

CCA NEWS



Cultivating the Culture of Peace: Overcoming Violence

IN THIS ISSUE

Asia Scene

- Council of Churches in Malaysia
10th Triennial Assembly in Sarawak 3
URM Training Program in Indonesia 7
CBSC Training in Myanmar 8
IT and the Quality of Life 9
Churches Adopt Villages in Gujarat 10

Global Currents

- Frontier Internship in Mission
Fortieth Anniversary 12
WCC-URM Working Group 14
World Association for Christian
Communication Congress 15

Reflections

- The Peace of Christ: A Reflection 16
Towards Religious Freedom in Asia:
Indonesia's Experience 18

Newsbriefs 20

Council Feature

- National Christian Council
of Sri Lanka 24

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96, 2nd District, Pak Tin Village,
Mei Tin Road, Sha Tin, NT,
Hong Kong SAR, China

Telephone + 852 2691 1068
Fax + 852 2692 4378
email cca@cca.org.hk
www.cca.org.hk

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Ahn Jae Woong

EDITOR
Geoff Alves

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
Henriette Hutabarat
Corazon Tabing-Reyes
Daniel Thiagarajah
Cynthia Yuen
Hope Antone

EDITORIAL

Starting this year, and for the next four or five years, 'Fullness of Life for All' is the theme or motto of the Christian Conference of Asia. It describes the vision of CCA for all Asian people to experience a wholesome life, an abundant life, what the Bible calls shalom.

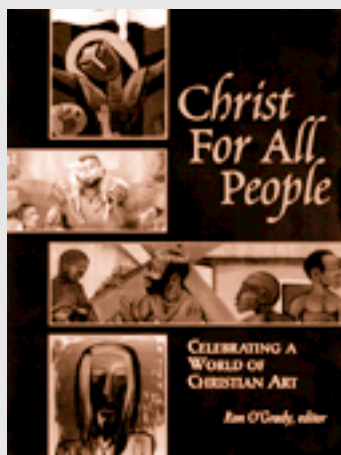
But related to the vision of fullness of life is the task of working towards it. For fullness of life is not just something that is given to us—it is something that involves our participation to bring it about. And here lies the big challenge behind the biblical and theological correctness of the theme.

Moreover, as we consider the ongoing and even at times worsening scenarios of socioeconomic and political realities in Asia, we also cannot help but wonder if we have really done our part well enough. We are not even sure whether our involvement at this juncture of our history is indeed meaningful or helpful. And we cannot help but often feel helpless in the wake of so many issues, such as ethnic conflict, religious intolerance, economic crises, political uncertainty, gender inequality, environmental destruction, globalisation and the like.

Nevertheless, in the midst of all these realities, CCA tries to respond to its vision and continue its mission of proclaiming in word and deed the saving will of God for fullness of life for all. One of the concrete ways that CCA has focused on is to contribute towards overcoming the violence that is so much a part of life in Asia. This is this year's subtheme to the overall theme of 'Fullness of Life for All'. Hence, the chosen theme for Asia Sunday 2001 is 'Cultivating the Culture of Peace: Overcoming Violence'. Asia Sunday is suggested to be held on the Sunday before Pentecost to commemorate the founding day of the former East Asia Christian Conference—now CCA. This year, it was suggested that Asia Sunday be observed on 27 May. However, we encourage churches and councils who were not able to observe it on that date to set aside any other Sunday during the year to commemorate Asia Sunday and to use CCA's suggested liturgy.

Above all, let us continue to think of and try out ways for cultivating the culture of peace in our individual lives, in our churches, in our communities, in our countries.

Ahn Jae Woong



New Christian Art Book

Christ for All People: Celebrating a World of Christian Art

This new book, published by PACE on behalf of the Asian Christian Art Association, contains over 100 artworks from artists in more than sixty different countries. It will be released soon at a cost of US\$30.

'One in Christ, in Faith, in Hope and in Love'

Council of Churches in Malaysia holds its 10th Triennial Assembly in Sarawak

Under the theme, 'One in Christ, in faith, in hope and in love', the Council of Churches in Malaysia (CCM) held its 10th Triennial Assembly on 23–26 April 2001 in Kuching, Sarawak, East Malaysia. This was the first time the CCM Assembly has been held outside the Malaysian peninsula.

About 100 delegates from member churches and associate members as well as observers, guests, staff and local organising committee members attended the assembly. CCM has had fifty-four years of history and has sixteen member churches and five associate members.

The member churches include: Anglican Diocese of Kuching, Anglican Diocese of Sabah, Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia, Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia, Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore, Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Methodist—Chinese Annual Conference, Methodist—Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference, Methodist—Sarawak Iban Annual Conference, Methodist—Tamil Annual Conference,

Methodist—Trinity Annual Conference, Orthodox Syrian Church, Presbyterian Church in Malaysia, Protestant Church in Sabah and the Salvation Army.

The five associate members are: Boys' Brigade in Malaysia, Girls' Brigade in Malaysia, Malaysian Care, Sabah Theological Seminary and Seminary Theoloji of Malaysia.

Sense of Ownership

In his report, the General Secretary underscored that in the last two triennial periods, the CCM has learned 'to become self-sufficient and to accept and share the responsibility of the life and work of the council equally among the member churches and associated organisations.' During these years, the council has not made any appeal for grants from overseas to maintain its administrative needs. This is a clear indication of the growing 'sense of ownership' of the life and work of the council among member churches and associate members. Although it was noticed that the churches are slow in contributing towards the General Fund, 'they



Rev. Ralph Lee presents greetings from the Hong Kong Christian Council to the Assembly of the Council of Churches in Malaysia

Making Visible the Unity in Christ—the Role of CCM

In his address to the assembly, the Most Rev. Datuk Yong Ping Chung, Anglican Archbishop of Southeast Asia Province and President of CCM, underlined the crucial role of CCM in working towards the visible unity of the church. He said, ‘This is an important reason of CCM’s existence.’ The theme of the assembly, he added, ‘... compels us to see oneness in Christ spiritually and in our social witness. We cannot remain divided as churches.’ He challenged the assembly by asking, ‘What does it mean to be united? Can our “council” move towards a “communion” of churches?’ He said that ‘CCM’s role in this regard is to find ways to offer to the churches an image of churches mature in faith, hope and love and capable not just to look after their own need but to manifest the quality and character of one faith, one hope and one baptism in Spirit and in truth.’

Responding to this challenge, the assembly deliberated and affirmed the nine marks of membership in the ecumenical council as suggested in the WCC document on ‘Towards a Common Understanding and Vision’. This was presented by Dr Hermen Shastri, the CCM General Secretary, in his report to the Assembly:

- To be a member means nurturing the ability to pray, act and grow together as one body. There is a willingness to listen to each other and deal with theological disagreement through dialogue and mutual understanding.
- To be a member means helping one another to be faithful to the gospel, and questioning one another if any member is perceived to move away from the fundamentals of the faith or holistic witness of the Gospel.
- To be a member means participating in ministries that extend beyond the boundaries and possibilities of any single church and exercising responsibility for one another in the spirit of common faithfulness.
- To be a member means being part of a fellowship that respects the historical heritage of each church.
- To be a member means making a commitment to seek to implement agreements reached through theological consensus on a regional or international level.
- To be a member means participating in a fellowship of sharing and solidarity, supporting each other in struggles and needs.
- To be a member means understanding the mission of the church as a joint responsibility shared with others, rather than engaging in missionary or evangelistic activities in isolation from others.
- To be a member means entering into a fellowship of intercession for each other and encouraging shared worship.
- To be a member means taking a full part in the life and work of the council and its activities, by participation, financial contributions and the sharing of human resources.



are exemplary when it comes to the relief fund,' he said. During the period between 1998 to March 2001, CCM has supported toward helping the church in Ambon, Indonesia, in the midst of the conflict in that area, East Timor in its redevelopment, and to the Ethiopia Famine and Gujarat Earthquake relief campaigns, which reached the total figure of RM121,039.14 (US\$31,852.40).

Religious Freedom

Another issue that the Assembly gave its special attention to was the issue of religious freedom in the country. President Yong highlighted that 'race' and 'religion' are delicate matters on the national scene. He mentioned that 'the churches have not retreated from issues that impinge on our religious freedom. On the other hand we have also cooperated with the authorities on moral and national unity issues.'

The General Secretary reported that for the first time in the history of the council, a dialogue session was organised with representatives of PAS in

Petaling Jaya on 15 May 2000. At that meeting, the council openly rejected the call for an Islamic state and reinforced its support for the secular status of the present constitution. On the same occasion, the importance of continued Christian-Muslim dialogue was underlined, especially 'over matters where government or state policies impinged on the freedom of non-Muslims to practice and share their faith without encumbrances'. Further, he called the churches to join in the public debate on 'civil liberties' in the country, in order to ensure that the national policies will not be drowned into the dead alley of ethnic and religious polarisation.

On two occasions church leaders had opportunities to meet the Chief Minister of Sarawak State, Dr Datuk Patinggi Taib Makhmud and the Deputy Minister. In front of the church leaders on a luncheon meeting, the Chief Minister expressed his strong commitment to the establishment of religious freedom in Sarawak State and the whole of Malaysia.

New Officers of CCM

At its 10th Triennial Meeting in Kuching, East Malaysia, 23–26 April 2001 the Council of Churches in Malaysia elected its officers for 2001–2004:

President

Rt Rev. Julius Paul, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malaysia

Deputy President

Rt Rev. Tan Sri Datuk Lim Cheng Ean, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia

Vice Chairpersons

Rt Rev. Made Katib, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Sarawak

Bishop Datuk Voo Thien Fui, Basel Christian Church of Malaysia of Sabah

Rev. Thomas Philips, Mar Thoma Syrian Church

General Secretary

Re-elected for another term was Rev. Dr Hermen Shastri, of the Methodist Church



Display of CCA publications at the CCM assembly, with Anthony Row and Francis Sunderaraj

A Wider Ecumenical Relationship

Invited as speaker at the Assembly was the Rev. Dr Francis Sunderaraj, General Secretary of Asia Evangelical Fellowship. This invitation was perceived as an effort of CCM to extend its 'ecumenical relationship'. President Yong said that 'from his sharing, I am sure you will be convinced that the "labels" we give to each other have no place in God's kingdom. All Christians worthy to their name are "evangelical" in heart and "ecumenical" in spirit.' Further he affirmed that 'if there is going to be any worth to our ecumenism, it will mean that we are "one" in the Lord and we seek to live out our faith in our world spiritually, socially, politically and in every aspect we can conceive.' Dr Sunderaraj delivered sermons and Bible studies focused on the theme of the assembly.

The continued relationship of CCM with the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches is considered crucial in providing structures for ecumenical enrichment and cooperation in regional and international concerns. According to President Yong, CCM has hosted many regional and international conferences, thus providing opportunities for the representatives of churches from other parts of Asia and the world to have a first-hand experience of Christian life and witness in the country. Along with that, the participation of representatives of Malaysian churches in various ecumenical activities at regional and global levels was found enriching.

At this assembly, the CCA was represented by Mr Anthony Row, CCA president, from Malaysia, and Rev. Dr Henriette Hutabarat, Associate General

Secretary for Relationships and Communications. A session was provided for them to share the life and program thrusts of CCA.

Prior to the Assembly, Henriette Hutabarat visited some churches and theological schools in Malaysia, specifically Seminary Theoloji of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur and Sabah Theological Seminary in Kota Kinabalu. She

attended a Sunday service at a congregation of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia in Kota Kinabalu, which hosts many migrant workers from Indonesia. These visits provided a good opportunity to build and strengthen the relationship of CCA with the churches and other related institutions.

Henriette Hutabarat

CCA Meets with Asia Evangelical Fellowship

Part of the Tomohon Assembly mandate of the CCA is to work towards closer relationships with Evangelical and Pentecostal churches and bodies in Asia. During the Assembly of the Council of Churches of Malaysia in April 2001, Anthony Row, CCA president, and Henriette Hutabarat, Associate General Secretary for Relationships and Communications, met with Dr Francis Sunderaraj, General Secretary of the Asia Evangelical Fellowship (AEF). They began to discuss possible ways to develop a closer relationship between the two bodies. The meeting was positive, with both sides underscoring the importance of working together to make more visible our unity in Christ in the concrete situation of our Asian region. Inviting each other to one's activities or programs is one way to get to know each other better. In addition, a small meeting before the end of the year is planned to discuss our common challenge and witness in Asia today.



Henriette Hutabarat, Francis Sunderaraj and Anthony Row

Leadership Capacity Building

URM training program in Indonesia attracts people from the younger generation



CCA-URM, in cooperation with JK-LPK (Indonesian Christian NGOs Networking, the umbrella organisation for church-related NGOs in Indonesia), the GKI (Indonesian Christian Church) Synod and a local URM body, YBKS (Social Welfare Guidance Foundation—Solo) held a training program on leadership capacity building recently.

The theme of the training program was 'Building up the Leadership of URM Doers in Indonesia in Response to the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century'. These challenges are:

- ideological trends and alternative ideologies,
- the impacts of globalisation and foreign debt,
- the phenomena of religious- and ethnic-based violence,
- advanced information/technology,
- ethical problems arising from the development of biotechnology and the environment,
- human rights problems,

- the need for URM leaders from the younger generation and women in particular.

The training program was held from 19 April to 3 May in the twin cities, Solo, Central Java, and Yogyakarta. Twenty-four participants, aged from 24 to 35, participated. Of the twenty-four, nine were women. The participants came from throughout the country, which was very enriching for URM in Indonesia, as it enabled the participants to have a comprehensive perspective in trying to draw a picture of the new Indonesia. Four participants came from Malaysia, representing different churches. As CCA-URM is now trying to put the context and struggle of URM back to the church, it was good that the participants consisted not only of church-based and church-related NGO delegates but also of church functionaries. Seven of the participants were parish pastors. The presence of so many spirited people from the younger generation of URM made the

process of the training more alive. Everyone fully participated in the lively discussions and role-plays.

The training program itself was managed by dividing its process into three different stages, i.e. self-exploring and actualising, knowledge improvement and skill improvement. The self-exploring and actualising stage provided a space for the participants to first meet their selves and get ready to meet with others. Role-plays, self-exploring and exposure (field visits) were seen as very helpful in this regard. The participants were given choice of four different themes for the exposure programs: religions and violence, foreign debt and economic justice, food security and people empowering, and NGOs as transformative agents.

Knowledge improvement was done through panel discussions, seminars and group discussions on relevant topics for URM in Asia in the twenty-first century. Among the presentations were

CBSC Training in Myanmar

Churches promote savings and micro credit

Saving is a traditional practice of all human beings. It is not only for self-survival but also a process of social unity and living together. Any loans (credit) without savings easily leads to failure and corruption.' This was shared by Dr Prawate Khidarn, CCA's joint executive secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service, at the Community-based Savings and Micro Credit (CBSC) Training held in Yangon, Myanmar, on 23–27 April 2001.

Prawate emphasised the importance of the CBSC in a process of human development and social sustainability. Saving is not a new idea. It has always been practised in human societies around the world for their personal survival and social sharing. But recently 'credit' has been promoted to accelerate the economic improvement among the poor.

He added that 'saving is necessary and should be a prerequisite to all micro credit programs. Saving from

this perspective provides a venue for mutual responsibility, learning, sharing and decision making to all members.'

The training-workshop for church development workers in Myanmar was jointly organised by the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) at the Myanmar Baptist Convention Building in Yangon.

Thirty-two participants representing the MCC, YWCA, MBC (Myanmar Baptist Convention) and MUA (Mothers' Union Association) participated in the program. Supported by the Christian Conference of Asia, the program aimed to promote CBSC as a tool for the churches' participation in human development, economic improvement, self-reliance and social sustainability.

Rev. Smith N Za Thawng, the newly appointed MCC General Secretary, in his opening remarks identified the program as a foundation of community development, providing opportu-

nity for development of knowledge and skills to the participants.

Prof. Veera Kamvisate of the Chiang Mai Rajchapat Institute facilitated discussions using the 'credit union model' from Thailand. His facilitation included concepts and values, steps of formulating the group, group administration (membership, loans and repayment) and group sustainability.

Additionally, two resource persons from UNDP and the Grameen Bank office in Yangon shared their experiences, emphasising the significance of the CBSC.

Participants expressed their appreciation and needs for intensive training in the future. Dr Rebecca Tapa of YWCA has been asked to coordinate a 'joint training' to be held early next year. Five organisations (MCC, YWCA, YMCA, MBC and MUA) will be invited. Ja Naw of MCC volunteered to translate the CBSC handbook into the local language to be distributed in Myanmar.

Prawate Khid-arn

'URM: A Critical and Historical Study' and 'URM In the Future', by Rev. Josef P. Widyatmadja, from CCA-URM; 'Ideology and Free Market' and 'Critique to Globalisation', by Dr M.P. Joseph from India; 'Foreign Debt and Its Impacts: Indonesia Context', by Revrison Baswir, a local economist; 'URM, the Church and People's Movement', and 'Theology of Life', by Dr Kim Yong-Bock from Korea; 'Religious Pluralism

and Violence in Indonesia', 'Violence and Militarism', 'Women and Violence', and some other local issues. Another activity was on cyber activities and the URM Movement facilitated by Chan Beng Seng of DAGA, Hong Kong. Both participants and resource persons enthusiastically discussed the topics. Finally, skill improvement, focusing on leadership and management, helped the participants to bring

their new knowledge into practice. 'Such integrated training is very much needed by church people like us, in enabling us to transform the church on the one hand and to be faithful to be with the people on the other hand. This is not simple work, but with a regular training like we have here, I am sure the work will be easier for us', a participant shared.

Anna Marsiana

IT and the Quality of Life

Seminar critiques the use of information technology

A seminar held recently in Bangalore, India, concluded that information technology (IT) could be a 'powerful instrument' for achieving radical social change in society. The seminar, on 'The Challenges of Information Technology', organised by the Ecumenical Christian Centre (ECC) on 9–11 March, said that proper use of IT could help developing countries solve such major economic problems as poverty and unemployment and that it has the potential to increase the quality of life.

The forty-nine participants at the seminar, who came from churches, colleges, social action groups and media organisations, felt IT could create an 'open, informed and informing society'. In order to achieve this people should be made aware of the scope and benefits of the technology, they must have access to appropriate training in its use and it must be affordable. One participant said the new technology could be 'an instrument of human fulfilment and self-expression in the use of our God-given intelligence to transform the world'.

The director of ECC, M.J. Joseph, said that one of the purposes of the seminar was to create awareness 'for greater participation in the web of life through the modern communication media'.

Information is central to all human activities and exchanging information is 'a primary moral responsibility' of all human beings. An efficient flow of

information can take place only when there is an efficient IT infrastructure, set up and sustained by both the state and the market.

However, a statement issued by the seminar warned that undue importance to IT at the cost of a country's developmental activities should be opposed at all costs. Millions of poor and marginalised people in India are unlikely to benefit from the IT boom taking place there at present. Amid all the hype surrounding IT, there is a danger that governments might give low priority to the important tasks of providing clean water, housing, primary education and health. The statement said that the IT revolution will become meaningless if it does not cater to the needs of the poor and does not give voice to the voiceless. 'After all, the poor need penicillin now, and not Pentiums,' it noted.

The seminar urged the government and those who support and promote IT to make sure that IT is used to improve the quality of life of the weaker sections in the society. IT should be designed in such a way that it empowers women to move beyond their traditional roles, and help them take their rightful place in all areas of activity in the society. The seminar called on governments to facilitate training programs in the use of IT to produce the requisite human resources for IT services.

The seminar stressed the need for access to IT for every citizen, irrespec-

tive of class, caste, gender, language, physical handicap and geographical location, so that a digital divide can be minimised in the society.

The seminar made the following recommendations:

- IT must be used to strengthen the role of the media in making democratic structures more participatory and transparent. It also must be made use of to improve the quality and content of the print medium.
- Heavy investments in IT infrastructure might lead a country such as India into a debt trap, so adequate long-term plans for generating income must be evolved.
- The government should initiate adequate steps to safeguard the brain drain of IT professionals who are trained at the cost of the government exchequer.
- Computer training programs should be started at an early period of schooling with a view to forming an information society.

Highlighting the ethical aspects of IT, the seminar said that the new world of information activities, challenges and changes has opened up new issues, relationships, attitudes and values.

'It has become essential that with the arrival of IT, new defined codes of ethics have to be established that will guarantee human dignity and strengthen the religious and cultural plurality of the country.'

Philip Mathew

Helping the Homeless

Churches adopt entire villages in devastated Gujarat

After winding up emergency relief work in the state of Gujarat in western India, church charities are now adopting entire villages in a region devastated by January's earthquake.

Almost all the major church agencies that have been providing aid to the millions left without shelter are now working with the Gujarat state government to provide 'total rehabilitation' to villages.

Although government officials say that 30,000 died in the disaster, independent studies and social activists say the figure of 100,000 is a much more accurate estimate of the toll in the earthquake, which measured 8.1 on the Richter scale. The disaster struck Gujarat, home state of Gandhi, on 26 January, India's Republic Day.

Edwin Ramathal, director of the Indian branch of Lutheran World Service (LWS), told ENI that LWS India, along with Action by Churches Together (ACT), an international aid network set up by the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches, was now 'busy building 2000 temporary shelters in nine villages'.

'We are planning to adopt four [of the nine] villages and build [a total of] 700 houses [in them],' Ramathal said, speaking from Calcutta. LWS India would then meet the villagers' essential needs, from housing and basic infrastructure to health centres and schools, he said.

The village adoptions come on the heels of emergency relief efforts in which LWS India provided 21,000 families in forty-nine villages with equipment to set up temporary shelters—plastic sheeting, tarpaulin, tents, lanterns, bedsheets and blankets.

Likewise, after distributing food and relief materials worth 60 million rupees (US\$1.3 million) to 40,000 families over two months, Caritas India, a Catholic agency, is building 9,000 temporary shelters for homeless villagers in Gujarat before the monsoon strikes in June. The temporary shelters cost about US\$1.7 million. Caritas India plans to adopt ten villages and build 3000 permanent houses for the inhabitants.

Christian denominations across India have urged their members to help the people of Gujarat. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, based in the state of Kerala in southern India, has already collected almost 10 million rupees (US\$200,000) from church members for the church's relief work in Gujarat.

'We hope to double the collection in the coming months and adopt a village for total rehabilitation,' said Bishop Geevarghese mar Coorilos of the Bombay diocese, who has been coordinating the church's relief work.

In a circular sent to its twenty-nine member churches and partner agencies on 5 April, the National Council of Churches in India explained that

some of its churches had raised funds for relief efforts but 'intend to pursue rehabilitation work on their own because they want more visibility of the church's presence in the rehabilitation area'.

Church charities such as the Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI) have launched intensive training programs to prepare church and Christian aid workers 'to be listeners to people in need'. Dr Vijay Aruldas, CMAI's general secretary, told ENI that almost 300 volunteers had joined the initial medical relief effort, which included twenty hospitals and CMAI member institutions.

With medical relief 'no longer an emergency', the CMAI was now carrying out a series of programs to teach church workers techniques for carrying out 'psycho-social intervention' among quake victims, Dr Aruldas said.

Gujarat's inhabitants are in desperate need of more help. 'Whatever we are doing is not enough,' said Bishop Vinod Malaviya of the Church of North India diocese of Gujarat. 'The people are still struggling as the government relief has not been satisfactory.' Bishop Malaviya was speaking to ENI by telephone on his return to Ahmedabad from Jamnagar district, where his diocese has adopted a village.

With the monsoon a couple of months away, 'people need at least temporary shelters immediately', he said.

Ecumenical News International

Promoting Life

CCA hosts anti-racism forum

To strengthen the role of churches in dismantling racism, a forum on 'Anti Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance' was held in Bangkok on 16–21 May 2001. The forum was a joint program of the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia's Faith, Mission and Unity program area. Participants came from the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific to reflect on the theme, 'Promoting Life to Overcome Violence and Discrimination.'

The United Nations has proclaimed this year as the International Year of Mobilisation against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The Urban Rural Mission movement in Asia has been involved in dismantling racism through its programs for racial justice for many years. This includes its support for the struggle of Koreans and Burakumin in Japan, Dalits in India, Aborigines in Australia, Maori in Aotearoa—New Zealand and Chinese and tribespeople in Indonesia and Malaysia.

The concept paper on the Asia forum described racism as the belief that human beings can be divided into races and that members of some races are inferior to members of other races. Usually, this attitude also involves the belief that one's own race is superior to other races. People who believe in or practise racism are called racists. They claim that members of their own

race are mentally, physically, morally or culturally superior to those of other races. Because racists assume they are superior, they believe they deserve special rights and privileges.

Racism is a form of prejudice. Many people tend to consider their own appearance and behaviour as normal and therefore desirable. They may distrust or fear people who look or act differently. When differences are obvious—such as in skin colour or religious worship—the distrust becomes greater. Such attitudes can lead to the belief that people who look or act differently are inferior. Many people do not look for the same qualities in other groups that they admire in their own. Also, they do not recognise the different but equally good qualities that member of other groups possesses.

Sociologists often distinguish between individual and institutional (especially state) racism. Individual racism refers chiefly to the prejudicial beliefs and discriminatory behaviour of individual whites against blacks and other minority groups. It is based on assumptions of superiority and inferiority.

Institutional racism, on the other hand, refers to the policies of communities, schools, businesses, and other groups and organisations that restrict the opportunities of minority groups. Institutional racism may or may not have been intentionally set up to practise discrimination. Regardless, it can produce harmful results. For example

a company may hire only college graduates for work that does not require a college degree. However, a far smaller proportion of blacks than whites may have had the opportunity to earn a degree. Thus, the company policy lessens the job opportunities of blacks even though the firm might not have intended to do so.

In Asia, racism takes various and complex forms and is often linked to race or ethnicity as well as to religion. Unfortunately, some states even use religious differences to create conflict between different religious groups. Moreover, racism and discrimination in Asia have deep roots in colonialism and feudalism. It is also related to economics and cultural and social differences. Therefore, if we want to eliminate racism in Asia, we need a fundamental change in Asian societies.

New Appointment

Dr David Kwang-sun Suh was appointed on 1 May as the founding executive director of the Asian Christian Higher Education Institute. The institute is an arm of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia and he will be based at the Hong Kong Baptist University in Kowloon. David Suh is a former professor of Ewha University in Seoul, Korea and until recently was visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York and Drew University in New Jersey.

From Reign of God to Jubilee

Frontier Internship in Mission celebrates its fortieth anniversary

In conjunction with its fortieth anniversary, the Frontier Internship in Mission (FIM) held its international committee meeting in Cuba 1–8 April with the theme ‘From Reign of God to Jubilee’. Forty-two participants from eighteen countries in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and North America (including the United States) attended the meeting, which was hosted by the Cuban Council of Churches. The participants, who have been involved in different stages of FIM life, gathered in the spirit of celebrating God’s guidance in the life of FIM, expressing solidarity with people who are struggling for fullness of life and renewing the commitment to God’s call ‘to do justice and to love mercy’.

The committee reviewed the work of FIM since the last meeting in Amman, Jordan, in 1997. It also evalu-

“Let your kingdom come, oh Lord,
let’s start your feast in our life,
and our expectation and pain be
transformed in joyfulness.
Longing for an earth without sins,
Eden of feathers and flowers,
of peace with justice embraced,
a world without hatred nor pain.”
—from a song from the worship
resources

ated the FIM mission perspective and frontier focus areas in the midst of many changes and new developments in a global society. Through Bible studies, worship, deliberations, exposure trips to local situations and interaction with Cuban brothers and sisters, the participants were made aware of the complex realities of the Cuban situation and witnessed first hand the

sufferings of its people as a result of US economic embargoes and the policy of political isolation imposed by the government of the United States.

A Call to Lift the USA Embargo

In its press release the meeting stated, ‘Frontier Internship in Mission (FIM)—that came to life with the aim of giving a relevant Christian witness in the new missionary frontiers of our era, and for helping to build bridges of understanding among communities and peoples around the world and to transform Christian mission in the direction of deepening concern for justice and liberation—was established around the time when the embargo on Cuba was imposed. Four decades later, as we celebrate our fortieth anniversary and look at the challenges of the present time, we deeply feel that the alienation between the peoples of Cuba and the United States has lasted too long and must end. In this respect, we strongly call for the cessation of the USA embargo against Cuba as a first and critical step in the removal of hostility, mutual suspicion and prejudices, and to pave the way for friendly relationships among neighbours.’

Background

Rev. John Moyer, the Director of FIM, highlighted that FIM was founded in 1960 ‘at a time when the whole meaning and scope of mission was under a controversial and heated review on the understanding of mission. Within the



Participants of the FIM international committee meeting in Cuba

ecumenical movement there was a growing belief that mission meant more than just calling people to belief in Jesus Christ. The mission of the church was also to take the love of God into every aspect of the world's life and to work for justice for and with the oppressed.'

Considered by many as the 'mid-wife' of FIM, Margaret Flory, 87, of the Presbyterian Church USA, was also present in Cuba. Margaret Flory was instrumental in bringing about the idea of combining an internship experience with the challenges of frontiers. She recalled that 'basically the proposal called for recruiting a group of young people to be known as Frontier Interns with the understanding that they would be assigned to a frontier in the life of the world, that their presence on the frontier would encompass both study and service. Subsistent living was a crucial tenet of the proposed program as was the idea of each group of interns comprising a community of mission who would report to one another and pray for one another.'

Frontier Focus Areas

After forty years of FIM history, the above understanding is still at the cen-



Zhu Qinghuai from the China Christian Council presents a Bible in Chinese to Ms Coridad Diego, Head of the Department of Religious Affairs in Cuba

tre of the FIM program. In those forty years FIM has placed some 500 interns in over 100 countries in all regions of the world. The frontier focus areas for the past few years include:

- the search for God's mission in struggles for inclusive communities,
- the search for God's justice in the context of the global economy,
- the search for God's faithfulness in crises of identity,
- the search for God's witness in ecumenical life.

Interns are between 20 and 35 years of age and each placement usu-

ally lasts two years. Afterwards, interns return to their sending organisations for a minimum one-year re-entry period to ensure a reintegration into their sending body and the ecumenical movement in the intern's home country. Communities that want to receive an intern may propose a project to FIM. Individuals may apply to FIM if they are currently part of a community engaged in justice concerns. Communities that want to send an intern to another region may also apply to FIM. Projects are developed through a variety of ecumenical and community-based organisations. Detailed information about the program can be found in FIM's website at www.wcc-coe.org/fim.

Frontier Internship in Mission is in active partnership with the World Student Christian Federation and regional councils and conferences of churches as well as the World Council of Churches in building tomorrow's ecumenical leadership, committed for peace with justice.

*Henriette Hutabarat,
Co-moderator of FIM, 1997–2001*



Frontier Internship in Mission officers, 1997–2001

URM in the Third Millennium

WCC-URM Global Advisory Working Group meets in Senegal

The WCC-URM Global Advisory Working Group, comprising thirty-five participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Middle East regions, met in Dakar, Senegal, from 25 February to 4 March 2001. More women and youth were present at the meeting than before. This is a sign of hope for the future of URM since URM in the past has been mistakenly, albeit jokingly, perceived not as 'Urban Rural Mission' but 'Urban Rural Men'. The delegation from Asia comprised Maureen Loste, Young Su Ki, Anna Marsiana and CCA Faith, Mission and Unity joint executive secretary Rev. Josef P. Widyatmadja.

In his opening address, Kwame Labi, executive secretary for community and justice of the World Council of Churches, expressed the hope that URM would make a significant contri-

bution in empowering marginalised people who are victims of globalisation and debt. He also hoped that URM would note the present trend of growing religious violence and take part in the process to overcome it and bring peace with justice and reconciliation.

The regions presented their reports on 2000 and their program plans for 2002–2004. The theme of URM program in Asia is 'Fullness of Life for All in Asia: The Role of URM in the Third Millennium'. In the coming year the program of URM in Asia will focus on:

- mission to the victims of globalisation and debt, e.g. migrant workers, peasants, street children, child labourers, etc. **Being with the people** in pain is the expression of URM mission,
- mission to structural injustice. **Inspired by the Bible**, URM seeks for the Kingdom of God in its mis-

sion, proclaiming both ideology and spirituality of life,

- mission to bring **peace with justice for all** and reconciliation in a pluralistic society.
- mission to bring about the renewal of churches in their mission thinking: **'back to the church'**, yet developing a new way of being church in Asia.

At the global level of URM work, the priority issues are:

- mapping out and developing the sharing of URM's human and material resources,
- watching out for land and water issues and struggling against the commodification of life,
- renewing the training strategy of focusing on community organisations in an era of globalisation,
- supporting African rebirth instead of a hopeless Africa,
- re-emphasising URM's role in influencing mission thinking and practice. A URM global consultation on mission will be held in Africa in October 2002,
- the ongoing priorities of URM: youth and women leadership within URM, better communication and use of the Internet, more exchange in and between regions, finding alternatives to the ideology of globalisation, and stewardship.

An exposure program was conducted on 25–27 February. Acapas, the URM in Senegal, hosted the meeting.

Joseph P. Widyatmadja



Asian women participants at the WCC-URM meeting in Dakar, Senegal

Communication: From Confrontation to Reconciliation

Third global congress of the World Association for Christian Communication to be held in July

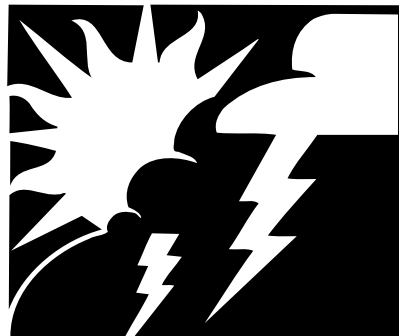
'However painful the experience, the wounds of the past must not be allowed to fester. They must be opened. They must be cleansed. And balm must be poured on them so they can heal.'

—Desmond Tutu, Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) will hold its third global congress in the Netherlands on 3–7 July 2001 under the theme: 'Communication: From Confrontation to Reconciliation'. The congress will celebrate many different voices of reconciliation while showing that confrontation and reconciliation are both aspects of communication. While one is the result of a breakdown in communication, the other is authentic communication. Neither is self-sufficient or permanent. Confrontation is a fact of life in today's world, but unfortunately reconciliation is not. Hence the congress will emphasise the belief that communication can enable reconciliation and contribute to healing among different peoples, cultures, faith, communities and nations.

The keynote presentations, made by Ursula Owen, Estela Carloto, Edgar Gutierrez, Charles Villa-Vicencio and

Sulak Sivaraksa, will focus on Confronting the Challenges, Memory and Reconciliation, Communicating Reconciliation, and Culture and Reconciliation. This, the third of WACC's Congress Resources, offers a selection of insights into historical memory. The space and dignity given to the articulation of historical memory are vital to reconciliation between people, communities and nations. Its denial, deliberate suppression or doctoring of facts, its treatment as a mere footnote in a nation's or people's history and



Confrontation is a fact of life in today's world, but unfortunately reconciliation is not

its disappearance as a public issue of debate are all examples of unwillingness to come to terms with one's past. The media has an important role to play in reinforcing a nation's debt to its history. But how does the media fashion history out of memories? If it is a selective reading, why is this so? And what are the responsibilities of public institutions in acting as the guardians of historical memories?

Discussion groups will be an integral part of the congress and provide an opportunity for participants to:

- raise issues of global, regional and local concern and to share different experiences of confrontation and/or reconciliation,
- explore ways in which public communication, especially the mass media, can contribute to resolving conflicts and to building peace,
- discuss ways of addressing and overcoming problems;
- identify courses of action that lead to greater understanding between peoples.

In the context of the theme discussion groups will focus on economics, communication networks, gender issues, disability issues, indigenous issues, community broadcasting, faith stories, new communication technologies, violence in the media, culture and reconciliation.

WACC

The Peace of Christ

Cultivating the culture of peace: overcoming violence—a reflection by Elmer Bolocon

The World Council of Churches has embarked on a Decade to Overcome Violence in the years 2001–2010. At the first Central Committee meeting after the Harare Assembly, at the end of the most violent century ever in human history, the committee members declared that they were convinced that a clear witness to peace grounded in justice is what the world needs today from all churches together.

In the Philippines, at this particular juncture in history, violence circumscribes people's lives. There is the violence of a runaway inflation that deprives the poor of the basic survival needs. There is the violence of unemployment, displacement, homelessness and utter disregard for fundamental human rights. There is the violence of wealth acquired through highly questionable means flaunted before a people who have virtually nothing to live on. There is the violence of burning villages, desecrated mosques and churches, murdered crusaders for peace and harassed community organizers.

Yet in the midst of all these, we hear Jesus' words, 'Peace is what I leave you. It is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does ...' (John 14:27) This verse is part of the farewell discourse of Jesus, pieces of advice and admonition that he left with his own disciples. It is very telling that the final legacy of Jesus was peace. And he made the pronouncement at a time

John 14:27, Romans 12:1–2,
Ephesians 2:11–22



when he was most troubled, a trouble brought on by his impending death. But a man who has lived peace is able to give it, in season or out of season.

The word for peace that Jesus used was *shalom*. It means people's health and safety, safe travel, dwelling securely without threat from beasts or bad neighbours, with an increased yield of the land because of rain at the proper season, harmony and wholeness.

Shalom is a condition or state. But it is also a concept of relations between individuals and communities. Therefore, we cannot speak of being at peace with God when other people, also God's children—our sisters and brothers—continue to live in a state of unpeace. For instance, Judges 11:13 says that in order for persons to live in peace, the land grabber must return the land to its original owner. Therefore, peace is much more than the absence of war or accepting Jesus into one's heart. It is more than 'inner' se-

curity. The biblical understanding of shalom is defined by the pronouncement of the king in Matthew 25, where the naked is clothed, the hungry is fed, the stranger is welcomed, the thirsty is given drink.

In the Bible, peace is comprehensive and indivisible. There can be no peace without a right relationship with God, a right relationship with fellow humans, a right relationship with nature, a right relationship with one's self. For shalom is a condition of total wellbeing.

I wish to share two points of reflection.

First, if we are to cultivate a culture of peace, we must wage war against the value system of the dominant society. The Bible declares, 'Be not conformed to this world.' (Romans 12.2) In other words, we must reject the standards of the world and affirm that which is important to God. What is important to God are people. Jesus showed that people were more important than systems, structures, profit or hegemony.

Today, because the predominant ideology is greed over need, the powerful ravage the land, leaving it desolate, yielding virtually nothing for our children, condemning them to a life of unpeace. Today, because the market takes precedence over the household, thousands of children lay down their frail bodies as the growling sounds of their stomachs lull them to sleep. When they awake, **if** they awake,

they live through another dreadful day of unpeace. Today, because fame and fortune are the benchmarks of success, one can step on people's toes, push them to the margins, or, better still, liquidate them! In other words, eliminate everything and everyone that will stand in one's way to fame and fortune.

For as long as systems, structures, regulations, property and status are considered more valuable than people, peace will be most untenable. It will remain an illusive dream. One way to overcome violence is to reject the value system of the dehumanising society that most of us find ourselves in.

Secondly, if we are to cultivate a culture of peace, we must wage war against the walls that isolate us from one another. In Ephesians 2, Paul refers to this wall as the 'dividing wall of hostility', which was no other than the law of commandments and ordinances. Ephesians regards the law as a wall that divides and causes hostility and unpeace.

We know how deep the conflict was then between the Jews and the Gentiles. They were enemies, to say the least. The Jews called themselves the 'People of the Law' and used the law to shut others out of their community, at the same time shutting themselves in from the rest of the world. To be a Jew, a Gentile had to abide by many detailed rules and regulations. Let us not forget that the law, made by the Jews, was naturally favourable to them. The Gentiles had to submit themselves to these laws if they wanted to stay out of trouble and live 'peacefully'. According to Ephesians 2:15, in order to reconcile the Jews and Gentiles, in order for peace to prevail, the law had

to be abolished. In fact, that is what Christ did. How did Christ bring peace to the Jews and Gentiles? Ephesians 2:14 reads, 'For Christ himself has brought us peace by making Jews and Gentiles one people. With his own body he broke down the wall that separated them and made them enemies. He abolished the Jewish law with its commandments and rules in order to create out of the two races one new people in union with himself, in this way making peace.'

Jesus abolished the law. Why? What is wrong with the law? It is true that laws make human relations and interactions manageable. Laws fulfil certain functions in civilised society. However, in actual practice laws have been turned into defences of special privileges for a few. And those privileged few think of themselves as law-abiding, as people of the law while regarding all others as outlaws, thieves, criminals or insurgents. For instance, one of the ten commandments was the simple admonition, 'Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.' What did the religious leaders do to make that simple admonition work for them? They mandated a day of rest that meant

that work was prohibited on the Sabbath. Luckily for them taking off from a day's work did not affect their income substantially. But how about the poor? If they did not work, they would have nothing to feed themselves. And because the poor could not afford not to work, they were condemned by the scribes and Pharisees as lawbreakers. This alienated them. As long as those unjust laws existed, there could be no peace.

In our respective countries today, unjust laws and treaties exist. Moreover, laws are legislated by the powerful who make ordinances that protect their interests.

And so, Jesus comes to reconcile enemies, but first he has to break down the wall of hostility by abolishing unjust laws. This done, those once enemies become friends. 'No longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.' (Ephesians 2:19) Peace between Jews and Gentiles was possible only by means of breaking down the wall of laws and ordinances that made enemies of them.

In each of our societies, the values of the dominant system, which are entrenched in the laws, more often than not ride roughshod on the lives of the poor. This perpetuates the culture of violence that makes it difficult, if not impossible, for people to make sense of the Christian claim that Christ is our peace.

The question for us in CCA is this: In a violent situation such as ours, how is it possible for our people to appropriate Christ's peace?

Bishop Elmer Bolocon is the General Secretary of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines

Questions to Stimulate Further Reflection

- What social values and public legislation in our countries perpetuate or promote the culture of violence?
- What mechanisms can our churches set up to counter these social values and public legislation?

The Plurality of Religions

Towards Religious Freedom in Asia: Indonesia's Experience

Asia is the place where most of the world's religions were born—Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, Shintoism etc. Hence the plurality of the religions in Asia, where we can find believers and adherents of all those religions. So it is that issues of religious conflict and freedom take place in this region. The right to religious freedom has been and continues to be a major concern of churches in Asia. Recent incidents in different Asian countries, particularly Indonesia, have led to situations of communal violence and religious persecution. Many churches have been undergoing traumatic experiences of religious intolerance, denial of religious freedom and persecution by the dominant religion. In this context, it is important to analyse the emerging trends with regard to religious plurality on the one hand and the right to religious freedom in Asia on the other.

Indonesia gives a lesson on the plurality of religions and the right to religious freedom since its independence on 17 August 1945. Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, with 210 million people. There are more than 250 ethnic groups and 300 local languages or dialects. The population includes five large religious groups—Hindus, Buddhists, Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, but Indonesia is not an Islamic state.

Living in a pluralistic community, people from different ethnic groups in Indonesia must stand firmly on a common ground to tie them together. In Indonesia, Pancasila (the Five Basic Principles) and the 1945 Constitution are the two major tools for uniting the nation. To recognise the existence of different religions and ethnic groups, Indonesia has a motto, the so-called 'Unity in Diversity' (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika). But recent conflicts in some provinces demonstrate that the unity of the nation is under threat as a result of failing to acknowledge the disparities within Indonesian society. From a Christian's perspective the need is felt of an attitude of religious tolerance for all religious members. Tolerance means the endurance to respect another's religion without losing one's faith and falling into scepticism and relativism. Religious tolerance also means living side by side with those who do not recognise your faith. Unfortunately this kind of religious behaviour is decreasing, even from religious leaders. Failure to address this and to convince people of the meaning of religious tolerance in a real social context and seeing it as an important aspect for supporting human lives can lead to mass riots amongst religious elements.

The Constitution of Indonesia guarantees religious freedom. Chapter XI, Article 29 of the constitution states:

1. The State shall be based upon the belief in the One and Only God.

2. The State guarantees all persons the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief.

Yet today Indonesia is experiencing a wave of communal violence all over the country, causing religious and ethnic minorities to live in fear and terror. Indonesian Islam, traditionally known for its tolerance and for recognising Indonesia's religious and ethnic diversity, is now factionalised and fighting ethnic and religious minorities. Almost all Islamic parties are eloquent in their position of not wishing to introduce Islamic law, but the number of Muslims demanding the introduction of Islamic laws increases.

There is a growing fear among minority religious groups, as well as ethnic groups, that Indonesia will become a religiously intolerant state. This will create even more problems. The Christians in Indonesia have become targets of attack by religious fundamentalists. Consider the number of churches destroyed, burned and closed since Indonesia's independence in 1945:

- August 1945 – March 1967 (22 years of Soekarno's presidency)—2 churches.
- March 1967 – May 1998 (32 years of Soeharto's presidency)—456 churches.
- May 1998 – October 1999 (30 months of Habibie's presidency)—156 churches.
- October 1999 – 31 January 2001 (16 months of Abdurrahman Wa-

hid's presidency)—211 churches.

The total number of destroyed, burned and closed churches is 825.

With this situation, the question: Is there any religious freedom and tolerance in Indonesia? And, who else in the world has experienced such a number of church destructions?

Recent Indonesian history has witnessed a wave of scenes of political Islam flexing its muscles in a disturbing manner. Islam and jihad are much abused terms. The majority of Muslims in Indonesia bear no violent intent and are strongly in favour of remaining part of a non-religious, nationalist state. But the radical fundamentalist fringe, led by groups such as the Islamic Front of Indonesia, Laskar Jihad and the International Committee for Islamic Solidarity, is making increasingly loud and assertive demands. The common belief is that the jihad groups are the thin edge of an angry wedge aligned with ambitious Muslim politicians and disgruntled military officers. The Islamic groups claim that they speak on behalf of the country's 80 per cent Muslim population and that gives Islam a dominant role in the state. They claim that this began with the drafting of the constitution at the time of Independence in 1945 and that a promised clause outlining the supremacy of Islam was left out.

The emerging violence and conflicts in Indonesia prove that religion and ethnicity are sensitive elements in human life that anybody or any group can employ for their own benefits.

Many people disagree that the social clashes in Indonesia are a religious conflict, but judging by the nature of the violence it is obvious that religious sentiment and ethnicity are

contributing to the breakdown of social harmony and tolerance in Indonesia. In understanding the human tragedy in Indonesia it is important to underline the kind of religious intolerance and social relations in Indonesia. Religious tolerance is nothing new for Indonesians. As a nation, Indonesians have been living together in an extended community, one in which people recognised the differences of others. Indonesians have a spirit of solidarity and living together despite their plurality.

Hostilities between Christians and Muslims have created communal disharmony in some of the islands of Indonesia since the beginning of 1999. The Maluku Islands have been in conflict since that time, although it is getting better and calmer now, but then no-one can guarantee that the violence will not erupt again. There is a common belief among the people of Maluku that the military have taken sides in the conflict and should be replaced by neutral troops and that the Laskar Jihad (Islamic Civil Militia from Java) should be ejected. This could ease the tensions and violence there.

Christians in Indonesia are worried about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the organised actions of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. These groups are very influential in promoting Islamic perspectives at every level of society within a fundamentalist framework. However not only Christians and other minority groups are concerned, many moderate and nationalist Muslims are also worried by the trends of the Islamic fundamentalists, who could eventually lead the country to a theocratic Islamic state.

Many people have asked where In-

donesia is heading. Many have doubts about Indonesia's future. History teaches that Indonesians should stand together and learn how to respect and help each other towards a sustainable peace, with harmony and justice for all, regardless of their religion, ethnicity or social backgrounds. All Indonesians should have equal opportunity and freedom to practise their basic rights as human beings. Religious and ethnic communities are two significant components that should go hand in hand in harmony and tolerance. They should establish programs to help needy and helpless people, to alleviate suffering and to release Indonesia from its current crisis. It is very important that those involved in conflict and violence should sit together to establish a culture of peace as follows:

- They need to discover creative ways of dealing with past/historical wounds. This implies recognising the mistakes that have been done and dealing with them.
- They need to learn new ways of celebrating pluralism. They must avoid seeing others as an enemy or a threat. Instead they should see how they can contribute to and enrich the life of each other.
- There must be a just sharing of political power, especially at the local level, so all can belong, express religious freedom and participate in shaping their future.
- They have to find civilised ways of managing disagreements and conflicts by expanding mutual dialogues and discourses to get consensus.

These principles could be an opportunity to implement the culture of

peace to overcome violence. Religion is a powerful force and freedom of religion or belief is a basic human right. Freedom of religion or belief also includes the right not to have a religion or belief, or to change one's religion. Freedom of religion is given a central place in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. And so it should be. Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right, because an individual's faith goes to the core of that person's identity. We cannot separate faith from personality. We carry the freedom of religion or belief with us into our engagement in other areas of life. In

modern secular societies religious matters are often considered as private matters. But religious freedom explicitly entails the right to public worship and to educate one's children in one's own religion. Religious freedom thus has both private and public aspects. However, religion is also an upholder of culture and a bearer of ethics and makes needed and constructive contributions to society.

But religion can be misused and become a harmful pretext to fuel conflict. Freedom of religion or belief should be tantamount to freedom of oppression. Unfortunately, this is not the case today. Too often religion is used as an instrument for gaining po-

litical power and promoting the exclusiveness of one group at the expense of others.

However, if religion can be misused to contribute to—or at times even participate in the outbreak of hostilities within or between nations—then religion can be equally important and powerful as a stimulus in ending conflict. One of the most important priorities for religious leaders today should be to make sure that every opportunity for positive involvement is used in order to diffuse conflict, facilitate peace and reconciliation, and create a more stable post-conflict situation.

Tony Waworuntu

NEWSBRIEFS

Deacons to Meet in Brisbane

The eighteenth World Diakonia Assembly, to be held in Brisbane, Australia, 5–11 July, is expected to attract up to 500 people from more than thirty countries.

Diakonia is an Ecumenical World Federation of Diaconal Associations and diaconal communities and had its origins at the end of the World War 2 when European deaconess communities, aware of the alienation caused by the war, saw a need for reconciliation with neighbouring nations.

The network and contact between deaconess orders has continued to expand and now covers most continents. It has expanded to include deacons and all those involved in church related diaconal ministries – lay and ordained, female and male.

Denominations to be represented at

the Assembly, to be held at the University of Queensland, will include Lutheran, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Uniting, Anglican and smaller groups of other denominations.

Delegates will be welcomed by the Assembly Patrons His Excellency the Most Rev. Peter Hollingworth, Governor-General of Australia; Rev. Prof. James Haire, President of the Uniting Church in Australia; and the World President of Diakonia, Deaconess Ms Chita Framo from the Philippines.

Keynote speakers will include Robyn Claydon of Sydney, chair of the Australian Lausanne Committee; Rev. Dorothy McRae-McMahon of Sydney, an ordained minister in the Uniting Church; Dr Vicky Balabanski of Adelaide, Lecturer at Flinders University,

South Australia; Right Rev. John Noble of Brisbane, Director of Ministries Development and Theological Education in the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane; and Rev. Bev Fabb, a deacon with the Uniting Church in Western Australia.

In addition to the formal business sessions of Diakonia, there will be regional gatherings and presentations, recreation activities, visits to local parishes, tours to the Sunshine and Gold coasts and a choice of more than thirty electives.

Information about the Assembly can be obtained from Conference Organiser, Sally Brown (email: sally.brown@uq.net.au, phone: + 61 7 3201 2808), or Archdeacon Heather Toon (email: htoon@powerup.com.au, phone: + 61 7 3408 1848).

Ecumenical Service for CCA



Rev. Kim Dong Wan, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea, organised a special Ecumenical Service for the CCA at Christian Building in Seoul on 6 April. Rev. Park Chung Shik, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, delivered the homily while Dr Kang Won Yong, former member of the CCA Presidium, and Dr Park Sang Jung, former General Secretary of CCA, gave their greetings. Dr Lee Ke Joon, Chair of the Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development also gave his greetings. Ahn Jae Woong, CCA general secretary, expressed his thanks for the support of the Korean churches. The ecumenical service was well attended by ecumenical leaders, major denominational leaders, academic circle and many friends from secular groups.

Textbook Issue in Japan

The National Christian Council in Japan (NCCJ) has issued an urgent appeal to 'stop Japan's Ministry of Education's attempt to rewrite history'. This move followed the official approval of new Japanese history textbooks that present Japan as a nation centred on the emperor, and use ancient myths and legends as real history. NCCJ says that by emphasising the importance of the nation over the in-

dividual and exalting Japan's invasion of Asia, these textbooks could plant jingoistic nationalism in the hearts of the young. Permeated with the ideology of the virtue of individuals sacrificing themselves for the nation and emperor, many of the textbooks clearly oppose concepts of peace, human rights and democratic sovereignty as stipulated in the constitution. The textbooks erase Japan's role in war crimes by not mentioning the issue of comfort women and by describing the purpose of the Pacific war as 'the Great East Asian Sphere of Peace'.

NCCJ is calling on Asian nations and those who have experienced the reality of Japan's subjugation to challenge this kind of thinking and to make sure that the truth of the Pacific war will not be erased.

A Christian member of the South Korean Diet, Kim Young Jin, held a six-day silent hunger strike in front of the Diet building in April to protest against the approval of a Japanese history textbook. His fast was accompanied by 'relay hunger strikes' of Christians who sat together with him, and various Christian groups in Tokyo and other parts of Japan. Women groups in support of the forced comfort women during the war also organised sit-in at the same place.

For more information on how to show solidarity and respond to the NCCJ appeal, contact the NCCJ at nccj@jca.ax.apc.org

Ecumenical Meeting on China Concerns

An ecumenical meeting on China concerns will be held in Hong Kong on 13-14 June involving representatives from ecumenical bodies as well as church leaders with experiences and expertise on China issues. In the afternoon of 14 June there will be a public forum on China and the DOV (Decade to Overcome Violence). Invited as speakers are Dr Philip Wickeri (from San Francisco Theological Seminary in California) on 'Ecumenical China Concerns: Retrospect and Prospect' and Clement John (from the World Council of Churches) on the DOV.

Malaysian Churches Support Students from Indochina



The three students from Indochina (centre) with Dr Albert Walters from STM and Dr Hermen Shastri, General Secretary of CCM

Through a CCA initiative, the Council of Churches in Malaysia has come forward to assist in the training of the future leaders of the churches in Indochina. At the moment, CCM is sponsoring three students, Kang Phal Da Ra Cheat from Cambodia, and Le Vinh Phuoc and Phan Hoang Van from Vietnam, who are studying at Seminary Theoloji of Malaysia (STM).

Archbishop Appointed Australia's Head of State

An Anglican archbishop has been appointed as the Governor-General of Australia. He will be the first churchman to hold the post as Australia's constitutional head of state.

The appointment has sparked a debate on the separation between church and state and renewed long-running controversy on the relevance of the British monarch, who is also Queen of Australia, and her representative, to modern-day Australia.

Archbishop Peter Hollingworth has been Archbishop of Brisbane since 1990. Before this he was best known as executive director of the welfare agency, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, and has been outspoken on welfare issues and a strong advocate of Aboriginal rights.

His appointment, while welcomed by all sides of politics, has been criticised by some leading church figures as giving an impression of special status for the Anglican Church.

At a media conference held after the announcement of his appointment, Archbishop Hollingworth claimed it would amount to discrimination if cler-

gymen were the only people excluded from the highest office in the land.

But the appointment has been criticised from within the churches by the Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, George Browning, as well as by prominent Baptist minister Tim Costello and Anglican priest Father James Murray, who is religious affairs editor for *The Australian* newspaper.

Archbishop Hollingworth succeeds former High Court judge Sir William Deane, a practising Catholic, who has been a popular governor-general at a time when the relevance of the post itself has been hotly disputed.

*Margaret Simons,
Ecumenical News International*

Myanmar News

- The Independent Church of Myanmar adopted a new name—The Independent Presbyterian Church of Myanmar—at its General Assembly meeting on 9 February.
- Effective 1 May the new general secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches is Rev. Smith Ngul Za Thawng. He was elected to the post by the Board of Management of the MCC last March. Rev. Smith is a member of the Baptist Church in Myanmar. His ecumenical experience includes work with the Student Christian Movement, then as secretary for University Christian Work, and, more recently, as Associate General Secretary of MCC.
- An installation service for Bishop Samuel San Si Htay as Archbishop of Anglican Church was planned for 3 June 200 in Yangon. He is the outgoing general secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches.

Korean Consultation on National Reunification

The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) held a 'Consultation on NCKK Policy for National Reunification' in Incheon on 15–16 March.

In a statement, participants of the consultation expressed their strong protest against the anti-peaceful declarations of the United States government, particularly since the inauguration of the Bush administration. They described such statements as reminiscent of the cold war era, which could lead to a build-up of tension between North and South Korea. They also urged the US government to give up its proposal of a 'national missile defence' (NMD) system, which is seen as a threat to peace not only in the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia but also throughout the world.

Participants also stressed the need for solidarity with churches and ecumenical organisations around the world in efforts for national reunification and for peace in North-east Asia and the whole world.

CCA–McGilvary Ecumenical Lectures

The CCA–McGilvary Ecumenical Lectures will commence on 12–14 July at the McGillvary Faculty of Theology in Payap University, Chiangmai, Thailand. This new endeavour is a joint program of CCA, the McGillvary Faculty of Theology and the Church of Christ in Thai-

land. The first lecturer will be the Rev. Kwok Nai Wang, former director of the Hong Kong Christian Institute and a former general secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council. Rev. Kwok will deliver three lectures at Payap University. The first, 'Human Rights: Different Contexts, Different Definitions?' will be open to the public. The second, 'Democracy and the Church', will be for the students. The third, 'Education and Social Change', will be for the faculty.

Chung Chi College Celebrates Fiftieth Anniversary

The wall in the chapel of Chung Chi College is decorated with the wooden escutcheons of the thirteen most prominent Chinese Christian universities and colleges plus a number of other Asian institutions of higher education. This indicates clearly the spirit of the college, which was founded in 1951. It takes up the rich spiritual and academic tradition previously established and cultivated by the various universities and colleges throughout China in the century before its inception. It also reflects the rootedness of this college in Asian soil and in the wider ecumenical fellowship. By joining other colleges, forming the Chinese University of Hong Kong, one of the most prestigious public universities in Hong Kong, the college showed its commitment to be an integral part of a distinctive Chinese institution for tertiary education.

In celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, Chung Chi College sponsored an

international conference on 'The Challenges of Asian Christian Universities in the Twenty-first Century', held at its beautiful campus on 9–11 May 2001. Some distinguished scholars were invited to present papers on the relation between Christian universities and churches, liberal and general education, campus ministry and theological education in a university setting.

Sri Lankan Appointments

- The Rev. Noel P. Fernando has been appointed President of the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka for the year 2000–2001.
- The Rev. Duleep De Chickera has been elected the new bishop of Colombo. His consecration was scheduled for 24 May.

New UELC Secretary

Dr K. Rajaratnam is now the executive secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India.

In Solidarity with Korean Women

The Partnership with Korean Women Task Group of the Church World Service Office for International Justice and Human Rights will hold a conference on 'Women in Solidarity for Peace and the Reunification of Korea' in September in Toronto, Canada. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes will represent CCA.

The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka

The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka consists of the Colombo and Kurunegala dioceses of the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka, the Baptist Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Student Christian Movement of Sri Lanka, the Ceylon Bible Society and the Christian Literature Society. NCC works through regional councils—the Ruhuna, Kandy, Vavuniya and Jaffna Christian councils. The council has been in existence for fifty years.

Though essentially a religious organisation, NCC coordinates its activities with secular organisations and other religious bodies. It maintains its identity as a religious entity and not an NGO and as far as possible works through and on behalf of its constituent churches. It endeavours to raise awareness among the Christian community and responds to the emerging political issues from a biblical perspective and raising the concerns of victimised and marginalised people in the society.

The essential task of NCC is to promote ecumenical witness. It endeavours to respond to God's love for humankind by strengthening the life and witness of churches and collaborating with the Roman Catholic Church and the churches belonging to the Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (EASL). Situated in a multireligious context, the council also endeavours to build bridges with people of other faiths and to collaborate for joint action when possible.

Subbashinie Perera, Information Officer, NCC-SL Commission for Justice and Peace

NCC recently underwent structural changes in order to conduct its activities efficiently and to ensure proper coordination of its programs. It is in a period of transition and is becoming more related to the churches it represents. Activities related to relief and rehabilitation, peace and reconciliation and church renewal are designated as integrated programs, while other activities are clustered together as Church Mission and Education, Justice Peace and Human Development and Family and Life. Under the new directions, the staff of the NCC are encouraged to conduct their programs as a team, pooling all resources together rather than implementing through particular, compartmentalised units.

The programs conducted by the units and the commissions are based on a critical reflection of the Sri Lankan context in the light of scripture, collective experience and human enlightenment. The war that has been ongoing for nearly two decades, human rights violations, the globalisation process and its adverse effects on people, the development process in the country which has not reached those in need, the marginalised, women and children etc. are focuses of its programs. The concerns of evangelism, Christian education, HIV/AIDS and the disabled also receive constant attention.

In a country engulfed in a virtual war for the last twenty years, building bridges of understanding between different communities estranged by the conflict becomes an essential witness of the council. The council has generally opposed any forms of a military solution and has advocated devolution of power within a united Sri Lanka.

