

## Special Edition on Holistic Mission in the Context of Asian Plurality

### Editorial

One major obstacle to building communities of peace in Asia is the narrow type of mission orientation which is so entrenched in the minds of Asian Christians. This mission orientation is clearly manifested in the zealous efforts of Asian Christians today to go into the world to share the gospel, which is but equated with Christianizing other Asians. This is really proselytism, often confused with conversion, and which has become a bad word in Asia especially for Asians of other faiths.

Although often understood as the task of sharing the good news (evangelism), upon closer analysis, proselytism springs from a desire for self-propagation, usually of a particular church or denomination. There are new congregations, usually with financial support from outside, that avidly promote this type of mission. Unfortunately, this mission orientation renders the church and Christianity as a whole suspect in the eyes of many people of other faiths.

It is ironic that the Asian Christians who inherited this 19<sup>th</sup> century (or even older) mission orientation are now the zealous promoters of this concept and practice while many of the former foreign mission bodies have already done a re-thinking of their mission understanding and practice.

In the wake of some crises and calamities, this traditional type of mission usually accompanies some relief efforts, usually done subtly, if not overtly. For example, stories have been shared of how some Christian groups went to Aceh, Indonesia following the tsunami with conversion strings attached to their relief efforts. Last year, when a group of Korean missionaries were held hostage in Afghanistan, the churches in Korea came under severe attack both within and outside Korea for zealously daring to go there with the so-called medical mission - in spite of warning from both Afghan and Korean governments. In fact, it is the whole church with its traditional concept and practice of mission that was severely attacked.

The Christian Conference of Asia affirms that our mission is really God's mission of proclaiming, sharing and living out the good news of fullness of life for all children in the household of God. We also affirm that the household of God is the whole inhabited world (*oikoumene*) and thus, all peoples, regardless of race, color, creed and faith, are already members of that household, endowed with the image of God within them, no matter whether they acknowledge it or not. Hence, mission has to be holistic—i.e. attending to the needs of the total person; affirming the divine image within them; opposing the forces that distort that divine image; and assisting the flowering or blooming of that divine image into fullness.

In view of this, two sub-regional consultation-dialogues were organized by the Christian

Conference of Asia to undertake this process of seriously critiquing mission in its traditional and narrow sense in order to promote holistic mission in the context of Asian plurality, poverty and injustice. The aims of these consultations were:

- To review, assess and critique the impact of traditional and narrow mission orientation and practices in Asia;
- To equip ourselves, our member churches and their related agencies (e.g. Bible schools and seminaries) with holistic mission understanding and practice in view of the context of Asian plurality.

The sub-regional consultation-dialogues brought together representatives of Asian mission bodies from CCA member churches (*mission-sending churches*) and representatives of churches from the host countries (*mission-receiving countries*) in Southeast Asia and South Asia. Participants shared the mission journeys of their respective churches and alternative forms of mission that they were engaged in—especially those which help to foster the ecumenical vision of fullness of life for all and the wider ecumenical approaches of intrafaith and interfaith cooperation.

The papers in this double-edition of *CTC Bulletin* were chosen from among the papers shared at the two consultation-dialogues.

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