



A CROWD OF FRIENDS, family and well wishers greeted Father Henry Saw Lone when he arrived at his home parish in the village of Yado in Mynamar in February.

# Priest returns from homeland

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Father Henry Saw Lone is back in Oberlin after spending February in his native Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, with family and friends.

The Catholic priest, who serves the parishes in Oberlin, Leoville and Selden, returned to his native land to renew his passport and government authorization to stay in the U.S., meet with his bishop and visit his family, whom he had not seen since 2004.

The family is doing well, he reported, with a nephew newly married. He arrived in time to attend a ceremony when a niece took the veil to join an order of nuns.

The trip was too short, he reported, but he got to spend a week in his old parish and visit with family and spend time with old friends and his bishop.

While at home, Father Saw Lone took lots of pictures and worked on two projects, a church he is helping to build and a water system he hopes to provide for his sister's village. The church is built but still needs pews, he said. The water project has not progressed very far, however. The priest, who collected money from his parishioners to help get water to his sister's village, said he hopes to have a progress report on that by June.



Father Henry Saw Lone

His sister, a teacher, makes 20,000 kyats (about \$20) a month, he said. Of course, he noted there are better jobs, but \$200 a year would be considered an average salary.

Cars are a rarity, he said. A used automobile on the black market would cost more than a new 4x4 Toyota in the U.S. Because of the expense, it would take 500 to 1,000 years for most people to accumulate enough money to buy a car.

Gasoline runs about \$3 a gallon and there were a few places selling

it for less, he said. However, with \$200 a year, you could only buy 50 to 65 gallons.

The majority of rural people live in bamboo homes with grass or thatched roofs. They have no electricity and may have to travel long distances to get food and water.

In the rural areas, water comes from natural springs and is good enough to drink. However, in other places, including the diocesan center, it is muddy and unsanitary. While it can be used for bathing, he said, it must be purified before drinking or cooking.

Myanmar is about the size of Texas, with an area of 262,000 square miles. It has 54 million inhabitants with 90 percent being Buddhist. Christians — mostly Catholic and Baptist — make up about 6 percent of the population. The rest are Muslims, Hindus and Spiritualists.

The average person has a fifth-grade education, he said, because it is just too expensive to continue on into middle and high school.

The staple diet of the people is rice. Many of the dishes are curries.

Father Saw Lone said that his trip was exhausting mentally and physically, but he was glad to be back in Kansas.

"God bless America and all the caring people of the world," he said.



A TYPICAL HOME in Mynamar is made of bamboo with a thatched roof and no electricity or running water.



**WATER IS BROUGHT** from rivers or streams by carrying it in bamboo or plastic containers like the one the girl (above) is using. Sometimes people, usually women and children, have to go miles to reach a water source like this (right).