

Conversation with Ditol – 4-24-26

Participants: Martha Ades, Sheila Carmichael, Ditol Myllemngap, Dick & Sharon Van Duizend

On the evening of July 31, 2026, the UUCF Partner Church Circle held an extended conversation via Zoom with Ditol Myllemngap, Headmaster of the Puriang Unitarian School, and member of the Boards of the Puriang Unitarian Church and the Unitarian Union of Northeast India.

School News: With well-justified excitement, Ditol told us that of the 11,400 schools in Meghalaya, the Puriang Unitarian School had been ranked 69th best in the quality of education provided, putting it in the top 0.6%. We applauded this recognition, noting that it reflected Ditol's vision, dedication, and hard work as Headmaster over the past 30+ years.

The school currently has 393 students and 20 teachers. The government covers the salaries of 7 of the 20 teachers including Ditol's and the high school teachers. The School Management Committee pays for an 8th. The funds donated by UUCF members cover the remaining teacher salaries. Only the 11th and 12th grade students pay a modest school fee. Some teacher salaries are as low as ₹3,000–₹4,000/month (\$31-\$42); total monthly salary outlay is approximately ₹78,000 (\$817).

Despite this low salary support, the Indian government continues to impose additional burdens on all teachers including requiring them to serve as census takers and requiring them to pay ₹500 to take a new teacher qualification exam. [He took the test last week and is cautiously optimistic that he interpreted the multiple choice questions and can continue teaching without need to retake the test.] He asked whether there is a similar in-service exam requirement in the US. We described the continuing professional education requirements tied to pay scales used here.

Ditol sees these requirements as political and budgetarily motivated. He has suggested to state education officials that the government should hire some of the many unemployed, educated, young people to conduct the census. He mentioned other anomalous government actions such as requiring that students participate in anti-smoking rallies while it produces cigarettes.

Community Issues: This year's monsoon has failed to produce Meghalaya's normally prodigious rainfall [up to 400"]. There has been enough rain to support the vegetable crop but not enough to flood the rice paddies. If the rains continue to fall short in August, there may be food insecurity in Puriang. The neighboring low-lying state of Assam has received flooding rains.

Health Conditions: We shared information about the state of health of ourselves and our families. Ditol is very health conscious. He does an hour of yoga each morning and is very aware of the dangers posed by chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, seeking to eat

organic food to the greatest extent possible. Ditol observed that in Puriang, health issues seem to arise after age 40 (though some members of his family lived well into their 80's). He continues to be plagued by ringing in his right ear. He thinks it started after a 2019 car accident.

The call closed with Ditol extending greetings to all at UUCF.