

# Our Link with Diocese of Toungoo

## *Toungoo Diocese Peaceful Prayer Walk*

### **Background:**

Since 2016, St John's Cathedral and the Anglican Diocese of Toungoo, Myanmar have formed a partnership for mutual learning and support through exchanging visits and prayers for each other.

In February 2016, a delegation led by the Right Revd Matthias C. Der, then Dean of St John's Cathedral, went on a fact finding trip to Toungoo. In October, St John's welcomed four guests from Toungoo. Included in the group were the Rt Revd John Wilme, the Diocesan Bishop, the Very Revd Canon Yo Shia, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, Toungoo, the Revd Jimmy Aung Khaing Nyunt, Principal of St Peter's Bible College and Miss Elizabeth Ei Hnin Phyu, delegate of the Anglican Young People's Association.

In 2017, to further strengthen the bond between the two communities, our parishioner Debbie McGowan offered herself as a volunteer teacher in Toungoo for 8 weeks starting from late January. The Cathedral was greatly encouraged by the mission trip.

In 2018, Debbie returned to Toungoo for another teaching mission, which shows our love and support to the people in Toungoo. Debbie's trip started on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan, and she came back to Hong Kong on 18<sup>th</sup> Feb.

In January 2019, the Anglican Diocese of Toungoo celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the diocese and the consecration of the Revd Dr Saw Shee Sho as the new diocesan bishop. It was a weekend of celebrations on 5<sup>th</sup> January and 6<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

To express support to our link diocese, a delegation of 16 people, including the Dean, the Revd Will Newman, Director of Music Felix Yeung, members of the Cathedral Choir, visited Toungoo from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> January 2019. The delegation further cemented the close partnership that has developed between St John's Cathedral and the Diocese of Toungoo. Members of the Cathedral Choir sang in four services, and the Dean preached at the Thanksgiving Evensong on 5<sup>th</sup> January.



**Weekly Prayer for Diocese of Toungoo:**

We pray for Bishop Dr Saw Shee Sho, his priests and people. We pray for the evangelistic and mission work conducted throughout the Diocese.

Please also pray for Debbie for her teaching mission in Toungoo.

### Updates on Debbie's trip (3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019):

Debbie McGowan went back to Toungoo for a whistle-stop trip in mid-March. During the trip, she attended the graduation ceremony of St Peter's Bible School and travelled to an ancient city called Pyay with the recently retired Bishop John and his wife Elizabeth.



It was lovely to be with the Agape 2 pre-school teachers during Debbie's fleeting visit. She spent the morning going round all six pre-school classes. They have also started summer classes for six to fourteen-year-olds, as most government schools are now on holiday until the new academic year begins in late June/early July.



(Photo on the left) Debbie presented the recently retired Bishop's wife, Elizabeth, with US\$60 to purchase kettles. Most local families boil their water over a charcoal fire outside. This kind donation was able to buy six new kettles for the staff and students of St Peter's Bible School.



(Photo on the right) From a very generous donor, Debbie was able to present Grace, Head of the Sunday School for the Diocese of Toungoo, with a further US\$500 to buy 400 more stationery bags for children in the rural villages. They are so happy to receive notebooks, pencils, crayons, pencil case, eraser and ruler, particularly as they have very little else.



(Photo on the left) Debbie was with the newly enthroned Bishop, the Rt Rev Dr Saw Shee Sho, his wife Catherine and two children, Grace and Syprian.

(Photo on the right) Debbie presented another donation (from her friend, Mark Powell, who taught with her last year) to the Head Teacher of pre-school Agape 1. Mark gave a talk to his local Women's Institute and they gave US\$90! They will use the funds to buy a slide for the playground.





Preparing for the graduation



After the graduation, Debbie travelled with recently retired Bishop John and his wife Elizabeth to Pyay for three days. On their final day, they visited some local villages in the Missionary Diocese of Pyay, and met Bishop Clement with his family.







Lunch in a hut in the mountains with one of Debbie's previous students, Saul Plati Wah

### Updates on the Delegation's Visit to Toungoo (11<sup>th</sup> Jan 2019):

Day 1: Before driving 5 hours north to Toungoo, the group visited Holy Cross Theological College in Yangon, with other overseas visitors



They also paid their respects by singing a hymn at the well-kept War Memorial



Day 2: The group had a thanksgiving service and breakfast at St Peter's Bible School in Toungoo before splitting into 2 groups: one group drove a couple of hours to Prayer Mountain, singing The Irish Blessing at

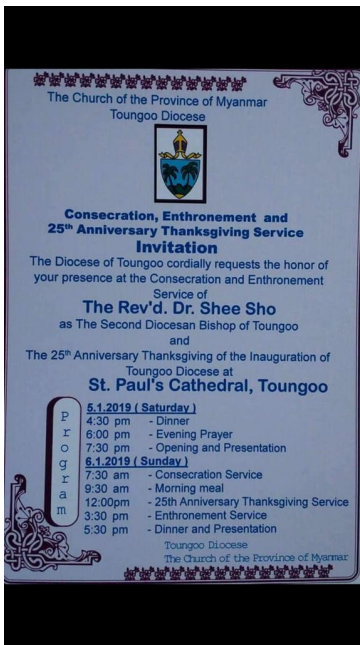


the top, and then visiting St Mark's Church where no foreigners have previously ventured. The other group went to Leik Tho to witness development of the youth hostel which has been funded by St John's Cathedral.



Team dinner at St John the Baptist Church





This was the programme of the celebration events that the group attended

Day 3: Group dinner at the Bishop's official residence







In preparation for the Consecration and Enthronement of the new Bishop

Day 4: The new Bishop of Toungoo, the Revd Dr Saw Shee Sho (front row, 4<sup>th</sup> from left) sitting with the Archbishop of the Province of Myanmar (5<sup>th</sup> from left) and all the other Diocesan, Missionary and retired Bishops. How colourful!







With the new Bishop and his wife Catherine

**Updates on Debbie's trip (13<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018):**

In her last week in Toungoo, Debbie had been showered with praise, blessings and gifts by her students, co-workers, congregation members and local friends in farewell parties again.

Before her departure, she visited the new youth hostel funded by the donation she helped raised last year. The hostel is located at Leik Tho, two-hour drive from Toungoo, in the mountains. She met around 20 students and had lunch with them. The students had never met any foreigners before that they were too shy to make any eye contact with Debbie.



Before and after



Debbie and the students at the hostel

Returning to Toungoo, Debbie treasured the remaining time with her fellow students and local friends. She said, 'I can't say much. Too emotional, and anyway words can't express my feelings ...'







'It has been amazing but now I do really need a rest. In the meantime, thanks a million for all your encouragement and support! I would also like to thank Bishop John and his wife Elizabeth, my wonderful friends and supporters. Without them, I wouldn't be here,' Debbie said.



Debbie has left Toungoo to travel around Mandalay region for a week. She will fly back to Hong Kong on 18<sup>th</sup> Feb (Sunday).

### Updates on Debbie's trip (5<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018):

Time flies. This week is the last week of Debbie's teaching in Toungoo. As Hong Kong continues to feel the chill in the air, it is much warmer in Toungoo. This week, the average daytime maximum temperature in Toungoo will be around 32°C, while the mean minimum temperature at nighttime will be around 16°C.

There was good news and bad news over the past week. First, the bad news: Debbie lost her voice (it is not good for a teacher to lose her voice!). The good news was that Debbie had recovered. Thank God!

During the week, Debbie and her friend Mark taught the classes together. They also went off to the Diocesan staff retreat. Bishop John asked Debbie and Mark to share their thoughts about being with the Toungoo Diocesan team at the retreat. Working with the Toungoo team was such a humbling but rewarding experience for both of them.

During her time off, Debbie had hotpot dinner with the locals. It was spectacular. They also went to see the amazing Toungoo Light Show. 'I feel very much at home and part of the "Toungoo Family"! I can't believe this is my last week of teaching. One month is not enough!' Debbie said.



The Diocesan staff retreat





hotpot dinner







Toungoo Light Show

### Updates on Debbie's trip (31<sup>st</sup> Jan 2018):

Debbie continues to have a good time with new and existing friends in Toungoo. Last week, she was joined by Father Graham Buckle (from St Stephen's, Westminster, the UK who has been invited by Bishop John to join their Priest retreat) and her friend Mark Powell. Father Sheesho (priest at St John the Baptist Church, near Debbie's hotel) took them all sightseeing around Toungoo.

Debbie's students didn't miss the opportunity to meet the visitors and they were all excited about knowing the outside world. They had so many questions to ask Father Graham and Mark! On Monday (29<sup>th</sup> Jan), Mark taught the Elementary class about Wales in the penultimate lesson (nine lessons in total). The students enjoyed the lesson and each one of them received a bookmark from Mark as a gift.

During the week, Debbie was also preparing gifts for the locals. 'Very many thanks to people who have donated again. Special thanks to those who donated the toiletries. There is a big mother's Union gathering at the beginning of February and we are putting together gifts for them,' she said.



Left: Father Graham (right) and Mark (left) were warmly welcomed by Debbie

Right: (From left to right) Father Sheesho and his family, Father Graham, Mark, and Debbie



Mark gave a lesson to the Elementary class.



Debbie's students asked Father Graham and Mark many questions. They were happy to meet the visitors.



The toiletries will be presented as gifts to the locals.

### Updates on Debbie's trip (22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 2018):

Debbie's teaching timetable is fairly full, which is how she likes it. She spends Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at one pre-school, and Tuesday and Thursday mornings at another one nearby. She has a daily



lunchtime lesson with the pre-school teachers, and twice weekly with twenty-five St Peter's Bible School students, whose Theological College is a few miles away across the river, near St Paul's Cathedral, (where she joins the Sunday School classes). Until three or four years ago foreigners weren't even allowed to cross the river!

On Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings Debbie has two 90-minute lessons (elementary & intermediate); Tuesday and Thursday evenings with the Bible School teachers. There are Saturday classes with youngsters aged 6 to 12. 'It's great fun, and they're really great students! I had a brilliant weekend. The weather is fine and sunny, though I needed a jacket this morning as temperature was only 16 ° C!' Debbie said.

On Sunday (21<sup>st</sup> January), Debbie attended a service of Thanksgiving for a new village hall, which the villagers built themselves. She then taught at the Sunday school, and was honoured to be invited to the 39<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebrations of one of the pre-school Head Teachers where she teaches.

On the other hand, Bishop John Wilme wrote an email to Dean Matthias last week. 'Debbie safely arrived in Toungoo and spent her Sunday morning service at St John the Baptist Church. She has already started her teaching classes. (It will be a busy month of teaching. We are also looking forward to seeing Chris (another volunteer from St John's Cathedral) and hope he will be happy to spend his time here in Toungoo too. We will have our annual clergy retreat for this year from 29<sup>th</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> February. Please remember us in your prayers.' Bishop John said in the email.





### Updates on Debbie's trip (15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018):

Debbie went on the trip to Myanmar for voluntary English teaching, not long after being blessed by the Dean.

'I'm feeling very relaxed and pretty excited about my trip. I know what to expect this time and so many friends, new and existing, to meet again,' Debbie said.

Debbie arrived in Yangon safely on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan. She was warmly welcomed by Bishop John Wilme and his wife Elizabeth, and she was invited to have supper with them in the Yangon Diocesan Office. The next day, they drove to Toungoo, which took about five hours. After the urban sprawl of Yangon, it's very rural.

On Sunday morning, Debbie attended the service at St John the Baptist Church, and she read the intercessions (the service is in English every three weeks). Everything was great: The singing was great. The flowers were amazing. The only "downside" was that the service started at 7.30 am.



Debbie has settled down quite well in Toungoo, and she will give her first pre-school lesson on Monday. Good luck Debbie!



Debbie's ready to go



English service at St John the Baptist Church



The altar and the flowers



Breakfast and lunch

#### **Updates on Debbie's trip (8<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018):**

Debbie McGowan will return to the Diocese of Toungoo in Myanmar for another teaching mission, which shows our love and support to the people in Toungoo. Debbie's trip will start on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan, and she will come back to Hong Kong on 18<sup>th</sup> Feb. Dean Matthias commissioned Debbie at the 9.00am service on 7<sup>th</sup> Jan. Please pray for her safe travel and ministry there.

Please also remember the ministry of the Diocese of Toungoo at this time. Bishop John Wilme will retire later this year, after 25 years as diocesan bishop. A new bishop will be elected and inaugurated in Jan 2019.

#### **Updates on Debbie's trip (27<sup>th</sup> Mar 2017):**

What a fabulous Myanmar trip! It was Debbie's last lesson in Toungoo on 25<sup>th</sup> Mar. In her last week of teaching, she paid a site visit to where the new youth hostel will be built.

The new youth hostel will be located at Leik Tho, two-hour drive from Toungoo. The Diocese of Toungoo is converting the dilapidated priest's house into the hostel, since it is easier for regulations and planning approval.

'As the funds are here, they are totally confident it will be finished by mid-May with 20 children, ages 11 to 14, moving in ready for the start of high school at the beginning of June. Their prospects without education is grim... Turning hopes into reality, thanks to you!' Debbie said.





Debbie paid a site visit and she was helping out at the site!

Returning back to St John the Baptist Church and St Paul's Cathedral, Debbie has been showered with praise, blessings, gifts and flowers by her students, co-workers, congregation members and local friends in farewell parties.



Saying goodbye to the pre-school children and the teachers ...



Showered with flowers and gifts

In the last few days before her departure, Debbie also presented gifts together with certificates to her students. She said, 'Thanks to my lovely St John's Cathedral Choir friends, who generously donated lipsticks, make-up palates, packs of playing cards (none of the students here had ever seen a pack of cards before I introduced them), chopsticks and bookmarks. Thanks also to Rita!'





Her students love these gifts.

After further exploring Yangon for several days, Debbie will be flying home, coming back to Hong Kong and join the Cathedral congregation again very soon.

**Myanmar Drop-in (25<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017):**

Groups of people interested in our link with the Diocese of Toungoo and Debbie's trip were warmly welcomed at the Harold Smyth Room. With Debbie sharing her vision and devotion, attendees got to know more about Toungoo, her trip and ways to support.





More information on Debbie's Trip:

## ***Debbie's Mission Trip to Myanmar January to March 2017***



- Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country but there are around 65,000 Christians
- Debbie was part of The Dean's delegation from St John's Cathedral that visited Toungoo ( one of six Dioceses ) in February 2016 and a close partnership has developed
- Toungoo is located 4 hours drive north of Yangon in the centre of Myanmar. It is a remote tribal area, with some places only opened to foreigners less than 2 years ago



- Toungoo's kids and adults are really keen to improve their English-speaking ability
- Debbie has volunteered to help teach English for 6 weeks in a Language Centre in Toungoo, departing at the end of January, subject to a work visa, returning to Hong Kong at the end of March
- She will pay for her airfare, hotel and living expenses and will not be paid for her work
- Money is needed for basic essentials ( including educational materials, clothes ) and will contribute to the Church's building programme ( eg. youth hostels and accommodation for the priests and teachers )

- All donations will go direct to Bishop John and the Diocese of Toungoo and will be very gratefully received



- The Dean and St John's Cathedral are supporting this trip and will make a significant contribution to the Diocese of Toungoo
- Dean Matthias says "I am very excited that Debbie will be a volunteer English teacher in Toungoo. This will further strengthen the partnership between St John's Cathedral and the Diocese of Toungoo for our mutual learning and for the mission of God. I invite you to join me in praying for her and supporting her trip"





### Debbie's teaching schedule will include:

- teaching at a pre-school every morning
- teaching the pre-school teachers every afternoon
- holding some adult evening classes
- giving some language workshops for teenagers at the weekends
- visiting St Peter's Bible School
- visiting different churches in the Diocese
- And perhaps she might have the chance to join some singing groups!

Please pray for Debbie during this venture and if you're interested in learning more,

do contact Debbie ☎ 9150-8393, ✉ [dvmsolutions@hotmail.com](mailto:dvmsolutions@hotmail.com) as she'll be very happy to hear from you!

If you would like to make a donation to the Diocese of Toungoo, you can either get in touch with Debbie direct or through St John's Cathedral office, which will be accepting donations throughout January 2017. You can either give cash or a cheque (payable to St John's Cathedral with 'Debbie McGowan Mission Trip' written on the reverse) or post a cheque to the Cathedral at 4-8 Garden Road, Central. If you would like a receipt for tax purposes please indicate this and include your full name and address.

