

Burma-born minister serves internationals in San Antonio

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SAN ANTONIO—When Tera Kouba was growing up in Burma, her mother hoped and prayed God would call her to the ministry.

As a youngster, she had other plans. But today, Kouba is the newly ordained minister of international/Asian ministries at First Baptist Church in San Antonio.



Tera Kouba, who was born in Burma and grew up there, points to a map of her homeland. (Photo by Ken Camp)

Kouba was born in Burma—now also known as Myanmar—where her father served 50 years as a Karen pastor and Baptist denominational leader. Her sister also is a minister, teaching at a Bible school in Myanmar.

As a young woman, Kouba worked 10 years at the YMCA in Mandalay.

“I see now how God used that time to teach me how to work with people of different backgrounds,” she said. “God shaped me and trained me through that experience.”

When she left her homeland, she first moved to Japan. In 2008, she relocated to the United States, initially settling in Boerne, about 30 miles northwest of San Antonio.

While going through a time of deep personal loss and heartache, she said,

“My heart was pulling me in this direction” to San Antonio.

‘God was teaching me’

She learned First Baptist Church in San Antonio had launched a ministry to Karen refugees from Burma in October 2007. At that time, the congregation already sponsored a Lao/Thai ministry led by Pastor Boun Phommachanh, and the first Karen people to arrive were from refugee camps in Thailand.

In less than a year, the church’s ministry grew from about 30 refugees to more than 200, and by the end of 2009, the church was ministering to 400 people.

Kouba found a place where she felt at home and welcomed.

“God was teaching me: ‘You are not walking alone. Be strong. You have a church family,’” she said.

In 2014, Kouba began working as an administrative assistant—initially with Pastor Boun and then with Wayne Williams, who had served part time with internationals at First Baptist and joined the church staff full time to lead the ministry when Boun retired in 2015.

As minister for international/Asian ministries, Williams not only worked with multiple ethnic and language groups at the church, but also organized mission trips, including six trips to Myanmar until the military coup in February 2021 made continued journeys there unsafe.

Recognizing leadership potential

Williams recognized Kouba’s devotion to ministry and her leadership skills. As he mentored her, he increasingly gave her additional responsibilities,

including arranging two mission trips to Myanmar.

She has worked with multiple ethnic and language groups, including Burmese, Karen, Karenni, Zomi, Congolese, Lao and Thai.

“I’m very blessed to have a church family and leaders that trusted me in my walk with the Lord, allowing me to grow and supporting me,” she said.

Mark Heavener with Texas Baptists’ Intercultural Ministries also became acquainted with Kouba and saw her potential as a leader.

He introduced her to Wally Goodman, who directed Hardin-Simmons University’s Logsdon Seminary programs in San Antonio.

“I told Dr. Goodman I wanted more information, and before I knew it, I had filled out an application. A few weeks later, I received my letter of acceptance,” Kouba recalled.

She noted her mother, now 82 years old and still living in Myanmar, had encouraged her to attend seminary years earlier.

“She hoped I would follow in my father’s footsteps,” Kouba said.

Kouba balanced a busy schedule—serving in the international/Asian ministries office at First Baptist and taking seminary classes, while also working as an interpreter and translator.

She became director of international/Asian ministries when Williams retired at the end of March 2022, and she graduated with a Master of Divinity degree in December that same year.

Subsequently, leaders of First Baptist Church approached her about being ordained to the ministry, to affirm their recognition of her calling and giftedness. She was ordained Jan. 28, and her job title was changed from director to minister.

“I am grateful for the love and support I have received from First Baptist Church,” she said.

‘Reflection of Jesus in her heart’

Last year, Heavener tapped her to serve on Texas Baptists’ Intercultural Advisory Committee.

“Tera is a part of our ministry to assist churches,” Heavener said. “She has a real reflection of Jesus in her heart. She mirrors him not only in her leadership, but also in her deep compassion for her own people group and the other people groups to whom she is a blessing.”

Heavener encouraged her to participate in the Baptist World Alliance meetings the past two years in Alabama and Norway.

“It opened my eyes in terms of learning how we can pray for and support each other,” she said. “We are brothers and sisters in Christ who speak different languages and come from different cultures. We are different, but we are all one in Christ.”

Each year, the international/Asian ministries at First Baptist Church observe Judson Day, honoring the memory of Adoniram and Ann Judson, the first Baptist missionaries to Burma more than 200 years ago.

“I want young people to remember their legacy,” Kouba said. “Burma has a rich Baptist heritage.”

She voiced hope that some of the rising generation may one day be able to return to Myanmar as Christian witnesses “when the situation is better there.”

“I don’t want them to forget where they came from,” she said. “Don’t forget who they are. Don’t be ashamed of who they are.”