

Guest Editorial: From a rich history, chosen for ministry

July 10, 2024

I come from a Baptist family with a rich history of Baptist churches in Burma (Myanmar). This is where I belong to the Baptist family, and this is who God called me to serve for his kingdom in San Antonio.

I arrived in Texas in 2008 and immediately connected with the Baptist church in Boerne. When I heard refugees from Burma were gathering at the First Baptist Church in San Antonio, the first thing that came to my mind was, “What can I do for my people?”

I got excited for their bright future in the United States. Then, I placed my name at First Baptist Church in San Antonio, where many Burmese refugees worshiped.

At first, I did not understand what “ministry” meant. I learned from my experience we are representatives of Jesus Christ, serving people with a loving and caring heart and strengthening them by meeting their physical and spiritual needs.

Leading in intercultural ministry

Mark Heavener, director of Texas Baptists’ Intercultural Ministries, was the first person I met from the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He loves the Lord and serves many people with a gracious heart.

Mark has helped the Burmese ethnic churches in San Antonio since Burmese refugees arrived in Texas. Through him, I learned more about the BGCT. With his support, I went to Hardin-Simmons University’s Logsdon

Seminary, and because of him, I gradually became a part of the intercultural family of the BGCT.

God has used Mark tremendously, and he has become a wonderful, supportive person for international ministries, as well.

The last three years, God called me to serve as a member of Texas Baptists' Intercultural Ministries' Advisory Council. With honor and excitement, I accepted the call to serve as a council member. I also received it as a blessing. It strengthened my friendship with other pastors and leaders in intercultural ministries.

Through Texas Baptists' Intercultural Ministries, I received terrific opportunities to attend and participate in Baptist World Alliance annual meetings in Birmingham, Ala., and Stavanger, Norway. It was such a blessing for me to see many Baptist Christian leaders from around the world.

I got to see the beauty of the world God created, as well as the great work God has used Baptist leaders around the world to do.

Strength from fellow Baptists

Adoniram and Anne Judson were the first American Baptist missionaries in Burma and were my spiritual pioneers. They inspired me to become a humble servant for Christ. I have no doubt their lives and legacy will live in our hearts forever.

It has been more than 200 years since the spiritual seeds they sowed in Burma began sprouting, growing and spreading across the country of Burma. Now, many of the fruits are returning to America.

The Baptist faith has remained unchanged in our First Baptist Church of San Antonio international/Asian ministries a decade after our senior

international pastors passed down the Baptist faith and beliefs by which we maintain friendships and relationships with the BGCT.

I am grateful for First Baptist Church of San Antonio's rich history of helping refugees here in Texas from Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa. In this way, First Baptist San Antonio could be an inspiration to other churches in the BGCT.

Being a part of the BGCT, we gain more knowledge of how the Baptist churches in Texas stand firm on the Baptist faith, as Jesus has taught. Texas Baptists' International Ministries organized our intercultural pastors to attend the BGCT annual meeting every year. The messages and information we received from the convention were tremendously supportive.

In the BGCT, we have made new friends and been inspired by other intercultural church leaders. We also have the opportunity to share about Texas Baptist universities with young people who want to pursue a degree in ministry.

We also benefitted from the BGCT with financial support while we were in three years of self-supportive church planning, financial support for our children's Vacation Bible School, and Baptist camps where we can go for youth and women's retreats every year.

Strength to fellow Baptists

God has brought refugees from around the world—not accidentally, but purposefully—to fulfill his commandment to “love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

Just as we have been blessed by Texas Baptists' Intercultural Ministries, the BGCT also will be blessed by ministering among international people

and with multicultural churches in Texas.

God's kingdom is very much like where we are now. We are a family in Christ, loving and caring for each other, praying for one another, and practically living as a good example to spread the good news to those who have not accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Chosen for ministry

Isaiah 55:8 says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD.”

I did not understand what God's plan would be for me. I was born and raised in Burma and did not know much about the outside world. I did not know much about the people, culture, religion, politics and even what freedom means to me.

However, I have hope and faith in God, who shows me how to walk by and with his will.

In his timing, God brought me to the United States and made me see the world and a new spiritual family I never had seen before. Looking back on the past, what God did in my life is a clear picture now. It makes sense that everything God did was designed purposely and uniquely to serve his kingdom in this new world.

Although I didn't deserve it, God chose me to be a part of this ministry journey. Even though we come from different cultures, speak different languages and come from different places, we are the same in one Spirit. Under the power of the Lord, we are connected as one in the body of Christ.

Tera Kouba is minister of international/Asian ministries at First Baptist Church in San Antonio. The views expressed in this opinion article are

those of the author.