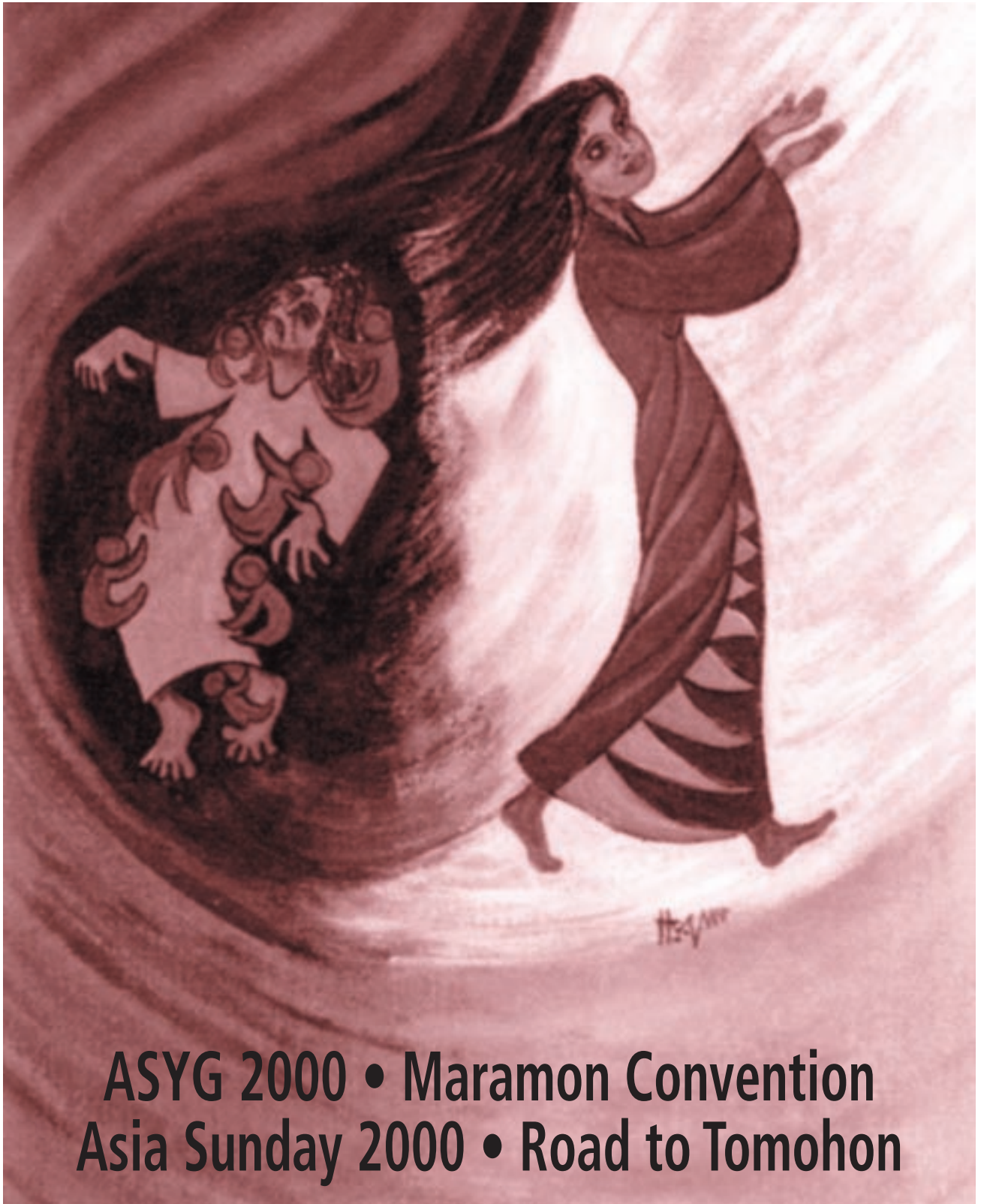


VOLUME 35 • NUMBER 1

MARCH 2000

# CCA NEWS



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VOLUME 35 • NUMBER 1  
 MARCH 2000

Official publication of the Christian Conference of Asia

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All roads now lead to the Eleventh General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, which is scheduled to be held on 1–6 June 2000 in Tomohon, Minahasa, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The Assembly will be preceded by a Youth Gathering planned by the Program Unit on Youth, a Women's Assembly planned by the Program Unit on Women's Concerns and a People's Forum brought together by the Program Unit on Urban Rural Mission. All of these will be held on 27–30 May in locations close to the Assembly venue.

The Asian Ecumenical Course, which is the main vehicle of the CCA for ecumenical formation and one of the main activities of the Program Unit on Education, will also be held in a venue close to the Assembly. The Assembly's life and work will therefore be part of the ecumenical formation of the participants of the course and the Assembly itself will be in the vortex of ecumenical events held at the same time and place.

Preparations in Tomohon are in high order. The whole church and community are being mobilised to host what Nico Gara, the General Secretary of the Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM), calls an 'assembly of the people ... staying with the local community and seeing life as they see it'.

The Catholic Church in Minahasa is also opening up its facilities to host part of the Assembly. Meanwhile, the program is close to being finalised. The worship and Bible study materials will soon be published. Physical arrangements are beginning to fall into place. Other preparatory materials will soon be sent to delegates, even as preliminary registration forms have begun to come in. A moratorium on staff travel will soon be in effect to ensure that all hands in the CCA will be devoted to the preparation for the Assembly.

The Assembly will make crucial decisions regarding vision and structure, and within that will enact the areas of program work that CCA will be involved in years to come. Above all, the Assembly is meant to be a celebration, cognisant of past achievements and contributions, but hopeful of and open to new people, new challenges and new opportunities. A special feature of the Assembly will be the launching of an expanded *Sound the Bamboo*. *Sound the Bamboo*, CCA *Hymnal 2000* will be the definitive edition of the CCA Hymnal, first published in a trial version ten years ago.

'Old' and 'new', remembrance and renewal, communion and companionship are undercurrents of the chosen Assembly theme: 'Fullness of Life for All'. This is also the theme of Asia Sunday, which celebrates the founding of the CCA in 1957 and which traditionally falls on the Sunday before Pentecost. It is fitting that Asia Sunday this year will fall on a Sunday when the CCA Assembly will be in session.

An old friend of the CCA once noted that every meeting of the CCA must include the 'past, present and future'. Thus we are hoping that in this Assembly several past General Secretaries of the CCA might attend and enter the celebratory mood. We hope that by honouring past work while anticipating new opportunities we will be keeping vital links that are foundational to our lives as we move into the new century.

*Feliciano V. Cariño*

## ASYG 2000

# One in Spirit, Together in Action

About one hundred youth and students from all over the Asia-Pacific region attended the Ecumenical Asian Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG) 2000, held 21–28 January 2000 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Most of the participants had also been in ASYG national gatherings or had worked on the issues of development and globalisation in their own country.

A Thai Buddhist, Pracha Hutauwatr, delivered the keynote speech on 'Impact of Globalisation in Asia'. He gave a Buddhist perspective on how globalisation impacts one's self and the ethos of one's culture. Professor Noh Jung Sun from South Korea offered a biblical reflection that analysed economic injustice in the world and challenged students and youth to work for changes. The highlights of the program were the thirteen exposure groups, which examined farming, ethnic, women's, urban, environmental and workers' issues. Participants were not only invited to see, but also to listen, dialogue with and experience these realities.

The response of the participants indicated that this was the best part of the gathering.

The different workshops allowed the resource participants to analyse what they learned. Resource people facilitated the discussion, which became so heated in the group that the steering committee had to change the timetable to allow for more time for sharing and discussion. The suggestions of the workshops are included in the statement.

The regional gathering also held morning worships, creative national reports, presentations, a market place, a solidarity night and a cultural night. The participants, who were young and full of energy, felt refreshed by this ecumenical encounter. They gained more ideas and were enthusiastic about working together at the national level when they went back home. This regional gathering should act as catalyst rather than as an end-point for the ongoing national ecumenical process.

*Cynthia Yuen*



## ASYG 2000

## Statement of the Ecumenical Asian Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG) 2000, 21–28 January 2000, Chiang Mai, Thailand

**W**e, the ninety-six Asian students and youths, representing eighteen countries in the Asia–Pacific region from five ecumenical youth organisations, namely Asia Alliance of YMCAs (AAYMCAs), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)–Youth, World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)–Asia Pacific, International Movement of Catholic Students–Asia Pacific (IMCS) and International Young Christian Students Movement (IYCS)–Asia, as well as international guests, gathered at the YMCA of Chiang Mai, Thailand, 21–28 January 2000 with the theme ‘Review, Reflect, Renew: Building Sustainable Communities’. We decided to gather near the beginning of this millennium that marks drastic changes in our world of which the Christian youth are called to respond. We gathered here to review critically the challenges of globalisation in our region, to reflect on relevant responses and renew our

commitment to building a just and sustainable community.

The spirit of unity and solidarity of Asian ecumenical youth is traced back to the Asian Youth Assembly in New Delhi, India, in 1984 and the Asian Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG) in Bangalore, India, in 1993, the regional gathering in preparation for the Ecumenical Global Gathering for Youth and Students (EGGYS). The ASYG 2000 regional gathering followed numerous national gatherings held between January and December 1999.

In our discussions and deliberations, we were specifically concerned about the negative impacts of globalisation on youth and students in our region. In particular, we struggled with the issues of polarisation between the North and the South as well as the rich and the poor, rapid environmental degradation, cultural erosion, consumerism, gender inequality and ethnic and religious conflicts.

### Our Vision and Commitment

As students and youth in Asia, inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, we renew our commitment towards a society of social equity, ecofriendliness, gender-fairness and life-affirmation. We envision a society where no one is marginalised, oppressed or impoverished, where every human being may live with dignity. We seek a global community where alternative values such as people’s participation and cooperation, generosity and tolerance, diversity and spirituality are accepted as the prime organising principles of society.

To realise our vision in our own contexts, we commit ourselves to the following:

### On Environment and Sustainable Communities

We commit ourselves to:

- practise and promote the 5Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle, repair, refuse)

### ASYG 2000 was coorganised by five regional youth and student organisations in the Asia–Pacific region:

- Asia Alliance of YMCAs (AAYMCA)
- Christian Conference of Asia–Youth (CCA-Youth)
- International Movement of Catholic Students Asia–Pacific (IMCS-AP)
- International Young Christian Students Asian Secretariat (IYCS-Asia)
- World Student Christian Federation Asia–Pacific Region (WSCF-AP)

### How does ASYG 2000 work?

Since April 1996, the representatives of these ecumenical groups informally explored the possibility of coorganising a gathering for the coming millennium. The first preparatory meeting was held in June 1997 when the core group started its work. To implement this project, a working group, which was formed by one staff member and one youth/student from each organisation, was developed to plan for national and regional gatherings.

ASYG 2000



among our family, friends and community,

- build awareness and launch campaigns on crucial environmental issues, and organise eco-events on 'Earth Day' 'Environment Day', 'No Waste/Traffic Day' etc.,
- organise study programs to help youth and students to get in touch with ecology, local wisdom, traditional knowledge, cultural roots and heritage in our search for alternative lifestyles,
- boycott environmentally unfriendly products and promote eco-friendly products such as organic products.

We urge:

- our churches to develop clear biblical and theological perspectives on environmental issues,
- our governments to establish environment-friendly policies and laws.

#### On Higher Education

We commit ourselves to:

- endeavour to create a space in universities/colleges for the students' voices to be heard,
- encourage students to be concerned with holistic human development as well as intellectual development.

We urge:

- our churches and social movements to create awareness among youth and students about the impact of globalisation on higher education,
- our governments to uphold their responsibility to provide quality and affordable higher education,
- our governments and universities to adopt a curriculum that is holistic to human development and meeting genuine local needs,

- our governments to implement the statement made in the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education,

#### Strengthening Rural Communities

We commit ourselves to:

- organise groups with concerned youth for the sustainable development of rural communities,
- network with other student movements, non-government organisations (NGOs), social movements and churches to support rural issues,
- expose young people to the realities of rural communities and encourage them to respond to these issues urgently,
- promote the use of local products,
- explore biblical foundations for strengthening young people's com-

## ASYG 2000

mitment to rural communities issues.

We urge:

- church leaders to lead and motivate congregations to practise simple lifestyles,
- our governments to adopt a balanced development policy preserving the sustainability of rural communities.

#### On Gender

We commit ourselves to:

- be critical of the mass media and its projection on women's image,
- raise awareness on women's issues

and rights among our organisations, create community for both genders to work in partnership, and support initiatives for women empowerment,

- work with women in vulnerable situations such as in prostitution, migration, and with HIV/AIDS, etc.

We urge:

- our churches to have equal respect for women and men, to encourage and support women's programs in the churches, to open the same opportunity for both genders,
- our churches to make prayers,

hymns and other documents to be gender sensitive,

- our governments to put a gender awareness course in the education curriculum
- our governments to take the following actions: to stop the use of sex workers to promote tourism, to create laws against sexual violence and gender discrimination, to ensure fair representation of women in legislative assemblies and all government institutions and also to protect the rights of female domestic workers.

## A Process Rather Than Just a Gathering

**M**ost Asian countries gained independence from colonising powers from the late 1940s on. Rapid development and globalisation during these past five decades have led to unprecedented changes in Asia. Asian countries have enjoyed both autonomy and prosperity in this post-colonial era. Such changes, however, have brought with them countless reversals in the lives of many people and the society as a whole. Youth in Asia are vulnerable to changes in education, culture and values.

In 1993, the Asian Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG) was held to study developments in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world. ASYG was first formed as the regional pre-assembly for the Ecumenical Global Gathering for Youth and Students (EGGYS) held in 1993 in Brazil. It helped strengthen partnership among these organisations in the hope that this process would revitalise the vision and ministry of youth and students.

Building on this previous ecumenical cooperation, the organisations involved decided that it was vital to

the life of the movements to build solid grassroots cooperation among the existing organisations in Asia for mutual commitment to social justice. It is against this backdrop that we decided to come together again in 2000 to continue the process of common study, analysis and reflection on the issues and concerns related to development and globalisation. It is hoped that in this process, a common understanding of development and globalisation in the post-colonial era from the perspective of youth and students in Asia-Pacific will be achieved. There is a challenge to youth and students to develop alternative paradigms of development that work for us. The sharing of our diverse cultures and contexts of our faith makes this gathering a genuine ecumenical encounter.

It is hoped that in this process, a common understanding of development and globalisation in the post-colonial era from the perspective of youth and students in Asia-Pacific will be achieved.

*Lung Ngan Ling*

## ASYG 2000



### On Indigenous People

We commit ourselves to:

- organise various educational programs on indigenous people's issues, and provide leadership development programs for indigenous youth,
- support the inclusion of indigenous language and culture in schools and in public life.

We urge:

- our governments to adopt the UN charters on indigenous peoples rights,
- our churches to promote indigenous theology.

### On Working with People of Other Faiths

We commit ourselves to:

- encourage ourselves to develop a deep spirituality that enables us to have an open attitude towards other faiths,

- ensure that our organisation's activities are open to and in dialogue with other faiths,
- work for reconciliation where there are religious/ethnic conflicts,
- network with people of other faiths towards achieving common goals.

We urge:

- our churches to promote inter-religious dialogue,
- our governments to allow freedom to practise one's own beliefs,
- our governments not to use religion for political purposes.

### Conclusion

We firmly believe that actions speak louder than words. With the blessing and guidance of our God, and inspired by individuals and groups working towards sustainable communities, action plans were drawn up at national, subregional and regional levels to

concretise our commitments. The implementation of these plans will also be in the spirit of the ecumenical collaboration renewed, initiated and strengthened through ASYG 2000.

We commit ourselves to putting the above action plans into practice to the best of our abilities within our own contexts. To bring changes towards the society which we endeavour to achieve, we feel that it is a critical moment for us as students and youth to respond to the call of God through our own practice, actions and continued reflections.

Being in one spirit of Jesus Christ, our Liberator, we will pray and work together with our sincere belief and aspirations towards a Biblical vision, that is: 'Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.'

(Amos 5:24)

## National Gatherings, January to December 1999

**T**he national movements of the five coorganisers were encouraged to work together for a national gathering in their own countries. The ASYG 2000 Core Group invited a national coordinator to facilitate the process in each country.

### From Korea

'The greatest outcome the national meeting brought forth is that Christian student and youth organisations in Korea gathered together for the first time. As the first gathering, we couldn't come up with any concrete cooperative tasks. We found, however, that we had had similar problems in similar situations, and then we agreed to search for cooperative issues and matters from now on.'



### From Myanmar

'Through this ASYG, students and youth of all organisations become more close with mutual respect and understanding.'

ASYG National Gathering in Myanmar

'Solidarity within these groups become stronger. We can share our own life, suffering and struggle. We recommend holding this program at least once a year.'

### From Bangladesh

'The action programs recommended by the National Gathering in Bangladesh are reasonable and workable.'

'Intermovement relationships between the partners is necessary at the local level to the regional level.'

'Steps should be taken to promote such relationships.'



ASYG National Gathering in Korea



## Where Are the Christians?

It is very common to relate globalisation with the development of the modern nation state system and to the global monetary system and financial market that enables the swift and efficient flow of private investment around the world. We can say that globalisation promotes a global monoculture based on consumerism. One thing is for sure: the change is very great.

A lot of people think that globalisation is fine, even good. Some think globalisation is something that will make them a part of modern society. They think they must hurry to catch up with it and ask no questions about its impact.

But can we just take globalisation for granted and ignore its harmful impact?

Globalisation seems very smooth on the surface but when we get to the bottom of it (which we seldom do) we see how it promotes poverty, preju-

### A participant from Indonesia gives a personal view of globalisation

dice, political corruption, oppression and the abuse of women, children and indigenous people. Many people are left behind while others talk about the prosperity that comes from globalisation.

Consider the case of Mbok Iyem, a saleswoman of traditional Indonesian medicines, who is no longer allowed to sell her own customary products because a large pharmaceutical company now owns the property rights of her traditional medicine.

Or consider how poor countries are using cheap labour as competitive bargaining in order to offer their industrial sectors to companies from rich countries.

We often think of globalisation as an issue and word that we cannot completely comprehend. But the most im-

portant aspect of globalisation is not the meaning of the word but what we, as Christians, can and must do in response to it. For as Christians we must say 'No' to something that oppresses people and to something (and not only globalisation) that creates injustice. We need to be with the suffering and weak in their fight against the oppression.

We often ask, 'Where is God in this situation? Why does God let the poor become poorer? Why does God allow women to be disrespected?'

But for me, the better question is, 'Where are the Christians?'

Some of us may say, 'Let's pray!'

But prayer does not mean only to close our eyes and to fold our fingers together.

It also means to open our eyes to see the reality and extend our hand to someone else. Even in a small way we can help.

*Bona Sigalingging*



# Consultations on Gender and Development

In response to a 1995 CCA Assembly mandate, gender awareness within the framework of gender and development has been a main component of the CCA Women's Concerns and Development and Service program units since 1997. After holding three subregional Gender Awareness and Sensitivity Courses in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Thailand in 1997 and 1998, the two desks called for a regional and a subregional consultation on gender and development. The purpose of the consultations was for follow up, evaluation and sustaining interest in the program. The theme was 'Partnership of Women and Men towards Inclusive Community'.

The regional consultation was held 1–6 December 1999 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. It was hosted by the Council of Churches in Malaysia and the Sabah Theological Seminary. The delegation, consisting of twenty-five participants from member churches and councils, two from the host team, three resource persons and two staff, was warmly welcomed at a sumptuous dinner given by the Sabah Council of Churches under the leadership of Bishop Datuk Yong Ping Chung, President of CCM. We missed the presence of women leaders in Sabah, nevertheless the hosts made us feel the warmth of ecumenical bonding.

The South Asia subregional consultation was held in Mount Lavinia, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 24–27 February 2000. It was hosted by the National Christian Council in Sri Lanka. There were seventeen participants: eight men, four of whom were general sec-

retaries of the national councils and a member church, and nine women. Both consultations were attended by people who are responsible for women and gender concerns and development and also by key leaders of member councils and churches. The consultation included worship, discussion of the gender and development framework, theme presentations and Bible studies on the partnership of women and men in leadership. People shared their perspectives of the situations in their own countries. There was analysis of gender and development situations. There was also gender analysis of activities of councils and churches and of church structures, programs and policies and gender/action planning. Participants used popular feminist methodologies.

The 1995 Assembly mandated a gender awareness program, a survey on the participation and status of women in inclusive community and analysis of structural possibilities for

equality in leadership. This mandate remains a big challenge, especially as it supports 'reaching out to churches even in the grassroots level'. But the sharing of experiences suggested that gender awareness in churches is often handled by women rather than by women and men working together. Lack of mutual service tends to marginalise women's issues and concerns. The consultation in Colombo was a very hopeful example of dealing with gender issues and visioning partnership of women and men in inclusive community, working together as both women and men. But partnership is not just a numbers game. There is a continuing need for empowering women to become capable leaders in partnership, just as there is also a need for men to learn what it means to be a partner-leader with women.

We have a vision. The Spirit of God in Jesus Christ gave us this vision. Hand in hand, let us work together!

*Corazon Tabing-Reyes*



Subregional Consultation on Gender and Development in Sri Lanka

# Asia Sunday 2000

## Indonesia: Fullness of Life for All

Since 1974 Asia Sunday has been celebrated every year on the week before Pentecost to commemorate the founding of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC, now CCA), on 14 May 1959. Following this tradition, this year's date for Asia Sunday will be Sunday, 4 June 2000, which is right in the middle of the Eleventh CCA General Assembly to be held in Tomohon, Indonesia. The material for Asia Sunday focuses attention on the Assembly and the churches and country that will be hosting it.

The theme of the Assembly is 'Time for Fullness of Life for All' and is based on the text of John 10:10.

The General Secretary of CCA, Dr Feliciano Cariño, writes about the Assembly: 'Above all, this is an Assembly that returns, as it were, to 'roots'. Over forty years ago, the CCA was born in Prapat, Indonesia, amidst all of the difficulties and hopes of the post-colonial period and as the modern ecumenical movement began to take off. Over forty years later, under new but equally difficult and challenging circumstances, it returns to Indonesia to begin a new century of ecumenical work. The Tomohon Assembly will in this sense be very special.'

Amid the rise of communal conflicts in many parts of Asia, particularly in

Indonesia, the issue of the 'fullness of life for all' becomes a crucial concern. What does it mean for

churches to hope for and proclaim 'the fullness of life for all', especially in the midst of conflicts and signs of community disintegration? How can we together promote the fullness of life for all in the pluralistic community of Asia, especially when many Christians suffer because of their faith? Through the theme of Asia Sunday 2000 churches are invited to reflect on and think afresh their mission to follow Christ who said, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

CCA encourages churches in Asia to join this celebration on this particular day.

However, if it does not fit your church's calendar, please feel free to find a suitable time around that date.



As we remember and pray for the churches and the people on this Asia Sunday, we suggest that the offering on this occasion be used to support refugees and internally displaced people in Indonesia. You may send your support through:

The Associate General Secretary for Finance, Christian Conference of Asia,  
96, 2nd District, Pak Tin Village, Mei Tin Road, Shatin, NT, Hong Kong,  
via cheque payable to 'Christian Conference of Asia'  
or via Account Number 295-259766-001 (HK\$ plus all other currencies)  
or 295-9-916715 (US\$) at the Hang Seng Bank, Hankow Road Branch,  
4 Hankow Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

# FABC Assembly

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), a network of Asian Catholic bishops, was founded in Manila in November 1970. It is the principal means for Asian Catholic bishops to come together to make plans.

The Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC met in Samphran, Thailand, 3–13 January 2000.

Two CCA representatives attended the assembly, Dr Feliciano Cariño, the General Secretary, and Associate General Secretary for Program Coordination, Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat

Conscious they were beginning a journey into a new millennium, the bishops of Asia gathered in Samphran, Thailand, and after ten days pledged themselves to continue the renewal of their churches by increasing efforts to witness to their faith through service and through the building of a participatory church.

'Asian people will recognise the gospel that we announce when they see in our life the transparency of the message of Jesus,' delegates to the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences unanimously agreed in a final draft statement. The gathering, which considered the theme, 'A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service', took place at a pastoral centre 32 km outside Bangkok. It drew some 160 bishops and other church leaders.

The meeting came less than two months after Pope John Paul II, during a weekend trip to New Delhi, India, released his response to the 1998 Synod of Bishops in Asia. The pontiff's apostolic exhortation 'Ecclesia in Asia' repeated his directive that Asian bishops evangelise primarily by proclaiming Jesus Christ as the unique saviour of the world.

The Asian bishops, meanwhile, have been hesitant to embrace this approach. At the synod in Rome and again at the meeting in Samphran, they expressed the need to evangelise by witnessing to the gospel and by entering into dialogue with followers of the other Asian religions. They talked about building local churches characterised primarily by service and love.

In the final draft document, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences built on Rome's encouragement. The Asian bishops emphasised the importance of having Catholicism take on a more Asian face. 'We are committed,' they said, 'to the emergence of the 'Asian-ness' of the church in Asia.' Their churches must increasingly embody Asian values, they explained, including a deep sense of the Spirit, of harmony and a holistic and inclusive approach to church life and activities in the wider society.

The statement highlighted a number of concerns that are especially pressing as the people of Asia begin to enter a new century. At the top of their list the bishops placed 'globalisation, which, unregulated by juridical and ethical norms, increases the millions who live below the poverty line'. They

said globalisation is accelerating the process of secularisation in Asia and it is helping to spawn extremist fundamentalism. Bishop after bishop deplored the growing gap between rich and poor in their countries. They see the new economic order as helping only a small fraction of their peoples.

The document celebrated the fact that during the twentieth century Asians freed themselves from the yoke of colonialism, but went on to say that 'corrupt governments, a growing concentration of wealth among the few and international economic 'restructuring' are causing great hardships for their peoples.

The document lamented the deterioration of the environment and growing concentrations of people in urban areas. It linked these developments to global economic forces.

The document stated that the social and political challenges that face Asia today appear overwhelmingly and are so massive and complex that they cannot be dealt with separately. The bishops said that solutions would be found only through 'integrated' responses by the churches and wider societies. 'We need to feel and act integrally,' they said. →

# Indigenous People's Training

**F**or forty years, CCA-URM has been involved in the struggle of indigenous people and Asian minority groups, working with them for their empowerment. URM puts the salvation of the poor and oppressed first and believes that the struggle of indigenous people is a manifestation of God's mission. God's mission is always a mission for life and against the power of death.

There is a need to bring together activists for indigenous peoples organisations to share their experiences and pains and plan together strategies to respond to the threat posed by globalisation and neo-liberal economic policies. In cooperation with the National Council of Churches in India-URM and SPACE Nepal, CCA-URM has been responding to this concern and has been conducting training on indigenous people's issues.

A training course was organised to focus on globalisation and the indigenous population. It was held at the Human Resource Centre, SPACE Chitwan, Nepal, on 14–21 November

1999. Issues such as the impact of globalisation and liberalisation on indigenous people, the indigenous people's movement for social change and possible responses to globalisation were discussed and analysed. There were twenty participants from different countries in South Asia—Nepal, Bhutan, India and Pakistan—including four women.

Rev. Josef P. Widyatmadja, the Executive Secretary for CCA-URM, attended the training. In his opening address, he expressed his gratitude to Rajan Singh, the Executive Secretary for NCC India-URM, and to Dhruva Maharjan, the director of SPACE Katmandu, Nepal, for their hard work in arranging the training. Dhruva Maharjan had been trained in a community organisation program sponsored by CCA-URM in Manila during martial law. In his opening remarks, Rajan Singh said that grassroots activists who are working with the indigenous people are the main targets of the training. The chief objective is for them to clearly understand the term 'global-

isation' and the world it encompasses. The training was conducted with regard to three major points: the impact of globalisation and liberalisation on indigenous people, the struggle of indigenous people put in a larger context and how we work with other sectors for alternatives.

Resource persons initiated the input process at the sessions. After the presentation by the researcher, there was discussion so that participants might have a clear understanding of the researcher's views, opinions and experiences. Such sharing sessions constituted a major part of the training. It is hoped that the sharing sessions will develop closer relations among the participants as they seek to develop solidarity among people with common concerns and strengthen the movement of indigenous people. The local committee also organised an exposure program that relates to indigenous concerns. In the program evaluations all participants committed themselves to follow up training.

*Josef P. Widyatmadja*

The document stressed the need for greater collaboration with the laity, more collaboration and more participation of all elements of their local churches, emphasising the need to be more inclusive regarding women and youth. It called for the building of small gospel-based communities.

In workshops and in other discussions, the bishops made frequent ref-

erences to the need of their churches to develop both their spiritual lives and further their commitments to working in the wider society. They again spoke of a 'triple dialogue'—with culture, with other religions and with the poor. They repeated their call for a 'new way of being church'.

The final document was important for the determination of the bishops

to continue on the path the Asian bishops' conferences have been taking for at least fifteen years. The bishops say they feel encouraged by both the Synod for Asia and by the papal declaration that grew out of it.

*Thomas C. Fox*

(Excerpted from a longer article in the *National Catholic Reporter* and reprinted with permission.)

# Malaysia: Gathering for Peace in Indonesia

We, Muslim and Christian leaders in Malaysia, call for an end to the religious violence in Ambon, the Maluku Islands and Lombok in Indonesia.

We declare that the heart of Islam and Christianity speaks of a God of love and compassion, who wills for all people to live in peace and harmony with one another.

Therefore, we appeal and pray that Muslims and Christians in Indonesia, and everywhere, work for peace and reconciliation. May God Almighty usher in an era of peace and reconciliation among all peoples in this century.

—Common declaration read by all at the Gathering for Peace

Some 150 Christians and Muslims came together on 20 February 2000 at the Loyola Hall of St Francis Church, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, in order to make a joint appeal for peace in Ambon, Maluku and Lombok in Indonesia. The gathering was organised by the Council of Churches of Malaysia, in an effort to express concern and solidarity with those in Indonesia who are working tirelessly for reconciliation among people of different religious factors.

Representatives of various Muslim and Christian organisations addressed the people. All the speakers spoke of the need to renounce violence in any form, and most especially if it is carried out in the name of religion. The conflict in Ambon and surrounding areas shows how once-peaceful societies can be destroyed when religious and cultural sentiments are inflamed by irresponsible forces.

Dr Amir Farid bin Dato Isahak of the Interfaith Spiritual Fellowship (INSAF) spoke of the need for 'true fellowship' among Muslims and Chris-

tians in Ambon, and how it can come about only when understanding and respect is emphasised and built up through interfaith education.

Fr Larry Tan of St Francis Xavier Church drew upon recent statements from the Pope and the Vatican to emphasise that peace is a real possibility provided that people of faith have a strong moral conviction to be peace-makers. 'To work for peace we must work for justice, as these two things go hand in hand,' he noted.

Dr Chandra Muzaffer of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) stated that Indonesia has had a remarkable record of holding divergent cultural and religious traditions together in relative peace. The present crisis in Indonesia is due in large measure to the collapse of Suharto's totalitarian regime and to political forces that work to hold onto power by creating trouble and dividing people. Long-term measures are urgently needed to seek out the root causes of injustices and address them. There need to be measures that support the

evolving democratic participation of the people, that replace the authoritarian political culture with power sharing and good governance and that inspire people to develop and sustain a culture of peace by drawing on each other's moral and religious convictions.

Mr Gopal Sundaram of the Council of Churches of Malaysia emphasised that Malaysia and Indonesia share a common religious and cultural history. What happens in one country is of great concern to the other. The Council of Churches in Malaysia is in close touch with the Indonesian Council in order to show solidarity and give support.

Dato Sulaiman of the Federation of Darul Fitrah pointed out that Islam is a religion of peace. The core religious traditions of Christianity and Islam call for building peaceful communities, and this must always be the 'true' witness of these religions in modern society.

As the gathering came to a close, all those present stood up to offer

prayers for peace efforts in Indonesia, and for all the families that suffer pain, grief and destruction as a result of violence. A common declaration was read by all present. The overall feeling was that people cannot take peace for granted. To ensure peace, the process of interfaith education for peace and understanding must always be a priority of religious communities in multiethnic and multireligious countries.

### Restoration of Justice and Peace in the Region of Maluku and Lombok, Indonesia

The Council of Churches of Malaysia calls upon the Indonesian Government and the leaders of the Islamic and Christian communities to work for the restoration of justice and peace in the

troubled areas of Ambon, Maluku and Lombok.

It is noted that Indonesia is under political and economic stress as it patiently heads towards democracy. Unscrupulous politicians and religious leaders exploiting religious and cultural sentiments of the people for their own vested interests are to be deplored. Inflamed sensitivities and emotions have led to open violence, which has caused death and destruction to many innocent lives.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches its followers to pursue the path of peace in all its dealings with others. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.' (Matthew 5:9)

Islam also teaches that peace is the way of life of those who submit to the

will of Allah, the Compassionate. The Council of Churches supports immediate measures to bring Muslims and Christians together to the negotiating table to work towards reconciliation and the restoration of peace.

We pray for God's sovereign grace and strength on all those who take positive steps towards peace.

Our prayers also go out to all those who have suffered pain and grief as a result of the recent bloody violence.

Christians in Malaysia commit themselves to always seeking the path of peace and understanding, so that the principle of religious harmony will always be upheld.

*Rev. Dr Hermen Sbastrri*  
*General Secretary*

*Council of Churches of Malaysia*  
*18 January 2000*

## KCC Starts Vocational Training Programs

**T**he Kampuchea Christian Council has opened a computer training and language training program in Phnom Penh to give young people training in computers and English. This program is part of the council's ongoing effort to focus on social development activities in underdeveloped Cambodia. Twenty-five young people are undergoing the training, which is given free of charge, irrespective of religious affiliations. The Executive Committee of KCC has outlined a long-term plan to expand the training centre and offer courses for more young people. The program has been initiated with the support of the CCA Indochina desk and with the assistance of volunteer teachers.



Students at the KCC Vocational Centre, Phnom Penh

## CCA General Assembly Press Accreditation

It has been a tradition of the CCA to welcome media representatives to its General Assembly. For its forthcoming Assembly in Tomohon, CCA would like to extend invitations to representatives from the church and secular media, local and international. This press corps will be able to cover the public assembly events and plenary sessions. Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa, the host church, has offered to provide free board and lodging to all participants of the Assembly in the homes of church members. This hospitality will be extended to the accredited press corps. Journalists/reporters who do not wish to avail themselves of this offer, and who wish to stay instead in hotels or inns in Tomohon may do so at their own expense. Those who wish to become part of the press corps should apply to CCA. Application forms can be obtained from the CCA office or can be downloaded from the CCA web site ([www.cca.org.hk](http://www.cca.org.hk)).

For more details contact  
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2692 3805, email:  
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## Church of South India Synod

The Twenty-seventh Synod Session of the Church of South India was held in Secunderabad, Andhra Pradesh, 12–16 January 2000 on the theme 'Cross: The Continuing Sign of Hope'. The newly elected officers for the biennium 2000–2002 are—Moderator: Most Rev. K.J. Samuel, Deputy Moderator: Rt Rev. B.P. Sugandar, General Secretary: Rev. G. Dyvasirvadam, and Treasurer: Mr Fredrick William.

## New Secretary of BTESSC

Rev. Dr M.J. Joseph, Director of the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore, India has been elected the Secretary of the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, India, for a period of three years. Dr Joseph, formerly professor and principal of the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kerala, is one of India's leading theologians.

BTESSC is the affiliating body of all theological colleges in India that award theological degrees and diplomas for graduate and doctoral studies.

## NCCA Speaks Out on Mandatory Sentencing

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) has added its voice to the calls for an end to the mandatory sentencing laws of the Northern Territory and Western Australia, describing them as 'a fundamentally flawed, unjust and inflexible approach to dealing with crime'.

The NCCA comprises the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches as well as twelve Protestant and Orthodox churches. The heads of all fourteen constituent bodies endorsed the statement. According to the churches, it is important that Australia should comply with international human rights agreements and respect the abiding moral principles that such agreements set forth.—NCCA

## SACC Calls for Peace and Security in South Asia

About twenty-five church leaders representing national councils of churches from five South Asian countries—Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka—attended the fifth meeting of the South Asian Council of Churches (SACC) that was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 9–10 December 1999. They had intensive discussions to develop action plans on various issues centred on the theme 'Mission and Vision of the South Asian Churches'.

The SACC emerged five years ago out of the common concerns of the churches in one of the world's most populous and diverse regions. It was intended to build up communities of justice and peace through interaction, mutual partnership and ecumenical fellowship. It reaffirmed the common identity, heritage and witness of the five South Asian NCCs through a shared platform in a pluralistic South Asian society.

While reaffirming their commitment to work for peace, reconciliation, communal harmony and religious



tolerance in a fragmented and turbulent South Asia, the church leaders reiterated their earlier decision to bear the burden of carrying out the efforts of like-minded people and organisations to transform the South Asia region to a peaceful place and to work for common humanity. The SACC leaders also expressed their concern and dismay about various issues that are confronting South Asian society.

—*Ipe Joseph and S.M. Chowdhury*

## NCC Korea Elects New Officers

The 48th General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) was held in the Suhdaemun Headquarters of the Salvation Army in Seoul on 22 November 1999. The theme of the Assembly was 'New Millennium, New Church and New Nation'.

Around 400 people, including 243 official delegates and guests from eight member churches, overseas partners and observers, gathered together. Vic-

tor Hsu, the Director of the Asia and Pacific division of the NCCUSA, delivered a special lecture on 'The Ecumenical Direction for Peace and Reconciliation' as part of the assembly.

Lee Sung Duk, Territorial Commander of the Salvation Army in Korea, was elected as the Chair. Vice chairs were Rev. Kim Soon Kwan (Presbyterian Church of Korea), Rev. Um Ki Ho (Assembly of God) and Yoon Chi Kyung (Korean Evangelical Church/Women). Rev. Shin Kyung Ha (Korean Methodist Church) was elected Recording Secretary and Kim Hak Joon (Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea/Youth) was elected Vice Recording Secretary. Lim Myung Ja (Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea/Women) and Shin Hyo Hee (Anglican Church in Korea/Women) were elected Treasurer and Vice Treasurer respectively.

The assembly identified four major program concerns: Christian unity, mutual cooperation and sup-

port among North and South Korean churches, overcoming violence against marginalised peoples and ecological concerns.

## General Assembly of PGI

The Communion of Churches in Indonesia will hold its Thirteenth General Assembly in Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, on 24–31 March 2000, under the theme 'Seek the Lord and Live', based on Amos 5:6. The Assembly will be hosted by Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis (Kalimantan Evangelical Church).

1,300 participants are expected to attend the assembly, including the delegates of the seventy-four member churches of PGI, observers representing twenty-five regional councils of churches in Indonesia and national Christian-related organisations. Also represented will be fraternal delegations from within Indonesia, such as the Indonesian Bishops' Conferences, and partner churches and ecumenical organisations from around the world. Dr Feliciano Cariño, the General Secretary of CCA, and Dr Konrad Raisier, the General Secretary of WCC, are due to be present.

The Assembly, which meets every five years, will elect the new leadership for the years 2000–2005.

Prior to the assembly, the Youth Pre-Assembly meeting was held in Sampit, Central Kalimantan on 10–15 March and attended by about 350 young people. At the same time, about 400 women participants attended the Women's Pre-Assembly meeting held in Kuala Kapuas, Central Kalimantan.—*Henriette Hutabarat*



Rev. Kim Dong Wan, General Secretary of NCC Korea, at the 48th General Assembly in Seoul

## Ms Reiko Suzuki Elected Moderator of NCC Japan

The National Christian Council in Japan held its Thirty-fourth General Assembly in Tokyo at the Korean Church in Japan, on 13–14 March 2000. The theme of the Assembly, based on Amos 5:6, was 'Seek the Lord and Live'.

The assembly was attended by about 100 delegates of the member churches and organisations of NCC Japan as well as fraternal delegates, including the Japan Evangelical Association, Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace, World Conference on Religion and Peace, NCC Korea and CCA. NCC Korea was represented by its General Secretary, Rev. Kim Dong Wan, and CCA by Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat, Associate General Secretary for Program Coordination.

The assembly, which meets every three years, received the working report of NCC Japan. The theme was introduced through a panel discussion that highlighted various issues that

threaten life on our planet. These include global warming and other problems related to ecology, developments in medical technology that often ignore human dignity and various forms of oppression and violence against life, including child prostitution and violence against women. The need for the churches to develop an ethic of life in an era characterised by a tremendous technological advancement was underlined by all four of the panelists. A Buddhist monk, who was present at the assembly, affirmed the growing collaboration between Christians and Buddhists in addressing the common concerns of society.

The assembly also elected the leadership of NCC Japan for the coming three years. Ms Reiko Suzuki, former General Secretary of Japan YWCA, was elected as Moderator. Ms Suzuki belongs to the United Church of Christ in Japan and is the first woman moderator in the history of council, which was founded fifty-two years ago on 5 April 1948. The two new Vice Moderators are Rev. Renta Nishihara from the Anglican Church and Rev. Kano Yoshitaka

from the Baptist Convention. NCC Japan is one of the three member councils of CCA whose members include Christian organisations (the other two are the Hong Kong Christian Council and the NCC Sri Lanka). Members of NCC Japan include the Anglican Church of Japan (Seikokai), the Association of Christian Kindergartens, the Christian Mass Communication Centre (AVACO), the Japan Baptist Convention, the Japan Baptist Union, the Japan Bible Society, the Japan Christian Culture Society, the Japan Christian Medical Association, the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Japan Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Korean Christian Church in Japan, the National YMCA of Japan, the National YWCA of Japan and the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) and nineteen associate members.

—*Henriette Hutabarat*

## Bishop Vinod Peter Elected President of NCCI

The National Council of Churches in India's Twenty-fourth Quadrennial Assembly, held in Ranchi 1–5 March 2000, elected the Most Rev. Vinod Peter as its President for the next four years. Bishop Vinod Peter is the Moderator of the Church of North India and also the Bishop of CNI Nagpur Diocese.

The National Council of Churches in India is India's largest ecumenical body. It comprises twenty-nine Protestant member churches, seven related agencies, thirteen all India Christian organisations and fourteen regional Christian councils. NCCI, as the national ecumenical forum, is deeply



Reiko Suzuki, centre, the new Moderator of NCC Japan

committed to united witness and to the cause of the poor and the marginalised. The NCCI has been called upon to assume a crucial role in confronting and responding to the recent political and religious situations in India.

The assembly is a major event in the life of the NCCI. It meets once every four years to review the work of the council and to set priorities for the future. The presidium, general body, executive committee and other committees are elected by the assembly.

Other office-bearers elected were—Vice Presidents: Mrs Eva Hansdak, Rt Rev. Geevarges Mar Coorilose and Ms B. Minni Nirupama, Treasurer: Mr John Hanchinmani and General Secretary: Rev. Dr Ipe Joseph.

—V. S. Lall

## Regional Consultation on Mission and Dialogue

A Regional Consultation on Mission and Dialogue was organised by the Mission and Evangelism Desk at the Berjaya Mount Royal Beach Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 23–29 February 2000. Forty-eight participants from fourteen Asian countries participated. The consultation explored ways and means of understanding and doing God's mission in today's Asian context, which is pluralistic in every way. It aimed to help the participants realise more fully how dialogue with people of other faiths is an inherent part of mission, which the churches can neither ignore nor avoid if they are to live authentically and meaningfully. The Rt Rev. Dr P. Victor Premasagar, former

Moderator of Church of South India and currently Professor of Old Testament at the Gurukul Theological Seminary, Madras, delivered the keynote address on 'Mission, Ecumenism and Dialogue'.

Rev. Dr Isaac Henry Victor, Head of the Department of Comparative Religions in the Eastern University in Sri Lanka, spoke on 'Muslim Initiatives and Concerns in Christian–Muslim Dialogue'. A special address on 'An Indian Christian View of Religious Pluralism' was delivered by the Rev. Dr Yohannan George of Kerala, India. Mr David Ravinder Selvaraj, Director, VISTAR (a support service organisation to social movements, peoples organisations and NGOs in India) spoke on 'Rethinking Mission and Dialogue'.

Rev. Dr Daniel Thiagarajah, Executive Secretary for Mission and Evangelism of CCA spoke on 'Emerging Theological and Missiological Discussions in the Context of Asian Plurality'.

Bishop Premasagar, Dr Daniel Thiagarajah and Ms Hope Antone did three Biblical Reflections. A panel discussion on 'The Present Day Reality in Sri Lanka and the Need for Dialogue' was presided over by Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, General Secretary of NCC, Sri Lanka. The discussants were Dr Stanley Jeyarajah and Mr Vijey Vidyasagar. Rev. Fr Yohan Devananda led a special session on 'Racial Harmony' followed by drama acted by young people of Moneragella. NCC Sri Lanka was in charge of local arrangements.—*Daniel Thiagarajah*



Participants at the Mission and Dialogue Consultation



Training in mission at Mae Sot, Thailand

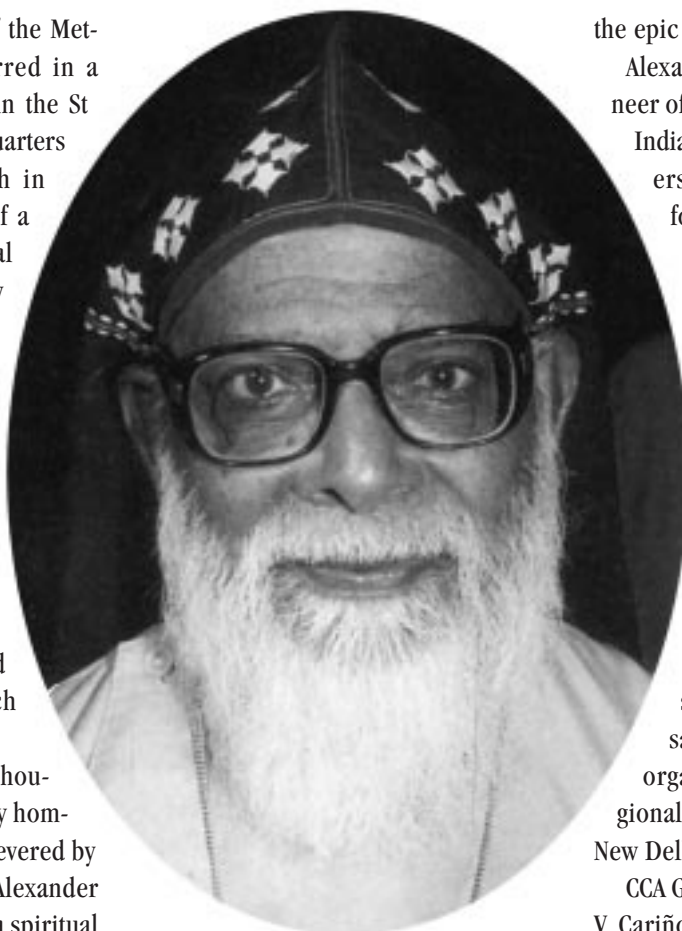
# Alexander Mar Thoma: A Great Indian Sage Dies

The Most Rev. Dr Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan, the IX Mar Thoma of the throne of the See of St Thomas, passed away on 11 February at the age of 87. Alexander Mar Thoma had been the Supreme Head of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India until 23 October 1999

The mortal remains of the Metropolitan were interred in a specially built crypt in the St Thomas Church at the headquarters of the Mar Thoma Church in Tiruvalla, in the presence of a large gathering. The funeral service was led by the new Mar Thoma, Metropolitan Mar Chrysostom, and by Suffragan Metropolitan Joseph Mar Irenaeus, with the assistance of all the bishops of the Mar Thoma Church. Several bishops of the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malabar Independent Syrian Church and the Roman Catholic Church were present.

More than two hundred thousand people turned up to pay homage to the pontiff, who was revered by millions of people in India. Alexander Mar Thoma was considered a spiritual leader for all sections of people in Kerala society. He belonged to the old school of thought that valued human compassion and love. He led a prayerful and simple life and he meticulously practised what he preached.

Born M.G. Chandy in a remote village in 1913, Alexander Mar Thoma's preliminary university education was



in Kerala. He did his theological education at the United Theological College, Bangalore. Later he took his Masters Degree in Theology at the Union Theological Seminary, New York, and his doctorate from the Hartford University in the USA. His doctoral thesis was on the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavatgita*,

the epic of Hindu religious scripture.

Alexander Mar Thoma was a pioneer of the ecumenical movement in India, where he showed great leadership abilities. As one of the founding members of the CCA (EACC) he provided leadership at the formation of EACC in Prapat, Indonesia, in 1957. He was several times an official delegate of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church at CCA Assemblies and WCC Assemblies.

The World Council of Churches invited Dr Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan to be the main speaker at the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the WCC, organised at the Asia-Pacific regional level. The event was held in New Delhi in September 1998.

CCA General Secretary, Dr. Feliciano V. Cariño, in his condolence message, described Alexander Mar Thoma as a great ecumenist, scholar and spiritual leader, who led a sagacious life for the sake of humanity.

He concluded that Alexander Mar Thoma's life and witness would be a great source of inspiration for the churches in Asia.

*Mathews George Chunakara*

# Maramon Convention

## A Time for Spiritual Renewal

*The Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church held its annual Maramon Convention 13–20 February 2000. Henriette Hutabarat, CCA representative to the convention, gives her impressions.*

Every year in the month of February a few hundred thousand people gather at the dry sandy Pampa River bed in Maramon, Kerala, India. Probably the largest gathering of Christians in the world, this is an annual event of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, organised by the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association. The Maramon Convention is a 105-year-old tradition. A pandal, a huge tent made of wood and bamboo and thatched with coconut leaves, is built to protect people from the heat. The pandal is gigantic but it cannot ac-

commodate the increasing number of participants who arrive at the convention towards the end of the week. Many of them simply stand outside the tent under umbrellas or sheltered by trees.

The convention is held for eight days, from Sunday to Sunday, from 7 am to 8.30 pm, with a few breaks for meals and tea. It starts with separate Bible study groups for women, men, youth and children. Then there are plenary meetings from 9:30 to noon and from 2 to 4. The night sessions, from 6.30 to 8.30, are attended only by men. It is a moving experience to see the enthusiasm of the people attending the convention. Meetings always start on time, requiring a highly disciplined community. This is part of the spiritual discipline that has been nurtured by the church for more than a century.

Speakers are invited from other parts of India and different parts of the world. When the messages are delivered in English, very capable interpreters translate the message into Malayalam.

The convention has been a source of inspiration for the congregations to carry the motto of the Mar Thoma Church: 'We are lit to light.' Most people come to the convention with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper (albeit to be used as a mat) in the other hand, to symbolise the convention's desire to nurture the spiritual life of the people and inspire them to be the lights in the world. As Prof. Anian Alexander Thomas, a member of the organising committee for several years, states: 'The message in the convention enriches the spiritual, cultural and national life of the people. Great importance is now attached to a crusade against social evils, alcoholism and drug addiction. Schemes for homes for the homeless, land for the landless and marriage aid ... have been started through the inspiration and challenges at the convention long before such schemes were initiated by the government.'

Everyone seemed to enjoy the singing time fifteen to thirty minutes before the message. All songs were in Malayalam and used local melodies and music. For each convention, the Department of Sacred Music of the Mar Thoma Church prepares and prints a



collection of new songs. Songs are also available on cassette. In addition to thanksgiving prayers, special intercessory prayers were offered every day for individual members who are sick, who struggle to find a job or who experience difficulties in their lives. One of the bishops would lead the prayer then allow space for people to offer their spontaneous prayers.

The convention was also a time for the congregations to hear the reports of the work of the different commissions of Mar Thoma Church, such as youth, women, theological education, publications and social service programs. A large offering was collected in three days, indicating this church's long commitment to self-support.

Nurturing the ecumenical awareness of the congregations is part of the agenda of the Maramon Convention. Leaders and bishops of various churches in Kerala attended the session to deliver their messages. Such encounters stimulate concrete ecumenical cooperation among the churches in the area and enhance the ecumenical perspective of the members.

The success of such a huge convention is achieved through persistent prayers and the full participation of the whole congregation as well as the outstanding leadership of bishops and clergy. Countless men and women work behind the scene. The new Metropolitan, the Most Rev. Dr Philipose Mar Chrysostom, is known as a person of deep reflective thought who has a special gift to deliver the message in a humorous way. Whenever he stands, people become excited: they smile and they show their eagerness to hear an inspiring and challenging message that



Ecumenical encounter with heads of churches in Kerala

is meant to make them both laugh and think.

Another important pillar of the Maramon Convention is the Most Rev. Dr Joseph Mar Irenaus, Suffragan Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, who is a member of CCA Executive Committee.

The Maramon Convention is a place for spiritual renewal and for stimulating people to social reformation. This is indeed the spirit of the Mar Thoma Church, which traces its origin all the way back to the coming of St Thomas to India in 52 AD. It retains its heritage as an Eastern church, especially through its liturgical life, yet at the

same time gives its priority to the transformation of the society.

I had the privilege to be invited to this convention to represent CCA and to be one of this year's speakers. As an ecumenical worker, I found this experience immensely inspiring. It has enriched my own spiritual life and enlarged my understanding of the rich spiritual heritage of one of the founding member churches of CCA. This experience has reconfirmed my belief shared by many that it is through rootedness in the life and spirituality of the local church that ecumenical work can grow and flourish.

*Henriette Hutabarat*



In the midst of children ...

# The Mar Thoma Church: A Historical Sketch

## A Step into the First Century

History and tradition attest to the St Thomas tradition of the founding of the Indian church in 52 AD. The infant church that took roots in the Kerala soil showed tremendous growth. But following the martyrdom of its Apostle, St Thomas, the growth, development and mission of this church was clouded in mystery for many centuries.

## The Syrian Church and European Christianity

A new age dawned with the arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498. His arrival initiated a flood of Portuguese people into India for trade and commerce. The Portuguese slowly began to field the economic and political power in the country. As the Portuguese community grew they attempted to bring the Syrian church under the Roman ecclesiastical supremacy. In 1653, the church asserted its freedom by taking an oath called the 'Crooked Cross Oath'. Mar Thoma I was then consecrated as a native bishop. Until this historical incident the ancient Syrian Church remained essentially one. However, the oath points to a tragic split whereby the church formed two groups, the Syrian Church and the Roman Church. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Syrian Church was in a state of decline. Life within the state and the church was grievously disturbed by different political, social and theological issues. Lack of leadership, absence of theological insights and poor knowledge of the Bible all weakened the church.

## Harbingers of Reformation

'The Mission of Help' from the Anglican Church came to Travancore in 1816–17. The first batch of missionaries, known as the 'Kottayam Trio', made invaluable contributions to the church and society through their active involvement in evangelism, theology, education, Bible translation and printing. During this period, Palakkunnathu Abraham Malpan and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan, two professors of the Syrian Seminary at Kottayam, dedicated themselves to the cause of a reform

in the Syrian Church. Their work included the revision of the St James liturgy into the vernacular, submission of the 'trumpet call' of protest against the false doctrines and practices of the church.

The nineteenth century witnessed two able leaders; Mathews Mar Athanasius (XII Mar Thoma) and Thomas Mar Athanasius (XIV Mar Thoma) who led the church on a path of reform. However, the church suffered problems and in 1889 it was marred by another division. This was the turning point in the life and mission of that section which held to the 'alone formulas' of the Reformation: Grace Alone, Christ Alone, Scripture Alone and Faith Alone. This reform section is now known as the Mar Thoma Church.

## The Mar Thoma Church: What Is It Today?

The Mar Thoma Church is an amicable blend of Eastern church features and Reformation ideals. It is unique in the respect that it forms a part of the ancient Syrian Church of Malabar but also holds to the principles of a reformed church. The Mar Thoma Church is self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. It claims its uninterrupted link with the age-old customs of the Syrian Church. It also affirms its belief that it constitutes part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. It affirms Jesus Christ and the Triune God and accepts the Holy Bible and the Nicene Creed as the basis for all matters of doctrine and faith. The Church highly values the importance of apostolic succession and celebrates constitutional episcopacy. It holds the offices of bishop, priest and deacon. It has always been keen to provide opportunities for theological education and has founded and sponsored a number of seminaries and study centres. It has also initiated numerous projects in the field of education, medical mission and other kinds of charity work. It enjoys full intercommunion with the worldwide Anglican communion and with CSI and CNI. It enjoys good relations with numerous Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church. It also has a long-term relationship with NCCI, CCA and the WCC.

# The Road to Tomohon

## Eleventh General Assembly: How to Get There

**T**he airport serving Tomohon is the Manado International Airport. Manado is the capital city of North Sulawesi and is roughly 40 minutes by car or bus to Tomohon.

There are several routes to Manado that we would like to recommend:

### Via Singapore

There is a Silk Air flight on Tuesdays and Saturdays that flies direct to Manado, leaving Singapore at 0955 and arriving in Manado at 1330. Silk Air is a subsidiary of Singapore Airlines, and connects with Singapore Airlines flights. This route is recommended, as Singapore is accessible by many airlines. It is most convenient for those coming from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) and Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam). 30 May and 6 June are Tuesdays. If an overnight stay is required in Singapore this can be arranged.

### Via Denpasar, Bali

There are daily flights from most places in Asia, including Australia, to Denpasar, Bali, the famous resort island of Indonesia. There is a daily Garuda flight from Denpasar to Manado that departs 1040 and lands in Manado at 1220. The Church of Bali runs a seaside resort where an overnight stay can be arranged.

### Via Davao City, Philippines

Manado is actually quite close to the southern city of Davao in the Philippines. There is a direct flight on Bouraq Indonesian Airlines from Davao to Manado, roughly two hours flying time, every Monday and Friday. We would recommend this route strongly to delegates from the Philippines, not only for reasons of convenience and time but also cost.

These are the preferred and most convenient routes. Other possibilities include via Jakarta, Surabaya and Ujung Pandang.

