned in Myitkyina until December 2025. The MMU expressed that they are happy to welcome the CLM in Myitkyina. The CLM is taking an important role in the MMU. Michael is the bursar and Catharina is the house manager.

The CLM is actively involved in the most MMU activities like mission unit meetings, social gatherings, happy hour, planning and decision making. Last September 2023, the MMU had the annual retreat in Anisakhan (Part of

Myanmar). It was guided by Jovito Dales a Columban priest from the Philippines and it was ended with the mass together with Francis Xavier the newly ordained deacon from Myanmar. The next day after, there was a one day break just to prepare for the bi-annual meetings.

In Edin parish, during World Mission Sunday Kurt asked Michael and Catharina to share about Columbans and experiences in the mission. Both of them tried to speak the language they learned in front of the mass goers. For CLM, it was a great experience and thinking that the MMU can do also the same during the vocation promotion in other parishes.

To commemorate to the faithful departed, the Ordained and the Lay Missionary joined the mass in the cemetery and visiting the tombs of the Columban fathers and sister who died in Kachin Land during their mission. We lit a candle and say a short prayer prepared by Catharina.

In this time of civil war, there are lots of internally displaced people (IDP). In Nam San Yang IDP camp, one of the camp across the river from Myitkyina, the MMU led by Kurt and guided by one local catechist, reached them to listen to the cry of the people and to know how the Columbans can help them. In that camp there are more than 300 individuals including children and elderly residing and unrecognized by the government. They don't receive any help from local authorities. After hearing their need, the MMU decided to give their basic need like rice, cooking oil, salt and onions. Aside from those needs, the medical team from Edin parish came to give medical check-ups to those people and also provided some medicine according to their need.

23rd November, the Columban Fathers, LM's and the sisters together with the local people have celebrated the Columban's day. There was a sharing of food and a short program prepared by the locals and people who are involved in the ministry.

25th of November Vida and Alvaro came to Myanmar for their official visitation to the MMU. They were brought to the different ministries and some institutions that Columban is supporting and they joined the MMU pre-assembly meeting for preparation to the GA 2024. They also visited to some nearby IDP camp to see the reality of the people in Myanmar.

CLM ministry

At the moment since the decision to stay in Myitkyina was still fresh, the CLM is currently looking for a possible ministry. As soon as Michael and Cata will go back to Myanmar after the meeting that will be the time to involved themselves in their target place of work.

Challenges

Everyone knows the current political situation in Myanmar and it is still ongoing and getting harder, for the MMU still the safety is the main concern. In Myanmar, the visa is a challenge not only for the CLM but also to MMU and to all foreigners in the country. The Ordained Columban and sisters got their religious visa whereas Michael and Catharina have still the business visa. By January the CLM will try to explore the religious visa before going to CLM international meeting in the Philippines. In addition, language also is a bit challenging although the CLM has learned the local language but still hard to understand and still trying their best.