

## **SIM BUILDING: A PERSONAL REFLECTION**

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If I had not heard the voice of God in my own personal way, I would not have come to AICS all the way from Himachal Pradesh where my wife and I (with our small daughter) were working as missionaries under the *Zoram Evangelical Fellowship (ZEF)*. Even so, to be able to work at AICS our paths were not easy, many hurdles were there to overcome, and we had to struggle through unexpected challenges to realize our calling. After we left Himachal Pradesh in 2003, for two years I did my M.Th. (missiology) in order to qualify myself to be able to teach at AICS. When we joined AICS in 2005, the whole campus was still in the developing stage. The last batch of M.A. (missiology) has just graduated the year we joined, and we took three fresh students for M.Div. (missiology) for the new academic year. BCM is mission-minded, so we thought, therefore we had high expectation that sufficient money would come from the headquarters to construct mission building and to develop mission studies. We envisioned many young people doing mission studies and going out to different parts of the world with full confidence in the power of God and in the gospel of Jesus Christ. But perhaps God was not in a hurry as we were, it has been some years now to be able to write what I am writing!

### **Mission Studies**

Many people might not know the fact that BCM mission policy did not have provision for its missionaries to do B.D. studies. If a missionary wanted to study theology at a B.D. level, he or she had to resign from the missionary job, and apply for the degree as a fresh candidate. Literally, missionaries were not encouraged to do B.D. studies. Although it is sad to say, I think it is good to confess that one thing that I discovered after joining

AICS was that, BCM had no great difficulty either financially or ideologically to training its pastors for theological degrees, whereas it had unspoken financial and ideological difficulties when it came to training its missionaries for higher theological studies. This tradition has embedded in the minds of BCM members and it is going to take, it seems, a few more years to completely let it go. Nevertheless, it is also clear that any local church member can easily

understand why a missionary who is going to work in a cross-cultural context needs as much training as a pastor who is going to work in Mizoram context.

I feel it is correct to say that inside AICS itself there has always been positive cooperation among the faculty members with regard to the implementation of M.Div. program and other mission studies. These mission studies are for BCM missionaries and anyone interested in mission to come and get their training for effective cross-cultural ministry and good leadership. However, during the early years of AICS, the sheer amount of works needed to develop AICS campus and the administration system could not spare much time and money to equally develop mission studies alongside the B.D. program. The mission program nevertheless has not been badly neglected, it has been growing slowly, gaining awareness not only within AICS but also from the local churches as well. In fact, since the year we took the first three students for M.Div. in 2005, God has been giving us students every year to study M.Div. at AICS. And in 2009 Asia Theological Association accredited our M.Div. degree, qualifying it as a standard degree acceptable around the world by other theological institutions.

Recognizing the need to train missionaries and sharing the vision of

AICS, BCM mission from the headquarters started sending its in-service missionaries to AICS since 2011 for their Diploma in Mission Studies. Another significant development in training missionaries within BCM can be seen when in 2018, BCM mission decided for the first time to send its recruit missionaries to do their Dip.MS at AICS. Having envisioned that all these things would take place one day, AICS from the beginning planned to have a separate building solely for students of mission studies. Although it has taken some years for the mission building to take its proper shape, the plan never dies down completely. Rather, it is exciting that I am now writing about the story of the mission building. What I want to say now is that this mission building, which is also called *The Shekina Institute of Mission Building* (SIM building), could come to the present stage only because of the grace of God. Truly AICS has been witnessing God's goodness in many different ways, including the development of its mission studies and mission building through the contributions of many godly individuals, families, and through many BCM local churches.

### **The Building**

Although it was clear from the beginning that mission studies would need a separate building of its own if it had to be established properly in

AICS, there was hardly a separate fund for mission building for a long time. Here, I would like to insert my testimony. Having witnessed God's faithfulness many times in Himachal Pradesh, my wife and I used to pray somewhat secretly for 10 lakhs for mission building. I still remember the joy that I had, when the then principal, Rev. Prof. K. Thanzauva, announced one morning in our worship service that Dr. Lawma and family donated one lakh for mission building. In my mind there was this feeling that it was going to be a

seed from God to give us 10 lakhs for mission building. After some months, the principal told me in our conversation

that Rev. P.C. Muanthanga could arrange a meeting at Shillong with some American donors, if we wanted to present our project for AICS mission program to the donors. We then prepared a simple project, and I was sent there to meet these American friends. After the meeting they told me that they were pleased with what I shared and that it was exactly the kind of project they wanted to help. I was extremely grateful to the outcome of our meeting. I went home with great

excitement, believing that God was going to give us 10 lakhs. It took a few months to exchange all the information they wanted through emails and other means. And one day I received a call from our former principal, who was then the General Secretary of BCM that rupees 20 lakhs had been deposited to our BCM account for AICS mission building. I was overjoyed to hear God's faithfulness for giving us not only 10 lakhs, but 20.

With 20+ lakhs we began to plan constructing a good mission

building at AICS. Not to confuse with its B.D. program under the Senate of Serampore college (University),



AICS gave a separate name to its mission program calling it the *Sekhina Institute of Mission*. SIM administration then comes under the supervision of the *Dean of Missionary Training* (or sometimes refers to as the *Dean of Mission Studies*). While planning to build a mission building, we experienced God's goodness once again through the person of Mr. R. Lalrinzuala, the chief architect and owner of the *Catalyst Architecture Studio*. I felt absolutely grateful when

## *Maranatha*

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I knew that he was willing to draw the picture for our mission building without any fee. His feelings I cannot tell, but it was a sign of God's faithfulness to me. AICS is greatly indebted to him. The site for the building was prepared and the foundation stone was laid by Rev. B. Thangchina on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

To construct the architectural design that includes class rooms, research rooms, offices and others, it was apparent that we actually needed much more than 20 lakhs. It was truly the commitment and hard work of Rev. Prof. K. Thanzauva and Rev. Prof. Dr. R.L. Hnuni, that AICS could have money to build the first three stories. Not only that they motivated the BCM churches and individuals to contribute money, but travelled to other countries to raise funds toward the construction of various buildings at AICS, including the mission building. After the foundation was laid, and most of the columns, beams and the slabs were put up, I had to leave AICS for my further studies. I could not trace every individual or local church who contributed particularly toward the construction of mission building. AICS is extremely grateful to all of them for their immense contributions.

After five years in 2016 when I came back to AICS, I was happy to find the mission building being occupied and to have been told that it

was even inaugurated by Rev. Dr. K. Lalrinthanga, the then AGS in charge of BCM missions. Only the top floor was left unconstructed. I was then conveniently given a big room for my office in the mission building, and it was exciting to have a room right in the mission building! Soon, we discussed about the idea of completing the mission building, especially the top floor. The principal, Rev. Prof. R. Zolawma was kind enough to give me the responsibility to continue the construction as it was first designed by the architect in the beginning. He promised me that he would try his best to find the needed funds.

Architect, Mr. R. Lalrinzuala helped us once again, and together we thought we might be able to finish the top floor with 50 lakhs although the actual estimate on government rate was much more. In 2017 the headquarters allowed us to make an appeal to local churches, where we budgeted Rs. 50 lakhs for the top floor only. Because there were other appeals in the Church that year, the amount collected through our appeal was not even one fifth of the amount we budgeted. At any rate, the principal graciously sanctioned 15 lakhs for the first phase, adding money to the appeal from other possible sources. From the faculty members, Mr. Laltlankima Hnamler and I happily took the responsibility for the construction,

hiring laborers from here and there and managing the money as sparingly as possible.

When we realized that we were not in a position to finish what we planned to finish with 15 lakhs, Mr. Laltlankima on his own initiatives had raised some more money, for which we were very grateful to him and to those who donated. With that little extra money, and with the help of AICS students who spared their invaluable times to help the construction work by wholeheartedly doing the manual works (for this we are extremely grateful), we could finish the first phase – the pillars, the beams and the slab. Again, the headquarters gave us 15 lakhs for the second phase, and I took the responsibility to oversee the construction alone, as Mr. Laltlankima this time was busy with another construction work, the zero-waste management. As I am writing this, the electricians are doing electric wiring. We have almost completed the top floor. We are enthusiastically looking forward to the completion of the mission building, at least the top floor, where the rooms would function exactly as planned and designed. Through all these once again I must express that we see God's goodness, and it is our hope that AICS through its *Shekina Institute of Mission* will continue to participate meaningfully and actively in God's mission. In the

days to come, AICS as an institution where different programs are integrated will bring greater joy to BCM members as we see the extension of God's reign and the glory of His name proclaimed through this institution, the programs, and its graduates.

I sincerely thank the magazine committee for giving me this opportunity to express my feelings and my spiritual journey at AICS, especially in connection with the mission building. *Soli Deo Gloria.*