

Border News Christmas



December 2025

Nursery school in the camp



Thank you for your ongoing support for the Karen Ministry

Please take time and enjoy reading about Rev Tim's reflection on his trip to the Karen Ministry.

This is a longer read than normal but it reflects upon how he feels after an absence of over six years from the border.

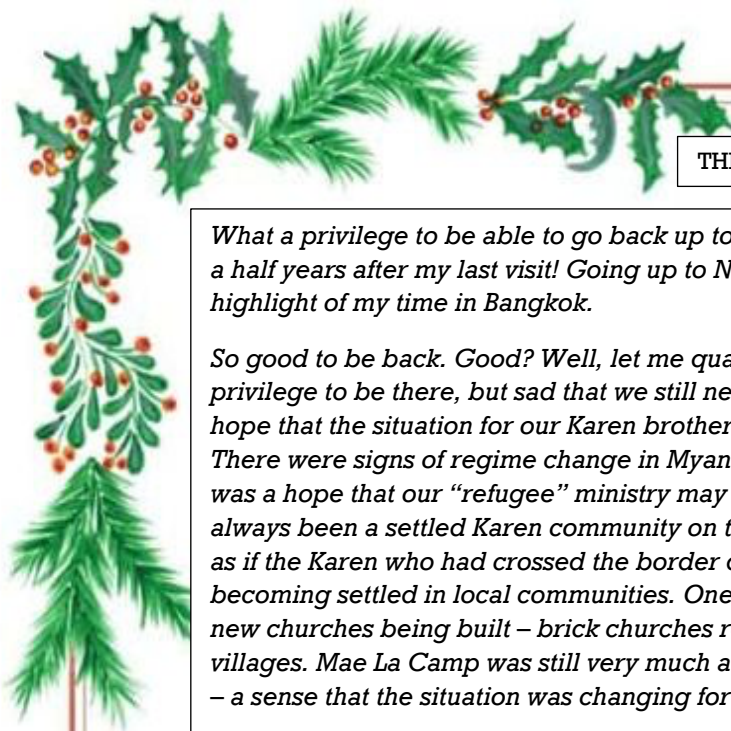
On behalf of the Karen students, children and staff at Noh Bo Academy, and the nurseries and orphanage in Mae La Refugee Camp, we send a sincere "Thank you" for your prayer and concern and for your ongoing financial support.

The situation in Myanmar is one of those "forgotten" humanitarian disasters in the world, overshadowed by other wars in other places. Please pray for Myanmar, for the Karen people in Karen State, and the migrants, simply seeking to make a normal life for themselves in impossible conditions.



Nursery Students

*Wishing You a
Blessed
Christmas
and A Very
Happy New
Year!*



What a privilege to be able to go back up to the border to visit our Karen ministry six and a half years after my last visit! Going up to Noh Bo and Mae La Camp was always a highlight of my time in Bangkok.

So good to be back. Good? Well, let me qualify that. Good to meet people that I knew, a privilege to be there, but sad that we still need to be there! Back in 2019, there was a real hope that the situation for our Karen brothers and sisters may have been improving. There were signs of regime change in Myanmar with a promise of fresh elections; there was a hope that our “refugee” ministry may even be moving into its final days. There has always been a settled Karen community on the Thai side of the border, and it was feeling as if the Karen who had crossed the border during the years of civil war since 1984 were becoming settled in local communities. One obvious indication of this was the sight of new churches being built – brick churches replacing the wooden churches in the Karen villages. Mae La Camp was still very much a refugee camp, but there was hope in the air – a sense that the situation was changing for the better.

Those hopes were dashed by the military coup in 2021, which overturned the results of the 2020 General Election and saw the arrest of the democratically elected leaders. In reality the military had never been far from power. Despite the overwhelming result in favour of the National League for Democracy, the military had reserved 30% of the seats in parliament for themselves even before the election was held. And the consequences of the coup – there has been widespread fighting right across Myanmar and renewed attempts to subdue the smaller ethnic groups by the government forces.

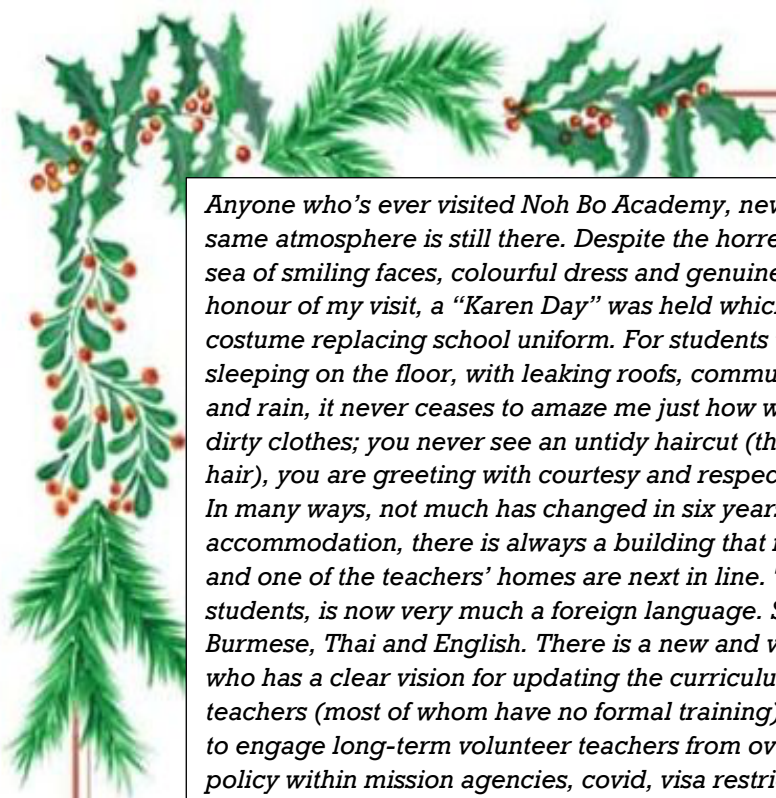
Myanmar is a federation – rather like the USA – twelve semi-autonomous states but subject to a national government. The lack of infrastructure slows down communications between states and makes it hard for the many ethnic groups to mount any concerted challenge to the government.

So what has all this meant for Christ Church’s Karen ministry? Many more refugees have crossed the border, Mae La Camp is full to capacity, and Noh Bo Academy, which was becoming a school for Thai Karen teenagers, is now predominantly filled with students from Karen state, many of whom who have travelled a long way to get there, one student even coming from as far away as Yangon. They have walked, ridden on the back of motorcycles, and, of course, crossed the river that flows along the border to get to Noh Bo.

Precisely how students first hear about Noh Bo remains something of a mystery to me but seems to be a case of “the word gets around”. One girl told me that she had been sent from her village because her local vicar knew about the school (there is a sizeable Christian minority across Myanmar). Others have relatives and friends – often relatives living on both sides of the border. On this visit, a simple show of hands in three classes suggested that almost all of the students now come from Karen state.

The students themselves are reticent to talk about home, and because Karen State has little infrastructure, it is likely that they don’t know much of what is happening beyond their own village. Seven years ago, I listened to teenagers talking about fleeing from their homes as soldiers came and torched their villages, and sadly this appears to have worsened. I was told that some students could not return home for Christmas this year because their villages have been destroyed and their parents are in hiding.

So where do we go now?



Anyone who's ever visited Noh Bo Academy, never quite forgets the experience, and that same atmosphere is still there. Despite the horrendous problems, you are greeted by a sea of smiling faces, colourful dress and genuine thanks for the support they are given. In honour of my visit, a "Karen Day" was held which made it very colourful day – Karen costume replacing school uniform. For students who live in wooden boarding halls, sleeping on the floor, with leaking roofs, communal washing facilities, and lots of mud and rain, it never ceases to amaze me just how well-presented they are. You never see dirty clothes; you never see an untidy haircut (they told me that they cut each other's hair), you are greeting with courtesy and respect.

In many ways, not much has changed in six years. Some rebuilding: with wooden accommodation, there is always a building that needs replacement. The girls' dormitory and one of the teachers' homes are next in line. Thai, which was spoken by many students, is now very much a foreign language. Students learn four languages: Karen, Burmese, Thai and English. There is a new and very efficient administrator at the school, who has a clear vision for updating the curriculum, and providing training for the teachers (most of whom have no formal training). In recent years it has not been possible to engage long-term volunteer teachers from overseas – for whatever reason – change of policy within mission agencies, covid, visa restrictions - but courtesy of communication technology, online learning is possible, English classes being supported from Singapore. One of my concerns – our overseas volunteers provided much of the Christian and spiritual teaching – has been met. Noh Bo has good contact with a Karen Bible College in a neighbouring village, and their students are regular visitors, leading bible studies and offering Christian support. At least one positive sign of local autonomy developing.

And so to Mae La....

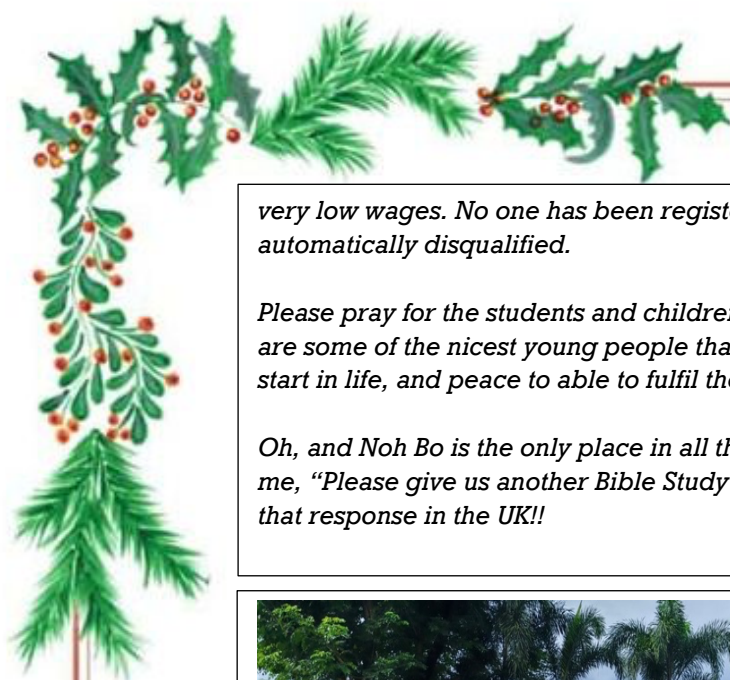
The Mae La Refugee Camp is a 45-minute drive south of Noh Bo. Because of covid, staff changes and the political situation, this visit was the first by a Christ Church member for four years. Again – so pleased to be able to make this visit. Mae La has sheltered refugees since 1984. It nestles beneath a very big hill – a safe site to shelter from the bullet of soldiers. It feels like a small town but just happens to have a wire fence around it. Inside, within the very squashed conditions, you will find a temple, a mosque, a hospital, and several churches, including three Anglican churches. (The Anglican Church in Myanmar/Burma goes back to British Empire days and the presence of Anglican refugees amongst the first of those to cross into Mae La Camp is the reason why Christ Church first got involved with the Karen.)

Formal links with the Karen Anglicans are now coordinated at diocesan level, whilst Christ Church continues its support for education. We support three nurseries and an orphanage in the camp.

As always, my reception was warm. I met with all the teachers. Support is badly needed – repairs to the buildings, and staff salaries (pitifully small) are ongoing, but now there is also a need for food. The nurseries have always provided a simple lunch for their children, but with outside aid drying up, there is no provision for food after December.

Wood for building repairs, which has previously been donated, also needs to be bought now. A doctor, working inside the camp told me that he feels frustrated by the lack of available medicine. In recent months, much overseas aid has been stopped, and whilst the Karen are very resourceful, they have nowhere to grow rice inside the camp. The situation for food is getting desperate.

Some of the men are permitted to work outside the camp at harvest time, but only those who are registered with the Thai authorities and inevitably, they are paid very



very low wages. No one has been registered since 2015, so recent arrivals are automatically disqualified.

Please pray for the students and children at Noh Bo and in the Mae La Camp. They are some of the nicest young people that I have ever met and all they seek is a good start in life, and peace to able to fulfil their God-given potential.

Oh, and Noh Bo is the only place in all the world where a young person has said to me, "Please give us another Bible Study before you go home." I don't seem to get that response in the UK!!





Some photos
of the staff
and students
from the Mae
La nursery
school and
Noh Bo
Academy





HOW TO MAKE A DONATION:

Cheques made out in foreign currency attract very high transfer fees in Thailand (\$60).

Cheques in Thai Baht are no problem.

Electronic transfer is best!

Please email us on accounts@christchurchbangkok.org to let us know when you make a payment, so that we can ensure that it arrives and issue a receipt.

Bank Account for Karen (New) A/C:

Siam Commercial Bank

A/C Name: Christ Church English

Branch: CP Tower

A/C No: 168-225-876-6

A/C Tape: Saving A/C

SWIFT code: SICOTHBK

