

# Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary

Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary (MUAS), formerly known as Burma Union Bible Seminary, is a baccalaureate college offering programs in religion, theology, education, and business. It is located on Mosokwin Road, Myaungmya, 137 miles from Yangon, in the Ayeyarwady Region of Myanmar. The sixty-acre school campus is surrounded by paddy fields and large trees.<sup>1</sup> The college also includes over 150 acres of rubber, cashew nut, and bamboo plantation.

MUAS is a member of the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Colleges and Secondary Schools. It is accredited internationally by the Adventist Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities, and by the Commission of Higher Education at the Southern Asia-Pacific Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The seminary is also recognized by the Local District Administrative Department.<sup>2</sup>

## **Small Beginnings (1927-1960)**

MUAS began as a small Seventh-day Adventist elementary school in 1927, started by F. A. Wyman in Mosokwin, two miles from Myaungmya.<sup>3</sup> It was built on thirty acres of land donated by a rice mill owner named U San Thu. U San Thu also contributed to the construction of several buildings and staff houses built in March of 1928. In 1934, the school was upgraded from four grades to six. Chit Mg served as the principal of the school until 1939. Ah Chu was the principal from 1939 to 1940 and A. Ba Tin from 1940 to 1942. When World War II broke out the school was temporarily closed.<sup>4</sup>

After World War II, the school re-opened in 1946, with Leonard Hare as the principal. Hare led the effort to repair the

school buildings that remained after the war. Although damaged, the principal's residence, school building, clinic, and two staff houses were still standing.<sup>5</sup> Two new dormitories and additional staff houses were also constructed. Due to war damage, Meiktila Mission High School was temporarily closed and attached to Myaungmya Mission School until 1957, when it was relocated to Kyauktaing, Tounngu.<sup>6</sup>

During the late 1940s, the Kinsaung Press was opened in the school compound. This provided the opportunity for students to work in the press and to learn printing. After three years of operation in the college compound, Kinsaung Press was relocated to U Wisara Road, Yangon in 1950.<sup>7</sup> When Hare was transferred to Ohndaw School, Robert Myat Pe served as the principal from 1949 to 1951.<sup>8</sup> During that time, Ba Myaing, the son of San Thu, donated thirty acres of land for mission use. After Robert Myat Pe left for Yangon, Francis R. Scott served as the school principal from 1951 to 1952;<sup>9</sup> A. E. Anderson from 1952 to 1953<sup>10</sup>; F. C. Wyman from 1953 to 1954<sup>11</sup>; Chit Mg from 1954 to 1956<sup>12</sup>; and Barnabas Peter from 1956 to 1957.<sup>13</sup> In 1957 the high school program was moved to Chauk Taing, Tounngu and the school at Myaungmya was reduced to middle school level and led by Barnabas Peter from 1957 to 1960.<sup>14</sup> Thounng Khin was principal from 1960 to 1962,<sup>15</sup> Ba Khin from 1963 to 1964, and Daniel Lwin from 1964 to 1966 when the school was transferred to the government's Ministry of Education.<sup>16</sup>

### **Founding of the Seminary (1960-1964)**

When the Meiktila Mission High School was transferred to Kyaw Taing, Tounngu, in 1960, Myanmar Union leadership decided that Myaungmya School should provide Christian education for those who finished high school.<sup>17</sup> Wallace W. Christensen, who had been a missionary in Myanmar before the Second World War

was called to serve as the director of the training program in which he was also the sole instructor.<sup>18</sup> He came back to Myanmar in 1960 to oversee the ministerial program for fifteen denominational workers, who were mostly high school graduates, enrolled for a two-year training course. All of these students, save Kyaw Win Mg, who drowned in the Wah Keh Ma River during an evangelistic meeting in the second year of the program, comprised the first group of graduates from the school in 1962 when the Myanmar Union President, C. B. Guild, conferred diplomas to the fourteen graduates.<sup>19</sup>

### **Transition to National Leadership (1964-1991)**

In 1964, Christensen returned to America due to health issues. F.C. Wyman served as the principal of the program until 1966 when all foreign missionaries had to leave the country.<sup>20</sup> Brown Kai became the first national to serve as the principal of Myaungmya Mission School.<sup>21</sup> From 1960 to 1974, the Seminary offered only a two-year program called the Bible Instructor Training Course (BITC).<sup>22</sup>

During the 1970s, the school experienced steady growth as it offered courses for high-school students who came from all parts of Myanmar due to required Saturday classes in government schools.<sup>23</sup> In 1974, under the leadership of Kyaw Ba Lay, the president of Myanmar Union Mission, the school introduced a three-year curriculum, Ministerial Training Course (MTC), for high-school graduates in addition to the two-year BITC for those who did not pass high school. MTC was equivalent to an Associate degree. The first graduates received their diplomas in 1977.<sup>24</sup> In 1978 BITC was terminated.

Also, during the 1970s, under the supervision of Seminary President Yan Aye, the current administrative building, two dormitories (one for men and women), and five staff houses

were built.<sup>25</sup> Due to the repression of higher education by the Myanmar government, the Burma Union Bible Seminary became the sole remaining Adventist institution for training church workers in the country.

In 1979, the Myanmar Union executive committee decided to introduce a four-year Bachelor degree curriculum and to expand campus facilities. The Thirteenth Sabbath Overflow Offerings of September 1972 and 1979 funded the construction of the main buildings.<sup>26</sup>

### **Full-Fledged College**

The name of the seminary was change to Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary in 1990. In 1991, the Seminary introduced a Bachelor of Arts in Religion with the approval of the Seminary Board.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the Seminary was authorized to offer a two-year Certificate in Teaching Ministry in 1991. The first convocation was held at the Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary under the leadership of President Herbert Sein. MYUM President Ba Hla Thein, attended the ceremony to confer degrees on the first graduates in 1993.<sup>28</sup> A total of eleven graduates including six Bachelor of Arts in Religion degrees, two Teaching Ministry Certificates, one Health Ministry Certificate, and one Enrichment Certificate.<sup>29</sup> During Herbert Sein's time, Joon Hyun Yoo Chapel, a clinic building, and a library building were erected.<sup>30</sup>

In 1996, the Seminary Board approved the expansion of the industrial arts, business, and education departments, and the termination of the two-year program with the intent of offering only baccalaureate college courses.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the Seminary offered courses for Bachelor degrees in religion, education, business administration, and applied arts in industry. In 1998, U Yan Aye returned to serve as the

president for the second time.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, during the 1990s the physical campus was improved with a new Education Department building and nine faculty residences in Rubber Hill, funded by the McNeilus Foundation.<sup>33</sup> In 2001, the MUAS Board voted to reintroduce a grade school with primary and secondary levels of education.<sup>34</sup> By 2018, the school had grown to more than thirty faculty members and over 600 students.<sup>35</sup>

## **Present Opportunities and Challenges**

MUAS is known among Myanmar Adventists as the “School of the Prophets” because of its vital role in educating employees for the Myanmar Union Mission. Ninety percent of the leadership of the Myanmar Union Mission comes from MUAS. MUAS is also essential for the retention of young adult church members. Because of Sabbath classes and examinations in government schools and colleges, faithful young people have limited opportunity for higher education. MUAS’s students come from the secondary schools in Myanmar’s five local missions.

Despite the expansion of MUAS’s campus during the twentieth century, overcrowding remains a problem, as does the lack of modern amenities and utilities. As a research-based institution of higher education, the outdated library collection and limited information technology resources are also a concern. MUAS is hindered in its ability to broaden course offerings and obtain grant funding by required national government recognition; thus, its greatest challenge is finding a way to achieve this government recognition while maintaining the integrity of its Adventist mission. Accreditation by the Association of Theological Education in Southeast Asia would also be beneficial.

## **Principals and Presidents**

Burma Union Bible Seminary (1966-1990)

W. W. Christensen (1960-1964); F. C. Wyman (1964-1966); Brown Kai (1966-1971); Kyaw Din (1971-1974); Kyaw Sein Pe (1974-1976); V. Kipzanang (1979-1990)

Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary (1990-)

Yan Aye (1990-1991; 1998-2006); Herbert Sein (1991-1998); Ngala Kem Thang (2006-2007); Alvin Po Po Hla (2007-2010); Connally Hla (2010-)

## Notes

1. Kyaw Din, "The Burma Union Bible Seminary," *World Mission Report*, Third Quarter

1972, 5.↵

2. *Academic Bulletin 2016-2020*, ([Myaungmya, Myanmar?]: Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary, 2018), 2.↵
3. Pe Yee, *The Story of Seventh-day Adventists in Myanmar*. Burmese ed. (n.p., n.d.), 217.↵
4. Ibid., 232.↵
5. Ibid., 316, 366-367.↵
6. Ibid., 351-354.↵
7. Yee, 352, 368. Burma Union Committee Minutes (BUCM), Myanmar Union of Seventh-day Adventists, 1950, 471.↵
8. BUCM, 1948, 271.↵
9. Yee, 328-330.↵
10. BUCM, 1951, 578. See also BUCM, 1952, 604.↵
11. BUCM, 1953, 373.↵
12. BUCM, 1955, 13.↵
13. BUCM, 1957, 58.↵
14. BUCM, 1959, 63.↵
15. BUCM, 1960, 34; BUCM, 1961, 51.↵
16. Yee, 350-354, 364-365. See also BUCM, 1960, 34; BUCM, 1964, 18.↵
17. BUCM, 1976, 11; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*

(Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966), 179; Gil G. Fernandez, *Light Dawns Over Asia: Adventism's Story in the Far Eastern Division* (Silang, Cavite, Philippines: AIIAS Publications, 1990), 290.↵

18. BUCM, 1963, 6; Yee, 364-365.↵

19. Yee, 365, 512.↵

20. Yee, 346, 341-342. Kyaw has given more realistic date. See Mervin Myat Kyaw, *The Legacy of Eric B. Hare and Tribute to Wonderful Missionaries*, (n. p., n. d.), 255; see also James Orville Wilson, *Advent Angels in Burma*, (n. p.: [Friends of Burma], [1971?]), 179.↵

21. Yee, 512.↵

22. Ibid., 365, 513.↵

23. Wilson, 230.↵

24. Yee, 514.↵

25. Ibid., 515-516.↵

26. *World Mission Report*, Third Quarter 1972, 2; U Yan Aye, "Indispensable Burma Union Bible Seminary," *Southern Asia Tidings*, July 1979, 5; V. Kipzanang, "Former Principal Appeals," *Southern Asia Tidings*, July 1979, 5-6; *World Mission Report*, Third Quarter 1979, 1.↵

27. BUCM, 1991, 38.↵

28. Yee, 516; BUCM, 1993; Kyaw, 205.↵

29. MUAS Committee Minutes 1993-2001, 1; Mission Minutes, Secretary Office, Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary, 1993.↵

30. Yee, 518.↵

31. MUAS Staff Committee Minutes 1996-1969, 19-21 and 27-35; Minutes of MYUM EC & AYU, CCM, SEM, UMM, Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventist, 1996.↵

32. Union & Missions Executive Committee Minutes, 1998, 32 and 56; Myanmar Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists.↵

33. Campus observation and interviews with some administrators.↵

34. MYUM Education Minutes 2001-2011, Myanmar Union Mission

of Seventh-day Adventists.↵

35. MYUM Education Minutes, 519; Statistical Report, Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary, 2017.

## Sources

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