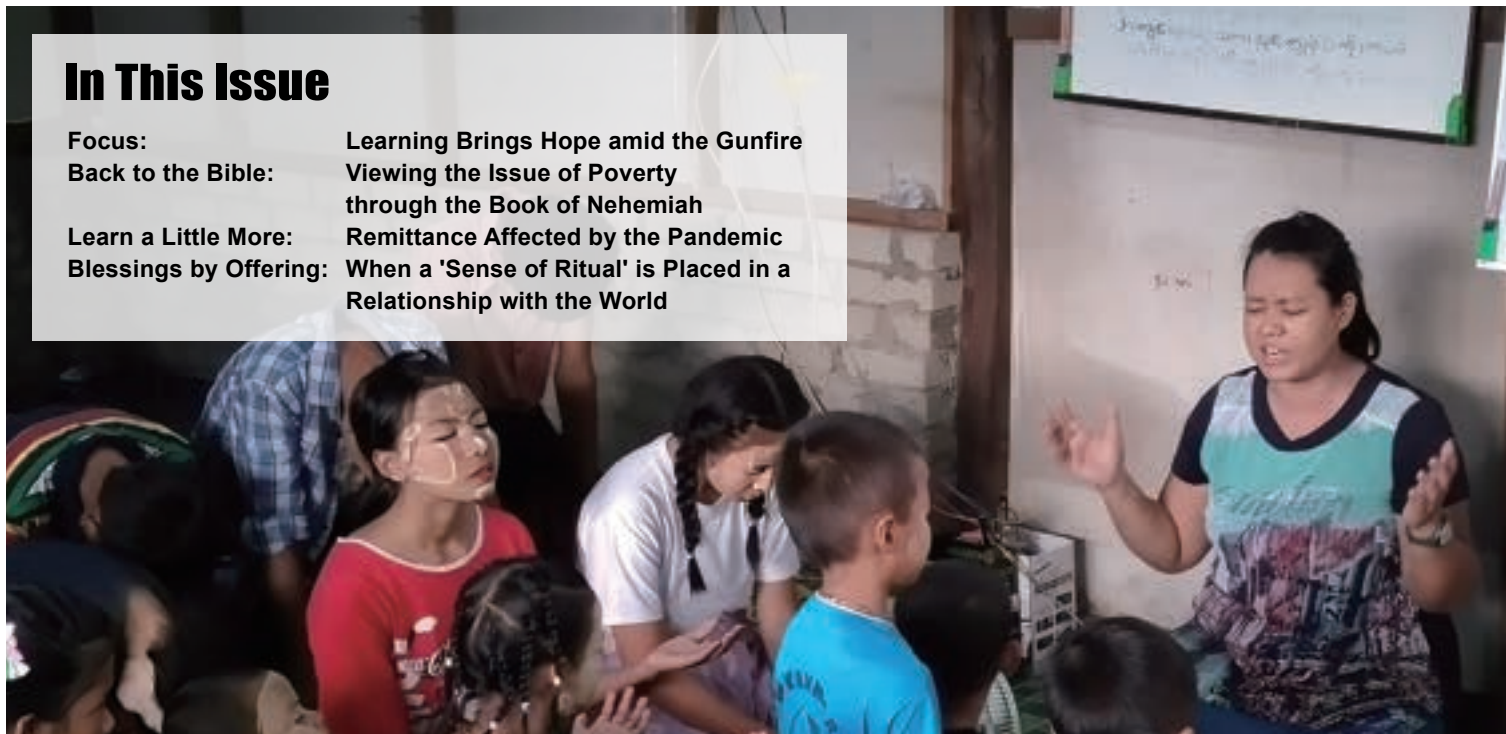


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Editor's note

In this issue, we will lay out the needs of people under crises in different countries with the perspectives of the 3C's – 'Conflict', 'COVID', and 'Climate'. Myanmar has gone through years of turmoil, and its people have experienced displacement and poverty that wears their hope for the future. In 'Focus', we will introduce 'Children's Learning Space in Myanmar', a new project that aims to help children regain hope through learning amid the war. In 'Learn a Little More', we will share the difficulties residents of developing countries face when receiving money from overseas relatives during the pandemic. Besides, we hope that everyone will fall in love with the world created by God, as many people suffer from environmental damage. Therefore, 'Blessings by Offering' brings everyone a 'ritual' to reconcile with the world. Finally, in 'Back to the Bible', we will read the story of Nehemiah together and contemplate how to integrate care for the poor and personal faith.

FOCUS

Learning Brings Hope amid the Gunfire

Written by Ness Ma (Communications Officer)

In Hong Kong, it is common to see students carrying school bags and playing with their classmates on the streets before and after class. It seems ordinary, but it is not a must that students can go to school safely without worrying about sudden attacks.

In other parts of the world, children may be unable to go to school safely. Since the coup d'état in Myanmar began in February 2021, the country has been engulfed in ongoing conflicts. In January 2023, the UN reported that after two years of coup d'état, over 34,000 civilian buildings, including homes, clinics, schools, and places of worship, have been destroyed in Myanmar. The country has 1.2 million internally displaced persons, nearly half of the population living below the poverty line.

In such a situation, children's needs are most easily overlooked. In addition to shelter and food, children need learning and peers. CEDAR and its partner in Myanmar, Fullmoon Family Foundation (FMFF), saw the needs of

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children. They launched the 'Children's Learning Space in Myanmar' project in January 2023, aiming to provide a safe learning place for children despite the volatile situation.

Why Setting Up the Learning Space?

When children in Myanmar go to school, they encounter dangers beyond our imagination. On 16 September 2022, the military claimed that there were members of opposition groups hiding in a school and attacked it with armed helicopters. The incident killed 13 people and injured 30 students; some lost limbs. If you were a parent, would you feel safe letting your children attend school?

Our partner shared that the situation in Myanmar is increasingly tense. The military arrests people at all times and all places, and residents might encounter powerful bombs at any time. Even locals do not know where it is safe. Therefore, we set up Learning Space near refugee camps, impoverished areas, and orphanages to reduce children's risk of travelling long distances to school.



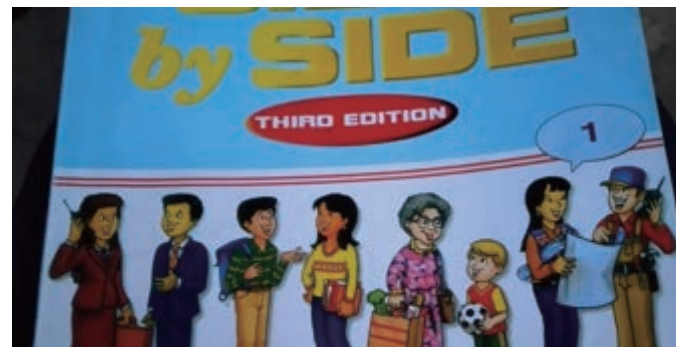
The Children's Learning Space classrooms are in the village, so children do not have to take risks to attend classes.

Besides attacks, Burmese children are targeted by human traffickers. As mentioned, many people are displaced within the country due to ongoing conflicts. Children may then not be locally registered and cannot attend a local school. If parents cannot look after their children, or if children are orphaned, they are at risk of being drawn to the streets. They may also end up selling flowers or begging on the streets as instructed by parents due to poverty, indirectly increasing their risk of being trafficked. Even though some children want to work to support their families, they may be unable to understand the contract terms and be deceived into signing contracts and forced into labour. Also, scammers may not have specified work details and locations in the contract and may include unreasonable requirements. Therefore, literacy and anti-trafficking knowledge can help children understand contract terms and identify fraudulent elements.

Introduction to Children's Learning Space

When children come to the Children's Learning Space, their main subjects are English and Burmese, as both are essential subjects in the Burmese education system. If students perform poorly in these two subjects, it becomes even more difficult for them to return to regular schools.

Classes are scheduled four days a week, each lasting two hours. Two days will cover English and Burmese languages. The other two days will have interest classes, Bible classes, character education, and teaching children how to protect themselves. The class size varies from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 40, depending on the Learning Space. Students must register in advance to join the English and Burmese language classes. They have to attend classes regularly to cultivate a good attendance habits. Interest classes are open to all students to explore and develop their interests. The Learning Space is not to replace formal education but combines tutorial and interest classes. Moreover, while children are from impoverished families, this programme is free of charge and provides free stationery and books.



Teachers of the Children's Learning Space would purchase English books like these as textbooks.

Regarding teachers, the 10 current teachers are not locally certified. Therefore, our partner provides short-term onboarding training for each teacher, such as classroom management and monthly on-the-job training and supervision. Our partner also organises an online teacher fellowship to encourage them to learn from each other and pray together.

We are grateful that children like JF (pseudonym) well receive Learning Space. He is currently living in a refugee camp with his family. His parents were farmers before fleeing the war, and they had no means to provide education for their children, so JF had never been to school. During the pandemic and coup d'état, what he felt the most upset about the displacement was his loss of friends. He has made new friends at the Learning Space, and they study together. Despite never receiving formal education from a government school, he has learned to read and write in classes at Learning Space. His literacy has improved significantly.

Difficulties Persist

It is indeed heartening that children can learn and grow in a safe place. However, Learning Space has its challenges, such as a workforce shortage and parents' opposition.

As mentioned above, some classes of Learning Space have up to 40 students. Our partner hopes to have one teacher and one assistant for each class to guide the children better. However, they only have 10 teachers teaching at 7 Learning Spaces currently, so achieving the ideal situation may not be possible. The workforce shortage sometimes prevents classes from being divided into different levels, affecting the teaching quality. The content of interest classes also depends on the teacher's abilities, usually drawing and singing. Occasionally, some teachers teach practical skills such as car repair, which allows students to gain valuable skills.

Besides, not all parents allow their children to participate. The majority of the population in Myanmar practices Buddhism, with a small number following Islam. They resist Christianity and do not allow their children to attend classes. Even though the classes are free for impoverished families, parents would instead send their children to work as they are also a source of labour. Therefore, teachers of Learning Space often visit families, telling parents how important their children's education is. It is hoped that the parents will eventually allow their children to attend classes.

Conclusion: It Is Learning, As Well As Bringing Hope

In the past two years, Myanmar experienced a coup d'état and economic setbacks due to the pandemic. Our partner pointed out that children living in such an atmosphere could lose hope. Starting this project, CEDAR and its partner aim not only to provide a safe learning environment for children but also to bring hope to them. Learning Space allows children to study in a safe place and enjoy the fun of learning with friends, but more importantly, it brings them hope. With

the company of teachers and peers, let children feel God's love for them and regain hope.

CEDAR supports this project, bringing hope to children's lives through education. However, many children in Myanmar are still out of school, and their future is worrying amid ongoing conflict. We ask everyone to pray that the Lord that more people are willing to offer help so that these children can have a safe environment to learn and grow in such a volatile situation.

Back to the Bible

Viewing the Issue of Poverty through the Book of Nehemiah

Written by Ben Cheung

Scriptures: Nehemiah 1:3

From the process of returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the city walls in the book of Nehemiah, we see that poor people often face humiliation, oppression, and insecurity.

Although Nehemiah was in a high position (cupbearer) in the Persian empire's palace, he did not forget that his fellow countrymen were still suffering far away. Although the Israelites had already returned to Jerusalem more than a hundred years, and the temple had been rebuilt for many years, the walls of Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonians were not yet rebuilt. The returned Israelites lived in an insecure and oppressive land. However, the Lord remembered His people and heard their cries of distress. Therefore, the Lord wanted Nehemiah to lead the Israelites to return and rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem.

The Lord demonstrated through the nation of Israel how He never left the people alone, released those captive and set the oppressed free. In the past, the Israelites relied on the Lord's help to rebuild the city walls and lead them out of their difficulties. Today, He continues to respond to the cries of the oppressed and the captives. Wars in the world, killings, and enslavement of others are unending. The wealth gap is widening, and those in power use weapons to intimidate the weak and solidify their status through economic power. In the midst of all this injustice and evil, the Lord is present on this earth, and His only Son, Jesus, has become the world's only hope in times of despair.

The Lord moved Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city walls to save the Israelites from the persecution of their surrounding enemies. Today, we must also rely on our mighty Lord. At the end of the world, we need to look forward to the Final Judgement and the fulfilment of the Jubilee that Jesus Christ proclaimed on earth. He listens to the prayers of the oppressed, the persecuted, and the poor. May the spirit of Nehemiah move us as well and inspire us to respond to God's calling.

Let's Think:

Most people pursue a comfortable life as their goal, but do we view caring for the poor as the meaning of our personal faith?

Editor's note: You can download more devotional articles about poverty and the church from our devotion app (Chinese only). Download the app now: <https://link.cedarfund.org/app-248>

Learn a Little More

Remittance Affected by the Pandemic

Written by Clara Chiu (Head of Partnership Development)



The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly spread worldwide in 2020, prompting various countries to implement measures such as school and work closures and different types of quarantine to control the outbreak. These actions had a significant impact on the global economy.

Global remittances have decreased, which reflects the impact of the pandemic.

When workers from a country go abroad to work and send back a portion of their earnings in the form of cash or goods to support their families back home, this transfer of money is referred to as worker or immigrant remittances.

The pandemic has caused significant unemployment and salary reductions, particularly in the hospitality, tourism, and construction industries, resulting in a decreased demand for overseas labour. Border closures have also made it difficult to export and import labour. Additionally, in various circumstances, financial institutions have temporarily suspended or only provided limited services due to the pandemic, making it difficult for immigrants to send money back to their home countries. The World Bank predicted a significant 20% decrease in global remittances.

Despite individual remittance amounts being relatively small, the total amount is three times that of official development aid worldwide. Remittances have helped meet the basic needs of many poor households in developing countries. Beyond helping individual families, remittances also stimulate the local economy and bring about change in the community. A decline in remittances could exacerbate poverty, limiting the opportunities for vulnerable groups to access healthcare, education, and other essential services.

Although the World Bank had predicted a significant drop in remittances due to the pandemic, their estimate turned out to be incorrect, as the 'resilience' of remittances proved to be very strong. According to a World Bank report in May 2021, global remittance inflows reached US\$540 billion in 2020, which was only a 1.6% decrease from the total remittances in 2019. In 2021, remittance volumes increased further, with the amount sent to low- and middle-income countries reaching US\$605 billion. Remittances connect migrant workers with their families back home and have become a social contract in financial terms. Despite the economic downturn, migrant workers have made every effort to save personal expenses and maintain remittances to their hometowns, resulting in a lower-than-expected decrease in remittances. The UN has designated 16 June as the International Day of Family Remittances to recognise the significant contribution of over 200 million migrants who send money to support their 800 million family members back home.

The issue of remittances is closely related to the population of overseas migrant workers. Taking Myanmar as an example, due to long-term political instability, the economic development in Myanmar has faced challenges, many people have sought better job opportunities in neighbouring countries with higher wages, particularly in Thailand where the government actively recruited migrant workers to boost the local service industry in the late 1980s. According to data from the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), in 2019, about 3.7 million Myanmar people were living abroad, with Thailand, Bangladesh, and Malaysia being the top three destination countries.

According to the International Organization for Migration's data in 2019, remittance inflows to Myanmar amounted to US\$2.8 billion, accounting for 4% of the country's gross domestic product.

Due to the importance of remittances, the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 10 aims to reduce to less than 3% the transaction fees of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs exceeding 5% by 2030. This underscores the crucial role that foreign remittances play in the economic and sustainable development of poor countries and communities.

Blessings by Offering

When a 'Sense of Ritual' is Placed in a Relationship with the World

Written by Tony Chan (Partnership Development Consultant)

'Sense of Ritual' has become a popular term in recent years. It refers to the act of performing small but meaningful activities in everyday life as if they were some special ceremonies. This creates a unique moment that stands out from the mundane. The term is frequently used in the context of relationships. Couples can benefit from cultivating a sense of ritual to keep their relationship fresh and healthy. Families can also benefit from this, as it fosters a sense of happiness and belonging among family members. Today, let's apply the 'Sense of Ritual' to the relationship between humans and the Earth and reflect on and practice our beliefs.

The relationship between humans and nature was beautiful and harmonious at the dawn of creation. People and other creatures cared for and served each other because of divine will. However, over several millennia, humanity has wilfully and recklessly destroyed the nature, shattering this once-harmonious relationship.

The phrase 'Mother Earth is sick' is common, but it is important to recognise that in any strained relationship, both parties are affected. As Earth's delicate ecosystem continues to be ravaged, humanity also faces the consequences and casualties.

In recent years, the devastating impact of climate change has become evident through frequent disasters. These catastrophic events have destroyed countless homes and claimed numerous lives. According to data from the UN, over the past 50 years, the number of natural disasters such as floods and heat waves has increased fivefold due to the effects of climate change, resulting in over 2 million deaths and an average of 115 fatalities per day.

Additionally, many people lose their livelihoods due to extreme weather conditions. In our poverty alleviation projects, we often come into contact with farmers who have been affected. Droughts and floods can result in crop

failures, causing farmers and their families to fall into poverty.

All of this goes against the will of the Lord and falls short of God's glory. We must work to restore our relationship with the Earth.

As 'Earth Day' on April 22 is approaching, CEDAR is offering a very ritualistic small action for everyone to restore our relationship with the Earth on this special day. You can now scan the QR code below to receive a sunflower seed bookmark and grow it into a real plant, symbolising our aspiration for reconciliation with Mother Earth. We firmly believe that by planting, we are taking a caring step towards the Earth created by the Lord and practising the lesson of loving our neighbours.



Of course, in addition to a sense of ritual, it is also important to cultivate a long-term relationship with the environment. We urge everyone to develop habits that protect the environment, care for the Earth and its inhabitants that God created, and participate in the 'Care for the Disaster-Stricken Poor' Campaign by making monthly donations to support communities threatened by climate crises, improve their livelihoods, and fight against disasters.



Get Sunflower Seed Bookmark
(Chinese webpage only)



'Care for the Disaster-Stricken
Poor' Campaign

2022/2023 Operating Statements

In the period of Jul 2022 - Feb 2023

Income	HK\$ 16,059,815
Donations	11,114,404
Grants	-
Appeal for Relief	4,607,025
Other Income	338,386
Expenditure	HK\$ 14,841,861
Development Projects - Asia	5,829,344
- Middle East	1,358,152
- China & HK	1,341,130
- Africa	1,442,947
Disaster Relief & Rehabilitation Projects	1,641,957
Partnership Development	1,865,076
Administration	1,363,255
Account profit and loss / (Deficit)	HK\$ 1,217,954

The budget for 22-23 is HK\$26,156,000. Please support our ministry with prayers and actions. The Earthquake Emergency Response in Syria project funds were disbursed in March.

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