

## **Offerings of Jade and Hearts of Gold**

*Cho Cho David and Orathai Chureson-Saw*

Hpakant, also known as *Jade Land of Myanmar*, is a small developing town in Kachin District located in the uppermost of Myanmar. The most precious jade in the whole world is produced from this town. The biggest size of local jade boulder discovered in the place weighs approximately 3,000 tons. A lot more are waiting to be unearthed.

The local Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mashikahtaung, located in Hpakant, had invited Pastor Samuel Saw, Southern Asia-Pacific Division president, and me to grace the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church. It took us 26 hours by bus and a passenger-convertible van on the bumpy road to reach the place. But the opportunity to witness the generosity of God's wonderful children in this humble Church outweighed every single minute spent on this journey!

There was no Adventist church in this area until 1987. In summer of the same year, a literature evangelist named Salai Aye Maung arrived to canvass. At that time transportation was a very big challenge; there were no cars and other effective transport means. Salai Aye Maung walked for three days carrying his books to reach the place. As he visited house-to-house selling books, he realized the presence of Adventist members doing business in the area. He approached them and helped start a regular Sabbath worship in their house or apartment. But he also reached out to members of other faiths. He went to their church services on Sundays until he was asked to preach. So, he shared Adventist teachings to his new-found friends.

At that time most land areas were unoccupied or unpopulated. Anyone could claim vast tracts of barren land as his own. Salai Aye Maung encouraged church members and some friends to clean the small hill at Mashikahtaung (present church location) and constructed a church on it. Soon the first Seventh-day Adventist Church was built with a wooden-bamboo structure reflective of joy and pride of the pioneering Seventh-day Adventist congregation in the place.

The concerted efforts of few faithful church members made Adventist presence stronger as years passed by. Salai Aye Maung tirelessly had been taking care of the church for some years. In 1993, however, Upper Myanmar Mission appointed a pastor named Casper Nyein to look after the church. After a year, Pastor Nyein left and Isaiah Hai took his place as church pastor until 1996. During these years, church was very small (10-15 attendees), and they were very poor, struggling to meet their needs. Despite economical challenge, each member was faithful in Sabbath keeping and tithe giving. And the Lord gradually blessed and prospered all members enabling them to give more to His work.

From 1993, having a pastor officially assigned to minister to people around Hpakant area, church membership had steadily increased, but the church building was, however, running down. Seeing the need for a wider space of fellowship and the rapid growth of church membership, church elders and members, leading by Zaw Dan and Win Thang, discussed the new church building plan and took the initiative to build together. The project was mainly financed by Zaw Dan and Win Thang and their families, and later, pastoral quarter was added. With the families' initiatives and generosity, many church members were inspired; they participated and financed the building into its completion.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary of Seventh-day Adventist Church's presence and the inauguration of the new building of Hpakant Church were combined as a double celebration of God's blessings and the gift of faithful SDA church community. The celebration began with a series of an evangelistic meeting; and once again, it was financed by the church members. In their considered honorable cause for this celebration, every church member added more effort and generously donated; some were compelled to present their special offerings that are found abundantly in the growing town – jade stones. At the end of the evangelistic series, Hpakant Adventist faith community warmly welcomed 10 additional members into their open arms.

God is being praised continually and work is progressing rapidly because of the unity in mission of His children in Hpakant. The good news is being shared and carried out into far villages in the mountains around the town by lay members and family of faith. We praise and glorify our heavenly Father for sending the Holy Spirit to work wonders among the hearts of faithful members of Hpakant Church.

Their remarkable giving spirit will always be well-remembered. Not because of the jade stones they brought as special offerings to God, but the hearts of gold that they continue to render and dedicate to Him and His mission!



Dr. Orathai Chureson-Saw holds a jade stone.