



Christian Conference of Asia

cca news



CCA Twelfth General Assembly
Building communities of peace for all

The great tsunami

Asian responses to Asian realities

Ecumenical ministry in the post-tsunami situation

Solidarity with the victims

Building communities of peace for all



As we live in an age of war, terror and conflict between individuals, groups, communities and nations, may the twelfth general assembly theme be a reminder to us of the need for participating in building communities of peace for all

This issue is being prepared to reach readers before the twelfth General Assembly of CCA, which begins in Chiang Mai on 31 March. The assembly provides an opportunity for official representatives of member churches and councils to exercise their rights to make crucial decisions on policies and programs of CCA. We are very happy that the preparations for the assembly are in full swing, under the efficient leadership of the Chiang Mai-based local organising committee, which is related to the Church of Christ in Thailand.

It is a matter of great joy and privilege that a renowned international ecumenical leader will be with us at the assembly. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, is one of the keynote speakers in Chiang Mai. A representative of the Vatican and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) will also be present. There will be the four general secretaries of the regional ecumenical organisations of Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the USA attending the event. Thus, this assembly is very symbolic in terms of ecumenical cooperation.

An eight-member group, named Living Letters, related to WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) will be there to do a mid-term evaluation and to be part of the formal launch of the DOV focus on Asia. Five former general secretaries of CCA, two former members of the presidium, presidents of the WCC, major ecumenical partners, representatives of fraternal organisations, observers and friends will also grace the occasion by their presence. The D.T. Niles Memorial Lectures, one of the highlights of the assembly, will be given by three outstanding speakers, and the related panel discussion on inter-faith cooperation in Asia will be initiated by people representing Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, moderated by a Christian scholar. The assembly will witness the formal release of the two volumes of *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, written and edited respectively by Dr Ninan Koshy.

Besides listening to the reports of the general secretary, presidents and honorary treasurer, the assembly will also elect a new leadership for CCA for the next five years. The assembly will review programs and help shape necessary new directions for the ecumenical organisation.

2004 ended and 2005 began on a grim note. The 26 December Indian Ocean tsunami created havoc in many coastal regions of Asia. It killed more than 200,000 people. A larger number of people were injured and many became homeless. Many children were orphaned and traumatised. Within a few days of the tsunami tragedy, CCA appealed to the member churches and councils to contribute generously to the relief and rehabilitation work that is still going on in many parts of the region. CCA also organised a consultation in Colombo on 'Ecumenical ministry in the post-tsunami situation'. The consultation stressed that all reconstruction programs should be 'people centred'. This issue has a report of that consultation along with many other stories and photos on the tsunami, which are not only revealing, but also informative.

The story on the Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG) 2004 featured in this issue makes interesting reading. The organisers, Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Network (EASY Net), did a commendable job in gathering 135 participants for exposure, reflections and worship, which is a good investment for developing ecumenical leadership.

As we live in an age of war, terror and conflict between individuals, groups, communities and nations, may the twelfth general assembly theme be a reminder to us of the need for participating in building communities of peace for all.

Let me also take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy Easter. —Abn Jae Woong



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CCA's Twelfth General Assembly

Chiang Mai getting ready for ecumenical event



Over 500 church representatives, observers, guests and friends from different parts of Asia and outside will converge on the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai to attend the Twelfth General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia.

A 25-member church delegation from the USA, four general secretaries of regional ecumenical organisations, ecumenical partners from around the globe and journalists will also be among those who will attend the assembly.

The Prime Minister of Thailand, Dr Thaksin Shinawatra, is expected to address the assembly on the morning of 1 April.

The 31 March to 6 April assembly will give CCA member church and council representatives an opportunity to make important decisions on the policies and programs of CCA, founded in 1957 in Prapat, Indonesia.

The assembly will begin with an opening worship at the Chiang Mai First Church of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), from 4 to 5.30 pm. Rev. Dr Boonratna Boayan, CCT moderator, will deliver the sermon.

The D.T. Niles Memorial Lectures will be delivered by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, Rev. Prof. James Haire and Dr Christine Loh. A panel discussion on interfaith cooperation has been organised as part of the lectures. Dr Asghar Ali Engineer, Swami Agnivesh and Ven. Dham-

manda (Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsing) will initiate the discussion on the occasion, which will be moderated by Dr Anna May Chain.

CCA general secretary Dr Ahn Jae Woong will present his report on the second of the assembly. The participants will also hear the reports from the CCA presidents and the honorary treasurer on the same day.

On Sunday, 3 April, the participants will worship at 37 local churches—Catholic, independent, CCT and tribal. Cultural presentations by Thai groups will be held during the dinner, opening and closing worships. A cultural troupe will also come from Korea to perform.

The two volumes of *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia* will be formally released on 2 April.

The assembly will close with worship at the chapel of the Payap University.

The general assembly, held once in five years, is the supreme body of the CCA, and is a time for leaders from churches in Asia and outside to come together for fellowship, sharing and mutual enrichment. Worship and Bible study plays an important part in the life of the assembly. The assembly also is a time when CCA speaks out on various public issues affecting the region.

The assembly will elect officers, members of the general committee, joint program area committees and many other subcommittees.

Pre-assembly events

Before the 12th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, to be held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 31 March to 6 April, a number of events will be held in Chiang Mai—people's, women's and youth forums and a workshop of differently abled people

People's Forum

Fifty people from churches, the Urban Rural Mission network and community organisations from different parts of Asia will attend a People's Forum in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 25 to 29 March 2005. It will be organised as a pre-general assembly event of CCA on the theme 'Building Communities of Peace for All'.

According to Rev. Josef Widyatmadja, the CCA executive staff member in charge of the forum, 'This gathering will focus on making efforts to strategise people's resistance to face the impact of globalisation, especially children, labour and farmers.' It will also attempt to develop people's resistance and hope for another world where peace and justice prevail.

In addition the forum will try to build awareness among churches and people's movements on the meaning of building communities of peace amidst globalisation and the war on terrorism. Among the other objectives of the forum are:

- To enable people at the grassroots to share their life situations and exchange experiences of hope and struggle.
- To identify, reflect and analyse common issues from the perspective of people in pain and struggle.
- To strengthen solidarity and networking among the members of URM groups and participants in Asia.
- To reflect on God's mission from the perspective of the people in pain and struggle through the involvement of Urban Rural Mission in Asia.
- To give inputs to shape the future direction of the URM program.
- To make a framework for future priorities and concerns to the program of the URM for the next five years.

The daily activity at the forum will include biblical reflections on the theme, group discussions, plenary sessions and workshops on the theme and on 'Geopolitics in Asia', exposure programs and faith celebrations.

The venue of the People's Forum will be the Royal Lanna Hotel in Chiang Mai.

The forum is likely to issue a declaration from the perspective of people in struggle, which will be addressed to the General Assembly.

The first People's Forum was held in 1973 in Singapore. The last forum, held prior to the 11th General Assembly of the CCA in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, gathered 52 participants on the theme 'Time for Fullness of Life for All'.

Women's Forum

The pre-assembly Women's Forum will be held from 26 to 30 March at the Holiday Garden Hotel in Chiang Mai. Women delegates to the CCA General Assembly, representatives from the Asian Network of Ecumenical Women and Chiang Mai-based women from the Church of Christ in Thailand will attend.

The forum will provide ecumenical space for women to know each other, study, worship, celebrate together and find strength from friendships forged at the gathering.

Cora Tabing-Reyes, the CCA executive staff member who is coordinating the event, says, 'The forum is an opportunity to explore the assembly theme from women's perspective towards gender justice and equality.'

The participants may find in the forum a space to influence the general assembly, which is the highest decision-making body of CCA, to consider women as equal partners of men, cocreated in God's image, to build communities of peace for all. The forum participants are likely to present their message,

drawn from their sharing of experiences, perspectives and actions, to the general assembly.

The main goal of the forum is to enable women to contribute to ecumenical discussions and actions, and to bring gender issues into the agenda of the ecumenical movement in Asia, especially on overcoming violence against women.

The forum will issue a message to the general assembly, focusing on issues related to gender and building communities of peace for all.

Worship, which will be reflective, participatory and intercultural, will set the tone for the daily activities of the forum. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, will deliver the keynote speech at the forum.

Different workshop groups will discuss issues such as domestic violence, violence against women in the church, women and sexuality, women and HIV/AIDS, women and the environment, women and economic justice and women and interfaith relationships.

There will also be a presentation on the Decade to Overcome Violence by Tale Hungnes, who is a member of the DOV Reference Group.

One of the highlights of the forum will be 'A night of celebration: celebrating women in the ecumenical movement in Asia', which will commemorate ecumenical women trailblazers in Asia and ecumenical women's movements working at national and regional levels.

Youth Forum

The pre-assembly Youth Forum will gather 75 youth from different churches in Asia to discuss various issues affecting the churches

and societies, and to evolve strategies and programs that could influence life and ministry of CCA over the next five years.

The main objectives of the four-day forum are to influence the twelfth general assembly, especially the decision-making bodies of CCA, to ensure proper youth participation in them and to provide a common platform for youth leaders across Asia to discern issues and to respond to them.

Among the long-term objectives of the forum are to influence the policies and decisions of CCA on the issue of youth empowerment for the next five years, to make CCA more focused on youth leadership development and empowerment within the churches in Asia and to develop future leadership for the ecumenical movement and churches in Asia.

The forum will be held at the Lotus Hotel from 26 to 29 March. The participants will consist of 35 youth delegates and 30 youth stewards to the CCA General Assembly, resource persons and guests from EASY Net and Chiang Mai.

According to Rakesh Peter Dass, CCA executive staff member coordinating the program, the major components of the forum will be Bible studies by Esther Jayachitra (India), reflections on the main assembly theme by Lesley Capus (Philippines) and inputs on the DOV by a member of the WCC-DOV Reference Group, among others.

The Youth Forum prepares the participants for better and coordinated participation in the general assembly. It also ensures proper selection of youth leadership for the next five years of the CCA, and so it assumes a very critical role in the assembly.

Workshop of Differently Abled People

A workshop of Differently Abled People (DAP) will be one of the four pre-assembly events organised by the CCA in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 26 to 30 March. This workshop will also be a follow-up of the 2003 CCA-EDAN joint consultation on people with disabilities.

The main focus of the Chiang Mai workshop will be on interdependence, says Lee Hong Jung, the CCA executive secretary who is organising this workshop. It is being done with the hope that 'differently abled people will be in the forefront of eco-justice and peace movements'.

'Differently abled people are not objects to be taken care of at a distance but subjects to participate in making history inclusively, particularly in eco-peace and justice movements, contributing their intrinsically interdependent nature, experience and wisdom,' Hong Jung, in a background paper for the workshop, has noted.

The workshop will also probe into the various possibilities of information technology and how it can be used to enhance interdependency in relation to eco-justice and peace and differently abled people.

The theme of the workshop is 'Weaving the web of interdependency of differently abled people for eco-justice and peace in the age of information technology'.

The two major thematic inputs will be on

'Disability and interdependence crisis in globalisation' by Samuel Kabue and 'The issues on disability and eco-justice and peace in the DOV process' by Ralphine Razaka Mantenasoa.

There will also be four subtheme presentations, Bible reflections, group discussions and worship during the four-day workshop.

It will come out with ideas for establishing an inclusive Internet eco-justice and peace movement web of differently abled people in Asia.

'This will strengthen social and ecological nature of differently abled people based on the principle of interdependence, and provide a creative process of healing and reconciliation of the wounded and broken relationships in the web of life,' says the background paper.

The venue of the workshop in Chiang Mai is the Crystal Spring House. Twenty-five people from Asia and outside will attend the workshop, which is expected to enhance an integral diakonia ministry for differently abled people.

Special airfare for assembly participants

Thailand's flag carrier, Thai Airways International, has extended its support to the 12th General Assembly of the CCA. 'We are pleased to inform you that Thai Airways International will support the event with a special airfare for registered delegates to travel on THAI's flight to Bangkok and return,' THAI's Convention and Incentive Sales Division has said in a communication to CCA. THAI has assigned a convention code number, 05033107, to the event. Registered delegates to the assembly have to make bookings directly with the Thai Airways International office in their respective countries. Details of THAI's routings and nearest sales offices can be found on www.thaiairways.com.



Liberating and empowering

Towards a contextual Asian theological education

On 9–12 January a group of representatives of theological movements and associations of theological education in Asia met in Shoki Coe House at Tainan Theological College and Seminary (TTCS) in Tainan, Taiwan, to share their assessment of Asian contextual theologies and the struggles of their respective movements and associations and to map some plans for working together.

Expounding on the rationale of the meeting, Hope S. Antone of CCA-FMU said that while many theologians and seminaries have become very interested in Asian theologies (e.g. minjung theology, Dalit and Tribal theologies, homeland theology, theology of struggle, and Asian feminist theologies), 'many of our own Asian seminaries and theologians find these "alien" and threatening'. Among the churches, there is also a prevailing allergy or aversion to ecumenism while there is a resurgence to denominationalism, she said.

While the group affirmed the importance that each movement or association has played in history and continues to play today, it pointed to a noticeable setback experienced by all contextual theologies.

Huang Po Ho, president of Tainan Theological Seminary, which hosted the meeting, aptly summarised the sentiment of the group by saying, 'All contextual theologies are experiencing a setback weakened in the wake of the current situation. It seems that we cannot find any role of Asian theology in the life of the church, thereby making the church more marginalised in Asia.'

Yong Ting Jin, coordinator of the Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, said that feminist issues continue to be a 'blind spot' even for Asian progressive theologians.

The group envisioned a truly contextual and relevant Asian theological education that would help bring about transformation for Asian churches, seminaries and societies.

They described it as one that is rooted in and responsive to Asian contexts and realities. Informed by global theological movements, it is liberating and empowering. It critically draws from our Asian resources for spirituality and wisdom. It transforms church and society, seminaries and theological education, and Christian higher education. Holistic in methodology, it is engaged in the public arena and models right relationships between local and other cultures, disciplines and faiths.

The group commended the efforts of theological associations towards achieving something of this contextual Asian theological education. Yet, they dreamed of a wider theological consortium in Asia that might involve a mobile faculty or a mobile curriculum, which would include theological and religious studies with emphasis on Asian religious and cultural diversity and feminist theologies. Plans are under way to explore this possibility.

The group consisted of representatives of the following movements and associations: Program for Theologies and Cultures in Asia (Kang Namsoon and Simon Kwan), Association of Theological Education in Southeast Asia (Sientje Merentek-Abram), CCA-WCC Ecumenical Theological Education (Wati Longchar), Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians-Asia (Arche Ligo), Northeast Asia Theological Schools (Huang Po Ho), Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (Soosai Arokiasamy), Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology (Yong Ting Jin), Congress of Asian Theologians (Kang Namsoon and Soosai Arokiasamy), Asian Christian Higher Education Institute (Archie Lee and David Suh), and the Christian Conference of Asia (Hope S. Antone).

The CCA-FMU desk organised and facilitated this meeting, with support from ACHEI.



Participants sharing experiences, food and dreams around a mealtable

Oppression and marginalisation

Ecumenical solidarity for uprooted people

An uprooted poinsettia plant is placed at the centre of our midst—a symbolic, yet stark reminder of the fact that the numbers of those who are uprooted in Asian societies are growing in stark and startling terms. Their suffering is compounded with each passing day, as hopes dim, governments tighten levels of indifference, once-active and responsive civil society and NGO groups strain to cope with the magnitude of the growing numbers and the faltering patterns of aid givers shows signs of growing fatigue.

An equally potent and powerful symbol right at the centre was a long piece of thread. First it was held together to symbolise oneness in purpose and belonging as Asian communities. Then it was spread just ahead to remind everyone of the critical need to stay in cohesion as they immerse themselves and extend this collective into the ranks of those who are dispossessed and marginalised.

Mae Sot

Twenty-four people from Myanmar, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka gathered in Mae Sot from 8 to 13 December 2004.

They struggled to understand the multiple dimensions of oppression and marginalisation that uprooted people face. They were united in a web of shared commitment to develop and strengthen inter-local ecumenical solidarity between churches and churches, people and people and other faith-based and secular movements.

In the opening worship, Pastor Ree Dee Parichatkhiri of the Huay Nam Khun Karen Baptist Church in Mae Sot, Thailand, challenged the participants to live out the gracious power of God's love, goodness, joy, justice, reconciliation and peace for the displaced and uprooted. She also urged them to unite all ecumenical efforts and organisations in solidarity with the uprooted.

The backdrop

Asia today has the largest number of uprooted people—refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers, internally displaced people, victims of conflict and others in similar circumstances. The failure of protection and humanitarian services often render them even more vulnerable. Obligations stemming from international conventions and other agreements are unmet by governments who claim the resources needed are unavailable or inadequate. Some governments avoid their obligations arguing that doing these things constitutes interference in the affairs of other countries.

It is distressing that guidelines for the treatment of refugees have been flagrantly ignored. Some governments have not yet ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Additional Protocol. Furthermore, international legal instruments have failed to incorporate issues pertaining to the wellbeing of displaced persons.

The observations and deliberations were significantly influenced and enhanced by the presence people from the Karen community living in the camps on the Thai-Myanmar border. Their presence, as well as the location of the meeting—only a few miles away from the border, meant that the meeting gained from first-hand accounts. It also gave opportunity to encounter affected peoples within the camps and learn from their lives, hopes, fears and aspirations.

The participants shared their national situations. There are common patterns of displacement/dislocation as well as similar causes and manifestations. Reflections on the national reports launched into a broad analysis of the political dynamics, economic compulsions, social formations and religious-cultural factors of uprootedness. The participants learned that the claims for the self-determination of ethnic groups within nations cannot always be resolved within the paradigm of the modern nation-state.

The Karen experience

Rev. Dr Saw Simon, Principal of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School in the Mae La Refugee Camp outlined the circumstances of the establishment of the school. This was followed by Dr Cynthia Maung's presentation of her work as a medical doctor in the Mae Tao Clinic, which serves thousands of Karen refugees, migrant workers and local poor people.

The field visits and narratives from the Karen experience of dislocation challenged everyone. The Karen face an uncertain future and the neglect of the international community.

They urged the churches in Asia to find the will to strengthen the presence of the church in Myanmar as a voice and instrument for the liberation of people from their bondedness and oppression. Dr Simon said, 'We strongly believe that through the help of God we will have our dream and vision realised and be able to live and serve God enjoying the freedom, rights and dignity as human beings created in God's own image in our own land, Kawthoolei.'

Panel issues

Ecology, Health and Healing

Lee Hong Jung, CCA Joint Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service, presented a paper highlighting the interconnections between globalisation, development policy and practice, and its effects on the lives of ordinary people around the world.

He underlined how as the new century moves with apocalyptic uncertainty down the path of globalisation, the concerns for the sustainability of the 'earth household' itself have become of paramount importance. This could well be the last generation to have the opportunity to avert ecological collapse and irreparable damage to the systems that sustain complex life on earth.

Tourism and the phenomena of displacement and uprootedness

Ranjan Solomon, executive director of the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism, focused attention on how the tourism industry shows disregard for the welfare of people, ecology, culture, women, children, workers and the development processes. The entertainment of the leisure-seeking class seemingly has no limits and their holiday escapades bring them 'sun'n'sand' while leaving thousands destitute and deprived of their traditional livelihoods, food, security and jobs.

Interfaith and spiritual perspectives

Pastor Ree Dee Parichatkhiri brought home the imperatives of working on the issues of uprootedness on firm spiritual grounds. The sharing of love and peace, justice and freedom demands a unity of spirit not just in bland dialogue, but also in interreligious partnerships for common social advancement.

Core issues and strategies

People's security

- Ethnic nations
- Internally displaced people
- Refugees
- People in conflict situations

Ecology, health and development

- Sustainable living environments
- Ecology of health and development
- Primary health care
- Traditional and alternative medicine
- Life-giving agriculture
- Tourism

Education and culture

- Education
- Formal and non-formal education (liberating alternative education)
- Culture
- Affirming identity (history and culture)
- Leadership formation

Women, children, aged, and differently abled people

- Self-guarding
- Recognition
- Self-organisation
- Empowerment
- Participation

All groups

- Human rights, justice, and equity
- Interfaith
- Gender
- Cultural
- Ecological

Towards a promised land

The following is the communiqué from the participants of the CCA workshop on strengthening inter-local ecumenical solidarity for uprooted people

Kawthoolei is a Karen word that conveys the sense of an ideal nation—inclusive, just, devoid of evil and oppression, where all of God's creation lives in plurality and in harmony, recognising the multidimensional gifts of God to creation. All of humankind is assured there is a Kawthoolei—a promised land awaiting them. It is God's covenant with God's people.

We live in Asia, where we are confronted by a reality that is in contradiction of this promise. Asia is a region where the forces of hate, prejudice, distrust, greed and exploitation have condemned people in millions upon millions to despair, humiliation, isolation, separateness, uncertainty, indiscriminate bombings of civilian populations by arrogant armies, forced labour demands, limitations of freedom in movement, landmines and deprivations of multiple kinds. Those who must suffer the consequences are the uprooted of Asia. They have invariably fled violence, racism or discrimination based on ethnicity, caste, religion, socioeconomic status or ideological affiliation.

When God's people are in distress, God is also in distress. When God's people are uprooted, God accompanies them in their desolation and search for Kawthoolei. God hears the cries of the people who are exiled by the designs of human self-indulgent behaviour that is oppressive, exploitative and geared to self-aggrandisement. God is displaced too but God incarnated hears the cries of the suffering. God dwells among them, offers them hope, gives them courage and points to them the pathway to liberation. A compassionate God, who shares their pains and sense of exclusion, accompanies the uprooted people of Asia. Their circumstances are not easy by any stretch of imagination. The experience of uprootedness is one of innumerable atrocities, human rights violations and abuses. Their lives are in a perpetual state of threat and their security is never guaranteed, for the nature of hatred, prejudice and distrust, which prompted and created their plight, has not altered. The hostilities have remained and the powerful have displaced those who they see as undesirable to have in their midst.

As the church in Asia, we must take cognisance of Paul's letter to the Galatians, 6:9, where he says, 'Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.' This constitutes a challenge for the church in Asia, which is summoned to respond with compassion, clarity, vision and courage to the sufferings of the millions of those uprooted people, whether they are refugees, migrants, internally displaced people, victims of faulty and ill-conceived development projects, conflict, discriminatory legislation or the wrath of nature at the continual exploitation of the earth. We must equally be mindful of the fact that the forces of globalisation have also engineered development policies designed to create wealth in the name of prosperity while, in practice, it has only resulted in more poverty for more people with its obvious consequences of the displacement of people from their locations of livelihood.

Yet, the victims of these situations cry not just for help in their immediate environs. They want it to end once and for all. They ask, 'Why, God? For how long more?' They want release from fear and hardship, not just in some ameliorative sense, important as that is in the dire straits they now are in. They want liberation in its completeness, not just for them but for their oppressors too so that, in the final analysis, they can live together in peaceful, just, and interdependent coexistence with and for each other, sharing a common humanity. This is a challenge that we are bound to take note of and respond to. It is not merely a choice we have before us, but an imperative. To this urgent obligation, we commit and pledge ourselves to the newly initiated Asian Ecumenical Process on Life and Peace for Uprooted People.

Bridging the gaps

Doing mission and evangelism with an ecumenical vision

Twenty program and related staff and representatives of mission, evangelism and ecumenism units of member churches and councils of the Christian Conference of Asia gathered on 2–7 December in Taipei, Taiwan, for a workshop on ‘Doing Mission and Evangelism with an Ecumenical Vision’, bearing in mind the CCA General Assembly theme, ‘Building Communities of Peace for All’. The meeting was jointly organised by CCA and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT), which also hosted the workshop.

The workshop opened with worship, during which Rev. William Lo, PCT general secretary, spoke on the ‘Incarnation of the Kingdom of God’, saying, ‘To actualise the kingdom of God involves not only to love

our neighbours but also to walk with them. We should not limit our sharing within the community of Christian sisters and brothers alone. We need to break down the walls that divide us so we can work together for justice, peace, democracy, human rights, ecological issues. and to reach the marginalised in our societies. Christians should seek ways to cooperate with other religious and secular groups and organisations in our countries.’

The workshop included sharing of and listening to stories of involvement in mission, evangelism and ecumenism, an input on bridging the gaps between the three by Hope S. Antone of CCA-FMU, an overview of the challenges in Asia today by Cheng Yang-en, a historian-theologian of Taiwan, a panel presentation on contextual responses to the

challenges by Tarcisius Fernando (Sri Lanka), Rex Reyes (Philippines), Tina Rendell (Australia) and William Lo (Taiwan). Workshops and discussions were held to deepen the sharing, which included strategies and suggestions for future directions.

In a summary of the four-day workshop, the group affirmed their belief that ‘it is God who calls us into God’s mission of turning to the world in love and compassion (*missio Dei* or God’s mission), through sharing the good news of fullness of life for all (*evangelion* in evangelism), throughout the one household of God (*oikoumene* in ecumenism).’ But the group was deeply aware of the many challenges, including the distortions, gaps and contradictions that have come about with regards to mission, evangelism and ecumenism. These are worsened by the impact of globalisation, terrorism and fundamentalism, to name a few.

The group’s recommendations contained in the summary included the following:

- To support the capacity building needs of churches and national councils of young or newly opened nations such as Timor Lorosa’e, Laos, Cambodia and Nepal.
- To find and share resources, information and opportunities for exchange and sharing of mission with youth, women and children.
- To initiate and facilitate, as the churches, the role of building bridges and relations across political and ideological lines, as well as between churches and other religious or civil society groups.
- To affirm the prophetic role/function of the church, especially in these challenging times through denouncing evil and all forces of dehumanisation.

Worship and visits with four local churches enabled the participants to learn about special ministries of the PCT, including through the church for the hearing impaired and the church for families of people with Hanson’s disease.



William Lo sharing a reflection during the opening worship.

Ecumenical enablers training

Trauma counselling with children in tsunami-affected countries

Twenty-two participants at the National Ecumenical Enablers' Training held in Bangkok, Thailand, on 1–4 February agreed to organise national trainings for trauma counsellors who will work with children and survivors in the worst tsunami-affected areas in Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India.

This decision came about as a concrete response to the current situation of traumatised children following the tsunami disaster of 26 December and after hearing a presentation and discussion on 'enabling the ministry of promoting the dignity of children' led by Sanjana Das, a staff member of the Church of North India dealing with promoting the dignity of children.

The training included an overview of the ecumenical movement, presented by Mathews George Chunakara, Asia Desk secretary of the World Council of Churches. He also led a session on enabling the ministry of

diakonia and solidarity.

There were also sessions on sharing of ecumenical scenarios and ecumenical formation from the national contexts by the participants, who came from India, Indonesia, Timor Lorosa'e, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Korea and Taiwan.

Hope Antone, executive secretary of CCA-FMU, gave a presentation on enabling the ministry of gender justice, highlighting the glaring need for it in Asia as well as the long struggle for it throughout Asian history. She also led two Bible studies on unity and ecumenism during the two morning worships.

Richard A.D. Siwu of Indonesia led a third Bible study, while Bishop Dharendra Sahu, newly installed general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, gave two presentations on the biblical-theological bases and perspectives and new challenges of microecumenism.

The training was part of a series of capac-



Sanjana Das (left) giving a presentation on enabling the ministry of promoting dignity of children, while Marlene Sigar served as moderator

ity-building activities for the Ecumenical Enablers Team in Asia (EETA), a joint venture of the WCC Asia Desk and the Christian Conference of Asia. The first meeting that launched EETA was in January 2003 in Bangkok. That meeting also identified the areas of need or weakness as well as the strengths and gifts of various churches and NCCs in Asia.

In response to a great need for skills in management, an organisational management course was held in December 2003, also in Bangkok. In February 2004 EETA linked with the Basic Ecumenical Course of NCC Philippines, which opened spaces for other participants from Malaysia, Indonesia and Cambodia. In March–April 2004, EETA supported two resource persons from CCA to the leadership capacity building program for youth and a seminar for women in Nepal. In October 2004, a regional Ecumenical Capacity Building for Church Leaders in Asia was held in Korea.

Following all these, it is now felt that EETA should focus a bit more on national capacity building programs, especially for young churches and councils or churches in newly open countries.



Sint Kimhachandra (left) welcomed the participants, while Mathews George Chunakara (middle), and Hope S. Antone (right) co-facilitated and provided inputs at the meeting



The great tsunami

Asian response to Asian realities

Ecumenical consultation calls for post-tsunami initiatives to be people-centred

A consultation, 'Ecumenical Ministry in the Post-tsunami Situation', held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, has urged churches and civil society groups to empower local communities in Asia to decide on, implement and monitor reconstruction efforts. The consultation, attended by 33 participants from 14 countries, including most of the tsunami-affected Asian countries, stressed that all reconstruction programs at the level of planning, operating and evaluating in the post-tsunami situation must be 'people-centred'. The consultation, organised by CCA, affirmed that people

should be considered in planning, implementing and monitoring all aspects of the reconstruction initiatives. These initiatives should be based on fairness, transparency and integrity, and they should be inclusive to ensure that people of all faiths, ethnicities and political leanings are treated with equal respect.

The 26 to 31 January consultation urged the mobilisation of 'Asiatic' resources for 'promoting local wisdom, local ecosystem and local culture-based projects through Asian ecumenical networks'. The consultation began with an opening worship led by

CCA general secretary Dr Ahn Jae Woong. Speaking on 'Life Must Move on' he said that the task is to build a chain of networks for providing physical and mental care for the victimised, and spiritual care to overcome their sense of helplessness. He explained the role of Asian churches as providing effective and immediate care for the victims, evolving strategies to pressurise concerned people to set up early warning systems for the Indian Ocean region, engaging actively in reconstruction and rehabilitation of tsunami-stricken areas, and evolving forward-looking and life-enriching plans. 'Let us not

bypass crippled situations around us, do not just engage in charitable work alone, but do our best in the name of Jesus Christ for fullness of life for all God's people,' he said. He concluded by saying, 'Helpful God will continue to guide us indeed, so that life must move on.'

A communiqué issued by the consultation said that 'preferential option' should be given to the most vulnerable, and life-centredness must be a focus to ensure integration between ecology, health and development. All work should be contextual as well as religiously and ecologically sensitive.

The consultation affirmed spiritual empowerment of the people and 'spirituality of the poor and the spirituality of kenosis' as basis for tsunami-related involvement by the churches and concerned groups. It stressed drawing from the spiritualities of different religions to help each other in coping with the crisis. All post-tsunami reconstruction

programs should be done in ways to address peace issues in civil war or ethnic conflict areas.

The participants felt that 'we should take steps that would eventually help the revitalisation and transformation of ecumenical movement in Asia so that we can better work together for the tsunami-affected people and possible future disasters.'

The consultation decided to meet with those churches that are using relief for conversion purposes to urge them not to undermine the ministry and witness of local churches and Christian institutions in a religiously plural context.

One of the highlights of the consultation was a field visit to the southern Sri Lankan coastal town of Galle, which was badly hit by the 26 December tsunami. The field visit gave the participants an opportunity to witness the severe devastation wrought on the lives and livelihood of the people, on economies

and on the ecosystem. The tsunami incident created serious psychological trauma for the survivors, who are struggling to keep their lives together. In some cases people may not be able to go back to their previous livelihoods either because they are fearful about returning to their homes by the sea or because they are alienated from their work situations due to their dislocation.

As part of the follow-up initiatives, a comprehensive program for ecumenical intervention will be prepared, which will be discussed and finalised in subregional meetings to be held soon.

The consultation hoped that this would revitalise the mobilisation of Asian resources in formulating an Asian response to Asian realities, which will be culturally sensitive, contextual and appropriate in the present geopolitical realities of the region.

The full text of the communique is available on CCA's website: www.cca.org.hk.

A call for action

The World Social Forum calls for solidarity with the victims of the tsunami disaster

The killer waves of 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean regions left a trail of devastation, with over a quarter of a million people dead (many of these children and women), more than half a million people injured and five million homeless. Coastal stretches of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India (including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands), Thailand, the Maldives and East Africa have suffered. The livelihoods of millions of fisherfolk, farmers and their families in the coastal regions were wiped out in a matter of minutes. People are traumatised, trying to cope with the shock of the loss of their loved ones and virtually everything they owned and faced with the painful prospect of rebuilding their lives from the wreckage.

The extent of destruction caused by the tsunami is incalculable, and comprehensive assessments of the losses—economic, social, ecological, and psychological—have yet



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to be completed. While relief operations are mostly in place, it has yet to reach many communities and people in an equitable manner. While unprecedented amounts of aid are pouring in, now, more than ever, in their hour of greatest need, the peoples of the South must be heeded in their long-standing demand for debt cancellation.

The world and the popular media have also highlighted the devastation of several 'paradise destinations' once frequented by holiday-makers. We need to recognise that this disaster has rendered workers and communities dependent on travel and tourism virtually destitute. There are persistent calls to hurriedly re-establish the tourism infrastructure, especially in those countries that strongly depend on tourism. The tourism industry is calling for international solidarity while tourists in Western countries have abandoned the people that once served them in better times.

This raises the question: 'What does solidarity in tourism mean at this point in time?' There is need to urgently put in place mid- and long-term reconstruction plans based on people's aspirations to rebuild livelihoods, while, at the same time, to be able to live in safety and security. This should include restoration of mangrove forests and other coastal ecosystems, which in the past have protected coastal regions from storms and waves. The mangrove forests that remain protected people and property from the tsunami, whereas areas where the mangroves had been cleared for 'development' have shown huge losses of life and damage to property. Unsustainable industries, including tourism, stand out as a primary cause of mangrove loss. Developments that violated coastal zoning regulations are the subject of protests by groups and people concerned with the protection of coastal ecology and sustainable livelihoods. We call on governments to pay serious attention to the consequences of such impunity.

There have been reports that some governments are planning 'permanent relocation and rehabilitation of affected persons'. Our concern is that governments are planning to 'use' this natural calamity to 'clean the beaches' and make them available for tourism and big fishing businesses.



In line with this, we, the participants of the World Social Forum 2005, call upon people, NGOs, civil society groups, trade unions, aid agencies, relief agencies, development organisations, the media, the tourism industry and tourists, governments, the UN and its relevant agencies to:

- work towards just and transparent conditions in international cooperation and comprehensive debt cancellation, as pre-conditions for sustainable development,
- establish comprehensive and authenticated information on the situation and the needs of people, particularly in the non-tourist areas, and to begin assisting them as required,
- ensure and encourage the central role and participation of local people and civil society in the rebuilding efforts,
- restore the natural barrier or 'greenbelt' around coastal areas that are now vulnerable to future storms and tsunamis.

Towards this objective we would endorse sustainable hydrological restoration of mangrove forest areas and the protection of coral reefs,

- in areas dependent on tourism, not focus on an area only as a 'tourism destination' but on the people most urgently in need of aid, not support the hasty reconstruction of tourism infrastructure in the areas dependent on tourism, but to observe, in every project, strict and clear criteria of environmentally friendly, socially responsible and participatory tourism, with a view to an overall sustainable development that benefits the whole population,
- set up mechanisms and processes of disaster warning and management systems in areas that are vulnerable and to pay special attention to phenomena such as the trafficking of women and children that are often outcomes of such disasters.



Thailand tsunami relief update

A group of half a dozen Church of Christ in Thailand church and ministry workers and leaders were in the south of Thailand from 28 December to 8 January visiting communities and assessing the damage done by the tsunami. After visiting and providing immediate relief supplies to some communities in Krabi and Phang Nga, the team went to an area in the Takuapa District of Phang Nga, called Tambon Khuk Kak. This is where Khao Lak and Ban Nam Khem are located, two areas severely damaged by the tsunami. A Lutheran church under the CCT near there was the team's point of reference. They met with government officials, met with local leaders, interviewed community members and had many discussions over several days.

The community around the Children's Centre of Khuk Kak is inhabited by a minority people called the Moken (a group of the Chao Lay or sea gypsies that make a living off the sea and prefer to be called the Thai Mai people group) (63 families) as well as another 36 Thai families who have lived together in the same community. Forty people were killed in this community and much damage was done. Most of the homes were severely damaged or destroyed while the people's fishing livelihood was also essentially destroyed. The government has built a series of ten temporary shelters that can house up to ten families each. Food and water and other basic necessities have been

provided. However, most of the families were without kitchen utensils and stoves when the CCT team was there. Therefore the CCT contributed by providing stoves and cooking kits for each family. Other items were purchased, particularly to assist the Thai Mai families because they appeared to be greater need and receiving less attention.

The CCT representatives recommended that the CCT establish a long-term presence in the community to provide assistance in moral support through counselling and friendship, rebuilding homes, scholarships for children, and vocational training and support.

The Thai government is planning to allocate 100–120,00 baht to build a house for each family that has lost a home. The houses will be constructed in the next three months. Each family will be given a choice of three different designs to select from. The houses will be built in three different sites throughout the District of Takuapa. Unfortunately the homes affected were in many more than three villages. Therefore, many families will be required to move in order to receive a new home. The Thai Mai people are one group who appear to have to move. The land they are living on now is considered prime land for tourism and development. Indications are that the Thai Mai people are likely to suffer abuse of their rights due to the high interest in the land they are occupying. The assessment team from the CCT highly recom-

mends that CCT work amongst these people to help them to protect their rights.

A group of 70 volunteer pastors and elders enrolled in a short course in January on trauma counselling. The plan is to disperse the team around to various communities to be available to provide counselling and support for families affected by the disaster.

The CCT has appointed a new permanent committee to direct the tsunami relief response of the church in the south. The new committee will likely move the operations centre from Nakorn Srithamarat to Trang. Trang is closer to the area that was affected and is the location of the District 17 church of the CCT. CCT will:

- establish a working committee to develop and carry out a plan approved by the tsunami relief committee,
- assist in providing for immediate and long-term needs, especially the human rights needs of those specific groups that are at greatest risk of abuse, including the Thai Mai,
- plan to establish a home for children orphaned by the tsunami disaster, with the possible inclusion of a school,
- develop a coordination centre to allow volunteers from the CCT and international partners around the world to join in the CCT ministry in the south.

—*Sint Kimbanchandra, General Secretary, Church of Christ in Thailand*

Taiwan hospitals' response

Five Christian hospitals in Taiwan have established an aid team for tsunami relief. The Mennonite Christian Hospital in Hualien and the Lutheran-related Chia-yi Christian Hospital joined Mackay, Chang Hwa and Sinlau (Presbyterian) hospitals to respond to the tsunami. The first step was prayer and support activities, followed by the organisation of medical relief. Rev. Kho Thian-hian, chaplain at Sinlau,

said that a group of eight medical professionals was awaiting the return of a governmental survey team before setting out. Others among the hospitals were similarly prepared. He said that approximately 150 doctors across Taiwan were prepared to engage in relief work. Huang Chun-hiong, superintendent of Mackay Memorial Hospital, said that when word of the rescue effort came to his office a group came together for prayer. They then

published a letter to all staff asking for volunteers. 'Mackay will be in the middle of the rescue and relief effort.'

Chia Yi Christian Hospital and the Mennonite Hospital each dispatched teams to Indonesia on 3 January. Chia Yi sent three doctors and four nurses, and the Mennonites one doctor and four nurses.

—*Yang Shu-bao. Translated and rewritten by David Alexander*

The Christmas Bowl

The Christmas Bowl is a program of Christian World Service, which is a commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia. It began with Frank Byatt in 1949. He had an idea to place a bowl on the table Christmas Day to remind us that many of God's people suffer as a result of poverty, war, lack of education and health and lack of equality and empowerment.

One day after Christians in Australia contributed to the Christmas Bowl the terrible tsunami hit. The government and people of Australia responded by giving huge amounts to Asian governments and aid organisations, including the Christmas Bowl.

In for the long haul

The Christmas Bowl program of the NCCA and partners in Sri Lanka and India have agreed they will be working together for the healing of people and the reconstruction of infrastructure for the next decade.

Volunteers from the Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OfERR), based in India and Sri Lanka, have fanned out to meet with organisations and individuals in order to assist people affected by the tsunami. The initial priority areas in the proposed action plan included identification and management of hazards on return to home areas, ensuring drinking water quality and food safety, sanitation and hygiene, managing dead animals and debris, ongoing provision of supplies, prevention and management of diseases such as chicken pox, measles, typhoid, malaria, respiratory infections, addressing special needs of children, disabled and older people and safety of workers.

The chair of OfERR, S.C. Chandrahasan, said: 'We thank our partners for their messages of concern and support received in the wake of this massive tragedy.'

Within hours of the tsunami disaster the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka (NCCSL) began purchasing emergency supplies and local congregations of the Anglican, Methodist and Church of South India took charge of distribution to affected families.

Assisted by an initial grant of \$50,000 from Action by Churches Together Interna-



tional (ACT), trucks with emergency supplies of food, clothing, water, water tanks, medicines and cooking pots, went to all communities on the eastern and southern coasts.

A core committee of church leaders is helping to plan the response and is working with government agencies to better coordinate efforts. Thousands of land mines have been washed loose. With over 1,000 km of coastline laid waste, employment in the tourist and fishing sectors will take years to recover.

The new General Secretary of the NCCSL, the Rev. Jayasiri Peiris, said: 'We've got to do more than rebuild buildings. We've got to rebuild a people who have been left traumatised by this disaster. That's a process that's going to take years and years.'

In India the churches have responded similarly. The Director of the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), Sushant Agrawal, said, 'Bringing relief by distributing material aid is only one way of addressing the needs of people. They also need trauma counselling—and we are trying to assist them in this way as well. We want to give people hope and strength for the future. We and our partners will do everything to relieve their lives.'

Given the enormity of people's losses of those they loved, he continued, 'Whatever we give them, no matter how much, it can never be enough.'

Faith communities cooperate in tsunami relief

The appeal for tsunami relief in Australia is being conducted on a multifaith basis. Re. Prof. James Haire, President of the National Council of Churches in Australia, said, 'In this time of great suffering and need in Asia, this multifaith appeal is an expression of the importance of cooperation and consultation between faith communities, in the collection and distribution of aid.'

He added, 'Cooperation between the faith communities is strong in Australia.'

The participating organisations are the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils, the Hindu Council of Australia and the National Council of Churches in Australia

Funds will be channelled through aid agencies either connected with, or chosen by, each of the five organisations.

The money will be distributed according to need.

The sea that came to see us

A close encounter with the tsunami

The bus from Bangalore reached the pilgrim centre, Velankanni, at around 9 am on 26 December. The nearly 12-hour journey was quite an uncomfortable experience for us. The first thing my wife, son and I wanted to do as soon as the bus stopped in front of the Golden Sand Hotel was to rush to reception to check in to relax and freshen up.

As I was entering our names and address at the hotel register, some women staff of the hotel came rushing inside sobbing, trying to tell us that the seawater was rushing into the town. The men at the reception made fun of them, saying, 'These silly women, they always exaggerate when something minor happens here.'

Outside the hotel, we could see much panic and confusion as people started running in one direction yelling that big waves had hit the beach and hundreds had been washed away. They were asking people to run for their life.

I decided to go out and see what was happening. To my horror I saw seawater gushing in, inside the hotel. I ran back to the reception and almost grabbed the room key from the man at the reception. I asked my wife and son to run towards the room, which was on the ground floor, some 50 feet away from where we were. As the water chased us, we ran faster and got inside the room. From the room we saw that the water had stopped some 10 feet away. We were ready to go upstairs to the first or second floor of the building if the water came any further.

Some of the cars and vehicles that were parked inside the Golden Sand, located 2 km from the beach, stood half submerged in the water. By that time, a crowd had gathered in the premises of the hotel, and everyone was waiting and watching anxiously whether the water would rise, and if so what to do next. Some men who had come there from Kerala could be heard telling their wives and other family members, watching the scene from the

second and third floors of the hotel, to get inside their rooms and to start praying.

There was no electricity. The phones were dead. Even the mobile phones were not connecting. After trying many times, I was able to contact my sister and mother in Kerala to tell them we were safe. The relatives and friends who knew we had gone to Velankanni had started making frantic calls there to know our whereabouts.

We began to feel that the only way to get out of Velankanni was to wade through the muddy and dark seawater and then look for transport. We were in two minds whether to leave immediately or to stay on for some more time for the water to recede. The bus that brought us had already gone.

Those were moments of great anxiety and tension. To make matters worse, there were the usual rumours doing the rounds. Among them was that of another massive tidal wave hitting the town around 5 in the evening and so people should leave the place soon. People who had their own vehicles were getting ready to leave. People who came by public transport like us were at a loss to decide what to do. We had not unpacked our bags except to take out our toiletries. We were mentally prepared to leave any moment. As the three of us were sitting outside the hotel room not knowing what to do, an employee of the hotel, who also doubled as a driver, came to us and offered to drop us outside the hotel premises so that we could avoid getting wet up to our hips. So around 2 in the afternoon, we found ourselves in a jeep usually used only to transport goods. Halfway through one of tyres of the jeep punctured, but that did not deter the driver from going ahead.

On the way, we could see dead bodies being piled up in a health centre. By that time, news had spread that hundreds of people standing on the beach and nearby in the morning were washed away or were missing. We also saw kitchen utensils, gas cylinders

and household items floating in the water. I heard some people saying they saw snakes in the water. We felt relieved we had escaped walking in the water.

It took us 15 minutes to reach the place where we thought we could get some transport to get back home. There were tens of thousands of people, young and old, waiting for anything that could take them to safer places. But, that was not to be. There was no public or private transport available. The few private cars were jam-packed.

We realised that waiting there was going to be an exercise in futility, and so we decided to walk. The only encouraging thing was that we were not alone in doing that. Hordes of people were already moving on foot to reach the next town, hoping that there will be some mode of transport available to take them to their destination.

We walked for about 20 km with our luggage, providentially not very heavy. The weather was quite pleasant and there was a cool breeze blowing. But the sight of so many elderly men and women and young children walking such a long distance was upsetting. I walked with a great deal of disappointment and sadness. I felt bad that our short holiday, which we wanted to spend in Velankanni and later in the coastal town of Pondicherry, was ending in a fiasco.

My wife and 15-year-old son had no complaints. They rose to the occasion and tried to keep my spirits up. My son joked, 'We couldn't go to the sea in Velankanni, but the sea came to see us.'

When we reached the main junction of the town after about three hours of walking, what was waiting for us there was distressing. Being a Sunday, no shops were open. We were worried because our stock of drinking water was getting depleted.

The few buses that were coming and going didn't have space for even a needle. As we were standing in the midst of all those people, feeling helpless, a three-member

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family, whom we had seen during the 20 km walk, came to us and said if we walked in a particular direction we might find some taxis. We decided to continue walking.

As we trudged along, we saw a three-wheeler (auto rickshaw) coming our opposite direction. We flagged it. The driver agreed to take us in his vehicle, meant for only three, to the next bigger town, but for a price. I tried to bargain with him for a reasonable fare, but he would not budge. Of course, we knew it was not the time for bargaining. So, we agreed, and began a nearly one-hour journey packed in the tiny three wheeler like sardines.

I cannot remember the name of the town we reached. But it was a big town and it was business as usual there. No-one seemed to know what was happening in the neighbouring towns and villages.

After helping the other family of three get tickets in a luxury bus to go to Chennai, an overnight journey from there, we got into a taxi and embarked on a nearly five-hour trip, which took us to a place called Trichy, the second largest city in Tamil Nadu. It was past 11 o'clock when we reached there, but we managed to get a room in a hotel.

We had our dinner in the hotel restaurant. We switched on the TV before retiring. What we saw on the news channels sent shivers down our spines. It had taken more than 12 hours for us to find out exactly what had happened in Velankanni, and what the tsunami did to the coastal regions of many Asian countries.

The east coast town of Velankanni, 350 km south of Chennai, is where the Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health stands. The place teems with thousands of pilgrims

throughout the year. Velankanni, in the Nagapattinam district, was one of the worst tsunami-hit places in India. Thousands of people perished there. Many of them were worshippers who had come out of the church, situated very close to the beach, after the morning service on that fateful day.

The church, situated on an elevated place, was not damaged, but many shops and properties in the vicinity of the church were destroyed.

If the bus had reached Velankanni a couple of hours before 9 am, we also would have found ourselves on the beach.

I asked Jaisy and Michael what they would have done then. 'We would have held on to a coconut tree,' my son said.

Well, actually, there are hardly any coconut trees on the Velankanni beach.

—Philip Mathew

Action plan in India

The role of local government in relief and rehabilitation work

The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), Delhi, organised, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), a meeting of the presidents of village, block and district panchayats (village councils in India) of 23 tsunami-affected districts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, at the Madras School of Social Work, Chennai, on 29 January 2005. More than 100 presidents of the panchayats deliberated on, among other things, the involvement and role of local government in relief and rehabilitation work currently under way and the formulation of comprehensive programs for local governments to avoid and mitigate the sufferings of the people during such tragedies in future.

They discussed and approved the following action plan to empower the Panchayati Raj Institutions, enabling it to play an effective role during the tragedies such as the one that befell on 26 December 2004, taking a toll of thousands of lives and depriving

the survivors of their means of livelihood, maiming children and others and devastating infrastructure.

The action plan reflects the deliberations at the meeting and the responses of the elected panchayat presidents solicited by the Institute of Social Sciences in a 10-point questionnaire. The view that emerged was that the elected local government representatives were totally ignored by government agencies in managing the crisis. Panchayats and municipalities, despite being envisaged by the constitution as the institutions of self-government, were kept on the margins. The emerging consensus was that the involvement of panchayats would go a long way in ensuring effectiveness, greater transparency and accountability in the utilisation of relief and rehabilitation of funds. The participants emphasised that the tsunami has woken up the system to the urgency of empowering and strengthening local government bodies. The value of local knowledge and experience was underlined by everyone.

Involvement of the third tier government

Along with union and state governments, panchayats and municipalities, which are democratically and constitutionally elected bodies, should be involved in all relief and rehabilitation activities. Special programs under Articles 243 G and 243 W must take the panchayats into confidence on issues like livelihood, development and civic services.

Disaster management

Disaster management should be included as one of the responsibilities of the local government institutions. A disaster management plan at each panchayat/municipality level should be formulated with the active involvement of panchayats and municipalities as they are well aware of local conditions and local needs than any other agencies. The government in consultation with the panchayats must spell out rehabilitation policy taking into account the specific needs and requirements of the affected people. There

is need for a mapping up of populations who are more vulnerable to natural and human-made disasters in consultation with panchayats/municipalities.

Disaster management volunteers

At panchayat/municipal level, disaster management volunteers should be formed to carry out rescue operations, first aid, shelter management, water and sanitation, dead body disposal functions, providing basic services etc. The volunteers could be organised as teams and trained to upgrade skills.

Networking and linking of panchayat and municipality with other agencies in the disaster management operations

The first casualty in a disaster situation is normally the communication network. Therefore, panchayat/municipalities have to set up a reliable communication and information network, interconnecting national emergency operation centres, state and district emergency operation centres. Use of ham radio should be promoted at the village level. In general panchayat/municipalities should be networked and linked with other agencies being involved in relief operations.

Proper assessment of the loss of life and property

An important activity of tsunami relief operations is the proper assessment of the loss of life and property. Panchayats/municipalities should be involved in this activity as they are having thorough knowledge of the ground realities and the close association and proximity with the people. The required training for this task should be provided.

Sustainable and cost-effective relief development activities

The losses due to natural disasters reduce the pace of sustained economic development in the already resource scarce states and often lead to a heavy drain on available resources, diverting them from development activities.

It is necessary to move away from the relief mode after a disaster to preparedness, prevention and mitigation, as this will be more cost-effective and sustainable. This can be implemented through a massive campaign

by mobilising the participation of local communities, voluntary organisations, community-based organisations and the private sector. Similarly with involvement of communities, mitigation plans could be formulated. In this effort, panchayats/municipalities should play a leading role as the mitigation plan will have to be addressed through the local development plans.

Grama sabha

The role of grama sabha (village council) has to be emphasised in matters related to decisions regarding technology, cost, location, infrastructure planning and beneficiary identification. The issues of accountability and transparency need to be addressed through grama sabhas. Every panchayat must have a bulletin board with the names and addresses of victims as well as details of the assistance given in cash and kind, if possible with the source.

Separate schemes for women through local governments

As women are the worst affected, especially due to the loss of children and scarcity of basic services, there should be a separate scheme (including psychiatric and coun-

selling centres) for women and children through the local government bodies. Women should be given the freedom to handle local situations according to their best knowledge without imposing foreign models. Their ideas and plans should be given utmost priority. Women's self-help groups should be given responsibilities in consultation with the panchayats.

Capacity building of local governments in disaster management and prevention

Adequate resources should be provided to the panchayats/municipalities to build up their capacity to deal with natural disasters, both disaster management and prevention. Expertise/training should be given to them in the areas of early warning, first aid, rescue operations, evacuation, health management and food security.

Sensitising and training of panchayat and municipality members on disaster management will have to be promoted and capacity for the same should be institutionalised in the existing institutional framework in the states. Training modules for this should be developed immediately.

—Jacob John



The tsunami has had a devastating effect on the lives of millions

What is a tsunami?

A tsunami (pronounced tsoo-nah-mee) is a series of waves, generated in a body of water by an impulsive disturbance that vertically displaces the water column. Earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions, explosions and even the impact of cosmic bodies, such as meteorites, can generate tsunamis. Tsunamis can savagely attack coastlines, causing devastating property damage and loss of life.

What does 'tsunami' mean?

Tsunami is a Japanese word with the English translation 'harbour wave'. 'Tsu,' means harbour, 'nami,' means 'wave.' In the past, tsunamis were sometimes referred to as 'tidal waves' by the general public and as 'seismic sea waves' by the scientific community. The term 'tidal wave' is a misnomer, although a tsunami's impact upon a coastline is dependent on the tidal level at the time a tsunami strikes, tsunamis are unrelated to the tides. Tides result from the imbalanced, extraterrestrial, gravitational influences of the moon, sun, and planets. The term 'seismic sea wave' is also misleading. 'Seismic' implies an earthquake-related generation mechanism, but a tsunami can also be caused by a nonseismic event, such as a landslide or meteorite impact.

How do earthquakes generate tsunamis?

Tsunamis can be generated when the sea floor abruptly deforms and vertically displaces the overlying water. Tectonic earthquakes are a particular kind of earthquake that are associated with the earth's crustal deformation; when these earthquakes occur beneath the sea, the water above the deformed area is displaced from its equilibrium position. Waves are formed as the displaced water mass, which acts under the influence of gravity, attempts to regain its equilibrium. When large areas of the sea floor elevate or subside, a tsunami can be created. Large vertical movements of the earth's crust can occur at plate boundaries. Plates interact along these boundaries called faults. Around the margins of the Pacific Ocean, for example, denser oceanic plates slip under continental plates in a process known as subduction. Subduction earthquakes are particularly effective in generating tsunamis.

How do landslides, volcanic eruptions, and cosmic collisions generate tsunamis?

A tsunami can be generated by any disturbance that displaces a large water mass from its equilibrium position. In the case of earthquakes-generated tsunamis, the water column is disturbed by the uplift or subsidence of the sea floor. Submarine landslides, which often accompany large earthquakes, as well as collapses of volcanic edifices, can also disturb the overlying water column

as sediment and rock slump downslope and are redistributed across the sea floor. Similarly, a violent submarine volcanic eruption can create an impulsive force that uplifts the water column and generates a tsunami. Conversely, supermarine landslides and cosmic-body impacts disturb the water from above, as momentum from falling debris is transferred to the water into which the debris falls. Generally speaking, tsunamis generated from these mechanisms, unlike the Pacific-wide tsunamis caused by some earthquakes, dissipate quickly and rarely affect coastlines distant from the source area.

What happens to a tsunami as it approaches land?

As a tsunami leaves the deep water of the open ocean and travels into the shallow water near the coast, it transforms. A tsunami travels at a speed that is related to the water depth—hence, as the water depth decreases, the tsunami slows. The tsunami's energy flux, which is dependent on both its wave speed and wave height, remains nearly constant. Consequently, as the tsunami's speed diminishes as it travels into shallow water, its height grows. Because of this shoaling effect, a tsunami, imperceptible at sea, may grow to be several meters or more in height near the coast. When it finally reaches the coast, a tsunami may appear as a rapidly rising or falling tide, a series of breaking waves, or even a bore.

What happens when a tsunami encounters land?

As a tsunami approaches shore, we've learned in the 'What happens to a tsunami as it approaches land?' section that it begins to show and grow in height. Just like other water waves, tsunamis begin to lose energy as they rush onshore—part of the wave energy is reflected offshore, while the shoreward-propagating wave energy is dissipated through bottom friction and turbulence. Despite these losses, tsunamis still reach the coast with tremendous amounts of energy. Tsunamis have great erosional potential, stripping beaches of sand that may have taken years to accumulate and undermining trees and other coastal vegetation. Capable of inundating, or flooding, hundreds of meters inland past the typical high-water level, the fast-moving water associated with the inundating tsunami can crush homes and other coastal structures. Tsunamis may reach a maximum vertical height onshore above sea level, often called a run up height, of 10, 20 and even 30 meters.

Past tsunamis

- 1994 Mindoro
- 1993 Hokkaido
- 1996 Peru
- 1994 Kuril
- 1992 Flores
- 1998 Papua New Guinea
- 1994 East Java
- 1992 Nicaragua

Bandung spirit revisited

Listening to the voice of Afro-Asian people

Since the end of the Second World War II, the voice of Afro-Asia has played a significant role in most global conferences, in society and in the church. On 18–24 April 1955, the Afro-Asia conference took place in Bandung, Indonesia, and became the foundation of Afro-Asian solidarity at all levels. U Kyaw Than, former general secretary of East Asia Christian Conference, stated that the Afro-Asian spirit had inspired the first Asia Christian meeting in Prapat in Sumatra, Indonesia, to establish the first regional ecumenical organisation in 1957. U Kyaw Than also mentioned EACC's role in the formation of the All Africa conference of Churches.

On 15–19 November 2004 WCC-CWME organised an Afro-Asian mission conference, 'Called in Christ To Be Healing and Reconciling Communities', at the Ecumenical Christian Centre in Bangalore, India. About 60 people from Asia, Africa and the Pacific participated. Using this occasion, on 16 November 2004 Urban Rural Mission in India, in cooperation with CCA-FMU invited the participants to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Bandung, and about a hundred people attended.

Josef P. Widyatmadja, from CCA, in his opening remarks mentioned that Afro-Asian solidarity and friendship is rooted in the history of African and Asian people. This solidarity and friendship is based on freedom, mutual respect and recognition, not on conquest, slavery, occupation or colonialism. Author Gavin Menzies has noted that when Columbus came to the American continent, and Vasco da Gama came to the Cape of Good Hope, they took land and took native people to be slaves. But fifty years before the voyage of Columbus and Vasco da Gama, Zhenghe, an admiral of the Ming dynasty from China (1421) had reached Africa and other Asian countries. He did not enslave people or occupy any land. Instead Zhenghe promoted technology, culture and trade. Free and fair

trade between Africa and Asia came about through the Silk Road.

Fr Kwami Labi, executive secretary of WCC-URM, reiterated the need for Asia and Africa to work together in renewing mission thinking and practice as in the Accra Declaration 2004: 'Humanity is faced with institutionalised oppression, systematic violence, occupation and militarisation, marginalisation, and socioeconomic deprivation and exclusion ... Mission begins with raising our prophetic voice to expose and condemn the capitalist-led globalised context and its new geopolitical realities that intentionally destroy human community.'

A third speaker, M.A. Siraj, noted that colonial rule has ended but not the colonial mindset. Science and technology have given birth to a neocolonialism that grows daily. The nonaligned movement has been eclipsed by a violence that continues unabated as the world is terrorised in the name of the 'War on Terror'. At this point we understand the relevance of peace and solidarity in Asia and

Africa and the world at large and need to rekindle the spirit of Bandung. Islam, being the faith of a large number of people in the two continents, could play a major role. The word 'Islam' itself means peace, obedience, servitude to God (Allah). The term 'Assalamu alaikum', which Muslims use to greet others, literally means, 'Peace be upon you.'

CCA-FMU has conducted several conferences on the Spirit of Bandung since 2002. Two major conferences were organised on 'Asia Africa beyond Globalisation' in Bandung, Indonesia, in 2002, and 'Building Spirituality and Culture of Peace' in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

On 11–15 April 2005 CCA-FMU in cooperation with local groups from Indonesia will jointly celebrate the 50th anniversary with 'The Spirit of Bandung: Towards a Common Future Rooted in the Aspiration of People'. Participants from Asia and Africa will articulate and revise the Bandung spirit from the perspective of the processes of globalisation.



At the Afro-Asian Mission Conference in Bangalore: Kwami Labi, Josef Widyatmadja and M.A. Siraj

Decade to Overcome Violence

Churches seeking reconciliation and peace

Churches seeking reconciliation and peace: this is what the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) is all about. The church as the body of Christ in the world is entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. No less than that. The World Council of Churches was called into existence to pursue this ministry, and to build visible unity, for how can the church be reconciling when it is not reconciled as a body?

Violence however is part of the human story. Anthropologists say that violence had a constituting and preserving function in early societies. Be that as it may, there is general agreement that today violence has got out of hand. The lines between legitimate and illegitimate violence are blurred and the means of violence are horrendous to the degree that humankind can destroy itself. Violence is prevalent, so much so that we have all become accustomed to its daily face. Violence is about the destruction, elimination or annihilation of the enemy, be it a potential, imagined or actual enemy. But violence is also about power and control, profit and entertainment. In the popular view as in nations, violence is supposed to provide protection and thus security. The evidence however leaves considerable doubt as to whether one can trust violence for security. And very obviously violence is not fit for resolving conflict. One of the problems with conflict is that it is being perceived as being intrinsically and unavoidably violent. The confusion between conflict and violence—fuelled by the media's interchangeable use of the two terms—makes matters more difficult. The Decade to Overcome Violence has no intention to do away with conflict. Rather it hopes we will learn to deal with conflict creatively and constructively.



Understanding violence

Understanding violence is an essential step if we set out to overcome it. Not understanding what is going on ensures people are trapped in the grips of violence—just as it was when Jesus was crucified. His prayer, 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,' is pertinent today. Once people understand the roots, the spiral and the consequences of violence, the way is made straight for non-violence.

The World Health Assembly's Resolution 49/25 declares violence prevention a public health priority. This affirms the prophetic vision churches from around the world had when they called for a Decade to Overcome Violence. But a closer look at the reality of violence takes us quickly beyond some stereotypical ideas, for example that armed conflict or terrorism is the major cause of violent death.

In its World Report on Health and Violence the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 1.6 million people lost their lives to violence in 2000. About half were suicides, one-third were homicides and one-

fifth were casualties of armed conflict. The WHO differentiates between self-inflicted violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence.

Violence can have a host of causes, whether it is self-inflicted, interpersonal or collective. The nature of violence also varies: physical, psychological, sexual and deprivation or neglect.

Churches talk much about the interconnectedness of peace and justice. Violence is not simply the opposite of peace, just as the absence of violence does not mean peace. Violence at its core is injustice—both to the victim and to the offender. It dehumanises both, diminishes their dignity and blocks the way to creative and constructive alternatives.

But violence is no accident, it is learned—just as peace can be learned. Violent behaviour is being passed on from generation to generation, from top to bottom, from incident to incident.

And generally violence increases with each round.

Themes and goals of the DOV

Against this reality the DOV has been given four themes:

- The spirit and logic of violence.
- The use, abuse and misuse of power.
- Issues of justice.
- Religious identity and plurality.

These themes are based on the aims of the DOV as approved by the WCC's Central Committee in 1999:

- Addressing holistically the **wide varieties of violence**, both direct and structural, in homes, communities and international arenas, and learning from the local and regional analysis of violence and ways to overcome violence.

- Challenging the churches to **overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence**, to relinquish any theological justification of violence and to affirm anew the spirituality of reconciliation and active nonviolence.
- Creating a **new understanding of security** in terms of cooperation and community, instead of in terms of domination and competition.
- Learning from the **spirituality and resources for peacebuilding of other faiths** to work with communities of other faiths in the pursuit of peace, and to reflect on the issue of religious and ethnic identities in pluralistic societies.
- Challenging the **growing militarisation** of our world, especially the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

While the Decade is not modest in its motto, it is not claiming to eradicate violence. Violence can be overcome, as Jesus demonstrated, even in succumbing to it.

The means of the Decade to Overcome Violence

It is in the hands of the churches to give substance to the DOV. It places itself within the larger context of the Decade for a Culture

of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, declared by the United Nations for the same period, 2001–2010. The motto on the website of UNESCO, in charge of the Decade on behalf of the UN reads, 'Peace is in our hands.' Christians know peace is a gift and a responsibility, as the general secretaries of the national councils of churches in Asia stated in their September 2004 meeting.

Some of the means by which the World Council of Churches promotes the DOV include:

- Study and reflection—see the study guide 'Why Violence? Why Not Peace?'
- The annual DOV focus.
- The International Day of Prayer for Peace on 21 September.
- Specific campaigns such as 'On the Wings of a Dove' or EAPPI.
- The DOV web site: www.overcomingviolence.org.

The annual focus

As the annual focus of the DOV comes to Asia in 2005, churches in Asia have many possibilities to be part of DOV, to increase their cooperation and to share with sisters and brothers from around the world.

The annual focus aims at expressing solidarity with churches in the region, increasing mutual understanding for each other, and highlighting and celebrating ongoing work for peace and justice. Although it belongs to the churches in the region to give shape and content, the World Council of Churches offers some modest instruments for supporting the focus:

- Specific Internet resources such as a regional events calendar.
- 'Blessed are the peacemakers' award.
- 'Witnesses for Peace' display.
- Retreat for WCC scholars in the region.
- 'Living letters' delegations.

In 2004, the annual focus

was on the United States of America, with the theme 'The Power and Promise of Peace'. In 2003 it was on Sudan: 'Healing and Reconciliation', and the focus in 2002 was the campaign to 'End the Illegal Occupation of Israel and Palestine'. This one gave birth to the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). These experiences have shown that churches in a region or country have their strengths, priorities and challenges to bring into a focus. The focus is an opportunity to grow together, find new ways of cooperating and bring new partners into the fellowship. The theme for 2005, 'Building Communities of Peace for All' is timely and pertinent. Community is fundamental in peacemaking. The spirit and logic of violence destroys community without anyone being actually killed or injured. A community of peace on the other hand heals wounds and prevents violence.

2005 however is not only the year of the focus on Asia. It is also the mid-term of the Decade. Time to take stock and ask, 'What have we done so far? What have we learned and what do we need to do and how, over the next few years?' The churches' commitment in overcoming violence and building peace with justice will not end with the Decade. Violence will still be as urgent an issue. The question is not how much violence there will still be, but rather, where will the churches be in their determination and commitment to overcome violence and seek peace and reconciliation?

The twelfth CCA General Assembly in early April 2005 will be the first of three major gatherings celebrating the DOV mid-term. The second one will be the gathering of the Conference for World Mission and Evangelism in Greece. The third event, launching the second half of the DOV, will be the ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil. At that time, in early 2006, the Annual Focus will be on Latin America. Our joint commitment in overcoming violence is part of the fulfilment of our prayer, 'God, in your grace, transform the world.' May the churches hear what the Spirit is saying and may the Holy Spirit fill our hearts as together we seek reconciliation and peace.

—Hansulrich Gerber



Peace for Life

Sowing seeds of peace in the era of empire: Christians in solidarity with Muslims

A call to solidarity and action

Keeping the 2002 Manila Covenant alive, we, people of faith from nineteen countries, mostly of the global South—Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Latin America, Africa—along with those from North America and Europe, come together in Davao City, Philippines, from 28 November to 4 December 2004, to inaugurate Peace for Life, a people's forum and interfaith peace movement for life and justice.

Our meeting in Davao City presents itself in a moment of *kairos*, when events in our midst impel us to delve deep into the imperatives of our faith, when concern for the victims requires the necessity to act and take sides. It marks a critical step towards building people's solidarity and mobilising faith-based resistance to the empire's war on terror and destructive forces of corporate globalisation. We join together to call on people of all faiths and convictions to speak out and rise up against the violence, fear, and greed that drive empire.

By 'empire' we mean the combined economic, military, political and cultural domination by a powerful state, assisted by satellite states and aided by local elites of dominated countries, to advance its own interests on a global scale. US dominance (US\$400+ billion military spending per year and bases in over 150 countries) conjointly with transnational corporate power makes up the heart of today's empire.

Like past empires, today's empire has religious voices who claim war is God's will, who demonise Muslims and other groups that oppose empire, who criminalise peace-makers and who celebrate Pax Americana as the highest form of civilisation. We reject this misuse of faith. This is a sin against God and against our sisters and brothers. Like past empires, today's empire will not last. We call on people of faith to repent from worshipping the false gods of empire and war.

Solidarity with and among the peoples of Mindanao

We heard testimonies from Moros and Lumads, women and children who survived bombings, who were detained and tortured by the military and youths who refused to be cowed to silence. They are speaking out against increasing militarisation and oppression. We met with communities displaced by military violence who desire to return home but cannot yet. We met with small-scale miners and their families left with no options but to eke out a living in the midst of major health and environmental hazards. Now they may lose it all with the transnational corporations from the North coming to mine ores.

We, the participants of this conference, in solidarity with the tri-peoples of Mindanao—Moro, Lumad and marginalised migrant settlers—stand against the forces of war and militarised globalisation. We stand with farmers whose communities are about to be flooded by a large dam project. We have become aware of the legitimacy of the Bangsamoro struggle for the right to self-determination.

We are gravely concerned about the affliction that we have heard and seen. They are the faces of the victims of the resurgence of a new colonisation by the forces of empire. Sustained US war exercises and increased interference with the internal peace process heighten the menace they face, and a renewed influx of aid and corporate investment deepen the exploitation of Mindanao's patrimony and natural resources.

We celebrated with the tri-peoples of Mindanao who danced and sang and drummed their struggles for peace and justice in Mindanao.

We take strength from their determined resistance and stand in solidarity with them in saying no to corporate exploitation and no to the Philippine government's policy of an all-out war to impose corporate control over Mindanao peoples' land and resources.

The story of the people of Mindanao is the same story for many other people of the non-industrial South, pushed to the peripheries where no opportunities exist, untouched by economic programs, and unbenefited by development aid.



Participants from all parts of the globe at the people's forum

Christian-Muslim solidarity

The mighty have become more brazen, more arrogant in their exercise of power. The powerless and disenfranchised who cannot find any effective resistance to global hegemony and state terrorism have embraced the agents of privatised terror. Imperial occupation and subjugation is alive and well, bearing weapons of mass destruction and the modern-day evangelism of 'democracy', 'freedom', the free market and the global economy.

We are people of various faiths—Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus—who celebrate our common humanity and the universality of our spiritual heritage, who recognise that solidarity among people of all religions and convictions is necessary if we are to frustrate the certainty of an all-powerful empire and its wars of occupation and plunder. We are Christians whose faith teaches us the spirituality of resistance against those who arrogate power and use the scriptures to divide people according to religious beliefs and cultural practices. We gather to reclaim the progressive tradition of the world ecumenical movement. We are Muslims who believe that Islam is a religion of tolerance, compassion and peace, and we disapprove of the terrorist acts committed by the militant fringe within the community. Together, Christians and Muslims, we take an unequivocal stand against the empire.

Religious extremists/fundamentalists believe war is part of God's will and they have been chosen to impose 'God's will'. They exist on both sides of the current Christian-Muslim divide in the US war on terror. One of the gravest threats to people's security today is the merging of Christian religious extremism with the political, economic and military power of empire.

We call for an end to violence done in the name of religion and an end to intolerance. We call on people of all faiths and convictions to reject war; to reject fear-based, militarised national security; and to work for lasting peace grounded in justice.

Peace for Life: our common vision and principles

Peace for Life envisions a new world of peace with justice that embraces equality and the fullness of life for all. It embodies peoples

and communities, working in solidarity, who oppose the destructive forces of empire. As a movement for change, it derives its impetus from the global uprising for peace and the transformative force of faith. It is also a space for sharing cultural heritage, mutual support and reflection and a site of ongoing contestation and change. The shared stories of women and their discourse have sharpened our understanding of power and subjugation challenging us to forge diverse local and transnational coalitions. They have enriched our vision of peace based on radical egalitarianism, inclusivity and compassion. We strive for a new world nurtured by peoples upholding human dignity and human rights.

Peace for Life stands for:

- freedom from occupation by military forces in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq and anywhere,
 - gender justice and women's leadership in peacemaking at all levels,
 - the protection of religious, racial, ethnic minorities and other marginalised communities from all forms of discrimination, persecution and violence,
 - respect and the celebration of God's gift of diversity—each of our many cultures and religions contributes to the fullness of Peace for Life for all,
 - economic systems and financial institutions that place people and the environment before profits and in which decisions are made by those most affected,
 - food security for all,
 - the rights and wellbeing of children, who are most vulnerable to war and exploitation,
 - respect and recognition of the aspirations and efforts of self-determining peoples.
- We condemn and resist:
- the displacement of peoples from their lands and livelihoods by transnational corporations, large landowners and their use of military force,
 - the plunder of earth's resources and the exploitation of life forms by global corporations,
 - threats against indigenous peoples and their traditional lands and life ways,
 - the economic domination of capital that pushes wages and working conditions to lowest levels for the sake of profit,

- economic and political pressures through the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organisation over dependent and poor countries,
- all forms of commodification of people, including sex trafficking of women and children.

We say no:

- to war and to the continued development and use of weapons of mass destruction,
- to pre-emptive strikes, policies of unilateralism and national security that impose military bases, military exercises and increasingly repressive police and surveillance measures,
- to the violence of the armed against the unarmed, which devastates the lives of communities across the globe.

Our common call

We dare to live our hopes that a new world is not only possible but is already being built through people's movements, through solidarity among people of the South and the people of differing faiths and convictions, and through our common struggles to realise for all humanity and all creation peace for justice and life.

We call for vigilance in unmasking the deceptive and ever-changing face of globalisation and the empire. We urge people of all faiths and convictions to work in solidarity with one another on the following urgent calls:

- an immediate end to US domination and military occupation in Iraq,
- the permanent removal of US troops, bases and military exercises from Mindanao and other parts of the world,
- international solidarity for Mindanao (e.g. international fact-finding missions, an international people's tribunal).

Peace for Life stands with a variety of networks, alliances, and movements where the poor, deprived and marginalised play a central leadership role. We draw strength in sharing one another's grassroots stories and experiences to inspire, motivate, sustain and transform us in our struggle for just and lasting peace. We celebrate people's victories, however small, as moments that foster an ethic and spirituality for overcoming empire.

Energy and life

Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Gathering (ASYG) 2004

ASYG 2004 brought together nearly 135 participants for a fellowship of Christian youth and students in Asia during 7–14 December in Cipayung, Indonesia.

The ASYG 2004 was organised by the Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Network, or EASY Net.

Opening Worship

Students of the Theological Seminary in Jakarta and their choir group Cantoria led the gathering participants in an opening worship. The playing of traditional Indonesian drums, the di-ba, formally declared the gathering open.

Nam Boo Won, of YMCA Korea, and a former EASY Net core team member, led the community building.

The keynote address was presented by Max Ediger, from Documentation for Action Groups in Asia (DAGA) and the Centre for Just Peace, both based in Hong Kong.

Gender sensitivity workshop

The participants were divided into small groups for a gender sensitivity workshop. This provided the participants with an opportunity to examine the issue of gender as it affects different people, especially the participants, in their own countries and contexts. Through participants' sharing of their perspectives and experiences it was highlighted that gender orientation is 'taught' and passed through different social and cultural norms.

Exposure visits

Some participants went to a workers' community, people who are receiving very low wages and are not receiving any social benefits. Two groups went to a street children centre in Jakarta.

Other groups went to communities of victims of the 1998 riots that claimed the lives of eight children and whose families are still crying for justice. Other groups went to

farmers' community who are being evicted from the land by the government and big landlords. The last group went to a traditional village that is not being recognised by the government and has not been receiving any financial support from the government because of its policy to support a multireligious family lifestyle.

Meditation and faith reflection

Br John D'Cruz led the participants into a personal and spiritual journey in the evenings during the gathering. Bro John also left the participants with the following questions for their personal journeys after the ASYG:

- Do we have the ability and will to see beyond ourselves?
- Do we have the compassion to integrate the issues we heard and learn to our own issues?
- Are we ready to own the issues and concerns we heard and experience in this gathering?



International Human Rights Day

The participants dedicated a moment of silence and prayer to symbolically commemorate the International Human Rights Day. They wrote down names of victims of human rights violation in their country in memory of their unwavering commitment for justice and social change.

Indonesian night

The local organising committee, together with the STT Cantoria, played traditional Indonesian songs and dances. Some games were played to further introduce Indonesia to the participants. Several videos showing the beautiful scenery of Indonesia were also played. A special evening snack consisting of traditional delicacies and local fruits was also prepared. The night was crowned by community dancing.

Thematic workshops

The gathering consisted of four thematic workshops: peace and human security (led by Francis Lee), education and culture (John D'Cruz), globalisation and economic justice (Clarissa Balan) and ecumenism and inter-faith issues (Rakesh Peter Dass).

Open space

The participants were given the opportunity to plan and hold their own activity through the Open Space. YMCA and YWCA put up a booth showcasing materials and documents and present programs of their organisations. Some countries, such as Korea, the Philippines and Bangladesh, also put up booths to present their previous activities and souvenirs to be given away to the participants. Some participants organised workshops/discussions on women in the Bible, women fighting HIV/AIDS, hacienda luisita (a discussion on the plight of farm workers in the Philippines), US military presence in Asia-Pacific, environmental tourism and a men's caucus.

Synthesis

Nam Boo Wan led the participants into synthesising the several issues and processes that came out throughout the gathering. Some of these issues were poverty, unem-

ployment, economic globalisation and the resultant economic disparity between the rich and poor people, the rise of child labour, migrant workers and human trafficking of women and children, racial tension, and a consumerist mono culture, especially among the youth.

Global warming was also highlighted as a major ecological issue, linked to the wasteful consumption patterns of people and profit-driven global mass production. Important issues of concern also included human rights violations, which are directly linked to state violence, which takes the form of militarisation and military dictatorships. It was strongly noted that the global fear/threat of terrorism has led to the increase of military budgets and to the decrease of national budgets to major social services such as education and subsidies to agricultural sectors, who are primarily responsible in producing food for the world.

Closing worship

The closing worship symbolically closed the gathering through a presentation of 'ASYG Memories', which consisted of several photographs taken from the day the participants started to arrive, photos of the exposure visits, workshop discussions, plenary and

some photos of lighter funnier moments. As a gesture of the light which the world needs, participants lit candles and put them on the site of their countries in a map placed at the centre of the worship altar.

The candles signified the participants' commitments to carry on the learnings and to continue working for peace in their own countries and local communities.

Finally, the participants gave each other a blessing.

Cultural night

The participants, making groups according to their nationalities, performed their traditional songs, dances, games and artistry to be shared with the rest of the participants. Some countries also shared glimpses of their history and struggles through skits.

The cultural night concluded the ASYG 2004 on a note of celebration, dancing and joy. It also ended on a note of energy and vivaciousness symbolised in the young, energy and life for the goal that these youth leaders from across the Asia Pacific region had taken upon themselves to dedicate their lives to—peace.

A detailed report of ASYG 2004 will be published soon.



Participants of ASYG on an exposure trip

Building bridges for peace

The NCCA Gender Commission

The Gender Commission (GC) of the National Council of Churches in Australia began in 2001, growing out of the original Network on Women and Gender Relationships formed in 1996. Early difficulties were experienced in defining its role, forming an acceptable mandate and a lack of funding. These problems were slowly overcome and the launch of its mandate in 2003 at a function room in the state Parliament House in Sydney was a time of rejoicing. The guest speaker on that occasion was the first indigenous member of the state parliament, Linda Burnley. She made GC aware of the need for leadership training among young indigenous women, and during 2004 a gathering was organised by the youth component of NCCA that included leadership training as part of its program.

These are years of struggle as the commission encourages a woman's voice and perspective where previously there was none, or was minimal. Being alert to the need for inclusivity requires a watchful attitude by each individual member, then discussion and action to promote it in the right way. As a 'gender' group, it is well aware that sometimes there is a need for male inclusion. There are no male members at present! GC also values the diversity existing in the various denominations and encourages understanding and respect for the differing theology that forms these churches.

Areas of concern, while many, look to women's needs in theological education, in indigenous societies, in an interfaith context, in other Asian countries (the first representatives attended a consultation on violence against women and children in Manila in 2004) and other national and state women's organisations. A current joint project is making prayer flags with the state ecumenical women. These flags will be hung at women's events.

GC (as the former network) first produced a comprehensive booklet listing wom-

en's church organisations across the country. This was closely followed by a one-day seminar looking at the questions of violence and the churches' attitude to war—before the DOV campaign brought the issue to the forefront. GC was successful in gaining funding of A\$10,000, subsequently used in the DOV campaign office.

The idea for a joint venture of churches to consult on the subject of sexual misconduct came from GC and was then successfully taken up by the national executive. A separate committee is active in this area, and GC will maintain an ongoing interest. On the launching date for the White Ribbon Campaign GC held an interfaith forum, where four Sydney-based Muslim women were interviewed by a Christian. This was an eye-opener to many and encouraged an open door for future bridge-building exercises with Muslims. This link can only be strengthened by the reac-

tion to the recent tsunami horror, which had no regard for creed or colour, and which impacted on the world in an unprecedented way.

Nine member churches have representatives on the Gender Commission, and informing and encouraging them to play an active part is a current need if it is to gain from these varying voices and function most effectively. A part-time secretary in the central NCCA office for better coordination with the parent body is required.

A final summary from the Gender Commission's mandate: 'The Commission will continue to act like Jesus with wholeness and dignity in its decision making and in its task of dialogue, leading to action for education, justice and equality within and between churches.'

—*Alicia Simpfendorfer and Bernice Moore (joint coordinators)*



Christians interview Muslim women at an interfaith forum in Sydney

Oikoumene vision in the Lord's Prayer

M.J. Joseph

Let me begin with a gossip. A religious teacher asked her fifth graders to write down the Lord's prayer. A few excerpts:

Our Father who aren't in heaven
Hollow be thy name.
Give us this day our daily beard
And forgive us our dress passes
Let us forgive the kids!

The Lord's Prayer is the least offensive prayer said in ecumenical gatherings. The reason is that it is considered to be more ritualistic than sacramental!

The text in Matthew (Matthew 6:9–10) is longer than in Luke (Luke 11:1–4). In Matthew's version, God is addressed as 'Our Father'. Luke simply calls God 'Father', leaving out the 'our'. While Matthew uses the imperative form of *didomi* (*dos*) to make supplication for food, Luke uses *didou*, the present imperative form of the verb, to get the uninterrupted supply of food to all his children (*didou* could be translated as 'go on going'). The Matthean word 'debts' is replaced by 'sins' in Luke. However, both gospel writers agree on the basic vision of the prayer—bringing heaven upon the 'oikoumene' (earth). What is in heaven should happen on earth. Heaven has meaning only if it transforms the earth. What happens on earth creates joy in heaven. (Luke 15:7)

To make a joyful noise to the Lord, who is our Father, is a must. The psalmist makes us aware of the benevolence of God when he says, 'It is he that made us, we are his; we are his sheep, and the sheep of his pasture.' (Psalm 100:3) It is this awareness that makes the prayer ecumenical—that which is concerned with the whole inhabited earth. Heaven and earth are related to human need and relationship. Food and forgiveness are matters of survival. They find a place in the

life of the people in all places and ages. The care and protection of God is not confined to one continent. The concept of the world—as the *oikos* of God—makes sense when the physical as well as the spiritual needs of all people are understood in a broader framework.

'Our Father'—Father of all

God is addressed as 'Father'. Believers cannot exclude other people when they say the Lord's Prayer and address God as 'Our Father'. The prayer embraces the whole creation. (See the reference to 'earth' in the prayer.) What is the theological significance of the fatherhood of God? Why is this prayer ecumenical? The prayer speaks of the divine management of human affairs. (See also the meaning of the words *oikoumene*, *oikeo*, *oikos* etc. The Sanskrit verb, *grb*, means 'to hold together'.) How to hold things together in the name of God as Father? What is to happen on earth is a 'collective, corporate reality'. (See references to 'we', 'us', 'our'—nine times in the prayer.) Reference to God as Father in the High Priestly prayer (John 17) also alludes to the nature of God. The God of the Bible is a God in relationship. The reference to God as Father is not about the sexuality of the godhead, but of God's caring attitude. The world is not organised around Caesar, but under God, the Father.

The petition, 'Your kingdom come', implies three things:

- A celebration of a new sense of consciousness—God in our midst.
- A new sense of relationship among the family of God.
- A new norm of faith and praxis, rooted in love.

Sharing bread is an act of compassion in the oikoumene

Reference to 'bread' makes the prayer uni-

versal and the whole created order is also brought under it. Food is the substance of alienation. Twenty per cent of the people in the world consume 80 per cent of the world's resources. Food symbolises human dignity and 'human survival'. 'God is the giver of food and all other good things.' (Isaiah 6:9–13). Every kind of harvest is the gift of God in nature, which includes the sprouting of the seeds and the growing of plants. The Eucharistic prayer is a reminder of God's providential care, which is not limited to human beings. In the Eucharistic prayer the church expresses its thankfulness for all of God's benefits. It is indeed a 'sacrifice of praise'. The bread and wine—fruits of the earth and of human labour—are presented to God the Father in faith and thanksgiving. The world is to become 'an offering and hymn of praise to God'. It is nothing but the kingdom of justice, love and peace in the Holy Spirit. What is the ground reality today? What about market ethics? In a free market, there is no place for compassion and sympathy. Consumer values lead us to temptations of various kinds, e.g. conversion of agricultural lands to cash crops. Export-oriented agriculture is uncritically accepted. In Brazil soya beans are grown for export instead of black beans. In Kerala, paddy cultivation gives way to rubber plantation. Multinationals devour all kinds of indigenous sources! The nations of the world are encouraged to convert food money into the arms race. As market has never developed brotherhood or sisterhood, we should be quite aware of the designs of the 'evil ones'. 'Every gun that is made, every warship launched and every rocket fired signifies in a final sense a theft from those who are cold and are not clothed.' (Eisenhower) Market forces are violent, exploitative, manipulative and competitive. 'Man, if he is too rich in intellect, in emotion, in imagination, but too poor in love, runs the risk of becoming

a nothing, shadow of what man should be.' (Michal Quoist)

In a selfish world, God is pushed to the periphery. It should be remembered that 'Christian life is a continued assimilation of the mystery of the cross in the fight against individual and social selfishness'. (WCC document) When we pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' there is a universal groaning of the spirit for equitable distribution of wealth (food). 'Bread for me is a material problem, bread for my neighbour is a spiritual problem,' is a statement of secular spirituality.

To pray for daily bread implies a note of disciplined sharing. It can be rendered as 'give me the share (ration) which is due to me'. The inner stirring of the Spirit gives way to human need. We need to listen to the groaning of the Spirit from the cave of the heart as, 'Lord, let us not breathe with iron lungs, eat with robot hands, see with dead man's eyes; think with electronic brains, and feel with an engrafted double heart!' (Compare this with the norms for the last judgment in Matthew 25.) Compassion and concern are words of the human heart. That which is concerned with the cave of the heart transcends boundaries of any divide.

Forgiveness—fatherhood and brotherhood combined

The Lord's Prayer makes it mandatory for us to live in an authentic divine-human relationship. (See Ephesians 4:32.) As God's will is to build a fraternal (society) community on earth rooted in the reality of the cross, the message of reconciliation has abiding significance in the world. The world wants to speak the language of compassion and forgiveness (reconciliation).

Truth is bound up with true spirituality. An ecumenical spirituality is bound up with all that life offers. God's concern is not simply for judgment, but of healing and wholeness. The reign of God on earth is to blossom into a community of people, caring for nature, forgiving each other and praising God for the gift of divine providence in creation. In this respect, the Lord's Prayer speaks of an action plan for all.

Summing up

'God's glory and love are to become embodied in basic human realities like food and forgiveness; and they are to become an active force in our midst transforming life into something free and whole and secure.'

(Samuel Rayan) This is the message of incarnation. In the birth of Jesus, the cave is meant to become a cradle for all.

The vision of the magi is to become the quest for truth. In the Lord's Prayer, the call to abundant life is to remove all the barricades around God, and to learn the art of sharing the resources of the Father. In doing so, the church becomes the harbinger of good news through its ministry of peacemaking. 'The hands that touch are holier than the lips that speak.' (Mother Teresa)

The recital of the Lord's Prayer moves thus from the realm of creed, code and cult to the sphere of spirituality.

The spirituality of the Lord's Prayer is God in relationship with people. It is not how many times we recite the Lord's Prayer in worship, but to what extent does it read us and make our relationship humane in the *oikoumene*. 'We are birds of the same nest.'

Rev. Dr M.J. Joseph is the director of the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore, India. He was also a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

No justice, no peace Know justice, know peace

Max Ediger

Even for native speakers, the English language can be confusing, and even divisive as one word can be used by different people to prove conflicting positions in an argument. 'Justice' and 'peace' are two such terms. They are used freely by religious people, activists, political leaders and even members of both sides of a conflict. To use them effectively, we need to be clear how we will interpret them and how they will apply to our vision of participating in God's kingdom.

Peace

Ezekiel 13:10–16 speaks of a divided Israel. Some people were captive in a foreign country and others waited in the homeland for peace and the return of prosperity.

A few leaders told them that peace was coming. Peace would soon be made with the king of Babylon and all the captives would return. The country would once again be strong and rich. Hearing this, the people were happy. This is exactly what they wanted to hear.

The prophet Ezekiel, however, was not happy. His words were a direct challenge to

those in power. 'They [the leaders] shout peace, when there is no peace.' The words of the powerful, according to Ezekiel, were like a flimsy, unsteady wall built to keep out despair and hopelessness. Other lesser leaders saw that the wall made people happy so they covered it with whitewash so that it looked beautiful and inspired confidence. But when the rain and winds came, the wall simply collapsed because it had no substance. Then the people shouted at the leaders, 'Where is the whitewash you gave us?'

Peace is not something one can build, especially with false hopes and claims. Rather,

peace is the harmony within the global human family that can exist only when each person's dignity is respected and protected. Peace emerges when those injustices that destroy dignity are no longer painted over with a whitewash of lies and deceptions but rather are transformed into just economic, political and social systems, and communities take the steps necessary to insure that positive human relationships are protected and maintained into the future.

Christ left peace as a gift to his disciples. But he stressed to them that the peace he gave them was not the kind of peace they were used to. 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.' (John 14:27) The world tries to sell peace with 'wars on terrorism', military might, capitalist wealth, technology etc. These are but whitewash that covers over the true injustices of our world. Christ calls us to seek a different kind of peace, a peace of right relationships with all people as well as with the environment created as our global and mutual home.

Justice

There are those who define justice in legal terms. The law stipulates what is considered just and unjust in the society and also levies various punishments on the individuals who break those laws. Following a conflict, the actions of individuals who perpetrated violence against others are judged against these laws. If they are found guilty, the proper punishments are meted out and justice is served.

The assumption is that once these guilty individuals have been removed from the society, or at least from effective activity within the society, justice has been achieved. The weakness in this approach is that injustice lies, not so much within individuals, but within attitudes, prejudices and systems, which can permeate all strata of the society and make it possible for individuals to carry out acts of terrible violence against others. Therefore, removing individuals who have wrecked havoc on the lives of innocent villagers, for example, does not necessarily guarantee those villagers that the attitudes and systems that created their hell have been neu-

tralised. The fear of a recurrence of injustice, thus, remains deep within their consciousness. True justice cannot exist under these conditions. And, without justice, people can not feel or experience true peace.

Our vocabulary reinforces a concept of justice as judgment and punishment. Thus the courts where people are tried and, if found guilty, sentenced to punishment are often referred to as the 'halls of justice'. A 'justice of the peace' is a public officer invested with judicial powers for the purpose of preventing breaches of the peace, and bringing to punishment those who have violated the law. Many Christians speak of their God as a 'God of justice' who brings great punishment to anyone who fails to follow the right path. Justice, in this sense, is something to approach with great fear and trembling.

According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* the biblical concept of justice is actually quite different. The original Hebrew and Greek words for justice are the same as those rendered 'righteousness'. In about half the cases where the word 'just' and 'justice' appears in the King James Version, the American Standard Revised Version has changed it to 'righteous' and 'righteousness'. In general this justice is contrasted with that wickedness that 'feared not God, and regarded not man'. (Luke 18:2) In a larger sense justice is not only giving to others their rights, but involves the active duty of establishing their rights. Justice here becomes mercy. To 'seek justice' means to 'relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow'. (Isaiah 1:17, Jeremiah 22:15-16 and Psalm 82:2-4)

Know justice, know peace

Imagine sitting in a room with heavily shuttered windows keeping all the light out. You light a candle to break the darkness, but in time the candle burns out and the darkness returns. As long as you have candles, you can try to keep them burning for light, but if there are no more candles, there will be no more light.

Now, if you take the time to remove the shutters from the windows the wonderful light of the sun can shine into the room, bringing both warmth and life. If you want to enjoy this unending source of light, you

need to remove the barriers that prevent it from coming in.

We may look at justice and peace in this way. If the light represents peace, then peace is not something we have to make or create. It is a part of God's gift to us. The problem is that there are barriers (injustices) that prevent this gift from flowing freely into our world. We can try to create a little peace by lighting a few candles, but in time they burn out and the violence and fear of our world return.

To allow peace to exist as God's true gift to all of us, we must first transform the injustices that prevent it from reaching us. These injustices are many and exist in the political, economic and social realms of global life. They are the attacks on human dignity and community caused by unjust economic structures, marginalisation of people because of their ethnicity, caste, religion, gender and age, political manipulation by the powerful against the less powerful, chauvinistic attitudes etc.

When these injustices are not addressed in a positive way, those whose dignity is being trampled on often feel compelled to take drastic actions to call attention to their plight. They are not so much responding in violence as they are responding to violence.

Justice, or the return of righteousness to all our relationships, is essential for peace to truly exist. Justice comes before peace and thus the term 'justpeace'. Justice is the foundation for peace and it is through addressing and transforming the injustices that create suffering and conflict that we make peace a real possibility.

So the challenge to us is to work for justice both locally and globally. This requires that we study carefully the political, economic and social roots of conflicts and violence and then work with the marginalised to build positive alternatives. It is these positive alternatives that will begin to transform our violent world into a world where 'the wolf will romp with the lamb, the leopard sleep with the kid. Calf and lion will eat from the same trough, and a little child will tend them.' (Isaiah 11: 6)

Max Ediger is with the Centre for Justpeace in Hong Kong

People

Dhirendra Kumar Sahu

Church of North India Bishop **Dhirendra Kumar Sahu** has been elected the new general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Bishop Sahu has had many years of pastoral, teaching and administrative experience. From 1982 to 2000, he taught at the Serampore College in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. The new NCCI general secretary has degrees in theology from the University of Oxford, and a doctorate for his dissertation 'The Church of North India: A Historical and Systematic Theological Inquiry into an Ecumenical Ecclesiology' from the University of Birmingham. He served as a vice principal of Serampore College from 1996 to 2000 and has held the administrative responsibilities of a diocesan bishop from 2000. He has two books and numerous articles and research papers to his credit and has also attended several national and international ecumenical conferences and consultations.

DOV intern



Joram H. Calimutan from the Philippines joined the CCA in Hong Kong as an intern on 20 January. He is working for one year in the Decade to Overcome Violence program, whose focus this year is on Asia. Joram has worked as a volunteer development worker with the National Council of Churches in the Philippines. He has a bachelor's degree in commerce and management and a Master of Divinity from the Union Theological Seminary in Cavite in the Philippines. From 2000 to 2004, he served as an administrative pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines in Quezon, Cavite and San Pablo City.

Obituaries

Varghese Benjamin

Dr Varghese Benjamin, a former associate director and head of Social and Preventive Medicine at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, in India, passed away on 14 December 2004. He was 84. Dr Benjamin, Dasan to many of his friends, worked for CCA from 1982 to 1984 as a project staff dealing with health concerns. He was also a consultant of the Christian Medical Association of India.

C.I. Itty

C.I. Itty, whose ideas and views on development, poverty and justice influenced and challenged a generation in the ecumenical movement, passed away on 17 January 2005 in Geneva. He was 78.

He leaves behind his wife, two sons and their families.

Itty, C.I. to friends, was a former director (1970–1979) of the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development in the World Council of Churches.

He was one of the outstanding leaders from Asia in the ecumenical movement. M.M. Thomas, the well-known ecumenical leader, who knew him from his student days in Kerala, termed him 'an ecumenical black gem'.

Soon after completing his Master of Arts in philosophy from the Madras Christian College in 1950, Itty joined the Student Christian Movement of India (SCM) as a regional secretary.

In 1951, he attended two conferences of the World Student Christian Federation held in Bandung and Yogyakarta in Indonesia. From 1952 to 1954, he worked in the Indonesian SCM and YMCA.

Itty became a study secretary of the Indian SCM in 1956. He joined the Youth Department of the WCC in 1959. Among his important contributions to the ecumenical movement then was the organisation of the Pan African Youth Assembly.

Itty, who also worked in the Laity Department of the WCC, was a member of the Orthodox Church in India.

He left the WCC in 1979 and joined UN-ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission

for Asia and Pacific) as a consultant for nearly ten years.

He was able to mobilise a large number of youth for development during his ESCAP days.

M.M. Thomas also remarked that Itty not only had a great capacity to make friends with others, but also had the capacity to be a pastor and spiritual counsellor to a large community of colleagues and friends drawn from different countries and cultures of the world.

Ahn Jae Woong, general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, said that C.I. Itty was one of the towering ecumenical leaders Asia has produced.

David Gill, Hong Kong-based pastor and a former colleague of Itty in the 1970s in the WCC, considers him a 'real giant' in the ecumenical movement.

He said that even though Itty was a lay person, he did more pastoral work for people those days than many other clergy.

Ninan Koshy, an ecumenical leader from India and a former WCC staff member, who was a close friend and colleague of Itty, has written in a foreword of a publication to honour him that 'the inspiration and guidance that C.I. gave to a large number of persons engaged in justice-oriented action inside and outside the churches will be always remembered'.

Dr Boonreum

Dr Boonreum, a former chairman of the Chiang Mai YMCA, passed away in the last week of December 2004.

A Thai medical doctor, he made remarkable contributions to the church and society at local, regional and global level.

When Boonreum stopped practising medicine, he donated all his medical equipment to needy hospitals in the neighbouring countries of Thailand.

The CCA general secretary expressed grief over Boonreum's death. He said that Boonreum was a role model for Christians and non-Christians alike in his country and outside.

Towards people-centred tourism for empowerment

The Future Search Group of the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT), met in September 2004 at Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong, and issued this statement:

To empower the earth household and to strengthen our global profile in the tourism debate, we as a group of faith-based organisations, civil society organisations and activists groups and social movements have to confront the challenges of tourism and globalisation. We aim to launch key campaigns that reflect the struggles of peoples and communities and reflect local vitality and diversity for greater global visibility of the tourism issue. We are therefore committed to serving to re-evaluate sustainable tourism. We support less self-indulgent and self-centred visitation and promote more self-conscious tourism, including our right to say 'no' to tourism. Our purpose is to recapture and affirm our collective memories for justice, freedom and equity.

We believe in strong inter-local and inter-contextual solidarity as the basis for mobilising and understanding the challenge of tourism development. As representatives of a multiple constituency we recognise the importance of connecting members and their alliances in an intercontinental web that is based on democratic and representative platforms, strategies and action. We recognise that this space is important for the success of any project that seeks to broaden the ecumenical spirit of the tourism debate.

Our advocacy is based on networking, sharing, learning and strengthening the whole community and the resources of the earth on which we are dependent. In this engagement, we would bring to the centre of the discourse threatened environments and ecosystems, endangered species, marginalised peoples and communities and people living under oppression and occupation. We would particularly espouse the cause of empowering women and children and

indigenous heritage, culture and people. People's movements have brought into focus the need to shift the developmental paradigm and infuse it with a more local and indigenous wisdom and tradition. This genius is based on nonviolence, peace, justice and sustainable development. We therefore want to bring to the world, the voice of the people in the south and enrich the dialogue with each other and bring these elements into the process of integrating human values.

We will go forward through working in solidarity with local community representatives, activists and researchers from all parts of the world to develop strategies and strengthen struggles to make tourism more equitable, gender just, ecologically sensible, child friendly and sustainable.

Sharing hope for a new world

'Sharing Hope for a New World' will be the theme of the Fifth Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS V), which is set for July 2006. This was the consensus of the CATS V Continuation Committee, which met in Shoki Coe House at Tainan Theological College and Seminary in Tainan, Taiwan, on 13–14 January.

The theme is a call to affirm and reaffirm 'the hope that we have' as Christians in the midst of so much ruin, destruction and devastation experienced by peoples in Asia brought about by poverty and injustice, violence, the negative impact of globalisation and the war on terrorism. In addition, the 26 December tsunami disaster caused so much loss of lives and property as well as serious trauma for the survivors.

The theme also affirms that the hope for a new world and a new future is something that Asian communities of faith do share, and that other communities that are not necessarily based on faith can also be communities of hope.

The committee expressed gratitude for the offer of Rev. Dr Lo Lung Kwong, dean of the Divinity School of Chung Chi College in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to host

the next CATS gathering. More details of the plan for CATS V will be shared later. Present at the meeting were Kang Namsoon and Soosai Arokiasamy, co-moderators, Yangrae Son, treasurer, Hope Antone, secretary, Samuel Ngun Ling, Wati Longchar, Sientje Merentek-Abram and Hannah Chen. Arche Ligo was coopted to join the meeting for one day.

Mar Thoma Church tsunami response

The Madras-Calcutta diocese of the Mar Thoma Church has undertaken rehabilitation work to the tune of Rs 65,44,000 (US\$ 15,00,00) in the tsunami-affected areas of Tamil Nadu and Andaman Islands.

Suffragan Metropolitan Dr Zacharias Mar Theophilus said that a rehabilitation committee constituted by the church had visited tsunami-affected areas to evolve an action plan.

The Mar Thoma church will build houses for the underprivileged communities in Chennai and Pondicherry. It will also provide fishing nets to the affected families.

The church has been supplying drinking water to a tsunami-affected village in Pondicherry.

Musician

In the last issue we mentioned that Garrett Intorn had written the music for the forthcoming CCA General Assembly theme song.

Garrett Intorn is a Karen-Thai musician. He has composed many hymns and choral pieces in Thai, some of which are included in the hymnal of the Church of Christ in Thailand. He teaches music at the McGilvary Faculty of Theology, Payap University, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Mr. Intorn is also an accomplished classical guitarist.

Which language?

How do religiously affiliated schools deal with cultural, socioeconomic, gender and religious differences within the school population? Should the schools be advocates for the truth of their religious communities or should they be sites for learning to participate in interreligious dialogue?

These and other questions were behind the holding of the 4th Conference of the Education and Ethos Network on 20–22 January, to which Hope Antone was invited as a keynote speaker. The invitation came from Dr Chris Hermans and Prof. Aad de Jong, both of Radboud University in Nijmegen, Netherlands. Hope's presentation was part of an interactive panel on 'Religious Differences in Religiously Affiliated Schools'.

Other keynote addresses tackled the rest of the theme, 'Matters of Difference: Cultural, Socioeconomic, Gender and Religious Differences within Religiously Affiliated Schools'.

Following were some of the key points that Hope shared during her presentation:

- There is definitely a place for education in the 'first language', i.e. Christian education, for church-related schools and in many cases other religious adherents would expect and understand that. But schools need to guard against fostering an oppositional identity that can become the foundation for intolerance and demonisation of the other.
- Knowing that there are different religious adherents in religiously affiliated schools, educators need to teach in ways that stimulate among students a deep and learned commitment to their own traditions while urging them to participate in building religiously pluralistic societies.
- The 'second language' of religious education, i.e. the language of conversation and encounter, begins with recognising, appreciating and valuing differences, including the differences in our lenses for viewing the world.
- Learning from differences needs to be viewed not simply to foster tolerance but for mutually enriching each other, including learning from and correcting each other.

- Venturing into the 'second language' of religious education would at its best require a different curriculum that involves the participation of religious educators from other faith communities.

Apart from the four keynote addresses, there were parallel paper presentations on various topics and research done in the field. Participants came from church-related schools and universities in Europe, the USA and Canada, including Catholics, Protestants and Seventh-day Adventists.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Following the ecumenical ideal 'doctrine divides and service unites' could help in overcoming the brokenness of the present-day church, said CCA general secretary Ahn Jae Woong. Preaching at an ecumenical communion service organised by the Hong Kong Christian Council as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Ahn said that although God's temple is supposed to be holy, it is difficult to find holiness in it. 'Instead we find in it divisions, unholy alliances, jealousy, quarrelling, all kinds of scandalous,

shameful stories,' he noted, and added, 'The church is losing its saltiness, holiness, oneness, and togetherness.'

He urged the members of the church to learn from the ecumenical movement to overcome the brokenness of the church. The task of the ecumenical movement is to work for the visible unity of the church and for the renewal of the human community.

Ahn observed that the ecumenical movement:

- consistently emphasises God's mission for all God's people,
- engages fully in building justpeace,
- takes care of the whole of God's creation,
- upholds the enhancement of human dignity and human security,
- witnesses the gospel message to the whole world, until such time that 'they may all be one'.

More than 500 people attended the ecumenical worship. The main celebrant of the service was the Most Rev. Dr Peter Kwong of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui. Members of the Church of Christ in China Hong Kong Council, the Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church, the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui and the Salvation Army and many ecumenical friends were among those who attended the service.

Wanted: Executive Director

The Foundation for Theological Education in South Asia (FTESEA) invites applications and nominations for its position of Executive Director, a part-time or full-time position involving international travel. To facilitate cooperation between North American churches and theological schools in China and Southeast Asia, a candidate should have experience in international ecumenical theological education, crosscultural ministry, and financial administration. Asian background or experience is required, with BD/MDiv or equivalent minimum, either lay or ordained, woman or man. The deadline for applications is 15 September 2005.

Appointment to be made by 1 June 2006, with employment beginning 1 September 2006. Office location negotiable and will be determined at time of appointment. The job description can be found at www.omsc.org/FTESEA.pdf. Send applications/nominations with CV and email address, along with names and addresses of three references, and their email addresses to: Dr Gerald H. Anderson, chair, FTESEA, PO Box 6668, Hamden, CT 06517-0668 USA. Email: FTESEA@omsc.org. The FTESEA is an equal opportunity employer.

Asia Ecumenical Academy 2005

The Asia Ecumenical Academy (AEA), organised by CCA, is an in-depth regional three-week ecumenical formation and leadership development program for member churches and councils and partners for their participation in the promotion and shaping of the ecumenical movement in Asia.

This year's program, on the theme 'Ecumenical Formation towards Building Communities of Peace for All', will be held on 8–27 August in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Among the goals of AEA are to strengthen the ecumenical leadership of church and ecumenical organisations through enhancing their capacity in rethinking and doing the ecumenical tasks in the face of contemporary and emerging issues relevant to the churches' mission together in Asia.

Out of an expected 20 participants, 50 per cent are expected to be women.

Background

CCA realises that being ecumenical does not just happen automatically, especially in the context of increasing denominationalism and the cultural, ethnic and religious plurality that characterise Asia. The ecumenical spirit has to be intentionally nurtured through a process.

This process involves engaging people in experience, enhancing knowledge, attitudes and skills of being a community, inspired by the Holy Spirit, rooted in Christ and one's own church tradition but endeavouring to discover, respect and appreciate other church and other people's faiths and traditions. Ecumenical formation is in obedience to the imperative that Christians be visibly united in witness to God's will on earth.

While ecumenical formation should be for the whole people of God, the program will focus on (a) promoting ecumenical formation of leaders or enablers—key pastors, religious educators, national staff in church and ecumenical institutions, lay, women and youth leaders in the national, subregional and regional levels, and (b) advocating alternative perspectives, methodologies and

practices in ecumenical formation. The current world situation and its impact on Asia brings new challenges to church leaders to further their analyses and theological reflections on building communities of peace for all. Worshipping and learning together as a community of church leaders from diverse contexts and traditions will itself be an experience towards building communities of peace for all.

Dr Kim Yong Bock, the renowned Korean theologian, will be the dean of AEA in 2005.

Applications

The deadline for receiving application is 15 April.

For more information about the AEA, contact Ms Corazon Tabing-Reyes, Joint Executive Secretary, Christian Conference of Asia, 96, 2nd District, Pak Tin Village, Mei Tin Road, Sha Tin, NT, Hong Kong. Email: cora@cca.org.hk or egy@cca.org.hk.

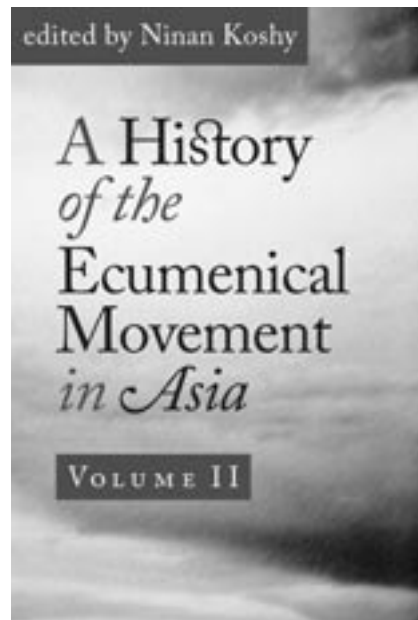
New book

A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Volume II Edited by Ninan Koshy

Following the acclaim and success of the first volume of the history of the ecumenical movement in Asia comes this second volume. Its approach is different. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia, Volume II*, is a collection of essays, written by a team of distinguished ecumenical leaders providing invaluable information on and insightful interpretation of the major themes that have enriched the life of the ecumenical movement in Asia.

Beginning with a brilliant presentation of the theological and mission concerns by Preman Niles, the authors explore the evolution, development and emerging trends of the wide range of concerns that have stimulated the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region, the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs and the Christian Conference of Asia and made them privileged instruments of the ecumenical movement.

Common to all the essays is a genuine Asian perspective, which provides Asian terms and interpretation to common themes



in worldwide ecumenical debate. The significant role played by Asian ecumenical consciousness for more than nine decades in broadening and widening the ecumenical vision is highlighted here.

The other essays include the involvement of the ecumenical movement in Asia in many areas—women doing theology (Wong Wai Ching Angela), the Roman Catholic church (Virginia Fabella), other religious traditions (Wesley Ariarajah), the YMCA (Bartholomew Shaha), youth and students (Yong Ting Jin), the academic world (Marshal Fernando), secular history (Ninan Koshy), human rights (Kim Yong Bock), social thought (K.C. Abraham), church and state and religious liberty (Clement John) and indigenisation and culture (Ron O'Grady).

Copies are available from CCA (see contact details on page 3.)

Tribute

The World Council of Churches paid tribute to CCA General Secretary Dr Ahn Jae Woong during its recent central committee meeting held in Geneva. The WCC general secretary, Dr Sam Kobia, in his report to the 15–22 February meeting thanked Ahn Jae Woong 'for his ecumenical commitment to the churches in Asia and globally'. 'We wish him all God's blessings,' Sam Kobia said.

The CATS vineyard

The CATS story told

Have you ever heard of cats planting a vineyard?
How can it be?
Yes, CATS—Congress of Asian Theologians
They planted thirty saplings of a vineyard in ECC,
Bangalore
In the year 1999.
It produces sweet grapes:
Its yield is indeed plenty; 150 kg harvested in one
season.

The fruit is being shared by humans, birds and
monkeys!
The birds and monkeys do have hunger and thirst.
Yes, they too are part of the web of life.

The CATS Vineyard is the symbol of the unity of
Asian churches
They represent the mystery of unity among the
theologians
The Catholic, the Orthodox, the Protestant and
others.

In planting the vineyard, there was no problem of
disunity
In harvesting the crops, there is unanimity!
In eating the grapes and their distribution there is
fraternity
In drinking the wine, there is table fellowship
In drinking the wine after its blessing, there is no
fellowship.
The theologians shout: 'Move slowly!'

The CATS told me the story of Naboth's vineyard
The story of the King Ahab and his wife Jezebel.
Naboth was killed through treachery
His ancestral inheritance was grabbed!
Elijah appeared to pronounce God's sentence of
annihilation.

The CATS vineyard told me the story of Noah's
vineyard.
Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a
vineyard.
A vineyard for the whole human race! A blessing
for all.
The grapes are meant to be distributed among all.
The vine is to be shared by all on the Mother Earth.

The CATS vineyard told me the story of a vineyard
told by Jesus.
A landowner of old planted a vineyard.
He did not build a wall but only a fence.
A fence is meant to be dismantled!
The produce of the vineyard are to be owned by
the family members.
What a pity!
The tenants have become terrorist!

The CATS vineyard told me story of Solomon.
During his time, all people lived in harmony and
safety.
They found safety under their vines and fig trees!
What a great lesson!

The CATS vineyard lives with a sigh.
It does not shout; but it only sobs.
It does not judge; but it waits patiently.
It asks one simple question: How long? How long?
It says:
I may live for twenty-five to thirty years!
Do you know how long you will live in Asia?
Repent and turn to God and
To one another in love.

M.J. Joseph